From Bishop Folda:
“They went to an out of the way place...” The grace of a retreat

Ask a Priest: How do I know if I’m doing what’s right?

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ON THE COVER:
Jesus meets his Mother on the Way of the cross. St Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava, Slovakia. (Adobe Stock)

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“They went to an out of the way place...:”
The grace of a retreat

You probably see or hear an announcement each year from your priests that they will be away from the parish for a week or so for their annual retreat. It is a requirement in Church law for every priest to make an annual retreat for several days for reflection and prayer. Our priests have different options to attend retreats right here in our diocese, but some choose to go elsewhere for their retreat. There is something to be said for a change of scenery!

Bishops are also expected to make an annual retreat, and I attended my retreat during the second week of January. Every year at that time, the bishops of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota gather together for our annual retreat, a time to step away from the daily activities of our ministry, and to spend some uninterrupted time with our Lord. We usually have a retreat director, a bishop or priest who offers various reflections and homilies to guide our time of prayer. This year, our retreat director was Father Wayne Sattler, a priest of the Diocese of Bismarck, and he did an excellent job. Most of our time on retreat was spent in silence, but we also had daily opportunities to share meals and conversation together. Our annual retreat is a beautiful time of fraternity and peace, and it truly is one of my favorite weeks of the year.

Usually when I’m on retreat, I have a number of prayer intentions that I bring with me. I always remember in my prayers the needs of our priests, deacons, religious, and seminarians. I also pray every day for all the faithful of our diocesan family. This year, with the ups and downs of the current pandemic, I prayed for those suffering from illness and for caregivers. And I thanked God for the countless good people of our diocese who are so committed and work so generously to build up God’s Kingdom among us.

This idea of making a retreat goes all the way back to Jesus himself. Numerous times in the Gospels, we read that Jesus slipped away from his disciples and the crowds for some extended time of prayer. He had a deep need for communion with his Father, and so, he “retreated” whenever he could. The most extreme example of such a retreat was the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert after his baptism. It was a time of intense prayer and temptation for Jesus, but he clearly felt the need for this time of solitude, and it prepared him for his public ministry.

Jesus also took his disciples away with him at times so that they too could experience some peace and solitude with God. In the Gospel of Mark (6:31), he says, “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest awhile.” He knew that they needed some time for quiet, some time for prayer and peace away from the crowds that followed them. It was a time when they could get to know Jesus better and come to a deeper understanding of his mission.

The Church wisely recognizes that priests and bishops need this time to recharge their spiritual batteries so they can better serve the people under their care. Deacons, religious sisters and brothers, and seminarians also make an annual retreat, but we shouldn’t get the idea that retreats are only for the clergy or for those in religious life. A retreat can be a blessing for everyone, and I know a number of lay Catholics who also make an annual retreat of some kind. A friend who is a husband and father agrees with me that it’s one of his favorite times of the year, not just to get away, but to get closer to our Lord!

I recommend an annual retreat to anyone who wants to go a little deeper in their faith life. It’s a good opportunity to place our needs before the Lord and to hear his voice in our hearts. It’s a time to ask our Lord for guidance when we’re contemplating a major life decision, like taking a new job, moving to a new home, or discerning our vocation. Perhaps a group of friends would plan to go on retreat together, or a group of people from the same parish. Perhaps your pastor would be willing to lead a retreat for the members of your parish, or otherwise invite a visiting priest to serve as retreat director.

You may be wondering, how can a busy person with a job and...
family just leave everything behind and go escape someplace for a retreat? This might seem like a luxury that is out of reach for most people, but the idea of a retreat can take many forms. Our annual retreat is usually five to seven days, with some taking a longer period for extended spiritual direction. A retreat can also be of shorter duration, like a long weekend from Friday through Sunday. Or, it can be an overnight or a single day of recollection.

I have heard some who are intimidated by the idea of a retreat. They’re unsure what to do with the time, or they are uncomfortable with the silence. But the hours of a retreat can be used in many ways. Typically, a retreat includes daily Mass, times for Confession, spiritual conferences, and opportunities to meet personally with a spiritual director. A retreat can be a good time to meditate on the Scriptures, to read a good spiritual book, or just to take some nice, long walks. No matter how we spend our retreat, the idea is to open the doors for a closer relationship with our Lord. If you give it a try, you can trust that he’ll be waiting there to meet you.

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Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

February

For religious sisters and consecrated women

We pray for religious sisters and consecrated women; thanking them for their mission and their courage; may they continue to find new responses to the challenges of our times.

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We pray for religious sisters and consecrated women; thanking them for their mission and their courage; may they continue to find new responses to the challenges of our times.
St. Peter Damian was born in 1007 in Ravenna, Italy. He was orphaned at a very young age and was sent to work on a farm owned by his older brother. Another brother, the Archpriest of Ravenna, took him from the farm and sent him to school. He was a bright student, and after his schooling he embraced the monastic life. He joined a hermitage run by the followers of St. Benedict.

At the hermitage he devoted his time to sacred studies, and was appointed the successor to the order’s abbot. He assumed the governance of the order after the abbot’s death in 1043, and proved to be a great and pious leader. In that time St. Peter Damian founded five other hermitages in Europe. His talents did not go unnoticed in Rome, and he was much employed in the service of the Church by successive Popes. In 1057 Pope Stephen IX prevailed upon him to quit his hermitage and made him Cardinal-bishop of Ostia. Peter constantly asked Pope Nicholas II to grant him leave to resign his bishopric and return to the solitude, but the Pope always refused.

Pope Alexander II was prevailed upon with difficulty to consent, but reserved the power to employ him in Church matters of importance, as he felt he might have need of St. Peter Damian’s help in the future. The saint from that time considered himself dispensed not only from the responsibility of governing his See, but from the supervision of the various religious settlements he had controlled, and he reduced himself to the role of a simple monk.

In his later years, St. Peter Damian fought simony, the buying or selling of ecclesiastical privilege, and upheld clerical celibacy. He supported strict self-denial and a life of solitude for monks. He encouraged common life for the secular clergy. In 1072 he fell ill with a fever and died on Feb. 22.

St. Peter Damian is considered to be one of the chief fore-runners of the Hildebrandine reform in the Church. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1828. Over the centuries, popes have singled out specific saints as Doctors of the Church as exemplary teachers in various theological or spiritual topics. The official title of “Doctor” stems from the Latin root word docere, which means “to teach.”

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Historical information from catholic.org.

**Feast day:** February 21  
**Death:** 1072  
**Doctor of the Church**

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen. *(From USCCB)*
How do I know if I’m doing what’s right?

Our questioner writes: “We hear it said, ‘Let your conscience be your guide.’ But so many people make wrong choices from a misguided conscience. How can we tell if our personal decisions are right or wrong?”

This is an important question because it has to do with our eternal salvation. Obeying God’s will is fundamental to the well-being of our souls. “Let your conscience be your guide” was Jiminy Cricket’s advice to Pinocchio. We may have also heard this advice from parents and grandparents. This phrase, in fact, closely parallels one of our fundamental moral principles found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC): “It is important for every person to be sufficiently present to himself in order to hear and follow the voice of his conscience” (CCC 1779). “Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as to personally make moral decisions. He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters” (CCC 1782).

We respect the primacy of individual conscience, where each person enjoys the freedom and autonomy to choose the course of action that best conforms to the will of God for humankind. God has given us the gift of conscience as a share in the divine image. “Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment.” (CCC 1776)

Conscience, the inner voice of God communicating his divine will, serves as the moral compass guiding the course of our actions. The great problem, as our questioner notes, is that we hear so many contrary voices from the world around us and from the Evil One himself. These voices act as a magnetic force deflecting our moral compass, drawing us off course while we navigate the stormy seas of life in today’s culture. Sadly, so many children and young adults are being formed in a society whose values have strayed far adrift of those found in the Scriptures and the Church. So how can we know if we are really doing the right thing when we “let our conscience be our guide?”

