Live life to the fullest

Purge what doesn’t matter to make room for what does
Join Bishop John Folda at any of these Regional Listening Sessions

The Regional Listening Session will begin with adoration, reflection on Scripture, and prayer. This will be followed by a time in a gathering space to discuss and to reflect together as a community on these questions: What are the top three things that are working well at your parish/the diocese? What are the top three challenges to address in your parish/the diocese? What is one step I might be called to take to respond? All of the faithful are encouraged and invited to attend these events. For more information, go to: www.fargodiocese.org/synod.

All sessions are 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. unless otherwise noted.

Sun. Jan. 22: Holy Cross, West Fargo (2 to 4:30 p.m.)
Mon. Jan. 30: St. Joseph’s, Devils Lake
Tues. Jan. 31: St. James Basilica, Jamestown
Thurs. Feb. 2: St. Michael’s, Grand Forks
Tues. Feb. 7: St. Catherine’s, Valley City
Wed. Feb 8: St. John’s, Wahpeton
Wed. Feb. 15: St. Ann’s, Belcourt
Thurs. Feb. 16: St. Therese, Rugby
Tues. Feb. 21: St. Philip Neri, Napoleon
Thurs. Feb. 23: St. John’s, Grafton
Tues. Feb. 28: Holy Rosary, LaMoure
Tues. Mar. 7: St. Alphonsus, Langdon
Wed. Mar. 8: St. Paul Newman Center, Fargo
Thurs. Mar. 9: St. Thomas Newman Center, Grand Forks

For more info: fargodiocese.org/campsummit

Register on or before Feb. 24: $300
After: $350
Family rate and scholarships available.
Space is limited.

Do not be satisfied with mediocrity.
Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.
-St. Pope John Paul II

For you entering grades 7-9
Red Willow Bible Camp
BINFORD, ND
JULY 9-13, 2023

Diocese of Fargo
Synod and Eucharistic Revival

Diocese of Fargo
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

14  FROM BISHOP FOLDA
    4  Next steps for the diocesan synod

8  LOCAL
    8  Holy Land pilgrimage a Thanksgiving to remember

11  NEXT GEN
    11  Trinity Elementary School experiences soccer on wheels

14  COVER STORY
    14  Live life to the full: Purge what doesn’t matter to make room for what does

19  FAITH AND CULTURE
    19  Gaze on the Lord’s Beauty: It’s the dawning of a new year

22  OUR CATHOLIC LIFE
    22  Seminarian Life: Learning to love Mary on Mary’s mountain

28  US/WORLD NEWS
    28  Violence worries church leaders, but tourists buoy Bethlehem residents

31  SIDEWALK STORIES
    31  Accident reveals the power of God’s mercy, love
When I announced last summer that the Diocese of Fargo would hold a diocesan synod, I explained our need to prayerfully reflect on the state of our diocese and how we can carry forward the mission that Jesus has entrusted to his Church, a mission to live the Gospel and to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). This is not a task only for the bishop, or only for priests and religious. It is a calling and a responsibility of all the faithful, and we all have a part to play in the work of the Church in our diocese. Over the last two months, many of you have responded to the parish self-reflection survey that we made available, which gathered information and offered an opportunity to ask: where am I in my faith life, and where should I be?

Now we have arrived at another stage of preparation for our diocesan synod. Regional listening sessions will begin in mid-January and take place at 15 locations throughout the diocese. We will begin each session with a time of Scripture reflection and prayer before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, realizing that Jesus is the head of the Church, and we draw our life from him, especially through the Eucharist. This time of prayer will be followed by time to reflect and discuss as a faith community on a few key questions: What are the top three things that are working well at your parish/diocese? What are the top three challenges to address in your parish/diocese? What is one step I might be called to take to respond? We won’t be putting the tenets of our faith up for a vote, but we will consider how we are living the faith, and how we can live it more fully in our diocese. We will listen to the Holy Spirit, who guides and empowers the Church, and we will listen to each other as well. I intend to be present at each of these listening sessions, and I hope you will make an effort to attend and participate in these gatherings to give input for our synod. Page 2 in this edition of New Earth provides the locations and dates of each session.

After these listening sessions are completed, the preparation for our synod will continue with a time of further reflection and consultation with priests and leaders in our diocese about what you have shared through the parish self-reflections and listening sessions. This will be a period of further discernment to identify and focus on the key issues that are before us. We will not only be looking at problems, but also at the graces and opportunities offered to us by our Lord. Lest we become disheartened by the magnitude of the task, we must turn to our Lord in prayer throughout this process, and trust in his mercy and love for his Church. By abiding in his presence, especially through the Eucharist, we can be sure that we are walking with Jesus and that we will be assisted on our synodal journey of faith. As he sent his disciples forth into the world, he promised, “I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). That promise was meant for us too.

Based on this consultation process, and with your assistance, I will formulate the significant issues and questions that should guide the rest of our synod. During the months that follow, we will spend time in prayer and further reflection on these key questions at the parish and diocesan levels. We will continue to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us his vision for the Diocese of Fargo and to lead us as we strive together to be a leaven in the world. And finally this preparation will reach its conclusion with the synodal assembly in April 2024. This 3-day gathering will include representation from throughout the diocese and will prayerfully discuss the questions and the mission that lie before us. From the prayer and deliberations of this event I will then prepare a pastoral letter and plan with key priorities for our diocese to move forward, always relying on God’s grace and the Eucharistic presence of his Son.

A synod is an act of the Church, and the word “synod” literally means “walking” or “journeying together.” Our diocesan synod, the first in 70 years, will be an occasion for all of us to
listen to the voice of our Lord as we strive to follow him more closely and carry forward the work he has given his Church to do in the Diocese of Fargo. The listening sessions that we are planning will be an opportunity to gather and “walk together” in faith, to pray together before our Eucharistic Lord, and to share the fruits of our reflection with one another. We will listen and discuss how the Holy Spirit is guiding and inspiring the bishop, the clergy, and all the people of our diocese. It is meant to be a communal exercise with Christ at its center, so I hope to see many of you in attendance.

As we continue our synodal journey, let us finally ask the intercession of Mary Immaculate, the Mother of the Church and the patroness of our diocese. Just as she listened and heard the voice of God at the moment of the incarnation, so may we listen to his voice and respond with faith, humility, and courage.

FROM BISHOP FOLDA

“... became flesh.”

Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

For educators

We pray that educators may be credible witnesses, teaching fraternity rather than competition and helping the youngest and most vulnerable above all.

BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR

Jan. 7–13
Region VIII Bishops’ Retreat, Clearwater, Fla.

