From Bishop Folda:
The journey of Lent

Warsaw choir makes a joyful, youthful, noise unto the Lord

Artist uses talent and passion to remember churches of the past

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ON THE COVER:
The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick depicted at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)

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The journey of Lent

On March 2, we celebrated Ash Wednesday and began the season of Lent. With the imposition of ashes, we heard those haunting words, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” This isn’t a statement of despair, but an exhortation to recall the shortness of our lives here on earth and to look forward with hope toward the eternal life that awaits us.

The forty days of Lent hearken back to the forty years the Israelites spent in the desert, a time of purification when they needed to leave behind whatever kept them from God. That should be our goal as well, a detachment from sin and the things of this world that keep us from our relationship with God. The season of Lent is much like the journey of the Israelites. We enter into the spiritual desert in order to be more perfectly aligned with God.

The forty days of Lent also recall the forty days that Jesus spent in the desert. After his baptism, he went into the desert where he fasted and prayed intensely. He experienced temptations from the devil, temptations to put aside his Father’s plan and to take an easier way forward, but he firmly rejected those temptations. The observance of Lent helps us to focus deeply on God’s presence in our lives, and also to reject whatever temptations might draw us away from him.

Most of us probably grew up with the custom of “giving up” something for Lent. It might have been a favorite food, television, or an activity that we typically enjoy. This practice of fasting unites us to the fasting of Jesus, and helps us to detach from anything that might hold us back on our journey to God. Perhaps we fast from a particular food or a beverage. Or, maybe we fast from television or the internet. The Church offers us days of fasting and abstinence—Ash Wednesday, Good Friday, and the Fridays of Lent—but there is great spiritual benefit to a daily fast that leaves more room for God in our lives.

Lent is also a time of prayer. Jesus prayed in the desert because he had a constant desire for union with his Father. We pray because we need that same union, a union with the One who made us and has loved us from all eternity. Lent is an excellent time to read the Bible, perhaps a chapter or two a day from one of the Gospels, or from one of Paul’s letters. The Word of God will always be a pathway for closeness to our Lord. Many choose to pray the Stations of the Cross during Lent, a beautiful devotion that allows us to walk with Jesus on the sorrowful journey of his Passion. The greatest prayer of all is the Mass, which is the sacrifice of Christ made present to us at the altar. When I was in college, I started the habit of attending a daily Mass during Lent whenever I could, and it was a great blessing in my life. I encourage everyone to attend Mass and pray before our Eucharistic Lord as often as possible, especially during Lent.

Of course, Lent is about more than giving up chocolate, television, or video games. Lent is also about charity, the love of others. Jesus commands his followers to give alms, to share our riches with others, especially the poor. Some form of almsgiving or charity should be part of our Lenten observance. Pope Francis cautions us, however, not to be content with just making a monetary donation. He urges us to come face-to-face with the poor, with those in need, and to give of our time as well. For many of us, the gift of time is the most precious gift of all, and to give time to another is a real act of sacrificial love. A visit to an elderly neighbor, a phone call to a lonely friend, or an email or card to someone who is grieving, can be a gift of love that also blesses the giver. When we give of ourselves unselfishly, we begin to know the love of Jesus more personally.

For our catechumens and candidates, the season of Lent is a time of preparation to receive the sacraments for the first time at Easter. Every year at the Rite of Election on the first Sunday of Lent, I greet those courageous brothers and sisters who are looking forward to their Baptism, Confirmation, and first Eucharist. It’s always an inspiration to see them gathered at the Cathedral with their pastors, sponsors, and family members, and it reminds us that we are all on a journey of conversion.

“I like to think of Lent as a kind of extended retreat. It’s an opportunity to step away from business as usual, and to turn our attention back to the Lord who loves us and who died for our sins.” Bishop John T. Folda
One of the most powerful experiences of conversion during Lent is taking part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There is nothing more liberating than making a full confession of our sins and hearing the words of absolution from the priest confessor. Every one of us is in need of repentance, because we are all sinners. But Jesus gives the power of forgiveness to his Church as a sign of God’s merciful love, and we should be sure to take advantage of that mercy as often as possible, especially during this holy season. If it has been a long time since you went to confession, now is the acceptable time!

I like to think of Lent as a kind of extended retreat. It’s an opportunity to step away from business as usual, and to turn our attention back to the Lord who loves us and who died for our sins. This extended period of prayer, fasting, and charitable works also reminds us that conversion is a lifelong project. Every day is another opportunity to respond to God’s grace and to prepare for the moment when we will stand before our Lord, hopefully to rejoice with him in eternity. May this year’s journey of Lent be such a time of grace for all of us.

**BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR**

Mar. 15–16  
Catholic Charities General Board Meeting and Retreat, Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 19  •  9 a.m.  
Mass for Ecclesia Domestica Men’s Retreat, Hankinson

Mar. 23  •  3 p.m.  
St. JPII Schools Board Meeting, Pastoral Center

Mar. 24  •  6 p.m.  
Catholic Man Night, St. Leo, Casselton

Mar. 26  •  10 a.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Philip, Hankinson

Mar. 27  •  11 a.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, Holy Spirit, Fargo

Apr. 1  •  6 p.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 2  •  10 a.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo

Apr. 2  •  7 p.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Anthony, Fargo

Apr. 3  •  2 p.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. John, Wahpeton

Apr. 8  •  7 p.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, Basilica of St. James, Jamestown

Apr. 9  •  10 a.m.  
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Catherine, Valley City

Apr. 10  •  10 a.m.  
Palm Sunday, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 12  •  11 a.m.  
Chrism Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

**Prayer Intention of Pope Francis March**

A Christian Response to Bioethical Challenges

We pray for Christians facing new bioethical challenges; may they continue to defend the dignity of all human life with prayer and action.
St. Casimir grew up in a world where his life was not his own. As the second son of King Casimir IV of Poland, his life was scheduled to cement his father's authority and increase Poland's power. But Casimir realized from an early age that his life belonged to someone else, a much higher king than his father. Despite pressure, humiliation, and rejection, he stood by that loyalty throughout his life.

Rejecting even ordinary comforts, he slept little, spending his nights in prayer. Though his father must have wondered about him, he must have seen and admired Casimir's strength. But the king showed that he misunderstood this strength when he sent Casimir as head of an army to take over the throne of Hungary at the request of some nobles there. Casimir felt the whole expedition was wrong but was convinced to go out of obedience to his father. Casimir was only too glad to listen to the advice of his officers and turned back home. His feelings were confirmed when he discovered that Pope Sixtus IV had opposed the move.

His father, however, was furious at being deterred from his plans and banished Casimir, hoping that imprisonment would change Casimir's mind. St. Casimir's commitment to what he believed was right only grew stronger in his exile. He participated in his true king's plans wholeheartedly by praying, studying, and helping the poor. He died at the age of 23 from lung disease.

Historical information from catholic.org.

**PRAYER FOR PRIESTS**

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)*

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**SAINT OF THE MONTH**

St. Casimir

By Paul Braun

Feast day: March 4
Birth: 1461  Death: 1484
Patron Saint of Poland and Lithuania
Winner of “Give Back Teacher” award from St. Michael’s School in Grand Forks

Catholic Financial Life announced Kim Flanagan, kindergarten teacher from St. Michael’s Catholic School in Grand Forks, as one of three winners of the Give Back Contest. More than 11,000 votes were cast for 57 Catholic educators that were nominated from all over the country. Based upon the nominations, votes, and comments shared, Mrs. Flanagan was chosen as a Give Back Teacher.

Mrs. Flanagan will receive $500 and St. Michael’s Catholic School will receive $4,000 from Catholic Financial Life.

For 40 years, Mrs. Kim Flanagan has demonstrated a passion and commitment to Catholic education. As a Franciscan, Mrs. Flanagan lives her mission as she is generous and loving to her students each day as they learn to be faith-filled learners. She forms the students through exceptional academics and shares her love of Christ and his teachings.

GRATEFUL

Catholic educators inspire and ignite a spark in the hearts and minds of their students.

We at the University of Mary support Catholic educators in their training, work, and career goals. As part of our commitment to supporting Catholic education, we offer a $5,000 scholarship to those employed full-time by a K-12 Catholic school or other recognized partner.
Recent studies have shown that 78% of Catholics who leave the faith, do so by the age of 23. This is an alarming statistic. In order to preserve the faith in our young adults, we as Catholics must ask ourselves how we can combat the increasingly relativistic and secular society we live in. How can we draw young adults to Christ?

That is at the heart of Newman Living’s mission. Newman Living residents are encouraged to delve into their faith through an active life of prayer, fellowship, and formation. Our current residents and staff are reminded, as the Proverbs 27:17 says: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” Residents live that out every day. We’d like to highlight their stories:

“I cannot talk highly enough about my experience so far here at NDSU with the Newman Center and Newman Living. I have truly found the community I had been desiring for so long, a community that has encouraged and supported me to dive deeper into my faith. The community here has been one of the greatest graces received, and I can see the effects that it has had on my faith and prayer life. No matter what event is happening, daily Mass, or Adoration, there is always someone ready to tag along.” –Mary Heil, student at NDSU

Students like Mary are given ample opportunities to delve into their faith in their college years. Through this community, they form virtuous friendships that last a lifetime. The Newman Center’s new housing complex, dedicated towards strengthening faith, authentic friendship, and Catholic values is changing lives. It is intentionally faithful and set apart from other college communities. At Newman Living, students in the tri-college area are able to enter into this strong culture, away from the typical secular on-campus living experience. In its time, Newman Living has created the ideal environment for residents to learn more about their faith, their community, and themselves.

The students have the opportunity to experience life together. Whether that’s by borrowing a can opener from a neighbor, studying with roommates, or participating in the housing activities, faith surrounds them. Residents feel safe and encouraged to welcome God into their lives in new ways, and begin exploring the life he has in store for them. Newman Living has the capacity to house 82 students in three, four, and eight bedroom apartments. Each unit includes furniture, a full kitchen including a dishwasher, in unit laundry, and all utilities included!
Cardinal Muench Men’s Hall

Aloisius Cardinal Muench served as Bishop of Fargo from 1935 to 1959 in addition to service as Apostolic Nuncio to Germany from 1951 to 1959. He worked tirelessly to promote vocations during his time in North Dakota and “considered the education of priests his primary responsibility and concern.” It is in the spirit of Cardinal Muench’s love for the People of God and their spiritual care that this Men’s Hall is established.