Young and old alike are subject to formation in the false values presented in so much of today’s movies, music, magazines, and social media. We need to limit our intellectual diet of these secular sources in favor of the more spiritually enriching nutrition God offers through the Scriptures and the Church. Reason enlightened by faith is the basis for proper moral decision-making, so we need to do all we can to open ourselves to the guiding light of faith. Relying on our own intellect without the resources of faith is akin to a ship navigating at night without the aid of compass and headlight. To stay on course, we must submit to the wisdom of God’s Word and the authority God has established to guide us.

Laxity of conscience is the predominant source of erroneous judgment in today’s world, arising from an “anything goes” attitude. For such persons, there is really no sin. Others fall prey to the rigors of an overly strict conscience, fearing almost everything they think or do is sinful. To reach a proper balance in discerning moral right and wrong, we need the assistance of the Scriptures, our church magisterium—the teaching body of popes and bishops—and the collective wisdom of Tradition handed on over the ages. Contemporary problems such as medical and bioethical issues require ongoing reflection on the part of our church authorities as well. “In the formation of conscience, the Word of God is the light for our path. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church” (CCC 1785).

We have a responsibility to keep ourselves informed on the Church’s teaching. “The education of the conscience is a lifelong task” (CCC 1784). Personal prayer and study of the Scriptures, paying attention to informative homilies at Mass, reading Catholic books and periodicals such as New Earth, listening to Real Presence Radio, and subscribing to Catholic media outlets such as Formed.org will all help shine the light of faith on our path. There is a rich treasury of resources available to bring deeper knowledge of our faith and moral teachings into hearts and homes today.

We must first be confident of being on course if we are to save our own souls. Then we can better assist the formation of our children and youth, the responsibility of parents and of the Church as a whole. The Body of Christ, eager to follow the word and way of Jesus, will do well to ask our Blessed Mother’s intercession for assistance in our moral choices. Her life was one of obedient service to the will of God, and she is most eager to see us, like the servants at the wedding feast of Cana, listen to her son and “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5).
Annual Lenten program, CRS Rice Bowl, begins Ash Wednesday; benefits those overseas and at home

By CRS Rice Bowl

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) invites Catholics across the country to pray, fast, and give through its annual Lenten program CRS Rice Bowl, which begins in March alongside the season. CRS Rice Bowl is an important part of CRS’ mission to serve Catholics in the United States as they live their faith in solidarity with their sisters and brothers around the world.

“When Catholics take part in CRS Rice Bowl, they’re reaching across physical distances and bringing themselves closer to their global family,” said Beth Martin, director of Mission and Mobilization Campaigns at CRS. “At the same time, they’re bringing themselves closer to God.”

By using CRS Rice Bowl materials, families, and educators can teach children about the season of Lent, Jesus’ sacrifice, and about how they can help their sisters and brothers around the world while living out their faith. As part of the Rice Bowl program, 75% of all donations go to CRS programming in targeted countries. CRS Rice Bowl participants also have access to meatless Lenten recipes from different countries along with other resources for Holy Week, including the Stations of the Cross. CRS will also host virtual events throughout the Lenten season, including prayer nights in Spanish and English.

“Lent is a time for Catholics to reflect on their personal relationship with God,” Martin said. “It gives us the opportunity to strengthen our connection to Him, and we hope that CRS Rice Bowl provides families with the tools to help everyone fully experience and understand the season.”

CRS Rice Bowl, which began in 1975, kicks off on Ash Wednesday, March 2. Every year, families from nearly 14,000 communities across the United States fill nearly 3 million Rice Bowls with their Lenten alms. While these donations make a difference around the world, they also help in the United States, as 25% of all donations stay in the diocese from which they came.

“By making a small sacrifice during Lent, Catholics in the U.S. can be a part of the larger movement of CRS Rice Bowl,” Martin said. “Not just around the world, where the help is needed, but also here at home, where families might also be struggling to put enough food on the table.”

Each year, CRS Rice Bowl features the stories of families from three different countries in order to bring U.S. Catholics closer to those they help through their Rice Bowl donations. For 2022, CRS Rice Bowl has identified families from Rwanda, Guatemala, and Bangladesh. Through their stories, Rice Bowl participants are invited to learn how people in these countries overcome the factors that can lead to hunger, including flooding and drought.

“When you donate to CRS Rice Bowl, you are sharing your life and your abundance with our global family in need,” Martin says.

CRS Rice Bowls are available at local parishes, and individual Rice Bowls labels can be downloaded for free online at crsricebowl.org. Materials designed for families, parishes, elementary and middle school students, high school students, universities, and dioceses are also available online.
Across the United States fill nearly 3 million Rice Bowls with their Lenten alms. While these donations make a difference around the world, they also help in the United States, as 25% of all donations stay in the diocese from which they came. “By making a small sacrifice during Lent, Catholics in the U.S. can be a part of the larger movement of CRS Rice Bowl,” Martin said. “Not just around the world, where the help is needed, but also here at home, where families might also be struggling to put enough food on the table.”

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St. Ann’s Indian Mission was part of several holiday initiatives to make sure local families had a merry Christmas. Church volunteers assisted the Turtle Mountain Tribal Offices at Thanksgiving and Christmas to ensure that families without transportation were able to receive turkeys and hams offered to each family.

As Christmas approached, an array of toys, games, and candy showed up on the church doorsteps as members of St. John Neumann Church in Canton, Mich. shopped online and shipped toys to Belcourt. Volunteers spent a day wrapping the gifts and then Santa and his elves delivered the gifts to local children in need a few days before Christmas. The delight on the children’s faces was reward enough for the volunteers who made Santa’s visit possible by loaning their delivery van and time.

Local organizer Duane Gourneau, a member of St. Ann’s Indian Mission parish, said, “It was beautiful to bring joy to the children on Christmas, and we were blessed to have one of our priests help out. Father Dave Brokke, our associate pastor, came with us and offered to bless the house of each family on our route.”

The combination of tangible and spiritual gifts reminds us of the call to attend to the needs of those around us as they bring to mind the gifts of Christ’s presence and the magi’s offerings on the first Christmas.

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It is a Lenten tradition that dates back to the earliest days of the Catholic Church. The Stations of the Cross, also known as the Via Dolorosa (the Sorrowful Way), are a popular devotion in Catholic parishes all across the world. The Stations of the Cross, or Way of the Cross, is a series of prayers and devotions dedicated to each of the steps along the way of Christ's condemnation by Pilate to his burial in the tomb.

The faithful observe the Stations of the Cross as a way to commemorate Christ's suffering and death for our sake, and to gain plenary indulgences (conditions on receiving plenary indulgences may be found at www.ncregister.com/blog/4-ways-to-gain-a-plenary-indulgence-daily-during-lent).

In the early days of the Church, pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem to walk in the footsteps of Christ taken on the day of his passion, from Pilate's praetorium to the tomb in which Christ was buried. Tradition holds that even Mary, the Mother of God, made the pilgrimage herself after Christ's resurrection and ascension, making daily visits to the sites of her son's suffering and death. Later, as tradition has it, she placed memorials near her home of the original five stations observed by the faithful.

At first, the Way of the Cross could only be observed by visiting the actual sites in Jerusalem. Over time, the tradition changed. An interest developed in the fifth century for the Church to reproduce the holy places elsewhere so that pilgrims who could not travel to the Holy Land could take part in the devotional spiritually. Thus began the tradition of erecting statues and other works of art depicting the Way of the Cross. The practice of building stations outside of Jerusalem became a necessity when the Ottoman Turks blocked access to the Holy Land in the 1500s. The statues and paintings that came from this period are considered masterpieces today.