Jan. 16
Martin Luther King Day, Pastoral Center closed

Jan. 17 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, Holy Spirit, Fargo

Jan. 22 at 2 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, Holy Cross, West Fargo

Jan. 23 at 5:15 p.m.
Mass at St. Paul Newman Center, Fargo

Jan. 24 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

Jan. 25 at 9 a.m.
Women of the Word, Nativity, Fargo

Jan. 25 at 3 p.m.
St. JPII Schools Board meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

Jan. 26 at 5:15 p.m.
Operation Andrew Dinner, Bishop’s Residence, Fargo

Jan. 30 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Joseph, Devils Lake

Jan. 31 at 9 a.m.
Mass for Catholic Schools Week, St. Joseph, Devils Lake

Jan. 31 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. James Basilica, Jamestown

Feb. 1 at 9:30 a.m.
Mass for Catholic Schools Week, St. James Basilica, Jamestown

Feb. 2 at 9:30 a.m.
All Catholic Schools Mass, Shanley Gym, Fargo

Feb. 2 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Michael, Grand Forks

Feb. 3 at 9 a.m.
Mass for Catholic Schools Week, St. Michael, Grand Forks

Feb. 6 at 5:30 p.m.
Real Presence Radio Banquet, Delta by Marriott, Fargo

Feb. 7 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Catherine, Valley City

Feb. 8 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. John, Wahpeton

Feb. 9 at 5:30 p.m.
Mass for the Legislature, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck

Feb. 14 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Alphonsus, Langdon

Feb. 15 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Ann, Belcourt

Feb. 16 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Therese, Rugby
On Dec. 8, 1991, a priest at the Shrine of Betania in Cúa, Venezuela was celebrating Mass. After the consecration, he noticed the host begin to bleed from one side. The priest quickly preserved the host and studied it to make sure it was a miracle.

The local bishop took up an investigation to make sure it wasn’t explained by something natural. During the Mass there were numerous pilgrims who immediately verified that the priest did not have wounds from which the blood present in the Host could have flowed. Besides, from the analyses, the result concluded that the blood of the priest did not match the one of the Particle.

The Host of the Miracle was subjected to some special studies, requested by the then Bishop of Los Teques, the Most Reverend Pio Bello Ricardo. Results confirmed that the blood was human blood of type AB positive, which matches the one found in the cloth of the Shroud of Turin and in the Host of the Eucharistic Miracle of Lanciano, which occurred in Italy in 750 AD, and was analyzed by 500 commissions of the World Health Organization.

The host was later enshrined in a convent in Los Teques and left exposed for thousands of pilgrims to see each year. In particular, one pilgrim from New Jersey named Daniel Sanford arrived at the convent in 1998. He explained what happened next.

“After the celebration ended, the priest opened the door of the Tabernacle which contained the Host of the Miracle. With great astonishment, I saw that the Host was as if in flames, and there was a pulsating heart that was bleeding in its center. I saw this for about 30 seconds or so, then the Host returned to normal. I was able to film a part of this miracle with my video camera.”

The video was sent to the local bishop, who encouraged the dissemination of the video for the purposes of spreading belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. The miraculous Host can still be seen today in the convent in Los Teques, and the blood on the host is still fresh, as it was when the miracle first occurred.

**MONTHLY EUCHARIST MIRACLE**

The Eucharistic Miracle of the Shrine of Betania

*Republished from Aleteia.com (edited for content and space)*

~

**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)*
What do we mean when we pray for Christian unity?

January always contains the “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity,” spanning the week from Jan. 18–25, ending on the feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. St. Paul was a man driven to proclaim the gospel, emphasizing that Jesus Christ bridges the divide between Jews and Gentiles (cf. Eph. 2:14). By giving their lives in faith to Jesus, both groups could have equal membership in God’s people and equal opportunity for salvation.

Therefore, it is supposed to be characteristic of God’s people, that they are one. The Creed states that we believe in “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.” Unity of mind and heart among Jesus’ followers should demonstrate the love they share and the one gospel they follow. However, we all bring our sinful habits into the church, so the unity that Jesus intends for his followers has always been fragile.

To paint in very broad brushstrokes, there have been two long-lasting fractures among Christ’s followers over the past 2,000 years. The first is commonly dated to the year 1057, when Christians in the east (basically Eastern Europe and the Middle East by today’s understanding) and the West (largely in western and central Europe) separated over the issue of the Pope’s authority over all other bishops. The western Christians, long centered on Rome, were comfortable seeing the Pope as the successor of Peter and the head of the Bishops. Christians in the east, now calling themselves Orthodox rather than Catholic, did not dispute the pope’s authority as a bishop, but denied his authority over their own bishops. Today, the divide between Catholic and Orthodox Christian still centers around the authority of the Bishop of Rome. Catholics and Orthodox largely see the sacraments in the same ways (with some distinctions), the Communion of Saints, and the means of salvation.

The second divide has its roots in 1517, with Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. This was largely a division within western (Roman) Catholicism. Much has been said about the movement Martin Luther began, but his central dispute was against the belief that the sacrament of Holy Orders embedded any special power in ordained clergy. The Protestants emphasized the “priesthood of all believers”—a notion that is Catholic as much as it is Protestant—and denied that there was any other sort of priesthood (what we call the “ministerial priesthood”) that helps the flock grow in grace through celebrating the sacraments. Since Luther allowed for no teaching authority rooted in Holy Orders, Luther became an authority in his own right, a pattern followed by many of his contemporaries and many in Protestantism today. Therefore, Protestant Christianity is not a homogeneous body, with many differences based on the religious and cultural ideals emphasized by the founders of different denominations.

Therefore, the followers of Jesus are not nicely unified. So how should we see each other whether we are Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant? Can we call ourselves brothers and sisters in the Lord? The Catholic Church would say yes, though in an imperfect, limited, way. The Second Vatican Council did much within Catholicism to bridge the divides between Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants, recognizing that “elements of sanctification and of truth” (Lumen Gentium, 8) are found outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. These paths for grace include the sacred Scriptures, the life of grace, the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, etc. (CCC 819).

However, despite the things that we share, the divisions within the church are significant. Catholicism doesn’t hold only a portion of what helps us follow Christ, but the fullness of it. Therefore, the historic divisions of the Church were rooted in sin. Though the people of today are not to blame for them, the ongoing divisions can turn others away from Christ entirely. That is why the Council wrote, “it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone… that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrust all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the People of God” (CCC 816).