The purpose of the Men’s Hall is to provide an opportunity for college men to live together in an intentional community so they can better pursue growth in their human and Baptismal vocation. Through the experience of common prayer, shared commitment to acts of service, and enjoying leisurely activities together, the men are encouraged to grow in their vocation to be Fratres in Christo—men of God and loyal brothers to each other.

“My favorite element of living in the Cardinal Muench Men’s Hall is the constant presence of God and authentic Catholicism in my own life and in the lives of the men surrounding me. I had a tendency to overlook how God is intricately working wonders in my everyday life, but ever since I started living with these seven other God-driven men, I can’t help but see just how much of a role God is playing in our lives. Every interaction we have together, God is always included. Another part of everyday life I highly cherish is the sense of community and fraternity I have with my brothers. Every night we gather to say night prayer, invite priests over weekly for a community dinner, and often plan and participate in events together like playing basketball at the wellness center.” –Ashton Lacko, student at NDSU

Full kitchen in the four-bedroom apartment.
(St. Paul Newman Center)

Ashton has been able to enter into the Newman Living community and experience the numerous graces that flow from living a healthy lifestyle centered on prayer, discernment, and fraternity, he has been encouraged to allow the Lord to work in his life. The fruits have been immeasurable.

There are a limited number of spaces open for the 2022-2023 leasing term. Visit www.bisoncatholic.org/housing to apply today!

Quotable
St. Katharine Drexel
Feast day March 3

“If we wish to serve God and love our neighbor well, we must manifest our joy in the service we render to Him and them. Let us open wide our hearts. It is joy that invites us. Press forward and fear nothing.”

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

Weekend for couples October 7-9, 2022

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For more information, Call (701) 356-7903 or visit HelpOurMarriage.com
Artist uses talent and passion to remember churches of the past

By Paul Braun

Eighty-nine year old Leo Beauchamp of Walhalla, a native of Olga, N.D., always liked to draw and paint throughout his life, but it wasn’t until the mid-1980s that he decided to use his passion for art as a way to commemorate a little North Dakota history.

You could say Leo’s roots go deep in the town of Olga. Born and raised there, he faithfully attended Mass at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church. He was an altar boy until he was 13, and then transitioned to being a member of the church choir. Leo’s wife, Lenore, also a member of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, sang in the choir, and the two were married there in 1953. Their six children were all baptized and confirmed at Our Lady, and two of them were married there as well.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart has always held a warm place in Leo’s heart, even after its closure in 2005. His love for the old church helped to stoke his creative juices in his works of art.

“My painting passion has been buildings that mean something to me,” said Leo. “From a collection of old postcards, I ‘rebuilt’ my hometown of Olga as I remembered most of it in the 1940s. I call it ‘Olga, ND in Oil.’”

In the mid 1980s, a friend invited Leo for an afternoon of painting at her home. The Brush Bunch is an art group begun by a group of ladies who liked to paint but each person was painting alone. They began meeting in the basement of the St. Boniface rectory in Walhalla, where Leo and Lenore eventually moved to in 1996. They are now parishioners of St. Boniface Church. The group still meets every Tuesday.

“It was an introduction to a passion I only felt but never pursued until now,” said Leo. “I joined the Brush Bunch Art club in 1996. I was the first male in an all-female group. I started with oil paint and it is now my medium of choice. In 2018, I decided to paint churches in our area regardless of denomination. I have around 15 church paintings.”

The Brush Bunch held their 50th Annual Art Show in May 2021. This year the show is scheduled for April 30 and May 1 at the American Legion in Walhalla. If you attend, you’ll see many of Leo’s paintings of different churches around the diocese, as well as works from other members of the Brush Bunch.
Job opening: 
**Elementary School Principal**

Saint Joseph Catholic School, Williston, ND is searching for an Elementary Education Principal for the 2022-23 school year. Candidate must be a dynamic and decisive leader, an effective communicator in both public and private meetings with parents, staff, and benefactors, and be accessible and visible in the life of the school. The principal works closely with the administrative team, including the Superintendent, Business Manager, and School Secretary, to effectively advance the mission of St. Joseph Catholic School: educating the whole student—mind, body, and soul.

Candidate is expected to advance the philosophy of Catholic education to give personal witness to the beliefs and practices of the Catholic faith.

Candidate must have a master’s degree in education with a North Dakota Teaching Certificate and has (or is able to obtain) a Principal Credential. Salary ranges from $70,000 to $85,000, plus a $10,000 signing bonus.

For more information, visit stjswilliston.com or call (701) 572-6731. Submit resume to Fr. Russell Kovash to: rkovash@bismarckdiocese.com
We want to introduce you to a man. A man with a big heart, warm personality, and a love for life. We also want to share a beautiful story, a miracle from God. This miracle has touched our lives on an intimate level as well as the lives of many around the world. This miracle comes from God through the intercession of Blessed Columba Marmion.

In 1966, terminal breast and lung cancer began to spread in 39-year-old Patricia Bitzan. At this time, medical knowledge was not able to conquer an illness like this. Even today, it is difficult to overcome. The curing of her illnesses was a great gift to our family and to all who are blessed to know “Mom.”

In January 1966, when John was only five months old, Patricia Bitzan had surgery for breast cancer. In May of that year, the cancer had recurred in her lungs and her doctors told her that her chances for survival were very slim. Father Arnold Weber, a friend from St. John’s Abbey, came to visit Patricia and her husband Donald. He brought a small flyer that explained the Cause for Abbot Marmion’s sainthood, which asked for support from the American Benedictine Abbeys.

Patricia and Donald were intrigued by The Cause. They made the decision to visit Abbot Marmion’s tomb and pray for healing. They contacted Father Alcuin Deck at Marmion Abbey in Aurora, Ill. to ask them for advice before making the pilgrimage. Father Alcuin wrote to Father Benedict Becker, who was postulator of the Cause in Rome, and Father Benedict advised them to pray for her cure to God only through the intercession of Abbot Marmion.

Joseph Columba Marmion lived from 1858 to 1923. He was Abbott of Maredsous Abbey, a Benedictine Abbey with more than 100 monks in Belgium and had a reputation as a very holy man who ministered to the sick, poor, elderly, and unwanted. He wrote three books that have been published in 17 languages and have been part of the theology study by many religious communities. He made the Doctrine of Divine Adoption the central theme of his writings, believing that all were called to holiness, because we are all the sons and daughters of God in Jesus Christ.

There are few New Earth stories I’ve enjoyed collecting as much as the ones to follow. It’s one thing to know intellectually that miracles exist and continue to occur throughout the world. Reading the stories of miracles in scripture and of miracles attributed to saints’ intercessions broadens my perspective of just how powerful and intimate the Lord is in our lives.

However, it’s tempting to feel like those events are in distant lands and distant times. Would God still multiply loaves and fish to feed 5,000 people today? Does he only heal the sick fortunate enough to be able to travel to special shrines an ocean away? Is he truly with us in the suffering we experience in our own homes and hospitals?

The following are stories of God’s handiwork in the lives of people in the Diocese of Fargo. As you read these stories, ask the Lord to increase your faith. Ask him to be present in all the trials of your life. He is here in our homes, hospitals, and vehicles. Let us dare to be bold in our prayers and petitions.
We want to introduce you to a man. A man with a big heart, warm personality, and a love for life. We also want to share a beautiful story, a miracle from God. This miracle has touched our lives on an intimate level as well as the lives of many around the world. This miracle comes from God through the intercession of Blessed Columba Marmion.

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At the time Patricia and Donald were invited to Abbot Marmion’s tomb, they had just started a new business. They had seven children, ages 11 months through 15 years. After having been delayed for many weeks by an airline strike, they arrived at Maredsous Abbey on August 8, 1966. The Benedictine monks warmly welcomed them. Upon visiting Abbot Marmion’s tomb, which is under a marble slab in the alcove of the church, Patricia said that when she touched that cold marble, she felt a bond with Abbot Marmion that she felt for the rest of her life.

They stayed at Maredsous for four days, where the monks celebrated Mass at the tomb each day. The fourth day was John’s first birthday. Soon after they returned from Maredsous to their home in St. Cloud, Minn., Patricia saw her doctor. The doctor noticed that the tumor was shrinking, and the tumor was gone within a few months. None of Patricia’s physicians could give a reason for this healing.

In 1979, at the request of the Vatican, the Diocese of St. Cloud conducted the investigation into the miracle. A panel was assembled that included the Bishop of the St. Cloud Diocese (Bishop Speltz), the Abbott of St. John’s Abbey (Abbott Baldwin), four priests, and an oncologist. The panel questioned Patricia, Donald, Father Arnold, and Patricia’s three physicians separately. Patricia was also sent for examinations from two physicians whom she had never met. They also testified as to whether she was cancer free. The testimony was transcribed, attested to, and sent to Rome along with medical records and x-rays. The doctors were required to swear to the truth and to not reveal what was said.

Patricia and Donald waited and waited for the findings of the investigation. Finally, six months later they were informed that the miracle theory was rejected. In a translation from Italian
to English, it was deemed a “happy coincidence.”

Although the investigation of the miracle seemed closed, the situation changed in the early 1990s. The investigation took on new energy with the efforts of two remarkable men: Father Mark Tiereny from Glenstal Abbey in Ireland and Brother Ferdinand Poswich from Maredsous Abbey in Belgium. These men put great efforts into furthering the Cause for Sainthood of Abbott Marmion. Brother Ferdinand collected and organized all the records and letters of Abbot Marmion. Father Mark came to Maredsous and spent several years writing the biography and heroic virtues of Abbott Marmion. Heroic virtue is “the performance of extraordinary virtuous actions with readiness and over a period of time…. The presence of such virtues is required by the Church as the first step toward canonization. The person who has practiced heroic virtue is declared to be Venerable, and is called a ’Servant of God’” (Catholic Encyclopedia).

Father Mark came to the United States to visit Patricia and to interview the only one of Patricia’s physicians who was still living. The Vatican also still had all the original documentation, the medical records, and the x-rays. They thoroughly reviewed the evidence again, and in January 2000, Pope John Paul II declared the healing a miracle.