By the end of the 17th century, depicting stations in churches became more popular. In 1686, Pope Innocent XI, realizing that few people could travel to the Holy Land due to the Moslem oppression, granted the Franciscan order the right to feature stations in all of their churches, and that the same plenary indulgences would be given to the faithful for practicing the devotion as if they were in Jerusalem. Pope Benedict XIII extended these indulgences to all of the faithful in 1726. Five years later, Pope Clement XII permitted stations to be built in all churches and
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Father Phil Ackerman, pastor of Holy Cross Church in West Fargo, encourages his parishioners to take part in observing the Stations of the Cross not only during Lent, but year-round.

“The Stations of the Cross is a profound way to reflect on Jesus Christ’s day of crucifixion,” said Father Ackerman. “The observance is a way to help us reflect on the passion and suffering that Jesus freely embraced as he went to the cross to die for us. We are most familiar with parishes offering them during the Season of Lent. However, many faithful pray the Stations of the Cross throughout the year. I am deeply inspired by the humility of Jesus. He endured suffering, insults, and ridicule for our sakes.”

“Jesus falls the first time” displayed at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)
Today’s observance of the Stations of the Cross consist of 14 traditional stations:

1. Pilate condemns Christ to death
2. Jesus accepts his cross
3. Jesus falls the first time
4. Jesus meets his blessed mother
5. Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross
6. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7. Jesus falls the second time
8. Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem
9. Jesus falls the third time
10. Jesus is stripped of his garments
11. Jesus is nailed to the cross
12. Jesus dies on the cross
13. Jesus is taken down from the cross
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb

The accompanying prayers for each station vary, but one of the more popular series of prayers used in the United States may be found at www.catholic.org/prayers/station.php.

In most Catholic parishes across the world, the stations are led by a priest or deacon each Friday during Lent. However, a layperson may also lead the stations. One may also observe the stations privately and still receive the same plenary indulgences as those who observe the stations as part of a public parish observance.

Nearly all Catholic churches display the Stations of the Cross on their church walls. Other churches and holy sites have erected stations separate from the main building on the grounds of the church or holy site. Still other religious orders and organizations display the stations as a completely separate entity, devoted solely to the observance of the stations.

One such site I have personally visited is located along Interstate 40 near the city of Groom, Texas. A 19-story tall cross was built in 1995 that may be seen for about 20 miles.

“Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry his cross” displayed at St. Thomas Church in Buffalo. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)

“The Stations of the Cross is a profound way to reflect on Jesus Christ’s day of crucifixion. The observance is a way to help us reflect on the passion and suffering that Jesus freely embraced as he went to the cross to die for us.”

– Father Phil Ackerman
Surrounding the cross are statues of the 14 stations, along with a depiction of the Last Supper, the three crosses on Calvary, and an empty tomb. My family and I would sometimes travel to this site on Good Friday as part of our devotion to the passion and death of Christ. More information on the site may be found at crossministries.net.

Interestingly enough, the empty tomb is considered to be a new, 15th station. In 2000, Pope St. John Paul II urged Catholics to add the 15th station, Christ’s Resurrection, to the Stations of the Cross. The 15th Station is not required, and anyone may pray either number, or go back and forth between 14 and 15 (many parishes that have a 15th station omit it on Good Friday).

"As a parish priest, I have found the deep love and devotion people have as they walk and meditate on the 14 Stations of the Cross to be so profound,” said Father Ackerman. “Thirty-six years ago, I had the privilege of walking the Way of the Cross in Jerusalem. Not only was it a painful journey for Jesus Christ but a difficult one. Imagine the uneven narrow streets, people gathered to watch Jesus carry his cross! Jesus would do anything for us! He loves us! He paid the price of our sins. The Stations invite us to enter into the Passion of Christ. It is a great gift of God's mercy and forgiveness for us."

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday March 2. As we approach the season, let us renew our devotion to Christ—his suffering, death, and glorious resurrection. If you haven’t taken part in the Stations of the Cross for a while, maybe this Lenten season is the perfect opportunity for you to observe this time-honored tradition once again, and receive the promised indulgences so graciously granted by the Church.

"Veronica wipes the face of Jesus" (right) and “Jesus falls the second time” (left) depicted at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)
On Jan. 21, a group of 50 students and parents from Shanley High School and Sacred Heart Middle School attended the 2nd Annual March for Life at our State Capitol in Bismarck. We were joined by hundreds of other pro-life warriors and some of our state representatives and faith leaders to support pro-life legislation in our state and to march for an end to abortion.

The day began with the celebration of the Eucharist at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, with Bismarck Bishop David Kagan and many groups from across North Dakota. It was great to see the youth of our diocese united in faith and their defense for the voiceless and vulnerable. Bishop Kagan encouraged us to keep fighting so that we can turn the tide of this tragic period of our nation’s history.

After Mass, the marchers began their walk to the State Capitol, where the University of Mary organized this year’s rally. Monsignor Patrick Schumacher, a priest of the Bismarck Diocese, led us in a time of prayer and silence for all whose lives were destroyed due to the practice of legalized abortion. Our students heard from other pro-life supporters who thanked them for their witness and encouraged them in keeping steadfast in their defense of the unborn.

The day was filled with an overwhelming sense of hope and anticipation as our nation’s Supreme Court is currently considering a case that seeks to directly limit the practice of legalized abortion in the United States. This is a pivotal moment, an important time to pray and fast, and as many of the speakers at this year’s rally highlighted, a time to renew our efforts to support mothers and fathers throughout North Dakota so that the act of abortion becomes unthinkable.
Before anyone climbs a mountain, preparation must take place. Climbers need to physically train, study the mountain they wish to climb, ask guides for their input, and gather all the correct gear. Without these steps, the journey will be even more arduous than first anticipated, or the climber will become so discouraged and not even attempt the journey at all.

The same can be said about our spiritual lives. If we don’t train, study, seek mentorship, and equip ourselves with the right tools, it can be easy to give in to discouragement and abandon the ascent.

The Diocese of Fargo is pleased to announce a new summer camp for middle school students this July. The purpose of this camp is to provide an opportunity for youth to step away from the busyness and frustrations of life and to be fed through dynamic keynote talks, the Sacraments, engaging praise and worship, and small group interactions.

Before starting my work here in Fargo, I worked in the Diocese of Crookston and was privileged to direct a middle school camp called St. John Paul II Camp (JP2 Camp). It was there that I witnessed the transformative power of God through camps like these. For most of the campers, highlights included: encountering Jesus through the Sacraments, meeting other youth who were excited or curious about their faith, and the small group discussion.

For me, summer camps are special because they help build upon the foundation that has already been established in the hearts of the youth. It inspires them to live their faith more radically, and it equips them for ministry in their home parishes.

Camp Summit is for all youth entering grades 7, 8, and 9 who have a desire to deepen their relationship with Jesus and to share it with others they encounter. This five-day experience is designed to encourage and equip the youth for discipleship to their family, friends, and communities.

To learn more about Camp Summit, or to register your kids, visit www.fargodiocese.org/campsummit.
The Great Divorce: a launching point for Lenten reflection

Bernadette O’Keeffe
Parishioner of the Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Lent is right around the corner; a time for prayer and penance with the purpose and hope of deeper union with God. Often, one of the first great trials of Lent is choosing “what to do for Lent.” There are an overwhelming number of books and guides made to help the faithful reflect and grow during this season. Many are quite good, using guided questions to structure one’s Lenten reflections and sacrifices.

Personally, I find it difficult to engage in some of these books, and while it could be part of the sacrifice, I will admit I more often sink into boredom rather than rise to the heroic task of reading it. Then I fall behind, and the whole endeavor is given up for something more within my abilities.

Mercifully, there are works of fiction that can act as excellent mirrors for the soul and can be especially effective in keeping a wandering mind more attentive. One such book is The Great Divorce by C.S. Lewis.