These words may not sit well in a culture like ours that speaks so much about pluralism and diversity. We may have diverse ways of understanding, but truth itself has no diversity. Therefore, Christ entrusted his Church with the truths we need for salvation, and we pray that the separated portions of the flock may be united in the Church once again. While we pray for unity among Christ’s followers, let’s say yes to the deeper conversion and holiness that unity requires. And if there are prayer services in your community during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it would be good to plan to attend.
Holy Land pilgrimage a Thanksgiving to remember

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

On Nov 17, 2022, 84 pilgrims boarded the plane and took an 11-day pilgrimage to Israel to “Walk in the Footsteps of Jesus” in the Holy Land. Their spiritual guides for the pilgrimage were myself and Father Moen, pastor of Sacred Heart in Minto and St. Stanislaus in Warsaw. We were assisted by Deacons Ken Votava and Tom Geffre, both from Jamestown.

One of our pilgrims spoke of their experience and said, “I did not want to give up my Thanksgiving with my family, but I’m glad that I did as I came home a different person than when I left. I am ever grateful to celebrate Thanksgiving on my arrival home with new beginnings. This is an opportunity that anyone who gets a chance to make sure you go. Christmas and Holy Week will never be the same.”

I have now had the privilege of taking eight pilgrimages to the Holy Land, and was asked by a brother priest, “Why do you go there so often?” I told him there is more conversion on one hour of this trip, than you can have in many years of classroom experience. I love taking groups to see the sites because I can see conversion happen right in front of my eyes that I could not have had if I taught the same material to the same group of people in a classroom setting. They have to be able to see the distances and terrain, the places where our Lord lived, worked, taught, and healed. It becomes real in their hearts after they hear the gospel at each site, pray the rosary decades where they have occurred, and offered Mass at a Holy Site every day. We even blessed marriages at Cana, celebrated anointing of the sick in Capernaum, and renewed our baptismal promises at the Baptism site of Jesus.

This was the first time any of my groups had a chance to celebrate Mass in the tomb of our Lord Jesus. The tomb only fits three people inside of it, and everyone else felt like Mary Magdalene waiting for our Lord in Holy Communion outside the tomb, just as she waited for his presence that first Easter. Whenever you can have Mass at the place of the Annunciation, the Mount of Beatitudes, the baptism site of our Lord, the upper room, or even Bethlehem, it brings a new perspective to the pilgrims. Many comment that it opens their eyes to the mysteries of the faith. Even though it is the same Lord we receive at every Mass in Holy Communion at home or in Israel, I like to explain to them to imagine if you were blind, and someone at home tried to describe a tree to you, how the tree’s leaves change colors, the branches break, soon new sprouts of growth take place. It is when you see it firsthand that it makes sense, and the response is that their faith is bolstered.

Father Moen has traveled with us for his third pilgrimage and said, “I love to go to the holy sites as I feel that Jesus is talking to me personally, and I can grow from those experiences to help others encounter the living God.”

Even though we just got back from this pilgrimage, we are already planning for the next one on Jan. 15–26, 2024. If anyone wants more information on this trip, they can reach out to myself or Father Moen for more information.
Purgatorial Society commits to praying for the dead

“I can hardly wait to get to purgatory!” said nobody ever. Although the souls in Purgatory are assured of going to heaven, they must undergo purification, and therefore live in a state of yearning for heaven without knowing exactly when they will reach it.

The souls in purgatory are part of the Communion of Saints to which we on earth belong, and so the Church encourages us to pray for them. “From the beginning the Church has honored the memory of the dead and offered prayers in suffrage for them, above all the Eucharistic sacrifice, so that thus purified, they may attain the beatific vision of God” (CCC 1032). As a way of actively participating in these sacrifices for the poor souls in purgatory, St. Joseph’s Church in Devils Lake has established the Diocese of Fargo’s first Purgatorial Society.

A Purgatorial Society is an association of Catholic lay people, religious, and/or priests who work together to assist the poor souls in purgatory through prayers and Masses for the dead and other acts of charity for their benefit. Father Chad Wilhelm, pastor of St. Joseph Church in Devils Lake, submitted the statutes of the proposed society for the approval of Bishop Folda, who gave his approbation on Oct. 18, 2022, the feast day of St. Luke. This means that all people who join the Purgatorial Society will receive an indulgence as they pray and offer sacrifices on behalf of the poor souls in purgatory.

Fittingly, the inaugural day of the Purgatorial Society was Nov. 2, the Feast of All Souls. Those who enrolled in the society at that time attended Mass and obligated themselves, without penalty of sin, to 1) attend four meetings annually, when possible; 2) include in their daily prayers a special prayer for the poor souls in purgatory; 3) receive a certificate stating that they are enrolled in St. Joseph’s Purgatorial Society; and 4) be willing, if asked, to offer a rosary before the funeral of Purgatorial Society members.

The next meeting and enrollment opportunity for parishioners of St. Joseph Church in Devils Lake is Jan. 15 at 3:30 p.m. It is our hope that more of our parishioners will join our Purgatorial Society and that more Purgatorial Societies will be established throughout the diocese.
Catholic Charities North Dakota celebrates 100 years!

By Alyssa Yanish | Director of Marketing for Catholic Charities North Dakota

The new year is here and everyone at Catholic Charities North Dakota couldn’t be more excited! 2023 marks 100 years since our agency was established. We can’t wait to celebrate this milestone.

Catholic Charities North Dakota was founded in 1923 by Msgr. Vincent Ryan under the name Catholic Welfare Bureau and was created to serve women experiencing unexpected pregnancy and to help them with the adoption process. Later the Catholic Welfare Bureau was renamed Catholic Family Services, and in the 1980s, we started providing guardianship services along with adoption services.

Now, at the beginning of our 100th year, we offer two different guardianship programs, two adoption programs, counseling, and charity care. We have extremely passionate staff that work every day to provide the best care and service to our many clients. It’s because of our staff that we have been able to continue for 100 years.

To celebrate 100 years of service, we are planning parties across the state in the month of June. While some details are still being finalized, we do have locations set for our Minot and Fargo parties. Our party in Minot will be held at the Roosevelt Zoo. The zoo will be open to the public for free on June 7 during the day and there will be cake and ice cream provided in the evening. The party in Fargo will be held at Bonanzaville on June 20. All party details will be available at www.catholiccharitiesnd.org along with information on how to RSVP. We can’t wait to celebrate with you!
Trinity Elementary School experiences soccer on wheels

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

Anyone who was watching the World Cup Soccer tournament last month knows the game can move fast. Now imagine the game on wheels!

Students at Trinity Elementary School in West Fargo got a taste of wheelchair soccer during gym class last month, courtesy of Fargo-Moorhead’s Hope Inc. Gunner Linstaedt, Phy Ed teacher at Trinity, has been inviting Hope Inc. to the school for the past two years to help introduce his gym classes to the adaptive sports some of their classmates, who are mobility challenged, take part in.