Patricia said that a crucial difference between the original review and the review in the 1990s was that in 1979 the evidence was translated to a team of Italian doctors who reviewed the evidence for the Vatican. In the 1990s, a bilingual doctor translated the evidence so that the meaning of the medical terms did not change in the translation.

In 1998, Columba Marmion was named Venerable, and on September 3, 2000, he was beatified along with Pope John XXIII, Pope Pius IX, Tommaso Reggio (an Italian Archbishop from Genoa), and William Joseph Chaminade, who founded the Marionist nuns in Southwest France. Our Holy Father asked us to pray that these men can “help us live in greater confor-
mity to the Spirit of Christ. May their love of God and neighbor illuminate our steps at this dawn of the third millennium."

The miracle has touched our family in many ways. We are so grateful for the gift of having Patricia in our lives and the impact that she had on us and our family. It is impossible to quantify the impact the miracle has had on our family or to express enough how grateful we are to God for her miraculous cure.

Seven years ago we lost our mom on Sept. 6. That was the anniversary of our family gathering at Blessed Columba Marmion’s tomb together. We will never forget the peaceful silence as we gazed upon his tomb. Then out of the silence we heard our Mom say, “Blessed Columba Marmion, I brought you my children.” There was not a dry eye. This was her prayer and hope for healing—that she could raise her children. We had 48 more years with Mom.

The physical healing of Patricia from God was through Blessed Columba Marmion’s intercession. It has impacted us greatly. However, the miracle is also much more. It has given us an opportunity to evangelize and talk about our faith with people that we might not normally share our faith with. It has also deepened the faith of our entire family.

We know that there have been other miracles that have occurred that have not been verified. We also know the miracles that have happened have extended beyond physical healing. Recently, a young boy died with complications associated with leukemia. People throughout the U.S., in Italy, and in Belgium were praying for a miraculous cure through the intercession of Blessed Columba Marmion. Although he did not receive the physical healing that we prayed for, it was truly a miracle that this young boy brought so many people together to pray, deepening the faith of many throughout the world.

For the month of January, we as a Bitzan family prayed for a miracle cure for our sister. She also, did not receive the gift of physical healing. However, we know, and as the parish priest of this young boy stated in his funeral homily, “With that hope in miracles, we might ask the question, ‘why didn’t God heal them? Why didn’t he give us the miracles we asked for?’ Truth be told, in asking for a miracle and all the lengths we went to, to ensure to the best of our ability that our loved one is healed, this our Lord expects because of the precious gift of human life.” The priest also noted that not all miracles are physical healing. Just as the young boy brought many people together to pray, so too did our sister, bringing people from across Minnesota and Paraguay (where she started a foundation to serve those in need) together in prayer.

A famous saying of Blessed Columba Marmion is, “We are all called to be saints, to be ‘other Christs.’ Sanctity is not for the few, but for the many.” God gives us miracles through the intercession of saints to point us to the examples that we need to live out our calling to be saints. As Blessed Columba Marmion also said, “Christ is the perfect model of our holiness. God finds in Him all his delight, and sees in us these same delights, in so far as we resemble Jesus.”

Saints and Blesseds like Abbott Marmion can give us examples of how we can work to resemble Jesus. We must always believe in the hope and possibility of miracles. Especially the miracle of God’s love and our salvation in heaven for eternity.

Blessed Columba Marmion lived in extraordinary times with great faith. We would love to see God work through him in the Fargo Diocese with a second miracle for his Canonization.

Blessed Columba Marmion pray for us.

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Blessed Columba Marmion, O.S.B. 1858-1923

God, our Father,
you called your servant, Columba,
to the monastic life.
You bestowed on him the grace
to understand the mysteries of your Son
and to make him known as the ideal
for all who have been baptized.
Grant that we may learn from his example
to live in Christ by opening our hearts in joy
to the Spirit of your Son, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Blessed Columba Marmion (Marmion.org)
Reflections on an amazing rescue

By Father Dale Kinzler | Pastor of churches in Cooperstown, Aneta, Finley, and Jessie

“O h my gosh! You survived that? You are a miracle!” That was the typical response from the lips of the many who viewed the picture of the crushed vehicle from which I was extricated on Sept. 14, 2021. Many of you viewed the television news report of my accident that day, and many have heard my interview on Real Presence Radio from Jan. 26. Let me briefly share what I am learning from the perspective of faith as I continue to recover physically and grow spiritually through this experience of that near fatality.

I call the accident “Three Feet from Death” because, had I and my vehicle slid a single yard further forward under the semi approaching from my left on a gravel road while I was driving the main highway, I would certainly have been crushed. I contend the heavenly powers provided the extra three feet of breaking power that saved my body while sacrificing the vehicle.

Let me share briefly what I call the “celestial conference” that must have occurred while my soul was screaming, “Is this how I am going to die? Lord, I’m not ready yet!” I realize that while I had no time to verbalize these thoughts, they arose instantly in my brain responding to the adrenaline rush as I watched in horror the scene unfolding before me. Everything seemed to happen in slow motion as I and my car slipped under the middle of the semi’s trailer while I slammed on the brakes in desperate hopes of stopping short of a collision.

My thoughts and fears of death came to mind within a split second, but God, who can work in a nanosecond, must have held conference in the timelessness of heaven while “time stood still” on my behalf at that moment on earth. I envision the Holy Trinity, with perhaps Mary and Joseph and my guardian angels, consulting with significant others who have gone on before me. Foremost among those would be my parents, Howard and Mildred Kinzler, who passed away in 2011, from whom I had purchased the 2004 Oldsmobile Alero I was driving that day.

“Shall we bring him home now?” God asks. I can hear my parents say, “He will be with us soon enough.” I can hear the guardian angels say, “He could indeed have been better prepared. If he remains alive, there is more he can do, and he will certainly be much more serious about being ready when he is finally called home.”

Those thoughts came to me while I lay in my hospital bed in Sanford Hospital of Fargo, whose helicopter had brought me in for surgical repair of a fractured right leg and torn left knee. I also began to reflect on the miraculous nature of the circumstances of my rescue. The farmer’s ready response in calling the Cooperstown rescue team, the fact I sustained no internal nor spinal injuries, and the marvelous medical care I received, all point to God’s provident care through human instruments. Follow-up care, and all the support through cards and letters and prayers, has been truly amazing. I have told so many people, “I am riding on the wings of your prayers.”

Had I gotten up from my hospital bed that day and walked home unharmed, that would have been a miracle clearly stupefying even the most skeptical of scientists. But the clear evidence of divine intervention on my behalf is enough argument in my book, to reply “Yes indeed, God be praised!” to anyone who remarks on the miraculous nature of my survival. God, seat belt, air bag, and rescue team all worked together in my defense that day.

I am fully aware of the significance of my accident happening on the Feast of the Holy Cross, Sept. 14. God would give me my own physical cross to bear for the next several months. I still bear the cross of limitations while I work toward as full a recovery as God and circumstances will...
allow. Meanwhile, I am taking advantage of this serious wake-up call to re-evaluate my priorities and my balance of life pursuits. I hold in my heart the thought, “The most important thing in this life is to be fully prepared for the next life.” That calls for a balance of prayer and action. Prayer has indeed risen to the top of my list of priorities, and I need to do much more of what Jesus did, to “come away and rest a while” and “go to the mountain to pray.” That prayer should also guide my service to his people in the years that remain for me here.

“Father Kinzler still plans to hike the Appalachian Trail when he retires.” That was the closing sentence of the television report the day of my accident. I had boasted of those plans to family and friends. God in his sense of humor has given me pause to reconsider that plan. Yes, I will enjoy hiking in the future, God willing. But no longer do I need to finish the whole 2,200-mile trail in five months to log another entry in my journal of physical accomplishments. I will modify that plan to do shorter hikes for the sheer pleasure of enjoying the extra time God has given me here.

In the meanwhile, I will give full attention to the spiritual journey, walking the path of discipleship in response to Christ’s bidding, “Take up your cross and follow after me” (Matt. 16:24).

“God gave me another chance”

By JoLynn Reisenauer | Parishioner of St. John’s Church, New Rockford

On Oct. 27, 2021, my husband, Randy, drove to the emergency room with shortness of breath. A week earlier he tested positive for COVID-19 and was high risk. The days, weeks, and months that followed were both a test and a testament of our faith.

In less than a day he was ambulanced back to the same emergency room, telling his family he loved us, and asking for a last blessing from Father Reese Weber. Up until this point in life, my husband was a man of very quiet faith. We watched him (via FaceTime) for several hours struggle for breath, thinking this was the last day we might see him.

That evening Father Reese drove to the hospital and anointed Randy before he was put on a life flight to Fargo. There were days Randy had progress and days when we clutched to prayers, hope, and family.

In the meantime, our quiet town three hours away rallied for him in ways we never thought possible. Our family was humbled by the hundreds of daily prayers in his name for healing. Despite multiple setbacks (viral and bacterial pneumonia, and collapsed lung), our doctors and staff would enter his room daily, reminding us, when he had small improvements, that he was a very rare case in comparison to their other patients. They too, willed hope for recovery.

He was ventilated and sedated so heavily that all his body did on its own until late November was will his heart to beat. The rest was covered by machines, IVs, prayers, and God. Doctors did not know if he would fully wake back up or if his mind and lungs could ever recover. But our family, extended family, St. John’s parish, neighbors, and the community of New Rockford were on their knees. St. John’s held a prayer service just for him.

And he woke back up. He couldn’t lift or turn his head the first day. He told us of family who had passed away sitting with him. He told us of a peace that surrounded him in his slumber, while we held his hand and begged God for the chance to tell him we love him with his eyes open. On one of Randy’s worst days, Father Reese visited again and gave him another blessing. He urged Randy to keep fighting his good fight, as there was more work on earth to do.

Randy woke up changed. His daughters and son are close by, watching this transformation in a man they’ve always known. They are baffled at times by his patience and positivity as he continues to work hard to gain his strength back. He just repeats, “God gave me another chance. I won’t take that for granted.”

While in the hospital, the community blessed us by praying, offering donations, and helping care for our grandchildren. We don’t know how to repay such a gift. We do know all of it came from God’s blessings. We consider Randy’s healing a true miracle.