Lewis, known for his many fruitful allegories about Christianity and spiritual life, originally titled the book Who goes home? when it was published in an Anglican newspaper in 1944. The final title is a reference to William Blake’s poem The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. In the preface, Lewis explains: “Blake wrote of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell.... in some sense or other the attempt to make that marriage is perennial. The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable ‘either-or’; that...some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found...” (Lewis, vii).

Lewis places himself and the moral of The Great Divorce in opposition to this lie that we don’t need to choose between Heaven and Hell but have what we like from both.

To illustrate this, Lewis creates a fictional version of the afterlife. Through the eyes of the unnamed narrator, Lewis shows the reader characters and patterns of life we might recognize (either in others or ourselves). The story begins in the “grey town,” a joyless city whose inhabitants live out their day-to-day lives just as they did on earth. This “grey town” is a representation of Hell. In a Catholic understanding, this place also represents a type of Purgatory, for there is a way out. The narrator finds a bus that flies through the sky to take the “ghosts” from the grey city to the foothills of Heaven. There, the ghosts have the chance to meet with spirits from Heaven and choose to stay in that new country.

The narrator wanders around this beautiful place and witnesses the meetings of several ghosts. One interaction is between a ghost who struggles with lust and the angel of God sent to meet him. The ghost wants to enter Heaven, but the lizard on his shoulder (representing his sin) whispers lies in his ear. The angel asks repeatedly, “May I kill it?” This question is an elegant example of how God is willing to work in our lives, but he will never force his goodness upon us. The soul must choose to offer everything to God. Finally this ghost agrees, and the angel crushes the lizard. In a dramatic transformation, the ghost becomes a solid spirit and the lizard becomes a white stallion. On this stallion, the soul is able to ride off towards the hills, deeper into Heaven and closer to God.

This theological fantasy is packed with even more images and symbols, and yet it is Lewis’ shortest book. At only 118 pages, this little book is a quick read. To have it as a starting point of reflection, reading two to three chapters a week would be a good pace. The characters and symbolism are so layered in their implications that taking a chapter and rereading it would also be a fruitful practice.

Ask yourself where you see likenesses of your own story. Use Lewis’ story as a mirror for yourself this Lent, and see where God is calling you to come deeper into his country.
The Blessing of candles and throats

By Mary Hanbury
Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fargo

On Feb. 2 we celebrated the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. The Feast of the Presentation is one of the oldest feasts of the Christian church, celebrated since the 4th century in Jerusalem.

On this day we remember Joseph and Mary’s adherence to the Mosaic law as they brought their son to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord, “and when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord” (Luke 2:22). The law also required them to bring a lamb or two pigeons for the offering of a sacrifice.

We can picture Mary carrying her son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World, up the steps of the temple. The “light” she carries enters the temple, the house of God. The Spirit revealed to a man named Simeon that he would not die before he has seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came upon Joseph and Mary and he took the child in his arms and blessed God saying, “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32). This prayer of Simeon is prayed every night by those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours. Notice the language; he recognizes that the Child is a “light” for all peoples.

The Church used the symbol of light from this story by referring to this day also as Candlemas. We have the option to reenact the footsteps of Joseph and Mary as they took the “Light of the World” into the sacred temple. In the liturgy, there is candlelight procession into the Church before Mass starts. The celebrant then also blesses all the candles, not just candles used for the liturgy, but people can bring candles and have them blessed for home use.

In Poland there is a tradition to call it the “Feast of Our Lady of Thunder Candles” because people place their candles in windows during thunderstorms as they pray for protection. People will keep the blessed candles in a special place, either to be used in time of protection, or for a space set aside for prayer.

In England, there was a tradition to use the symbolism of the light to also mean an early spring, as the days get longer. There was a saying, “If Candlemas be fair and bright, / Come, Winter, have another flight. / If Candlemas brings clouds and rain, / Go, Winter, and come not again.” So if the bright sun “overshadows” the brightness of Candlemas Day, there will be more winter. However, if the light of Candlemas Day radiates through the gloom and darkness of the day, the end of winter is near.

In the United States, the German American immigrants had their own tradition on this day watching a badger—or similar animal such as the groundhog—and its shadow to indicate a longer winter or early spring. The Irish favor Feb. 1, the feast of St. Brigid, as the day for predicting the weather.

You may have noticed that the candles blessed on Feb. 2 make an appearance on Feb. 3 for a rather unusual tradition of blessing throats. This is the feast of St. Blaise, a fourth-century bishop from Armenia. The story is that while he was in prison for refusing to renounce his faith, he came across a boy choking to death on a fish bone. St. Blaise prayed and the boy was miraculously saved. Since then a tradition evolved on his feast day to take two of the newly blessed candles and place them around a person’s neck in the form of an X while saying this prayer of healing, “Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness.”

So next year when you see the announcement about the groundhog seeing or not seeing his shadow, you can recall this symbol of light and what this really means for us as Catholics. You could also read the story of the Presentation with your family as you light your blessed candle and recall how Jesus is the light that shines out of darkness.

Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory for your people Israel.” —Luke 2:29-32
Threat of storm reveals God’s plan

By Father Bert Miller | Pastor of parishes in Park River and Veseleyville

Time is ticking away. Harry works at his desk day in and day out. It’s that beautiful season of autumn. Harry does not have time to enjoy the season as the stack of immediate work on his desk is high and never seems to shorten. He’s tired and prays to have a break even if just for a few days.

After 10 grueling weeks of work, Harry sees three last tasks that cannot be done today or any day this week. He asks for four days off and the upcoming holiday. He doubts he’ll get his request given the lateness of his ask.

His boss says yes! Harry is off down the road to the largest big city in his area. He freely maneuvers in and out of the heavy traffic like a kid again. He sings with the radio, happy to be free of his desk, phone, and stacks of work projects.

At Harry’s destination, he realized he made his reservations for three days instead of four days. What was he thinking when he made the reservation? Maybe God had a plan. The hotel manager suggested he could stay an extra night since the hotel had plenty of room. Harry said he would consider it.

The next day Harry visited family members he hadn’t seen in at least three months. One had been sick, requiring surgery. One had not been able to work due to COVID-19 in his workplace. But, everyone was happy for the afternoon of fun and food.

When Harry got back to his hotel room, he heard on the television that a great rain, ice, snow, and windstorm was predicted for the last days of his vacation. A usual worrier about weather events, Harry decided he would just wait out the storm with an extra day at the hotel.

By morning the reports of the upcoming storm were worse.

The storm would affect the region between the place where he was and the warm home he would like to be.

He decided he would leave on the third rather than fourth day of his vacation/break. He would not have to talk to the hotel manager. Just enjoy another day in the big city and prepare to go home the next day.

Harry explored parts of the city he was not familiar with, found an old college friend for a lengthy lunch full of the joys of the past, drove around some more, and then went back to the hotel. After a nap, he set out in heavy rain to find a sandwich shop.

It rained all night. Harry got up at 6 a.m. to get ready to travel home. It could be 6-7 hours in the right conditions. He had breakfast, listened to the news for reports of the storm. He packed the car and was on the wet freeway at 7:30 a.m.

By 8:30 a.m., Harry had cleared the city, and was speeding down dry roads. He could see the storm off to his right, but it never came his way. He stopped for gas and lunch and to stretch—always with the idea of getting home before sunset.

The roads were so good, Harry got home at 2:30 p.m. just when the snowflakes started to fly. By 5 p.m., there was an inch or two of white where only hours ago, there had been only green grass.

Harry thought God had a plan when he learned the reservation was for three nights instead of four. And if he took him up on his plan, he would get him home safe and sound.