According to the group’s website, Hope Inc. is a “non-profit organization that provides family friendly sporting and recreational opportunities critical to the health and development of children and adults.” The majority of those opportunities are for mobility challenged clients who otherwise might endure isolation from activities with family members and friends due to their disability.

“We try to get out to schools to introduce kids to the world of adaptive sports,” said Bill Gommesh, Executive Director of Hope Inc. “We talk with them about folks with disabilities to try to create awareness and understanding, especially for their classmates who may be mobility challenged. I think once we do this, kids don’t look at people in wheelchairs the same. I think they have a much more positive outlook on that.”

The day’s activities at Trinity centered on wheelchair soccer, but Hope Inc. offers about 25 other activities for clients, including sled hockey, adaptive skiing, basketball, baseball, and softball. The organization also rents out adaptive sports equipment to clients and their families. More information on their programs may be found at hopeinc.org.

Jack Witzel, a Trinity fourth grader and a Hope Inc. client, shows his fellow classmates how it’s done. (Paul Braun | New Earth)
University of Mary and UTTC bring cultures together for mid-winter powwow

By University of Mary

The University of Mary, in partnership with United Tribes Technical College (UTTC), is inviting the public and media to the third annual Mid-winter Powwow on campus. The event brings cultures together and helps celebrate the life and dignity of the human person.

The event Jan. 15, begins with a 10:30 a.m. Mass celebrated in honor of a holy man and “Servant of God,” Nicholas Black Elk—regarded as a historically notable and influential Native American leader who died in 1950. As a member of the Oglala Lakota peoples, Black Elk was a participant in the Battle of Little Bighorn as a boy, and present during the Wounded Knee Massacre. He later converted to Catholicism and led a humble life as a catechist in service to spreading the Gospel. In 2016, the Diocese of Rapid City officially opened his cause for canonization as a saint.

Following Mass, the celebration continues with an introduction to the Powwow—“Powwow 101”—in Lumen Vitae University Center’s (LVUC) Founders Hall at 11:30 a.m. The Mid-winter Powwow commences with a grand entrance at 1 p.m. in the McDowell Activity Center (MAC), with a second grand entrance at 7 p.m. Prizes for various categories of dance will be awarded. Attendees are invited to a traditional frybread and buffalo feed between 5 and 7 p.m. in LVUC’s Crow’s Nest Restaurant.

Entry fee for those 5 to 65 years of age is $5 per person, which includes the meal at the Crow’s Nest Restaurant.

For more information about the Mid-winter Powwow, visit umary.edu/powwow.

The Powwow marks the first day of the University of Mary’s Week to Celebrate the Life and Dignity of the Human Person, “Life and Dignity Week.” The week continues Monday with the celebration of Martin Luther King Day during the 10 a.m. Monday Morning Mission at the Starion Living Room inside the Lumen Vitae University Center on campus. The University of Mary is honoring the civil rights leader with a talk from Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers called “Building a Civilization of Love: A Catholic Response to Racism,” and includes words from Dr. King, sponsored by the Black Student Union. The week continues with a Community Learning Day on Wednesday with discussion of various social topics through the lens of Catholic social teaching. Life and Dignity Week culminates with the national March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20. Over 200 University of Mary students will board five buses to make the 60-hour round trip for that highly anticipated annual event. Also Jan. 20, the public is invited to take part in the third annual statewide ND March for Life event that begins with Mass at 10:45 a.m. celebrated by Bishop David Kagan in the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, followed by the march to the steps of the North Dakota Capitol for the rally at 12:30 p.m.

In 2022, nearly 230 students and faculty—five full buses—made the 60-plus hour roundtrip to the March for Life in Washington, D.C. That was the largest Mary contingent since leading the March in 2017, when over 600 attended. (University of Mary)
University of Mary and UTTC bring cultures together for mid-winter powwow

By University of Mary

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NEW EARTH JANUARY 2023
Every Lent for the past several years I’ve been purging 40 things from my house. Even though the season of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving doesn’t begin until Feb. 22, I tend to start thinking about this practice shortly after Christmas when I’m pushing the clothes in my closet aside to add another sweater and packing yet another pair of socks into an already full drawer.

Despite improving my old mentality to take things in because they’re free or “on sale,” every year I’m surprised how much stuff still finds its way into my home. As my priorities and interests shift throughout the years, this “40 things in 40 days” practice has been a helpful way for me to reorder my life towards God. It encourages me to ask the questions: What mission is God is calling me to? Does what I own further that mission or hinder it? Are the things I own either useful or beautiful? Are there things that make me feel guilty because I received them as gifts, spent money on them but don’t use them, or I know I’m better off not having such as inappropriate movies, books, or music?

While this exercise can be a bit of a chore initially, I look forward to the result. It’s not just about a cleaner, uncluttered home (as nice as that is), but about making room for something better—namely—room for God and the greater things he wants to give: peace, gratitude, and a mind and heart receptive to his love.

One of the scripture passages that often gives me pause is the story of the rich young man. The rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to gain eternal life. Jesus then tells him to keep the commandments. The young man then replies, “All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?” Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this statement, he went away sad, for he had many possessions. (Matt. 19:20-22).”

It wasn’t enough to just follow the commandments. That was the beginning of what Jesus desired for him, but Jesus was calling him to something much greater, a close relationship with him, one with complete abandon and without distraction and division. Jesus was offering to liberate this man by calling him to give all his possessions to the poor. We don’t know the end of the story. Maybe this man later followed Jesus. But in the moment, his possessions were a burden and hindrance that left him sad.

We may not be called to give everything away today. But someday we will. Someday when our health fails us and death approaches, the things of this world won’t matter. Only our relationships will remain, the most important being our relationship with Christ, who alone saves us from our sins.

Some are called to surrender their earthly possessions in their lifetime. Many religious throughout the centuries have done
so. Many saints born into wealthy families such as St. Francis of Assisi, Blessed Giorgio Frassati, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, and St. Katharine Drexel served God by either giving everything away or using what they’d been given wisely in order to serve others. Are we doing the same? Do we strive to use the wealth, time, and gifts God has given us for his glory? Or do we clutch to what we have, using it for our own pleasure and security?

In a little way, this “40 things in 40 days” practice is one way that helps me to not be attached to the things of this world. It’s one way that reminds me that we are all called to daily sacrifice. We are all called to rely on Jesus, not our wealth, abilities, or possessions. All of these things can be taken away at any time. It’s Jesus who builds treasures for us in heaven. It’s Jesus who reminded his disciples in the last line of Matthew’s gospel: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).”