NEW EARTH MARCH 2022

Randy and JoLynn Reisenauer of New Rockford.
(submitted photo)
One day I received a call on the emergency line. When it’s the emergency line, you drop everything and go because it’s a life and death situation. I went to the hospital and did the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for a gentleman in his mid-40s. His mother, ex-wife, and daughter were there lamenting over him. I said the prayers for him. When I anointed his forehead, his eyes popped wide open. At the time, I didn’t make anything of it.

The doctors moved him to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Before leaving, I went over to thank them. They told me the gentleman was dead when I arrived. His blood sugar was 1,400 points. They were just about to unhook the machines when I finished the prayers. They said that if I’d arrived a minute later, the machines would have been unhooked. His time wasn’t up yet.

Miracles during Anointing of the Sick

By Father Neil Pfeiffer | Pastor of churches in Jamestown, Buchanan, and Windsor

One day I received a call on the emergency line. When it’s the emergency line, you drop everything and go because it’s a life and death situation. I went to the hospital and did the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for a gentleman in his mid-40s. His mother, ex-wife, and daughter were there lamenting over him. I said the prayers for him. When I anointed his forehead, his eyes popped wide open. At the time, I didn’t make anything of it.

The doctors moved him to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Before leaving, I went over to thank them. They told me the gentleman was dead when I arrived. His blood sugar was 1,400 points. They were just about to unhook the machines when I arrived and had only kept them connected until I finished the prayers. They said that if I’d arrived a minute later, the machines would have been unhooked. His time wasn’t up yet.

Prayer obliterates kidney stone

By Maria Wanchic | Parishioner of St. Francis de Sales Church in Steele

In January 2021, my husband, Eric, began having a terrible pain in his lower back. He knew right away it had to be a kidney stone. They had landed him in the emergency room (ER) before. The only thing capable of relieving that type of pain was several doses of morphine. I asked what his pain level was. “It’s got to be about a six,” he said with an obvious grimace on his face. “I’ll try a hot bath.”

The bath wasn’t helping. “I need to go to the ER,” he said between quick breaths. My mind began racing. It was the height of COVID-19 and the ER was already packed full. I began wondering if we’d catch COVID-19 there and if I would even be allowed in the ER. While all these fears rolled about in my mind, a thought—a bright light—entered my mind, “Pray over him,” it said.

I immediately yelled for my two older sons, “Caleb, Adrian! Get down here! We need to pray over Dad!” I asked Eric what his pain level was again. Barely able to speak, he whispered, “9-10.” I immediately ran to get him half a hydrocodone and Flomax. A few seconds later, Caleb and Adrian were in the bathroom with me.

Since we weren’t sure how to proceed, we all prayed in different ways. The boys placed their hands on Eric’s back while I raised my hands up to God in prayer. Adrian commanded the stone to disintegrate and saw it happening in his mind, while Caleb prayed silently and heard the word, “catalyst” in his mind.

I asked the Lord to help my sons’ prayers be effective. For about 30 seconds it seemed like the pain had worsened but suddenly, Eric, who had been on his hands and knees, slowly sat down and peacefully laid back in the tub, staring at us with a perplexed look on his face. I asked what was going on.

“The pain’s gone,” he said. “There’s only a bit of pressure, I’d say maybe it’s a level two now.” We just stood there, amazed. Then we all laughed with a deep joy when we realized no one knew what to think or say. After another minute, Eric said, “I don’t even feel the pressure anymore, it’s completely gone. I’m at a zero for pain.”

Even though I had given Eric a pain pill, there’s no way it would have been effective in the few minutes in which all of this transpired. We thanked God for this remarkable turn around and on that day our family’s faith grew in leaps and bounds!

I learned that day that when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus, he began to heal people by his human touch. This teaches and empowers us to do the same, for we have the same Holy Spirit within us. Just think of all the healing God wants to do with our cooperation. We just need to keep asking with faith. Praise be Jesus!
In another incident, I was visiting a parishioner in the hospital when another family stopped me in the hallway. They asked if I was a Catholic priest. I said yes.

They said, “Father, our mother has been here unresponsive for the last 10 days, and we have no idea why she’s not dying.”

I said, “Has anyone given her the last sacraments? I’d be happy to administer them to her.” They said no one had.

I visited the woman and did an apostolic pardon, enrolled her in the scapular, and anointed her. She wasn’t in a condition to receive communion so I didn’t give her any. When I was done with the prayers, she sat up, said thank you, fell asleep, and I was home with him. I finally got him down for a nap and decided to get some work done in the kitchen. I reached for a bowl in the cabinet. The next thing I remember is waking up on the kitchen floor. My son was crying. I crawled over to care for him not really knowing what had happened. I knew he needed to be changed, but I did not trust myself to lift him onto the changing table.

I called my husband at work, and he came home immediately. I fell asleep again. My husband changed our son and asked me if I wanted to go to the hospital. I didn’t immediately agree to go, as I was convinced that I was just tired. After some time had passed, I agreed to go to the emergency room. I had experienced a seizure.

My doctor suggested I see a neurologist. Within a week I had my results. A brain tumor. The neurosurgeon was able to get me in for surgery the following Wednesday. Everything was happening so fast. I never once doubted the plan God had for me, but every time I started to pray, I would cry uncontrollably. My hometown priest, Father Richard Fineo, told me he believes this was the Holy Spirit at work.

On the day of surgery, I took one look at my little boy and lost it. I wanted to be there to see him play and grow up. I told my son I was going to fight for him and for us. Then I stepped outside, breathed in the fresh air, and asked the Lord to bring me back to my son. The quarter size tumor was successfully removed, and the surgeon was confident she got it all. A biopsy was done on the tumor, and we anxiously awaited the results.

In the meantime, Father Fineo administered weekly Anointing of the Sick. On one occasion he laid a small piece of Padre Pio’s vestment on my scar. I began to pray for Padre Pio’s intercession. We met with an oncologist to discuss treatment options for stage three or four cancer. I continued praying for God’s will and for mine.

I made an appointment with Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minn. The results of the biopsy came back one week before my appointment. The tumor was an extremely slow growing type that, if need be, would respond well to treatment. The doctors at Mayo reviewed my scans and I was deemed cancer free!

We continue to do periodic scans, and I remain cancer free. This experience has brought me closer to God and made me see the miracles of every day. Some big, some small, but miracles just the same.

In October 2021, another miracle arrived. A baby girl!
Their voices reach out softly and melodically, filling the rafters of historic St. Stanislaus Church. Five young ladies, ranging in age from 11 to 21, offer their talents every other Sunday to the parish, located in Warsaw.

They come from two musical families. Sisters Kathleen Karien, age 14, and Emily Karien, age 13, who are both home-schooled, are joined by three sisters from the Plutowski family, Emily age 21, who attends Minnesota State University Moorhead, Minn., Gina, age 15, who goes to school in Minto, and Hannah, age 11, who is home-schooled. To hear them sing, you would never guess they are so young. The music they provide is professional and inspiring.

“The music here is very traditional,” said Kathleen Karien. “I’ve been to many other churches, and modern music can be beautiful, but it doesn’t feel right to ignore the traditional hymns. It’s nice to keep the traditional music, especially in this church, because everything is changing so rapidly, and maybe it’s just because I’m a teenager, but I don’t like that.”

The group’s repertoire consists mostly of Catholic hymns from the past—including Latin and the occasional Polish hymn in honor the Polish heritage at St. Stanislaus Church—with some modern choral pieces worked in.

The group got its start about two years ago, a product of the COVID-19 pandemic that limited the music program at St. Stanislaus. Emily Plutowski and Kathleen Karien were already members of the choir, but COVID-19 put a temporary halt to the group’s Mass participation. Emily and Kathleen decided to start singing by themselves, with Kathleen playing the organ since the semi-retirement of the church’s longtime organist, Dorothy Plutowski. Yes, Dorothy is the Plutowski girls’ grandmother. Dorothy still plays once a month, and current members of the St. Stanislaus Choir will come up to the choir loft to sing as she plays.

What motivates these young ladies in their ministry is a love for tradition. That love is inspired by the church they attended growing up.

“On the weekends I don’t come home, I bounce around at different parishes in the Fargo/Moorhead area,” said Emily Plutowski, who studies art at Minnesota State University Moorhead. “I especially love the big, beautiful churches there, because I grew up here at St. Stanislaus, and our church is so beautiful, so it reminds me of home.”

“With this church, you feel like when you walk in that you stepped back, and you don’t want to lose that,” said Emily Karien. “You want to keep the traditions that really date back to Christ. It’s kind of what keeps me in my Catholic faith, that beauty of the liturgy. It’s something you just don’t find in other places.”

And you won’t find many parishes with five such dedicated, spirit-filled young ladies giving of their talents to the glory of the Lord. Their music is just one of the many attributes that makes St. Stanislaus parish stand out.
School spirit is never in short supply in Shanley High School’s McCormick Gymnasium in Fargo. Legendary contests and great moments of triumph have come and gone over the years. The competition on Feb. 2, was no exception.

Flashing lights, blaring music, home and visiting teams’ fans decked out in their alma mater’s regalia? Check. Organized chants and cheers from the student body urging their team forward? Check. However, the competitors squared off not to dribble and shoot, serve, and spike this time. It’s Catholic Schools Week, and they came to engage in a battle of the minds at the regional Know Your Faith Competition.

The Know Your Faith competition traces its origins to 2010 in the Bismarck Diocese’s Catholic schools. The founders aimed to showcase students’ talents beyond athletics and proudly embrace our Catholic identity in education. It has since expanded to a statewide competition, with Shanley High School (Fargo), St. Mary’s Central High School (Bismarck), Bishop Ryan High School (Minot), Trinity High School (Dickinson), and Sacred Heart High School (East Grand Forks, Minn.) participating.

Last year, Shanley’s sophomores Jacob Mayo, Giovanni Nasello, and Keagan Walker brought home the trophy from Bishop Ryan in Minot. Shanley hosted the competition this year, the theme being “Rome 64 AD.” St. Mary’s captured its 6th state championship in convincing fashion, correctly answering Bishop Folda’s final question on the pope-saint who first used the motto “Servant of the Servants of God” (Pope St. Gregory the Great). The Shanley team of sophomores Charlie Bernhardt, Malachi Moore, and Rachel Seefeldt finished in 4th place.