What a great friend we have in the Lord!
Calling out UND’s “gender inclusion” policy

Last fall the University of North Dakota quietly advanced a “gender inclusion” policy that could infringe upon constitutional rights and create troubling housing situations for students.

The university may have followed the usual process for adopting new policies, but even campus members did not hear about the proposal until it was revealed by a statewide columnist. By that time, only a few days were left in the official comment period. The proposed policy adopts a system of “gender inclusion” that requires faculty, staff, students, student clubs, and even campus visitors to use an individual’s preferred pronoun and accept the individual’s “expressed gender.” It also requires that all communications on campus refrain from language that assumes a gender binary. Failure to do so would violate campus policy and subject the violator to penalties.

Before discussing more details about the proposed policy, let us review Catholic teaching and basic truths about the human person. Human beings are created male and female from conception. Our sex is an objective truth that cannot be changed. To deny it denies the dignity bestowed on us by God. The idea that gender can be separated from biological sex is false. The concept that gender is subjective or fluid is a man-made ideology contrary to objective, biological reality and disrespectful of nature and human dignity.

For some people, their perceived gender does not conform to their biological sex. They should be treated with respect and the university should foster a respectful learning environment. UND’s proposal, however, goes beyond setting mere rules for administration respecting a person’s preferred name and pronoun. It reaches into the free speech and religious rights of students, faculty, staff, and visitors. According to the state board of higher education, UND is the only one of the state’s eleven campuses pursuing such a policy.

Students and faculty do not lose their First Amendment rights when they enter the doors of a state university. The proposed policy by UND amounts to unconstitutionally compelling speech and a particular viewpoint. In fact, one court has already found a similar policy unconstitutional as applied to faculty. The court stated: “[T]itles and pronouns carry a message. The university recognizes that and wants its professors to use pronouns to communicate a message: People can have a gender identity inconsistent with their sex at birth.” This was impermissible compelled speech.

On Oct. 25, 2021, the North Dakota Catholic Conference sent a letter to university officials discussing some of the problems with the proposed policy and how it violated constitutional rights, North Dakota law, and university policy. It never received a reply.

Concerned about the proposed policy and the possibility that Catholic parents and graduating high school students considering UND might not know about the proposal, Bishop David Kagan of Bismarck and Bishop John Folda of Fargo directed the North Dakota Catholic Conference to prepare a letter on their behalf that Catholic high schools in the state could share with parents and interested persons. The letter was sent on Jan. 10.

The issue spread across social media and news outlets and UND began receiving emails and calls in opposition to the proposal. UND president Andrew Armacost subsequently held a virtual press event to answer questions about the proposed policy. Armacost emphasized that the proposal was only a draft and that the housing issue would be addressed.

On Jan. 21, one week after his press conference, Armacost announced that UND was withdrawing its proposed policy. The North Dakota Catholic Conference issued this response:

“Today, University of North Dakota President Andrew Armacost announced that the university will cease work and not implement the proposed ‘gender inclusion’ policy. The North Dakota Catholic Conference has issued the following statement in response:

“The North Dakota Catholic Conference welcomes the University of North Dakota’s decision to cease work on the draft policy and not implement it.

“We appreciate and support UND’s commitment to providing a safe and respectful environment that respects the free speech and religious rights of all students, faculty, staff, and campus visitors. No one should feel unwelcome on our state’s campuses.”

Following the press conference by UND officials, some questions still remained regarding housing assignments. We have had subsequent conversations with UND President Andrew Armacost during which he assured us that UND’s housing practices will not change. This clarification resolves our earlier concerns about housing.
In any season of life, let prayer be your foundation

Seminary is a special place, and I was reminded of this soon after my return from Christmas break. We began this semester, as we do all of them, with a brief silent retreat. This time helps us get back into the rhythm of seminary life, which is slower than that of the outside world. We have work to do, we take classes, and we have obligations. However, we are more insulated from the noise of the world than the average man.

This semester’s retreat reminded me of the necessity of making time for Jesus. Even in this special place, insulated from some of the noise of the world, it is still easy to become overly engrossed in my studies or other duties. Studies and work duties are appealing to prioritize because success in these areas is easily quantifiable. There is a box to be checked—once finished, it is done.

Now I know that days with Jesus as my guide and goal are always uplifting and life-giving. Peace often accompanies them. Difficulties are less disquieting.

—Garrett Aberle

Relationships cannot work this way. They do not work this way. Because of this, my relationship with the Lord will always be unquantifiable, at least in some respect. I can keep track of time I spend with the Lord, the number of devotions I take part in, or try to guess which of St. Teresa’s mansions the Lord has invited me into. However, there is no data point measuring the fullness of my relationship with the Lord. There is no box to check, after which I would have finished fostering my relationship with him that day. In addition, others will probably not see spiritual progress, and sometimes focusing on prayer can force a decision between excelling in studies to the extent I would want and spending the time with Jesus I want. While having papers to write and lots of philosophy to read, a sense of duty to complete these tasks can spur the question of how much time should I spend on each thing. Sometimes I can finish everything, but there are also days I cannot. Finding the balance is key. Understanding this is simple, but putting this into practice can be a struggle.

I know that days with Jesus as my guide and goal are always uplifting and life-giving. Peace often accompanies them. Difficulties are less disquieting. Now, recalling again the retreat, I see the Lord wished to remind me of the importance of prayer and the value of silence. This reminder has brought up a desire in me to recommit myself to growing in holiness and relationship with the Lord this semester. The Lord has shown me that my time in prayer must be the foundation of my day and all else should flow from that time—a time of pouring out my heart, a time of listening, and a time of silence.

As I enter my last semester of minor seminary, I am reminded that, despite having several years left, I won’t be in the seminary environment forever. This adds to the importance of using seminary well to establish a firm foundation in my faith and relationship with the Lord. With this foundation, the noise of the world and its busyness cannot creep into my soul. Then, when I am in the world as a priest, God willing, I may know with ever more conviction and clarity that the Lord is my firm foundation, my rock, and my refuge. I can then bring the interior peace and silence formed in seminary into the world to help my own growth in holiness and that of the people of God.

Then, on the most hurried and cacophonous of days, nothing can harm the quiet inside, or at least, I will know who can restore it should it be lost.

Quotable

St. Josephine Bakhita
Feast day Feb. 8

“The Lord has loved me so much: we must love everyone... We must be compassionate.”

Garrett Aberle
College IV at St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Seward, Neb.
Plan your life, your future, and your legacy

While we would never attend a Broadway musical without a ticket or take a trip without luggage, most Americans have not taken the time to plan for their future. We simply never get around to doing it.

The result is disappointing. When we fail to plan, our dreams, wishes and hopes may never fully be realized. Unfortunately, this also means our family and beneficiaries experience the expense and frustration of estate administration. A few months of probate can destroy what it took a lifetime to create. Don’t let this happen to you or your family.

Take the time to plan your life, your future, and your legacy. You will be glad you did. Steve Schons

The good news is that planning is easy and rewarding. In less time than it takes to choose and arrange a summer vacation, you can complete a plan that outlines your goals and lets your family and friends know the values you hold dearly.

Take the time to plan your life, your future, and your legacy. You will be glad you did, and every day thereafter, you can expect the peace and comfort of knowing that your efforts today will provide security for tomorrow.

How can I begin planning online?

Creating your plan is easier than ever before when you use the online Wills Planner available on our website. Organize your family estate information and goals using the secure system. When finished, you may share your information with an online attorney to complete your will or trust plan. If you have questions, information can be shared through the system so we may better assist you.

To get started please visit our website (www.fargodiocese.giftlegacy.com) and click on “Plan Your Will.” Create a username and password, then login. Enter information on your family, contacts and healthcare, finances, and your estate. Once you have completed all sections of the Wills Planner, click on “Create a PDF” to compile the information your attorney will need to finalize your plan. Be sure to have your attorney review your will. It is not legal until they do so.