Practically speaking, the “40 things in 40 days” has become something of a game for me, which means I’ve invented a few rules. Go ahead and do the same for yourself. Do socks that you were planning on tossing soon anyway because they have holes in them count as a “thing?” In my rulebook, no. Do apps, games, subscriptions, or music on your phone or computer count? Definitely yes.

I recently finished the book Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World by Cal Newport. It goes beyond the usual “phone addiction” narrative, admitting that technology can be a great tool if used with intention. Newport defines digital minimalism as “a philosophy of technology use in which you focus your online time on a small number of carefully selected and optimized activities that strongly support things you value, and then happily miss out on everything else.”

“People lose everything they leave behind in this world; but they carry with them the rewards of charity and the alms which they gave, for which they will have a reward and a just retribution from the Lord.”

– St. Francis of Assisi
The definition fits well for physical items as well. Those who choose to have less don’t mind missing out on small things but instead focus on the big things that are truly important to them. Cutting distraction and excess in our online involvements is often more liberating than purging unused items around the house.

On occasion, I’ve regretted getting rid of things. Despite not using something for several years, suddenly the perfect opportunity for it actually does arrive. The regret is short-lived, knowing the benefits that having fewer items and a simpler life have brought me. If the regret lasts a little longer, it’s an opportunity to praise God for all he’s given me. This tiny void is an invitation to sit with the Lord in my disappointment rather than reach to fill the void with a new distraction.

As 19th century British textile designer and writer William Morris famously said, “Have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful, or believe to be beautiful.” Sometimes it helps to think on those words as you prepare to donate or purge items that are no longer useful. The end goal is to live the life and mission God is calling you towards to the fullest without possessions that weigh you down.

This year, make a resolution to push away what distracts and to pursue the good. Jesus is always waiting for us to sit quietly in prayer, and he is never outdone in our generous efforts to follow him.

“There is but one love of Jesus, as there is but one person in the poor: Jesus. We take vows of chastity to love Christ with undivided love; to be able to love him with undivided love we take a vow of poverty which frees us from all material possessions, and with the freedom we can love him with undivided love, and from this vow of undivided love we surrender ourselves totally to him in the person who takes his place.” –St. Teresa of Kolkata
Know kids with time on their hands?

We invite K-12 students of Fargo-Moorhead-West Fargo to be our guests for a complimentary weekday dinner during the 2022-23 school year.

If your group has a creative talent to share with us, we’re an appreciative audience! This casual meet up is intended to create an intergenerational SPARK (Share Purpose Ability Respect and Knowledge) between our residents and area youth.

RSVP by calling 701.237.4700.

5300 12th Street South | Fargo, North Dakota
Independent Living | Assisted Living
CHILivingCommunities.org/Riverview
In Emily Stimpson Chapman’s latest book *Letters to Myself from the End of the World*, she chooses the tumultuous time of 2020 to write letters of encouragement and hope to her younger self. Chapman, now 45, writes to her 25 year-old-self, to be exact.

Chapman speaks with clarity on all manners of life and faith. Each three to six page letter starts with a short piece of advice: “Look to the saints. Expect every believer to fall. Holiness is not a self-help plan. The journey will not look like you expect it to look.” She doesn’t shy away from the hard questions about Catholicism or the sin of the world today and instead meets them with hope. She writes honestly about the struggles of her younger self and offers hope and support. She also admits that her older self is not perfect, but no doubt healing has occurred, faith has been strengthened, and fervent prayers have been answered.

Each letter is written sometime between June and November of 2020, a time rife with uncertainties with the pandemic, social upheaval, and the upcoming election. Reading letters from that time was oddly refreshing because even though we still face plenty of hardship today, it’s encouraging to see someone writing about the events of the world at that time with a clear mind and faithful heart. Her writing is filled with good humor and joy, a testament that God’s call to be joyful in the worst of times is not only possible but a way to relieve the suffering of the time.

Chapman’s advice to her younger self is both personal and practical, covering topics such as sacraments, saints, church scandals, sin, social media, prayer, suffering, adoption, motherhood, and long years of waiting. These letters are a testament to the power of prayer and grace.

One piece of wisdom that struck me as particularly well founded was from the letter “Don’t live in the future:”

“Every day you’re alive, the future will stretch out before you, giving you something to anticipate, to think about, to focus on. And because it’s an imaginary future, with no real sufferings or inconveniences in it, it will always be more attractive than the life you’re living. This is why living for the future always breeds discontent with the present. A real imperfect present can never compare to an imagined perfect future.”

I found Chapman’s tone of an older sister or a spunky aunt as a refreshing source of wisdom and encouragement in the vast library of Catholic books. *Letters to Myself from the End of the World* is an easy read, a source of rejuvenation for anyone who finds themselves weary from current events or their own shortcomings.
It’s the dawning of a new year

By Mary Hanbury | Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fargo

This picture represents the dawning of a new day. It depicts a journey from darkness into the light and, in that light, the gift that awaits us. It is a journey, like our lives.

The greyness of the Triumphal Arch at the top and darkness at the bottom give us the feeling of coldness, even emptiness. We walk forward because the dazzling light attracts us and are greeted as we walk through the Triumphal Arch with a heavenly host of angels surrounding the Holy Trinity. God the Father is at the top in the clouds. He is resting his arm on the earth and presenting heaven with his other arm. In the center Jesus, the son, is shown in His Eucharistic Presence in the monstrance. Between the Father and the Son we see the Holy Spirit represented by the dove.

These three images form a line of sight from the top down where our eyes are fixed intently on the Lord. Actually, the light mesmerizes us if we focus our eyes on the monstrance in the center with the angels surrounding our Eucharistic Lord, as if there is a circular, spinning motion going on. This image, full of light and life, gives us a glimpse into heaven, even though one would not need the Eucharist in heaven, since the Eucharist is to sustain us now until we meet Jesus face-to-face. The image of the Eucharist is to give us direction here and now.

We stand at the same level as the rising sun. A sign we are not yet in heaven but the path is shown. Jesus in the Eucharist is our way to the Father, and in this picture, heaven revolves around this truth. So too it should be with the Eucharistic Lord in our life. Let us begin the New Year with this image as it is the dawning of a new day, a new way, a path to follow.

Upcoming session focuses on school choice, gender

CATHOLIC ACTION

CHRISTOPHER DODSON

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

In my last column, I highlighted a set of legislative proposals to help pregnant women, born and unborn children, and new families. The state’s bishops later called these ideas Responding with Love: Legislative Proposals for a Sanctuary for Life. You can read their statement and find resources that can be used in your parishes to support this project at ndcatholic.org/rwl.