A hearty congratulations to St. Mary’s on their winning the title this year, and a special thank-you to the Shanley student body for being gracious and enthusiastic hosts. We’ll see you at Trinity High School in Dickinson next year!
The Book of Lost Friends speaks of hope that leads to boldness

I’m trying to impress upon my students that everyone has history. Just because we’re not always happy with what’s true doesn’t mean we shouldn’t know it. It’s how we learn. It’s how we do better in the future.”

So declares Benedetta (Benny) Silva, one of the main characters in novelist Lisa Wingate’s The Book of Lost Friends. I first learned of this work through Nancy Gourde, a colleague in Fargo who spoke about it during a monthly interview Father Jason Lefor and I did with her on Real Presence Radio. Once I carved out the time to read it myself, this book has grabbed a hold of my imagination and won’t let go.

The Book of Lost Friends actually reads as two stories woven together, alternating by chapter. One thread, set in the Reconstruction-era states of Louisiana and Texas a decade after the end of the Civil War, follows an unlikely trio of girls embarking on a perilous journey. The other thread, set in 1887 Louisiana, features Silva, a young newly hired teacher seeking to engage her high school English students through literature and through discovering the stories of their story in their tiny, rural town. Benny enters a climate of underachievement in which family dysfunction has contributed to a lack of confidence in the young people’s abilities, combined with a stubborn desire to conceal what took place at Goswood Grove, a local plantation where Silva is renting a residence.

Only when the Union defeated the Confederacy could the emancipation of slaves take place in earnest in the South. What many may not realize, however, is the number of families torn apart by the buying and selling of human beings. Is a child, a sibling, or a parent still out there somewhere? How can I get in touch with them? Black churches and newspaper publishers became critical in the work of reuniting loved ones, and this effort is what inspired Wingate’s engrossing historical novel.

The Historic New Orleans collection has collated some 2,500 “lost friends” advertisements, through which families separated by slavery sought to find their lost loved ones. The novel begins with an intrepid and resourceful African-American teenager, Hannie Gossett, intending to purchase a meager plot of land as a sharecropper with her family. Hannie comes to learn about the various heart-wrenching and hope-filled searchers of “lost friends,” realizing that her own story is just like theirs. Mostly illiterate at the beginning of the story, Hannie learns from her relative and companion “Juneau Jane” to read and write just well enough to jot down the basics of stories many others have told her, promising to share them during her travels. All the while, there are roaming gangs resisting the Confederacy’s defeat and unwilling to relinquish the slave trade. Wingate skillfully applies this tension, not in a sleazy “horror movie” way, but to remind the reader of the perils of that time and place.

One primary spiritual lesson I took from the book was the power of the virtue of hope to enkindle acts of boldness in people who seem to have nothing on which to place their hopes. Homespun Christian communities were pivotal in getting the word out about relatives with whom former slaves had lost touch, affirming that an abiding faith in Christ brings about true reconciliation and the achievement of one’s full potential. Although not an overtly religious work, Wingate’s novel portrays the practice of religion, both past and present, as something substantive and a trustworthy element of society. Miss Silva, aware of the baggage of disintegrated family ties in her own life, pours out her whole self in bolstering the hopes of her students, challenging them to envision a whole new destiny for themselves.

I just bet this story will reel you in as it did for me.

On March 19, we celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph. One would think St. Joseph was always popular in Catholic culture through the centuries, given the important role he played. Yet, his popularity is actually more recent.

It wasn’t until 1570 that his feast day was established for the universal church. In 1889, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical on devotion to St. Joseph in which he urged Catholics to pray to St. Joseph, as the patron of the church in view of the challenges facing the church. Pope Francis dedicated the year 2021 to St. Joseph and brought about a new devotion to the “Sleeping St. Joseph.” The Holy Father said, “when I have a problem or am faced with a difficulty, I will write it on a piece of paper and I will place it underneath St. Joseph, so that he may dream on it. That means: for him to pray for that problem.”

Today we see images and statues of St. Joseph in all our churches and even in our homes. He is often the “go to” saint for husbands and fathers. There is a traditional text often seen with his image: “Ite ad Ioseph” (Go to Joseph). St. Joseph has many titles, such as, Guardian of Virgins, Hope of the Sick, Patron of the Dying, and Terror of Demons.

Here in the United States, we have one popular St. Joseph tradition that has been gaining popularity in recent years called the St. Joseph Table or sometimes called St. Joseph Altar. This tradition stems from the Middle Ages in Sicily where the people suffered a severe drought that almost killed their crops. They prayed to St. Joseph to send rain and promised a feast in his name to feed those who were poor and in need of food if he answered their prayer.

The rain came, the crops were saved. Since then, every year the people of Sicily put out a spread of food on a specially dedicated table to St. Joseph and offer a feast for those in need. When the Sicilians came to the United States, they brought the tradition with them and it evolved into parish community celebrations. The St. Joseph Table is so popular in New Orleans that the Archdiocese releases a list of where the St. Joseph Tables are in town and when they are open for visitors.

The St. Joseph Table is a decorated table of bountiful food placed out for the community, but most especially for those in need, on or around March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph. It’s also referred to as an altar because there are often three tiers to the table and a statue of St. Joseph on the top as well as flowers and candles. The display is meant to resemble an altar because this is more than a table of free food for the poor but rather it should be an “altar of reverence” as well as a communal celebration.

People contribute their item of food and even dedicate their special offering to a loved one by placing a photo of them by their item on the table. This is a common European tradition called an “ex voto” where people put pictures or objects belonging to loved ones on side altars either asking for intercession or in thanksgiving for a favor received. The foods placed on the table can be anything from bread to beans, although local specialty baked goods are most common. There should be an image or statue of St. Joseph as the centerpiece. There should also be items that you might decorate a side altar with, such as linens, candles and flowers. The point is to make it beautiful, like you would an altar. Also added could be holy cards of St. Joseph, medals, and a petition prayer basket. There is even a blessing for it in the Church’s book of official blessings.

For more information visit yearofstjoseph.org/devotions/st-joseph-table.

One day in 1972, my brother Frank and I were at our local pharmacy in the Bronx. On the pharmacy counter was an unlabeled jar containing a silvery substance. Partly because it would be decades before liability became a thing, but mostly because Frank and I had been told by our mom not to touch anything, we poured some of the substance into our hands. The stuff was surprisingly heavy, and when we poked it, it split into tiny round beads. Not knowing that the substance was highly toxic mercury, we swiped a large bead of it to bring home and play with every chance we got.

Frank and I enjoyed the notoriety that came of being the only kids on the block with a hazardous chemical element in their toolbox. The notoriety was short-lived, however, and—to the disappointment of Frank, who’d been hoping that the strange substance would give him a superpower—neither my brother nor I experienced the effects of mercury exposure.

The mercury-filching episode was all but forgotten until one evening many years later when, in a mood of wistful nostalgia, I decided to share some random reminiscences with my husband Mike. At the time, Mike was fully absorbed in a game of online bridge, so I wasn’t expecting my musings to generate much of a response. But it was all good. Mike is a scientist who sometimes needs to get away from science stuff by taking a bridge break. And I’m a garrulous Italian who will talk whether or not someone is actually listening.

So, I went ahead with my reminiscences while the absent-minded professor stared at his laptop screen.

I said, “You know Mike, back in the Bronx, I would light cherry bombs inside metal trash cans and watch the can lids blow off.”
And Mike said, “Uh-huh, that’s nice.”
And I said, “Late at night I liked to ride the subway between the train cars... barefoot... with my eyes closed.”
And Mike said, “Uh-huh, that’s nice.”
And I said, “Sometimes I played with mercury.”
And Mike said, “What? Are you crazy? You could have died!”

So, dodging explosive-propelled metal trash can lids was no big deal. Straddling subway cars at night during a New York City crime wave was a yawner. But, in Mike’s scientifically savvy opinion, poking at little balls of mercury was an invitation to full-blown catastrophe.
Working toward a better type of politics

The political season has arrived in North Dakota. Not too long ago voters showed little interest in campaigns until the fall of election years. Then interest began to appear around the June primaries. Now party leaders, candidates, and activists begin their activities in the late winter and early spring when the party districts choose candidates to endorse and select delegates to the state conventions. The process is not new, but interest in these district activities has grown.

Redistricting has contributed to the increased interest. Some districts are new and some redrawn districts have incumbents facing each other. Moreover, redistricting also means more districts than usual will have races this year. For the Republicans, a much-publicized intra-party fight has added interest in the district meetings.

Catholic Church officials, including the North Dakota Catholic Conference, do not get involved in these activities. It stays out of party politics and elections. That does not mean, however, that individual Catholics should stay out of the process. Catholics have a moral obligation to participate in the political process. For some, that may mean becoming active in a political party.

Pope Francis has said that politics can be “the highest and greatest form of charity.” But, as with all good things, when politics becomes unmoored from the truth or becomes pursued for self-interest or hatred of others, it can become destructive. This is why we should never shed our Catholic faith when engaging in politics. Especially today, when politics—indeed our nation—is divided and hyper-political, it can become easy to get swept up in the politics and lose sight of our call to act as Christians in all things.

Recognizing the polarization and animosity in American politics, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops launched the Civilitize It campaign in 2020. As part of the campaign, Catholics were asked to take the following pledge:

- To affirm through my words and actions the dignity of every person, each made in God’s image. Even those with whom I disagree are made in his image.
- To respectfully listen in order to understand experiences different from my own.
- To engage in critical examination to ensure that my perspectives are rooted in truth, that my sources of information are unbiased, and that I do not open myself to manipulation by partisan interests.
- To form my conscience through prayerful reflection, study of scripture and Church teaching, and guidance from reputable experts.
- To reflect on my own values and seek, with others, to identify shared values.
- To be open to the process of dialogue that can require change of perspective—my own and others’—in service to the inviolable dignity of all and the common good.
- To be a bridge-builder who participates in constructive dialogue based in shared values, a mutual exchange of gifts, and the humility to seek the good.
- To see differences in perspective as opportunities for creative tension which can yield solutions for the common good.
- To work with others in order to identify creative solutions rooted in our shared values.