Where can I obtain more information on estate planning?

As you are completing the Wills Planner, you may find that you have questions. We would like to give you a free book—“Provide & Protect”—to answer important questions about the estate planning process. The book addresses ways to pass benefits to your children and other family members, how to prepare your advisors to make crucial decisions on your behalf, how to gather your property information and make key estate planning decisions. You may also take the quiz at the end of each chapter. Then view the answers online. To request your free copy of “Provide & Protect,” call me at (701) 356-7926 or go to www.fargodiocese.giftlegacy.com and click on Wills Guide.

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.
submitted two articles one night, and moments after I hit send, I was struck by the parallel of the two stories.

Sure, they both involved retired Catholics. But in my focus on the specifics of their work—the intricate toothpick sculptures of a Minnesota grandpa, the winsome travel guide written by a New Mexico single—I’d nearly missed how their paths mirrored each other.

Both had discovered a round-about way to fulfill their lifelong dreams.

Jerry Hackett always wanted to be an architect but opted for a practical path and worked as an accountant. He quietly provided for his six children. Then one day in retirement, the 70-something recalled a school project his child had done back in the ’80s: toothpick assembly.

Soon Jerry was looking up the dimensions of the Eiffel Tower and spraying Elmer’s Glue-All. Now 81, he’s created dozens of toothpick sculptures—bridges, windmills, churches—and generated a good deal of press. He works in his porch while listening to polka music, and he creates each sculpture to scale. There is a great deal of measuring: one inch of toothpick represents four feet.

Turns out he became an architect after all—a toothpick architect.

“I’ll wake up at night thinking about how to do this part of the church, and I can’t go back to sleep,” said Jerry, a member of St. Mark’s in Shakopee, Minn.

Marion Ambe, meanwhile, harbored starry-eyed ambitions of being a detective. She planned to study law enforcement. There was just one problem: She couldn’t stand the sight of blood.

Instead, she began writing for her local newspaper. The work entailed plenty of sleuthing. “Part of reporting is connecting the dots,” she said. “You see patterns.”


“Even if it’s on a church website, you can’t take it as Gospel truth,” said Marion, a member of the Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe. “I tried to verify every single fact.”

Lo and behold, this 60-something is now a detective—and no blood is involved!

“Your dreams may change as you get older, but they don’t end,” she said. “I feel like the 60s are just the beginning of my life.”

Immediately I thought of my late grandpa, who started writing an autobiography he’d titled Life Begins At 70.

At 73, he taught himself to play clarinet, putting numbered tape on keys to correspond with his fingering chart. Weeks later, he was playing the second movement of Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto.

Then I recalled an amusing story a Jesuit priest recently told me. Father Chris Collins was reading a program and saw his name listed as a jubilarian. He assumed it was a mistake. How could it possibly be 25 years of priesthood already?

“I can’t believe I’m almost 50,” he said, “because it feels like I’m just getting going.”

These Catholics demonstrate that our Creator is a God of surprises. We may resuscitate a long-lost dream—as an architect or detective, as a photographer or a florist. We can start in one direction and circle back. We might face a closed door and then discover there is another way.

Our options do not narrow with the ticking clock. We may find a new passion—or a new version of an old one that doubles the joy. Talents coalesce and converge in unpredictable ways. God is good.

He wants us to be happy and hopeful, to possess the “joyful optimism” named as a virtue in Salesian Spirituality. And in pursuing our passions, we make a sacred offering. As St. Augustine wrote: “The desire of your heart is itself your prayer.”

That prayer keeps pulsing—at 50, 60, and 70. It whispers: I’m just getting going.
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LIFE’S MILESTONES

Darrell and Phyllis Machtell, parishioners of St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City, celebrated their 60th anniversary Feb. 10. They have 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandchild.

Roger Burt of Lawton, parishioner of St. Joseph’s Church in Devils Lake, will celebrate his 90th birthday on Feb. 19. Roger is blessed with 4 children, 6 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
Life’s Milestones includes anniversaries for marriages, ordinations, and religious vows for 25, 40, 50, 60, 65, and 70+ years and birthdays for 80, 85, 90, 95, and 100+ years for those in the Diocese of Fargo. Submissions will only be accepted for milestones occurring during the month of publication, one month prior, or one month following. Send a photo with text to news@fargodiocese.org or to Diocese of Fargo, New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd S, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 with a stamped return envelope and phone number. Deadline for the March issue is Feb. 15.

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**EVENTS**

**Come to a Life in the Spirit weekend in Harvey**
Come attend a Life in the Spirit Weekend Feb. 25 at 6 p.m. through Feb. 27 at 3 p.m. at St. Cecilia’s Church in Harvey. The seminar serves as an introduction or renewal to a life in the power of the Holy Spirit leading to a new and deeper relationship with the Lord. The weekend includes praise and worship, talks and testimony, discussion groups, healing of memories, prayer, and more. Father Kevin Boucher will be the spiritual director. Register by Feb. 18. Meals provided. Free will offering. For more information and to register, contact Rosalie at raxtman@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2706 or the parish office at stcecilia@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2144. No cost housing available in St. Cecilia’s Social Center.

**Join St. John’s Church in Wahpeton for Mardi Gras**
Join St. John’s Mardi Gras Event on Feb. 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at St. John’s Church in Wahpeton. The Mardi Gras event includes a wonderful dinner, theme basket silent auction, carnival games, and a bake sale. For more information, contact St. John’s Church in Wahpeton at (701) 642-6982 or visit www.stjohns-wahpeton.org.

**A GLIMPSE OF THE PAST**

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

**75 years ago — 1947**
Academy of St. James students in Grand Forks were busy this month. The junior American History class gave a presentation for the Brotherhood Week symposium, and a handful of seniors sat (through) examinations in hopes of earning one of the 126 coveted nationwide Pepsi-Cola scholarships. On the lighter side, the St. James senior class students presented their play, “Everybody Works but Father,” a domestic comedy in three acts by Orville Snapp. Not to be forgotten was the annual Junior-Senior Prom. This year’s theme was “One More Tomorrow,” and music was furnished by Kermit Myhre and his orchestra.

**50 years ago — 1972**
Music for the heart and soul. Grand Forks hosted a liturgical workshop for lectors, cantors, choirs, organists, folk groups and people interested in creating a setting for liturgy, conducted by Joe Wise and other experts in their field. Joe Wise holds a BA in Philosophy and an STB in Theology from St. Mary’s Seminary (Baltimore, MD) and an MA in Religious Education from Catholic University (Washington, DC). He’ll remain in town until Sunday when all are welcome to attend “Joe Wise in Concert.”

**20 years ago — 2002**
Students at Sullivan (now Sacred Heart) Middle School, Fargo, raised a total of $5,000 for the Blessed Gianna’s Home in Warsaw. They expanded upon their original “Holiday Hearts” fundraiser and collected additional baby necessities to give to the Churches United for the Homeless to support mothers and their children who are living in shelters across the Fargo-Moorhead area.
Is your marriage going down the right road... or is it a little off track?

RETRouvAILLE
A LIFELINE FOR MARRIED COUPLES

Weekend for couples March 11-13, 2022

Does the distance between you seem wide? Are you already separated? Looking for a better way? Retrouvaille can help and offers hope for a better relationship. Retrouvaille is a peer ministry of volunteer couples that can help you learn the tools of healthy communication, build intimacy and heal, just as they have done in their own marriages. Retrouvaille is Christian-based, and Catholic in origin, and welcomes couples of all faiths as well as non-religious couples. Retrouvaille can help get your relationship back on track.

For more information,
Call (701) 356-7903 or visit HelpOurMarriage.com

Join the Diocese of Fargo
on a pilgrimage to Philadelphia, Emmitsburg, and Washington, D.C.