Meanwhile, efforts to enforce pro-life laws previously enacted are held up in court. State legislators passed two laws that they intended to go into effect together if Roe vs. Wade was ever overturned. That happened with the Dobbs decision. At the time I write this, neither of those laws has gone into effect.

The first law is a comprehensive abortion ban with exceptions for rape and incest passed in 2007. As I write this, it is before the state supreme court where the abortion lobby lawyers argue that there is a right to abortion in the state constitution.

The second law is a “heartbeat ban” that was passed in 2013 and was meant to be the law for all abortions after six weeks gestation. It does not have a rape or incest exception. It was enjoined in federal court. The North Dakota Attorney General is seeking to lift the injunction on the grounds that, after Dobbs, there is no reason to block the law.

North Dakota legislators might seek to combine the two laws into new legislation during the current legislative session.

What else might happen during the session?

North Dakota needs stronger protection for religious freedom. The federal government and most of the states provide more protection for religious freedom than the state of North Dakota. In fact, prisoners in North Dakota have more religious freedom rights than the rest of us. That needs to change.

Gender ideology will be a big topic during the session. Two years ago, the legislature passed a bill protecting girls’ sports, but Governor Burgum vetoed the bill. Legislators might introduce identical or similar legislation this year.

Many legislators are upset about gender policies in public schools that allow mixed-sex bathrooms, require teachers to use expressed gender pronouns, and even prohibit teachers from informing parents that the child is expressing a gender not aligned with his or her biological sex. At a minimum, legislation is needed to protect the rights of parents and the free speech rights of teachers and other government employees. The legislature should also explore how to protect minors from permanently damaging “gender transitioning” surgeries.

Some legislators are enthusiastic about forwarding parental choice in education and maybe this year it will pass. In November, Attorney General Drew Wrigley issued an opinion that the state’s “Blaine Amendment” is unconstitutional. Motivated by anti-Catholic prejudice, “Blaine Amendments” were placed into many state constitutions during the 19th Century. The North Dakota language was inserted at statehood and prohibited the state from assisting “sectarian,” meaning Catholic, schools.

We have long thought that the state’s Blaine Amendment was unconstitutional. Recent decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court made our case even stronger. Now the Attorney General has essentially pronounced the death of the state’s Blaine Amendment.

This development, however, does not mean that the state must provide parental choice in education. The legislature must enact it. Various methods exist to help parents, such as vouchers, educational savings accounts, tax credits, or reimbursements to schools. The principle is simple. Provide parents with some financial help so that they can choose the best educational setting for their children.

Every child has a right to state-assisted education and every parent has a right to choose the best educational setting for their children. The two rights are not mutually exclusive. The current system, however, says that a child can get assistance but only in a government school. The parents can exercise their right to choose, but if they choose a non-public school the child does not get the benefit of assistance. That assistance, by the way, is paid from the parent’s taxes.

The system we have is not only absurd. It is oppressive and disproportionately hurts families with lower incomes.

Well-funded interest groups have tried, often successfully, to portray parental choice programs as schemes to destroy the public school system and help rich families. In truth, parental choice does not harm public schools and is the lowest-income families who most benefit.

Finally, the legislature must help the least among us. With a large budget surplus, the legislature must ensure that our most vulnerable, including the sick, the addicted, the poor, the homeless, and women facing crisis pregnancies are respected, protected, and cared for. How we care for them now will be North Dakota’s true legacy.

Remember, to get regular updates on the legislative session, sign up at ndcatholic.org.
Robert Browning, John Lennon, and Pope Francis. What could a Victorian-era poet, a 20th century rock star, and a 21st century pope possibly have in common?

Well, I recently discovered something—each of them has tried to assure us that old age is not as bad as it might seem. For all three, “the best is yet to be!”

“Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made,” wrote Robert Browning in 1864. Over a century later, John Lennon recorded a song inspired by Browning’s words, “Grow Old with Me.”

Pope Francis recently echoed these words in his general audience talks on aging. “Old age is the phase in life most suited to spreading the joyful news that life is the initiation to a final fulfillment,” he said. “The elderly are a promise, a witness of promise. And the best is yet to come. The best is yet to come: it is like the message of elderly believers, the best is yet to come.”

Pope Francis sees our final years as a time of joyfulness. “Old age is the fitting time for the moving and joyful witness of expectation. The elderly man and woman are waiting, waiting for an encounter,” he mused.

Though seniors may no longer possess “the power of the energy, words, and impulses of youth,” in their weakness they make “the promise of the true destination of life even more transparent… A place at the table with God, in the world of God,” the pope said.

Though many of us think about death with fear and trepidation, Pope Francis encourages us to have a more positive outlook, placing our confidence in God, in whose hands we subsist.

Referring to the grilled fish Jesus served his followers after his resurrection, our Holy Father said, “This gesture of caring love gives us a glimpse of what awaits us as we cross to the other shore. Yes, dear brothers and sisters, especially you elderly, the best of life is yet to come… Let us hope for this fullness of life that awaits us all, when the Lord calls us.”

“When will my Lord come? When will I be able to go there?” the pope mused. “A little bit of fear, because I don’t know what this step means, and passing through that door causes a little fear. But there is always the hand of the Lord that carries us forward, and beyond the door there is the party… He is expecting us. Just one step and then the party.”

One step and then the party! Many might find this way of speaking a bit naïve.

Old age as we know it—or presume it to be—is commonly a time of chronic illness and loneliness, and the dying process is often accompanied by pain and suffering.

But it has been my experience as a Little Sister that the elderly often do await the Lord’s coming with eager expectation and a profound sense of peace. If the pandemic has taught me anything, it is that the elderly are surprisingly resilient, despite their evident weakness.

As Pope Francis was reflecting on the meaning of old age this summer, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and National Geographic published the results of their 2021 “Second Half of Life Study.”

“We can say with confidence that most prevalent opinions and stereotypes of aging were proven wrong,” an AARP press release states, “On the whole, life is good, especially for older Americans—especially those over 60. And the person you see in the mirror is far different from the type of person younger generations might think you are,” AARP wrote to its members.

The study found that about 80 percent of those in their 80s live with one or more serious or chronic health conditions, and yet, over 75 percent rated their health good, very good, or excellent.

“There’s a survival benefit to resilience,” a spokesperson reported. “People can reframe their situation and make the best of it.”

AARP also shared that most of those age 80 and older say they’re living their “best possible life” or close to it, compared with one in five younger adults... Psychologically, people notice and prioritize the positive and let the negative go as they age.”