Those are good principles, but I would offer these more specific “commandments” based on observations in North Dakota politics:

- Stay away from conspiracy theories. Of course, people who believe in false theories don’t recognize they are false, which poses a problem. As Catholics, endowed with reason guided by faith, we need to be vigilant against allegations of conspiracies that are not supported by verifiable evidence or attribute an unreasonable—or even theologically impossible—amount of power and evil to others.
- Do not accuse others of being fascists, communists, racists, misogynists, and other names. In fact, name-calling should rarely be used in civic discourse. Try to stick to the person’s position.
- Do not use or imply profanity. Profanity has no place in political discourse and that includes using a popular slogan that acts as a substitute for a profane and possibly sinful anti-Biden message.
- Do not assume that your social media shares, likes, tweets, and such are separate from your political life or your life as a Christian. Degrees of separation or anonymity do not insulate us from our responsibilities to be virtuous and charitable.
- Do not assume that the best delegate, candidate, or leader is the loudest or most controversial.
- Do not exaggerate. Stick to the facts and avoid labeling.
- Unless you have good evidence to the contrary, assume that even those with whom you disagree have good intentions.
- Never put yourself or party before the common good and the needs of the least among us.

Our state and nation need political discourse focused on the dignity of all human persons and the common good. It also needs a dialogue shaped by civility and even love. Let us pray and work for a better type of politics.
Let God into the snowstorm... and your brokenness

On my trip home from Nebraska for Christmas break, I got into a car accident. Nothing major, but I ended up going in the ditch. It easily could have been a lot worse. Since then I've experience anxiety in driving, especially in bad driving conditions.

In February, I was driving home with my brother from visiting a friend and ran into whiteout conditions. We made it through the first cloud of snow, but I could see another one ahead. We pulled over to wait for it to pass, but the wind was picking up, and it didn't look like it would end any time soon.

I called my dad to find out what I should do. He offered to drive out and drive in front of me so that I could follow his taillights. I was kind of embarrassed to accept his offer, but I knew my anxiety was too bad for me to try it on my own. So he drove out, and we both made it home safely.

Why do I tell this story? To be honest, it is a humiliating one to tell. Growing up in North Dakota, I should be used to driving in those conditions. However, my experience illustrates what God and seminary formation have been teaching me this first year: deep vulnerability and trust.

Each one of us have areas in our lives that we don’t want to look at. We are even more resistant to God and others discovering them. So we shut the door to that area of our hearts, lock it, and throw away the key. Sometimes we can even hide them so well that we forget they exist. But they are there. The walls we build around them influence our daily lives. They impact our relationships, how we react to certain situations, and most importantly, our relationship with God.

These are the areas where the devil strikes. He uses them to whisper lies into our hearts just like he did in the garden. He throws shame at us so that we hide from the only one who can save us. This is the movement of the evil spirit that St. Ignatius of Loyola talks about in his rules for the discernment of spirits.

In the seminary, especially the first four years, the primary mission is to learn to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The priest is to be an image, an icon, of Jesus to her bride, the Church. But how can a man be an image of someone whom he does not know? How can he be a man after God’s own heart if he does not first experience the heart of Christ, a heart which is broken out of love for his children?

This is the heart of God: The all-powerful God saw the brokenness and sinfulness of humanity and, instead of turning away from it, he entered into it because he knew that we could not save ourselves. He became totally vulnerable, totally wounding, so that we would not be afraid to open our vulnerable, wounded hearts to him. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15).

This is the life and vocation of every Christian: to become totally united with Christ, totally redeemed by Christ, even in the areas that we would rather ignore. –Kade Palmer

This is the life and vocation of every Christian: to become totally united with Christ, totally redeemed by Christ, even in the areas that we would rather ignore. The vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and holy matrimony are built upon this foundation. They are not a separate call but a deepening of it and an invitation to help others toward it.

The cloud of snow between me and home represented the areas of my heart that I would rather not journey through. The process of growing closer to God is a painful and scary one. But God does not just wait on the other side. He does not leave us orphans. He comes to us. He drives through the snowstorm to meet us where we are at, to console us, and to guide us to our heavenly home. If we rely on our own strength, it is impossible. But if we keep our eyes on him, if we let him enter into our brokenness and most vulnerable places, then he will never fail to lead us through to the other side.

If he did so for our salvation through the crucifixion, why would he not do it in our daily lives?

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How to fund your endowment

STEWARDSHIP

STEVE SCHONS
Director of stewardship and development for the Diocese of Fargo

“Only rich people can create endowments.” Has this thought ever crossed your mind? If so, the next few paragraphs may change your mind. You’ll discover that nearly anyone, with a little planning, can establish an endowment.

Do it now
Some folks prefer to establish their endowments now so they can enjoy watching them grow and benefit their favorite Catholic ministry.

1. Use cash. Finding enough cash to launch an endowment is always a possibility. Sometimes we receive an unexpected windfall through an inheritance or the larger-than-expected proceeds from the sale of a valuable asset.

   It may also be helpful to know that the Catholic Development Foundation allows a donor to fund an endowment over a period of years. Spreading cash gifts over several years may also have tax benefits for you, such as the generous ND tax credit.

2. Use securities. Do you have publicly traded stock that is highly appreciated in value but low in dividend return? Why not use this to start your endowment? Since the Catholic Development Foundation can sell your stock without incurring a capital gains tax, it may be the perfect funding method for you.

Do it now and later
You may want to start your endowment now, modestly, and then add to it later through your estate plans. This way you could see the fund in operation and enjoy knowing the good it does.

3. Use tangible property. Almost anything of value—cars, boats, homes, etc.—can be given to the Catholic Development Foundation. We will sell the item(s) and place the proceeds in your endowment.

Do it later
While it may not be feasible to start an endowment now, your estate will likely have enough resources at your death. Consider these possibilities:

1. Use the remainder of a trust. Donors sometimes establish a trust during life to provide themselves with ongoing income. When they are gone, whatever remains in the trust is disbursed according to instructions in the trust document. This, of course, can include the funding of an endowment with the Catholic Development Foundation.

   Trusts are very popular as gift and estate planning tools and may provide you with an excellent way to establish your endowment.

2. Use insurance proceeds. Do you have a life insurance policy you no longer need for protection? You could sign part or all of the policy over to the Catholic Development Foundation for creating an endowment when you are gone.

3. Use a bequest from your will. The most popular way to fund a future endowment is to earmark a portion of one’s estate for this purpose. If you do decide to create an endowment through a bequest, be sure to talk with our planned giving director to make sure your attorney uses our proper legal name and address.

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NEW EARTH  MARCH 2022  27
The Psalms: The Church’s song book

I had the extraordinary experience last month of recording all 150 Psalms for the new Catholic Hallow App. Over the course of several sittings, sequestered in a tiny studio, I endeavored to communicate the intelligence, passion, and devotion of the person (more likely persons) who wrote these ancient poems. Though I have been regularly praying the Psalms as part of the Liturgy of the Hours for the past roughly 40 years, I had never before simply read them through aloud, one after another. It was, at the same time, demanding and deeply prayerful—and it compelled me to see the Psalms with fresh eyes.

As I pronounced these poems from the Church’s privileged book of prayer, I thought frequently of Dietrich von Hildebrand’s musings on the heart. Von Hildebrand complained that the Catholic intellectual tradition gives ample attention to the mind and to the will but that it painfully neglects the heart—which is to say, the seat of the passions and emotions. In the presence of a value, he says, the entire person responds, the mind appreciating what is true in it, the will seeking what is good in it, and the heart delighting in its beauty. This multivalent “value response” occurs in relation to, say, Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony, a pristine winter morning, a lovely face, or an elegant mathematical equation. And it occurs, par excellence, with respect to the supreme value of God. The mind revels in God’s truth (think of the writings of Thomas Aquinas); the will responds to God’s infinite goodness (think of the dedication of Maximilian Kolbe or the Little Flower); and the heart overflows in the presence of his splendor (think of the words and gestures of the liturgy).

The Responsorial Psalms at Mass are just that: the privileged manner in which we speak back to God who has spoken to us.

Now, there is indeed something of Aquinas in the Psalms, for we could distill a theology of God from them; and there is indeed something of Kolbe in them, for we could tease from them a moral program; but there is in them, above all, the aching, longing, and delight of the heart. The Psalmist exults, laments, spits out his anger, excoriates his enemies, praises God and berates God; he is so happy he can barely contain himself, and he is so profoundly sad that he feels like lying down with dead people. The motto that St. John Henry Newman took when he became a Cardinal was cor ad cor loquitur (heart speaks to heart). I can’t think of a better description of what is happening as we recite the Psalms: to the God who has poured out his heart to us, we pour out our own hearts.

A second strong impression I had upon reading all the Psalms is how much stress they place on enemies. I would wager that “enemy” and “foe” are among the most common words in the book of Psalms. Again and again, the author agonizes over those who are opposed to him; those who threaten him, both with speech and with swords; those who plot against him, those who make him the object of their mockery; those who would be glad to see him in his grave; etc., etc. Moreover, the Psalmist actively wants their destruction, their defeat, their humiliation; he even wants to bash in the heads of their children! The reader of the Psalms might be forgiven for thinking that the author of these texts is more than a touch paranoid.

But I don’t think that psychologizing the Psalmist is nearly as interesting as musing on the theology that provides the context for his preoccupation with his foes. The simple truth is that, in a fallen world, the righteous man will have enemies, and the more righteous he is, the more of them he will have. The person with no enemies, as Churchill rightly saw, is not to be trusted, for he stands for nothing. There is, of course, no better example of this principle than Jesus himself in relation to his contemporaries. As the Gospels unfold, we see the army of Jesus’ antagonists increasing exponentially, and by the end of the narrative, those opponents put him to death. So intense is the opposition to him that we can speak of the sins of the world being placed upon him. To be sure, Jesus consistently urged the love of one’s enemies and, from the cross, he uttered a word of forgiveness to those who were putting him to death. But as Stanley Hauer was quipped, in order to love one’s enemies, one has to have some enemies. It is difficult to read the Psalms and not come to grips with these peculiar dynamics.

I can’t think of a better description of what is happening as we recite the Psalms: to the God who has poured out his heart to us, we pour out our own hearts.