Led by The Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

September 10 - 14, 2022

Peter’s Way Tours

For a detailed brochure and online enrollment please visit:
https://www.petersway.com/9873.html
Before baptizing 16 babies in the Sistine Chapel, Pope Francis reminded parents and godparents of their responsibility to care for and preserve the Christian identity the infants were about to receive.

“This is your task throughout your lives: to guard the Christian identity of your children,” the pope said. “It is a daily commitment: help them grow with the light they receive today.”

The pope baptized the seven boys and nine girls—the children of Vatican employees—in the Sistine Chapel during the celebration of Mass Jan. 9, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

The annual tradition of baptizing infants on the feast day, which began in 1981 by St. John Paul II, was canceled last year due to the pandemic.

Although the baptisms resumed this year, the number of infants was significantly reduced. In January 2020, the pope had baptized 32 infants in the Sistine Chapel.

Delivering a brief, off-the-cuff homily, Pope Francis recalled a hymn for the feast day that said the people of Israel went to the Jordan River to be baptized “with bare feet and bare souls.”

“These children today also come here with ‘bare souls’ to receive God’s justification, Jesus’ strength, the strength to move forward in life,” he said. “Your children will receive their Christian identity today. And you, parents and godparents, must guard this identity.”

With the sounds of fussy children filling the frescoed chapel, the pope repeated his usual advice to mothers of infants, encouraging them to make their children comfortable, and to not worry if they start to cry in the chapel.

“This ceremony is a bit long, the children then feel uncomfortable here in an environment they do not know. Please, they are the protagonists: make sure that they are not too hot, that they feel comfortable,” Pope Francis said.

“If they are hungry, breast feed them here, in front of the Lord, no problem,” he added. “And if they cry out, let them cry out, because they have a community spirit, let’s say a ‘band spirit,’ a spirit of ensemble, and all it takes is for one to start—because everyone is musical—and immediately the orchestra comes! Let them cry, let them feel free.”
Prayer surrounding West Coast pro-life walk seen as critical part of event

By Mary Powers | Catholic News Service

While the city of San Francisco was abuzz late Jan. 21 with weekends beginning, groups of young Catholics and Walk for Life West Coast pilgrims joyfully headed to the city’s North Beach neighborhood to pray.

Entering into a dimly lit Sts. Peter and Paul Church, the pews were filled with the faithful, a majority of which were young people, for all-night “Adoration for Life.”

Across the city at St. Dominic’s Catholic Church, attendees of a Walk for Life vigil also were spending their evening adoring the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, preparing for the next day’s events to mark the 49th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion nationwide.

Jan. 22 also is the National Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children in the Catholic Church.

While the Walk for Life West Coast is the public witness through the streets of San Francisco, the prayer surrounding the walk is just as critical to the event.

The vigil Mass and eucharistic adoration in churches across the city provide an opportunity for an encounter with Christ’s love and mercy, so adorers can then go out and be the face of Christ to others.

Brother Nikolas Simon, a Chaldean Catholic monk from the Sons of the Covenant Monastery, traveled by bus with his parish and local high school students from El Cajon in San Diego County for the walk.

“We can’t have a proper active life without a proper contemplative life,” Brother Nikolas said, speaking on the importance of prayer and adoration.

“And with the most holy Eucharist being exposed and having that intimate heart to heart friendship with Jesus Christ, who is our Savior, we can be a radiating Christ for other people,” he said. “In reality, we are fighting for the change and conversion of hearts. And that requires a lot of grace and for people to encounter Christ. If we can be that radiating Christ for them, that encounter of healing, I think that can transform lives.”

Earlier in the evening, Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, California, celebrated the Walk for Life vigil Mass at St. Dominic’s Church in San Francisco. “Speak the truth in love” was his message. He shared his hope that we will “build a culture of compassion.”

He also spoke on the possibility of Roe v. Wade being overturned in the decision the U.S. Supreme Court Case will hand down in the case Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization. If Roe is overturned, he said, “our response will be love, mercy, and kindness.”

Dobbs, which involves a Mississippi law that bans most abortions after 15 weeks, is a case seen by many as a direct challenge to the court’s 1973 Roe decision. The Dobbs ruling is expected within months.

Daisy Crae, being in her third trimester, decided to attend the vigil and adoration instead of the walk, joining the community in prayer. “Prayer is a powerful, essential part of the pro-life movement and an agent of change to bring truth, hope, compassion, and love,” she said.

“Never underestimate the power of prayer,” said Kathy Folan, a St. Dominic’s parishioner, birthmother, and Walk for Life board member. “St. Dominic founded an order of nuns before he founded the Order of Preachers. He knew no mission or new order would succeed without the powerful prayerful intercession of a group of religious women.”

“The Battle at Lepanto was won against all odds by the devout recitation of the rosary and Our Lady interceded. God can change hearts, and we can change hearts with His help and through our prayers and witness.”

The Christian victory over the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Lepanto Oct. 7, 1571, is credited with saving Western Europe.

“Ultimately this (abortion) is a spiritual battle,” said Father Mark Mary, a Franciscan Missionary of the Eternal Word, who is the host of “Life on the Rock” on EWTN. “I think the praying church is just hard to quantify. It gets overlooked. The faith gets us out here and it makes it matter to us. It fosters charity in us to care what’s going on.

“This is really the greatest loss of human life going on in the world. (Abortion) is the leading cause of death. And faith makes us care about it. It makes it an issue. Otherwise we just stay in our comfort zone and don’t come out.”

The 18th annual Walk for Life West Coast Jan. 22 drew an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 pro-lifers from as far away as Oregon, Idaho and San Diego.

Before the crowd walked through the city streets, they gathered in Civic Center Plaza to hear a number of speakers,
Vatican announces “Pilgrims of Hope” as motto for Holy Year 2025

By Carol Glatz | Catholic News Service

Pope Francis approved “Pilgrims of Hope” as the motto for the Holy Year 2025.

The motto aims to give a concise sense of the full meaning of the jubilee journey, Archbishop Rino Fisichella told Vatican News Jan. 13.

The words “pilgrims” and “hope” also represent key themes of Pope Francis’ pontificate, said the archbishop, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, which is in charge of the Holy Year planning efforts.

The archbishop said the pope approved the motto Jan. 3 and that he is awaiting further instructions from the pope. In the meantime, the council already is working with Vatican and Italian authorities on the best way to welcome a large number of visitors during the year.

Traditionally for holy years, the celebrations begin with the pope opening the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica on Christmas Eve and ends with the sealing of the door one year later. The holy doors of St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls and St. Mary Major are opened for the year, too.

A holy year or jubilee is a time of pilgrimage, prayer, penance and acts of mercy, based on the Old Testament tradition of a jubilee year of rest, forgiveness and renewal. Holy years also are a time when Catholics visit designated churches and shrines, recite special prayers, go to confession and receive Communion to receive a plenary indulgence, which is a remission of the temporal punishment due for one’s sins.

Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed the first Holy Year in 1300 and decreed that they would be celebrated every 100 years.

But just 50 years later, a more biblical cadence, Pope Clement VI proclaimed another holy year. Pope Urban VI thought holy years should be celebrated every 33 years as a reminder of the time Jesus lived.

Finally, in 1470, Pope Paul II established the celebrations every 25 years, which has been the practice ever since. However, special anniversaries have called for special holy years, for instance, in 1933 to mark the 1,900th anniversary of Jesus’ death and resurrection and in 1983 to mark the 1,950th anniversary.

Pope Francis, seeing a need to emphasize God’s mercy and to encourage Catholics to return to the sacrament of reconciliation, declared an extraordinary Year of Mercy, which ran in 2015-16.
Louisiana diocese completes annual 100-hour nonstop public Bible reading

By Catholic News Service

An annual 100-hour, nonstop public Bible reading took place in St. Martinville in the Diocese of Lafayette Jan. 19-23.