So perhaps as we begin to feel the burdens of age, rather than trying to recapture our lost youth we should spend more time with those who are older than ourselves.

We might enjoy their company and at the same time learn that the best is yet to come!
At the conclusion of my first semester at Mount St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md., I decided to reflect upon the various blessings and challenges of my first semester in major seminary. The semester was replete with joys and triumphs but also had its various challenges. This reflection gave me a true opportunity to thank the Lord for his generosity but also gave me the opportunity to be grateful for a loving mother in heaven, our beloved Mother Mary.

Having completed my four years of philosophical studies at St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Nebraska, I experienced new zeal and vigor for seminary studies as I began in a fresh location on the east coast. This new location offered many new opportunities for friendships with brother seminarians but also offered an opportunity to learn how to live in a larger community. Mount St. Mary’s Seminary (MSMS) has about 150 seminarians whereas St. Gregory the Great Seminary had only 28 in my last year. Quite the adjustment! Additionally, major seminary offers the seminarians opportunities to grow by themselves by offering more flexibility than minor seminary, especially when it comes to free time, prayer time, and even study time. This flexibility is wonderful, but it also requires the seminarian plan accordingly for the times of the semester that are naturally busier.

In all these adjustments, one constant remained, the necessity for daily prayer. The seminary community prays Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer together, as well as our daily community Mass. These designated times for prayer only begin to scratch the surface of what is necessary to remain spiritually grounded amid the craziness of daily seminary life. In addition to this, men are all but required to pray a daily holy hour and encouraged to pray the other hours of the breviary (this is required for priests and deacons, so we are encouraged to develop the habit).

The seminary also deeply encourages a profound, abiding relationship with the Blessed Mother. The reason for this is twofold: (1) a relationship with Mary is necessary for priests and seminarians (and I would argue also for all people striving for holiness) and (2) Mary is the seminary’s patron. Prior to entering formation at the MSMS, I knew how important a Marian devotion was and was striving to learn more about her so I could love her more. Because of the heavy emphasis the seminary placed on Marian devotion, I decided to study about and pray for the Blessed Mother’s intercession even more, and it has been absolutely life changing. I recognize now what an incredible gift it is to have a mother in heaven taking care of me and watching over me. I also realize that Mary, just like her Son, will not be outdone in generosity or love.

This generosity and love of Mary can be manifested in different ways, but most often it is manifested through the answering of prayers. Earlier in the semester, I was struggling with a paper, and I found this extremely frustrating. It should have been a simple paper, but I had writer’s block. Eventually, I decided to leave the paper for later and went to pray, asking Mary for her motherly wisdom and for help. When I returned to the paper, the words and ideas flowed right onto the page so quickly that I was done with the paper in under two hours. Mary helped her child who asked for help. My simple plea to Mary, which was a sacrifice of time, was repaid in her helping me write that paper. The Blessed Mother truly is a mother of all tenderness, sweetness, and love; we simply need to ask for her help.

As we are in the middle of this Christmas season, a time in the liturgical year when the motherhood of Mary is most readily on display, I pray that you can take solace in the fact that we have a beautiful mother in heaven who is interceding and loving us each day of our lives. Mary is truly a loving mother for each of us, interceding and bringing us ever closer to her Divine Son each day.
Retirement income you can depend on

With all the ups and downs in the financial markets, many folks are turning to the Catholic Development Foundation’s gift annuity program to create a steady, dependable stream of lifetime income. They like knowing that every quarter they will receive the same amount, year in and year out.

They like the other benefits, too. Things like a good payment rate (up to 9.2 percent) and income that is partially tax-free. They like the income tax charitable deduction they receive and, of course, the fact that they are helping a good cause like your favorite Catholic parish, cemetery, school, or any Catholic ministry.

To learn more, fill out the reply form below and send it to me at the Catholic Development Foundation. Once we know your age and the size of the gift you want to make, and whether it will be cash or stock, we can prepare an easy-to-read gift illustration that will tell you:

- How much you will receive for the rest of your life
- How much of your quarterly income will be tax-free
- How big your income tax charitable deduction will be
- How your gift annuity will benefit any Catholic ministry of your choice.

Example: Mr. and Mrs. Smith are both 75 years old. They give $50,000 to the Catholic Development Foundation in exchange for a charitable gift annuity. The Catholic Development Foundation’s payment rate for their combined ages happens to be 5.2% percent, which means they will receive $2,600 every year, or $650 every quarter.*

The Smiths will receive fixed payments for the rest of their lives. And even when one of them dies, the surviving spouse will continue to receive the same fixed payments for the rest of his or her life. Because the payments are backed by the full assets of the Catholic Development Foundation, the Smiths can have confidence that their annuity checks will always be there for them.

You don’t have to be married to obtain a gift annuity. In fact, single-life annuities pay a higher rate. Also, the older a person or couple is, the higher the payment rate.

I encourage you to fill out the reply form below if you are interested. This will allow us to provide a tailor-made illustration that will show you just how well a charitable gift annuity can work for you. You are under no obligation to proceed with a gift.

*Note: The rates vary, depending on one’s age and whatever is currently being recommended by the American Council on Gift Annuities.

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*One-life gift annuity rates

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**Two-life gift annuity rates

*Rates reflect American Council on Gift Annuities recommendations effective 1/1/23 and are subject to change at any time.

**Two-life annuity rates assume both annuitants are the same age. Rates will differ if annuitants are of different ages.

Please complete and return this reply form to:
The Catholic Development Foundation
5201 Bishop’s Blvd. S, Suite A, Fargo ND 58104

Dear Steve at the Catholic Development Foundation:
Please send a free illustration to show the benefits of having a gift annuity with the Catholic Development Foundation.

Age(s) / Amount $

Please contact me (us) about a personal visit. The best time to call me is:

Name(s):
Address:
City:
State: Zip: Phone:
Events

Head to Nativity, Fargo, for a sweet serenade
Head to Nativity Church in Fargo for a Christmas Concert “Twelfth Day” of Christmas. Pianist Brent Hermans will be performing on Jan. 8 at 2 p.m.

Catholic Man Night coming to Fargo-area churches
Invite a friend, bring your sons, and join us as we deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ, learn more about our incredible faith, and arm ourselves for battle against the secular culture. The night begins with adoration and confession at 6 p.m., followed by a simple meal and speaker at 7 p.m.
• Jan. 12: St. Joseph’s, Moorhead, Minn. Speaker Angela Wambach.
• Feb. 16: St. Anthony’s, Fargo. Speaker Father Luke Meyer.
• Apr. 20: Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. Speaker Brad Gray.