A third and final point I should like to make is that the Psalms give expression to the distinctively dialogic quality of biblical religion. It is a commonplace to say that Christianity is a revealed religion—which is to say, one based, not so much on philosophical speculation or mythological imagination, but on the speech of God to us. A divine person has addressed us and therefore it is only natural that we should speak back—in praise, thanksgiving, frustration, puzzlement, and grief. The Psalms, perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, display this conversational quality of biblical faith. And, therefore, it is perfectly appropriate that the Church has used the Psalms liturgically as the optimal way to respond to the Word of God. Though they are often obscured by bad lectors or set to tragically treacly melodies, the Responsorial Psalms at Mass are just that: the privileged manner in which we speak back to the God
who has spoken to us. It was actually a peculiarly thrilling thing that, as I read aloud these ancient texts and felt the emotion of the author, I sensed that I was indeed conversing with the mysterious one who had first broached the conversation.

So, if you feel that your spiritual life has grown a bit dry, or if you sense that you have wandered away from the God who loves you, I might recommend that you open up the Church’s songbook—and sing.

This Lent, examine your desires and decisions

In the daily readings shortly before Lent this year, the Church gave us the Letter of James. In the first chapter we read, “Blessed is he who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proven he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him. No one experiencing temptation should say, ‘I am being tempted by God;’ for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when lured and enticed by his desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death” (James 1:12-15).

Tending to boil ideas down to some kind of a core, two phrases struck me as the most important: “Blessed is he who perseveres in temptation” and “each person is tempted when lured and enticed by his desire.” Hmm... what combats desire? Decision. James is saying, with the grace of God, we can decide to stand strong against temptation. We can “persevere in temptation.”

The corresponding Gospel from Mark recorded Jesus’ admonition, “Watch out, guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” What could that leaven be that kept Herod and the Pharisees so entrenched in disbelief and sin but their desires? Desire for the status quo, desire for their positions, desire for this disturbing voice to quit rocking their boats of comfort. How many other desires enslaved them?

When I was a novice, we studied under Monsignor Thomas Hendrickson, chaplain at St. Francis Convent for 26 years. He taught us that pleasures taken too often become desires, then needs, and if unchecked they become demands. Even in the convent this can happen. How happy the devil must be when good people trying to follow Jesus stop thinking about this path. Once the Christian starts giving in to smaller desires too often, how easily we soon give in to temptations all the time. And when that happens, how quickly the devil will tell us those smaller desires can be greater pleasures, greater needs, greater desires, greater demands. He’ll whisper: “You deserve it; you’ve worked hard. You’re tired; let someone else pick up the slack. You can do it tomorrow. You’ll fail anyway; why try at all?”

This Lent is a good time to look at our desires, big and small. How do they direct our eyes and hearts away from Jesus and his warning to “watch out?” We don’t have to give up everything, but the beauty of some sacrifice for love of Jesus strengthens us to do it again. As we go along making the sacrifice of self-gratifying habits, we become conformed to Christ. In him, when we are “proven” we “will receive the crown of life that He promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12). The crosses we carry are small compared to his, but they are mighty in value. They lead to life or death. And, isn’t it true that others are watching to see how we’re doing?

The Pharisees were known as hypocrites. They were known to practice privately the very immorality they publicly condemned. Herod over a lifetime of indulgence learned to indulge in greater and greater forms of hedonism. Habits matter because “when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death” (James 1:15).

Lent is a season of re-starting. It’s a time to focus on our desires and habits and make decisions to whittle away at those that turn us away from following Jesus wholeheartedly. Jesus said to the disciples: “Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear? And do you not remember...” (Mark 8:17-18). As a believing Catholic and with the grace of the Sacraments so available to me, I know that Jesus wants me to decide to believe and follow him every day. It’s never been a once and done decision. It’s daily. It’s with every breath.

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**SISTER’S PERSPECTIVE**

**SISTER SARAH MARIE BELISLE, OSF**

Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen

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LIFE’S MILESTONES

Mary (Endres) and Winslow Helt, parishioners of St. Michael’s Church in Grand Forks, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 10 at St. John’s Church in New Rockford. They have been blessed with 2 sons, 2 grandchildren, and 1 great-grandson.

Lorraine Zikmund, parishioner of St. John Nepomucene in Pisek, celebrated her 80th birthday on Feb. 9.

Philomena (Minnie) Ries, parishioner of St. Thomas in Buffalo, will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 24. Minnie and her husband, Marvin, have 9 children, 19 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren.

G. Ann Zahradka, parishioner of Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo, will celebrate her 100th birthday on March 25. Ann (and her late husband, Leonard) is blessed with 5 children, 15 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren.

Pauline Klinger, parishioner of Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo, will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 1. Pauline and her late husband, Dale, are blessed with 8 children, 19 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and 1 great-great grandchild.

Norman and Shirley Vandal, parishioners of St. James Basilica in Jamestown, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 24. They are blessed with 7 children, 27 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Lois Hardy, parishioner of St. Boniface Church in Walhalla, will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 22. Lois and her husband, Bill, have 6 children, 8 grandchildren, and 7 great-grandchildren.

Harriet Dimmer, parishioner of St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City, will celebrate her 90th birthday on March 25. She and her husband (deceased in 2014) have 4 children, 10 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren.

Annastia (Anna) Neis, parishioner of St. Boniface Church in Esmond, will celebrate her 105th birthday on March 31.

Catherine Franklin, parishioner of St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City, will celebrate her 100th birthday on April 4. She resides at Eventide Nursing Home in Jamestown.

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 April issue is Mar. 15.
HAPPENINGS

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
St. Edward’s Church altar society in Drayton oversees the installation of a new rubrical altar and tabernacle. The altar was designed by the Rev. Leonard Michalski, pastor, and constructed by the St. Paul Statuary Company. The parish veterans of World War II donated the bronze tabernacle as a thanksgiving offering for their safe return as not one boy of the parish had to pay the supreme sacrifice.

50 years ago — 1972
Seven class offerings will be featured in this year’s Lenten adult education series for Fargo and West Fargo, N.D. and Moorhead, Minn. The program will run Monday evenings in March. Course titles are “Environment and Religion,” “Christian Life Styles,” “Scripture,” “Ecumenism,” “The Real Meaning of Freedom and Responsibility,” “Film Appreciation,” and “Attitudes Towards Women in Society and in the Church.”

20 years ago — 2002
A new scholarship fund was begun in memory of Deacon David Gates. This is the first scholarship given in a deacon’s name in the Diocese of Fargo. The Gates Family provided the initial donation to create the fund. The money will be used for the education of men interested in formation for the permanent diaconate. Deacon Gates was ordained in 1983 and was an active member of St. Arnold in Milnor. He also served as a deacon for St. Mary in Forman, St. Peter & Paul in Cayuga, and Our Lady of Mercy in Cogswell. Deacon Gates was 57 when he died in 2002.

Sister Edwardine Gerou, OSF, passes away Jan. 27

Sister M. Edwardine Gerou, OSF, 90, died Jan. 27 following a five-year battle with cancer.

Sister Edwardine (Eulalia Ann) Gerou was born October 8, 1931, to Philip and Lucille (Mindak) Gerou of Drayton. She was the second-born of eight children. In her own words she recalled the roots of her faith saying, “Our daily life was inseparable from parish life at St. Edward’s Parish where we received our initial religious education and first sacraments. The liturgy and sermons, along with study club offerings, became rich sources from which to grow the faith in our home. To this was added family prayers and religious reading material. We met Sisters from several different religious communities through summer vacation school. At one of them I announced I would like to be a Sister because I liked long dresses.”

Following high school, Eulalia came to St. Francis Convent in the Fall of 1949. Her reception into the Novitiate took place on July 17, 1950, on which day she received her habit and religious name, Sister Mary Edwardine. A year later she made her first vows becoming a “Bride of Christ;” she made her perpetual profession on July 18, 1954.

Sister Edwardine celebrated 70 years of religious life July 31, 2021. She summarized her life in the following words: “All in all, 70 years are truly but drops in the bucket of eternity. Each drop reflects so much of God’s love in persons, places and circumstances before which hindsight bows in gratitude. I see religious consecration as a privileged call to holiness as we journey through life with the Lord.”

Sister Edwardine spent her entire religious life in Hankinson. Her apostolic works included 40 years of teaching religion. She served St. Phillip’s Parish as their Religious Education Coordinator from 1983 to 2004. She also served as local convent superior, on several religious and education boards. A woman of practical skills, she contributed actively in the discussions and decisions of her Community at the local and provincial levels.

Sister Edwardine’s love of the outdoors led to her working in the gardens, flower beds, and tending the fish in the pond she helped build in the late-1960s. You could see her artistic touch throughout the convent grounds, as well as in the many beautiful candles she made, thousands of which were sold to support the poor in the Brazilian and Indian missions of her Franciscan congregation.

Please remember Sister Edwardine in your prayers.
Ukraine chaplain sees his mission as helping troops protect their humanity

By Cindy Wooden | Catholic News Service

For Jesuit Father Andriy Zelinskyy and the soldiers he ministered to in Ukraine, the threat of a war with Russia isn’t news; “the war started eight years ago,” he said.

What is new, he said, is that the United States and the European Union are taking the threat seriously.

Father Zelinskyy is coordinator of military chaplains for the Ukrainian Catholic Church. He ministered full time with troops on the front in Eastern Ukraine from 2014 to 2018 before taking on the coordinating role.

Speaking from Kyiv with Catholic News Service Feb. 14, Father Zelinskyy said while global headlines are filled with dread over the Russian mobilization of troops and weaponry on Ukraine’s border, most Ukrainians are just going about their business, and that is even more true for the troops.

One new thing for the Jesuit is that in December, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law establishing a military chaplain structure within the country’s armed forces. Before 2016, he said, all of the chaplains were volunteers; for the past six years some of them have been civilian employees, but starting in July they will be considered members of the military.

Father Zelinskyy had been part of an ecumenical and interreligious working group pressing for the law but running up against a “post-Soviet mindset” that either saw military chaplains as unnecessary or as a violation of the separation of church and state. Now he’s involved in designing training programs for the ministers.

“I see my role as helping lean heaven toward the soldiers,” he said.

“We must help them choose good, seek truth, promote justice and contemplate beauty,” he continued. “These are all essential for preserving their humanity. We can solve so many problems if we can preserve our humanity, especially in the chaos of war.”