The holy Bible was read publicly from cover to cover without pause in the square of the diocese’s oldest church parish, St. Martin de Tours. The parish was erected in 1765 and the present church dates to 1836.

The reading began at 12:30 p.m. (local time) Jan. 19 and ended at 4:30 p.m. Jan. 23, which is Word of God Sunday.

During the four days of continuous reading, 300 lectors from the various 121 parish churches in the Diocese of Lafayette as well as faith leaders from other denominations from across the Acadiana region were employed.

The Bible Marathon helped accentuate “the rich cultural heritage of the region by including its various nationalities and languages,” said a news release on the event.

In addition to English, selections from the Bible were read in French, Italian, German, Spanish, Vietnamese, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Over 3,000 people attended at various times throughout the 100 hours.

Fête-Dieu du Teche in conjunction with St. Martin de Tours Catholic Church hosted the Bible Marathon. Fête-Dieu du Teche is an organization that sponsors an annual eucharistic boat procession of the same name each August to celebrate faith, family and tradition in the Lafayette Diocese.

The Bible Marathon was livestreamed on the Fête-Dieu du Teche Facebook page.

The special event was intended to help “prime the pump” and reignite a love for the word of God and its practice in our lives, said Father Michael Champagne, a priest of the Community of Jesus Crucified, who is the organizer of the event.

“People everywhere love to exercise. It’s important to stay in physical shape, which is why many participate in programs such as CrossFit and compete in Iron Man races, triathlons and marathons. And we wanted to provide a way for people to spiritually exercise,” the priest said. “We, as Christians, and all men and women of goodwill, need to ‘shake the dust off’ our Bibles and begin to ponder God’s plan for our lives.”

“In these chaotic times we often get confused about how we are to act in our personal lives, in our families, at work and in our dealings with others,” he added. “God’s preeminent way of speaking to us is through the sacred Scriptures.

“Every page of the Bible recounts God’s burning and fatherly love for us, and the Bible Marathon is a reminder of that love.”

Lafayette Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel participates in the Bible Marathon every year. He said it “serves as a reminder of the importance of the Bible, the word of God and the sacred Scriptures.”

“In the very noisy world we live in today, the significance of the word of God can be easily lost,” Bishop Deshotel said. “The Bible is a record of God’s interaction with the human race” and “culminates in the person of Jesus Christ.”

Fête-Dieu du Teche added a new element to this year’s Bible Marathon—the “Friar Truck.” The retrofitted antique fire truck was transformed into a mobile church with a built-in pulpit.

The Friar Truck, blessed by Bishop Deshotel Jan. 7, was used for proclaiming the word of God during this year’s Bible Marathon, Father Champagne said. The truck is stocked with free Bibles, holy water, and will be used for itinerant street preaching on the Scriptures at various locations in the region.

Among this year’s readers was Louisiana Attorney General Jeff Landry, who noted that the rule of law won’t fail if it is anchored in the law of God.

The Bible Marathon—also called the “Jubilee of the Word Marathon”—“is a great way to recover that wisdom and reflect on it together,” he said.

According to Father Champagne, the public Bible reading in the church square in St. Martinville has spawned many Bible studies and inspired other Bible Marathons at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in New Orleans and most recently in Colorado.

During the marathon in St. Martinville, priests were available each day for the sacrament of reconciliation “by means of the Spiritual Care Unit,” a mobile confessional, according to the news release.

“Catholics who are properly disposed were able to obtain a plenary indulgence by reading or listening for 30 minutes from the holy Bible in the square during the event,” the release said. All lectors were asked to invite at least 10 people to come along with them “and listen to the Word while it is being proclaimed in the square.”

“We need proclaimers of the Word, but also hearers of the Word, and most importantly doers of the Word,” said Father Champagne.
Basilica prank in D.C. fades as true light shines

SIDEWALK STORIES
ROXANE B. SALONEN
Mother of five, writer for The Forum and CatholicMom.com, speaker and radio host for Real Presence Radio

At the 10th hour, I was asked to serve as a chaperone for Shanley High School’s 2022 March for Life trip to D.C., and eagerly anticipated my fourth trip to the capitol to join the throngs of those speaking out for life in this 49th year since the infamous Roe vs. Wade decision, which codified abortion in our land throughout pregnancy.

But at the 11th hour, our trip was canceled due to the enormity of obstacles that had presented themselves, and we were called to pray from home.

As I heard the opening speakers at the rally before the march on Real Presence Radio, my heart swelled. I could feel the energy, the excitement, the zeal for life.

The prior evening, the Catholics for Choice group had stolen into the night, projecting pro-abortion views in messages illuminated by lights onto the exterior of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

A tweet from a group representative explained: “We projected on the Basilica in D.C. because we know that most Catholics support reproductive healthcare. If you’re a fellow pro-choice Catholic/person of faith, join us by speaking out & sharing your story,” adding hashtags, “#LiberateAbortion,” and “AbortionIsEssential.”

In an attached video, the rep is standing across the street from the basilica, the slogans flashing onto the sacred structures behind her, as she gives an impassioned plea. “We are here tonight to lift up the majority of Catholics in the United States who support abortion rights and do not want to see Roe vs. Wade struck down” (my emphasis).

She said people who’ve had abortions are sitting in the pews, speaking at the lectern, and teaching Sunday school. “Abortion is part of the life of the Church,” she said, “and we are so tired of the clergy and the rightwing stigmatizing women and people who’ve had abortions. We need to start listening to them.”

The woman got it partially right. The post-abortive are part of our community, but they are part of the wounded of our community seeking reconciliation and redemption, not sitting proudly in their sin. Yes, we need to start listening to them, and we have been doing so. Hear some of these stories at silentnomoreawareness.org.

Thankfully, those deeds done in the dark were a paltry act when placed next to the tremendously lively, positive pro-life march that followed, in the light, and the rally preceding it.

One of the keynote speakers, Father Mike Schmitz from the Diocese of Duluth, shared the story of a woman named Helen who walked away from her beloved job as a nurse in 1973 when her hospital started performing abortions. He later revealed that the woman was his grandmother, and how much that decision had impacted her and her entire family line.

Father Mike said each of our lives matter, indicating that what we do for life—whether making a hard decision like his grandmother did, marching with thousands of others to prayerfully protest abortion, or standing on the streets of our city to offer hopeful alternatives for those seeking it—also matters.

He also shared of someone in an unplanned pregnancy situation whom he’d counseled 12 years ago who ended up completing the pregnancy, even when all her family and friends had advised she “just get rid of it,” and recalled how he’d assured her that her baby mattered and she was already a mother.

“She said, ‘I thought I hated my baby, and all these many years later I realized I didn’t hate my baby. I hated the circumstances in which I found myself... I was ashamed of myself,’” he relayed. She offered a suggestion to Schmitz for his D.C. address: “They need to know that my son is a gift from God himself.”

“That willingness to stand, that willingness to walk,” Schmitz followed, “it has echoed into my life: into the life of that young woman; and it is incarnate in the life of this 12-year-old boy, who wouldn’t be here if my Grandma Helen hadn’t stood... hadn’t walked.”

“Every child matters. Every woman matters. Every person matters,” he concluded. “Your being here standing, your being here walking, it changes you. And you matter.”

The words projected onto the basilica that night have now disappeared, and as the Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, proclaimed: “The true voice of the Church was only to be found” within the basilica that evening.

“There, people prayed and offered the Eucharist, asking God to restore a true reverence for all human life” he wrote in a statement. “Those whose antics projected words on the outside of the church building demonstrated by those pranks that they really are external to the Church, and they did so at night. John 13:30.”
Do you know where we are?

The answer will be revealed in the March New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is of St. Benedict’s Church in Wild Rice.