And while he said his most vivid memory of the front is “tens of kilometers of mud,” Father Zelinskyy insisted beauty also can be found there.

He tells the story of moving with an officer from one position to another near Donetsk in the fall of 2018. “We would move very early in the morning, because usually there was no fighting.”

The area was industrial, filled with defunct and abandoned factories, he said. They went inside one that was pocked with thousands of holes from bullets and missiles.

“The sun was just coming up,” he said. “It was like being in a planetarium and seeing a starry sky. It really was beautiful. You don’t have to make it up, you just have to see it.”

Of course, holding on to one’s humanity in war also means experiencing pain.

Before the war in Eastern Ukraine began, Father Zelinskyy was involved in a chaplaincy program working with military cadets in Lviv, in Western Ukraine.

When the war started in 2014, those young men were on the front.

“It was very difficult to see friends die,” he said. “It wasn’t just two or three. There were many.”

“There is nothing worse than war,” he said. “We have to treasure peace because if we lose it, it is very difficult to bring back.”
Love, protect the church despite its faults, pope says

By Junno Arocho Esteves | Catholic News Service

Beforere 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.

The same love that gave St. Joseph the strength to protect Jesus and Mary must inspire Christians to love the church, especially when calling out its sins and flaws, Pope Francis said.

Love “makes us capable of speaking the truth fully in a non-partisan way; of saying what is wrong but also of recognizing all the goodness and holiness that are present,” the pope said Feb. 16 during his weekly general audience.

“Nowadays it is common, it is an everyday occurrence, to criticize the church, to point out its inconsistencies—and there are many—to point out its sins, which in reality are our inconsistencies, our sins, because the church has always been a people of sinners who encounter God's mercy,” the pope said.

“Let us ask ourselves if, in our hearts, we love the church.”

Reflecting on St. Joseph as the patron of the universal church, the pope said he was concluding his series of audience talks about the foster father of Jesus.

The Gospel stories involving St. Joseph note that he takes Jesus and Mary with him and obeys God’s commands, thus highlighting his role as their protector, the pope said.

Departing from his prepared remarks, he added that “a very beautiful aspect of the Christian vocation” is protecting life and “protecting human development.”

“The Christian is—who we may say—like St. Joseph: he or she must protect,” he said. “To be a Christian is not only about receiving the faith, confessing the faith, but protecting life, one’s own life, the life of others, the life of the church.”

Christians, he continued, “must always ask ourselves whether we are protecting with all our strength Jesus and Mary, who are mysteriously entrusted to our responsibility, our care, our custody.”

St. Joseph, “in continuing to protect the church, continues to protect the child and his mother, and we too, in loving the church, continue to love the child and his mother,” he said.

Loving the church, he added, means protecting and walking with all its members.

“The church is not that small group that is close to the priest and bosses everyone around; no. We all are the church, all of us,” he said. “This is a good question: when I have a problem with someone, do I try to protect them or do I immediately condemn them, speak ill of them, destroy them? We must protect, always protect!”

Pope Francis encouraged Christians to seek St. Joseph’s intercession, especially in “the most difficult times in your life and the life of your communities.”

“Where our mistakes become a scandal, let us ask St. Joseph to give us the courage to speak the truth, ask for forgiveness and humbly begin again. Where persecution prevents the Gospel from being proclaimed, let us ask St. Joseph for the strength and patience to endure abuse and suffering for the sake of the Gospel,” the pope said.

St. Joseph’s intercession, he added, is also a source of comfort for the poor and the suffering and an encouragement for those “who serve the least, the defenseless, the orphans, the sick, the rejected of society.”

“How many saints have turned to him! How many people in the history of the church have found in him a patron, a guardian, a father!” the pope said.

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**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.
Catholic school enrollment increases this school year, NCEA report says

By Carol Zimmermann | Catholic News Service

Students compete in a game of tug of war Feb. 1 at St. Patrick School in Smithtown, N.Y. The event was one of many activities to celebrate Catholic Schools Week. (Gregory A. Shemitz | CNS)

Catholic school enrollment increased for the first time in two decades this school year, according to a preliminary report released by the National Catholic Educational Association Feb. 14.

The enrollment increase was from Catholic elementary schools and overall grew overall by 5.8%—primarily due to the sharp rise in the number of prekindergarten students. Catholic secondary schools’ enrollment went down by 0.4% this year.

Highlights of the annual report, which will be issued in March, showed an enrollment increase of 62,000 students, or a 3.8% jump.

The increase does not put Catholic school numbers back to their pre-pandemic levels though. During the first year of the pandemic, Catholic school enrollment decreased by 6.4%, its largest one-year decline in the 50 years the NCEA has been collecting school data. Right now, Catholic school enrollment is 2.8% lower than it was 2019-2020.

The brief report credited the enrollment bump this year to Catholic schools’ “dedication in safely opening classrooms and supporting their communities’ needs,” but it also stressed this trend must continue.

It pointed out that schools “need to continue to adapt to those needs and use the momentum to retain students and recruit new students in the upcoming years to stabilize or continue to increase enrollment.”

Elementary schools were initially hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic with an 8.1% decrease in enrollment last year. The report calls this year’s increase a “positive sign for long-term secondary school viability.”

The number of students in Catholic school prekindergarten classes increased by 33.5% this year with nearly every state reporting an increase of students in this age group particularly Utah with a 137% increase and California with a 134% increase.

The brief report pointed out that prekindergarten enrollment accounted for 66% of Catholic schools’ increased enrollment. But this increase, just as with overall enrollment, is still lower than pre-pandemic levels, which the NCEA report said was troubling.

Last year, NCEA announced that 186 elementary schools and 23 high schools closed in 2020. This year’s report says that on average over the past five years, approximately 100 Catholic schools have closed or consolidated. At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, 71 Catholic schools closed or merged.

In breaking down the data by dioceses, the report’s highlights found that the largest dioceses are losing enrollment at more than double the rate of other dioceses over the past two years.

“As the population in the United States shifts away from major cities, the largest dioceses may face more school closures and consolidations. Dioceses will need to determine how they can continue to serve underserved communities in their cities as these changes occur,” the report said.

The NCEA findings also noted how U.S. Catholic schools have adapted in recent years. Currently there are seven Catholic virtual schools, 71 International Baccalaureate programs, and 114 dual language immersion programs.

Nationally, 6.8% of Catholic school students utilize a parental choice program and 20.2% of Catholic schools enrolled students using parental choice programs.

The report’s data about principal and teacher retention found that 89% of principals and 86% of teachers returned to their school from the previous year, excluding those who retired. The report credited this high retention rate, even amid the pandemic, to the support Catholic school teachers and principals feel.

To ensure this retention rate continues, it added: “Catholic schools should continue to examine teacher pay as on average it is almost 20% below what local public school districts pay. Further, Catholic schools should offer opportunities for professional and spiritual growth for their teachers, and dioceses need to similarly support their principals.”
Child tossed into the trash a chilling wake-up call

One bright, January day, not long ago, a young mother in Hobbs, N.M., drove to a quiet spot behind a business and threw an object, wrapped in a black towel inside a trash bag, closed with a hair tie, into a large dumpster.

The object was her newborn child, his umbilical cord still attached.

A fellow sidewalk advocate alerted me of the news, and though it’s not a North Dakota story, I felt it worthy of sharing. It’s one that should cause all our hearts to break and stir.

I ended up finding more details online, along with a video showing the 18-year-old mother tossing the bagged baby into the furthest recesses of the receptacle, then leaving the scene. Many, in comments underneath, called for the stiffest penalty for her.

I assume that behind the mother’s shocking behavior, we will discover a complex story. I’m not reporting on this incident to raise more ire toward her, but to highlight some points my sidewalk-advocate friend wanted to share.

First, he wondered if the people upset with the mother knew that, in their state, abortions are allowed up to birth.

He also mentioned that, just a day before this tragic action, the mother could have had her child killed, legally, by abortion. Yet, by choosing this way to eliminate her baby, she faces charges of attempted homicide.

Indeed, whenever we peer into the issue of abortion, it is much darker than we can imagine, so we seek light to help us find our way.

In Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II wrote of the “enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil…the ‘culture of death’ and the ‘culture of life,’” noting that we all find ourselves involved in this conflict, “with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life” (EV 28).

Later, in Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis spoke of human beings being considered consumer goods to be used and discarded. “We have created a ‘throw away’ culture which is now spreading,” he said, adding that the excluded are no longer society’s “underside or its fringes or its disenfranchised,” but are “the outcast, the ‘leftovers’” (EG 53).

“Leftovers” are things generally tossed into the trash. And it’s chilling to consider not just that a young mother felt so disconnected from her child that she would bring it to a trash receptacle, but that she would swiftly toss this precious life into the bin, surrounded by yesterday’s garbage.

As two popes have indicated, as much as we would like to wash our hands of this garish act, we are not so far from it. Though we look upon it from afar, on some level, it is right here, close to our hearts.

It is certainly close to those of us who pray every Wednesday in Fargo at our state’s only abortion facility. We see the large trash bins behind the building, and we know of the refuse placed in them on a weekly basis, too. Whether the children who die there are disposed of in those containers or elsewhere, the bins are a symbol that a careless discarding takes place there every week. And it’s not just newspapers or plastic bottles that need recycling, but pieces of what was, just hours earlier, a living human being.

Thankfully, the baby was found and revived. Now named “Saul,” he has been given a chance at life. There is much cause here for rejoicing! He has people who love him and have circled in to be his support. Thanks be to God!

Someday, however, he’ll likely learn of his mother’s dire decision, made in a moment of duress. Hopefully, as he ponders that frightful moment, he might also discover a loving God who held him there in the dark, in 30-degree weather, until his human rescuers arrived.

“If you end up writing about this,” my friend said, “could you please put a plug in for Safe Haven Laws? That a mother can surrender her baby to a hospital or first responder station without repercussions? Many places even have baby boxes, like at fire stations, where the baby can be dropped off anonymously, and kept safe until he or she is rescued.”

We do need to get this message out. Whether by abortion or being throw into the trash, no child should have to endure such horrifying circumstances.

May the God who gives life, and gave baby Saul to our world as a gift, enlighten our hearts to know how to respond, always relying on his love as a measure.
Do you know where we are?

The answer will be revealed in the April New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from Transfiguration Church in Edgeley.