Annual Valentine Wine & Dine supports youth activities
Holy Spirit Church in Fargo will host its 13th annual Valentine Wine & Dine on Feb. 10 from 5 to 8 p.m. This fundraiser for parish youth activities features an elegant dinner paired with wines, as well as silent and live auctions and games throughout the evening. Tickets are $60/person and may be purchased until Feb. 3 by calling the parish office at (701) 232-5900. Visit holyspiritfargo.com/wine-dine.

Men’s and women’s Cursillo retreats coming soon
Cursillo is a three-day learning, sharing, inspirational experience of living in a Christian community. It is an encounter with Christ. During the three days, a person not only hears inspiring talks on what it really means to be a Christian, but actually experiences the joy of building and being part of a genuine Christian community. The “retreat” portion of the weekend lasts only from opening night until after breakfast the following morning, during which time silence is observed. Thereafter there is informal talk, discussion, singing, joking, laughter, and spontaneous informal prayer.

During the three days, short talks are given by laypeople and religious. The talks emphasize the true meaning of grace, the sacraments, the Mass, the nature and need of prayer, living one’s daily life in union with God, studying to understand the gift of God, and introducing Christ to others by word and deed. The atmosphere of the three days is one of joy and grace, and it produces wonderful results.

The men’s weekend is Feb. 2–5 at Maryvale Retreat Center, Valley City, and the women weekend is March 9–12 at Sister’s of St. Francis Convent, Hankinson. To register or for more information, contact Deacon Leitner (701) 840-1914, Doran (701) 840-1257, or Chelsey (701) 320-2370.

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
The Sisters of St. Francis of Hankinson have assumed the operation of the Drayton Hospital which was presented to them by Dr. Henry M. Waldren, Jr. Now known as St. Elizabeth Hospital, the institution is equipped with 13 adult beds and six bassinets. The sisters selected the name St. Elizabeth because the Saint is their patron and the first two nurses of the American order of St. Francis bore the name Elizabeth.

50 years ago — 1972
The parishes of the Diocese of Fargo are urged to participate in the 1973 program of Evangelization, called Key 73. The aims of Key 73 are (1) to renew ourselves in Christ and His Gospel and (2) to bring Christ and His Gospel to others. Growth is achieved by studying and applying Sacred Scripture, through reflection of Christ’s life, and through practicing the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. The program will have three phases. Phase I beginning now until Easter Sunday calls us to Repentance and Prayer.

20 years ago — 2002
On January 12, Bishop Samuel Aquila participated in the dedication of the new ultrasound machine at the AAA Pregnancy Clinic. The non-profit Christian clinic, provides help and assistance to pregnant women in need. Services are provided free of charge and include ultrasound examinations for women considering abortion. The state-of-the-art equipment produces a higher quality image which is important because mothers who view their baby on ultrasound are much more likely to continue their pregnancy.
LIFE’S MILESTONES

Jack and Rae Desautel, parishioners of St. John’s in Grafton, celebrated their 72nd anniversary on Dec. 7. They were married at St. John’s and were blessed with 3 children, 6 grandchildren, and 7 great-grandchildren with 1 more due in April.

Eileen Beck, parishioner of St. Mary’s in Munich, celebrated her 90th birthday on Jan. 5. Eileen and her late husband, Rallan, have been blessed with 6 children, 30 grandchildren, and 66 great-grandchildren.

Phyllis DeFoe, parishioner of Assumption Church in Pembina, will celebrate her 90th birthday on Jan. 8. Phyllis is blessed with 3 children, 10 grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren.

Florence Maurer, parishioner of St. James Basilica in Jamestown, celebrated her 102nd birthday on Dec. 9.

Frank Weigel, parishioner of St. Andrew’s in Zeeland, will celebrate his 90th birthday on Jan. 19. Frank is blessed with his wife Frances of 68 years, 9 children, 22 grandchildren, and 18 great-grandchildren.

Larry and Jean Charbonneau, parishioners of Blessed Virgin Mary Assumption Church in Pembina, celebrated their 70th anniversary Dec. 27. They were married in Osnabrock and are blessed with 8 children and enjoy their large extended family that spreads over 5 generations.

Frances Bjornstad, parishioner at Sts. Anne & Joachim in Fargo, will celebrate her 100th birthday Jan. 29. She has been greatly blessed with 6 children, 9 grandchildren, 13 great-grandchildren and 1 on the way.

Barbara Burley, parishioner of Blessed Sacrament in West Fargo, will celebrate her 100th birthday Jan. 19 at Kinder Care in West Fargo.

Rose Kerlin, parishioner of Our Lady of Peace Church in Mayville, will celebrate her 90th birthday on Jan. 13. Rose and her late husband Don were blessed with 8 children, 23 grandchildren, and 25 great-grandchildren.

Isabel Niswonger, parishioner of Sacred Heart in Minto, will celebrate her 95th birthday Jan. 20. She and her late husband Clarence were married at St. Stanislaus in Warsaw and have 7 children, 9 grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
Life’s Milestones includes anniversaries for marriages, ordinations, and religious vows for 25, 40, 50, 60, 65, and 70+ years and birthdays for 80, 85, 90, 95, and 100+ years for those in the Diocese of Fargo. Submissions will only be accepted for milestones occurring during the month of publication, one month prior, or one month following. Send a photo with text to news@fargodiocese.org or to Diocese of Fargo, New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd S, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 with a stamped return envelope and phone number. Deadline for the February issue is Jan. 17 and the deadline for the March issue is Feb. 14.
Holy Cross Family Ministries remembers actor Clarence Gilyard Jr., Ministry board member

By Holy Cross Family Ministries

The community at Holy Cross Family Ministries is in mourning following the death of Clarence Gilyard Jr. The actor who appeared in the hit TV series “Walker, Texas Ranger” served on the board of directors of the ministry founded by Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C. He was 66.

“We are deeply saddened by the passing of Clarence Gilyard, a beloved friend and dedicated board member of our ministry,” said Father Fred Jenga, C.S.C., president of Holy Cross Family Ministries. “Please pray for his peaceful rest and please pray for his wife, Elena, and his whole family.”

Gilyard costarred with Chuck Norris in “Walker, Texas Ranger” and Andy Griffith in “Matlock.” He also had notable roles in major movies alongside Bruce Willis in “Die Hard” and Tom Cruise in “Top Gun.” He appeared in nearly 40 TV series and films during his career. In recent years, Gilyard taught stage and screen acting at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he was a professor.

Recently, Gilyard attended at the 75th Anniversary Celebration of Family Theater Productions, a ministry of Holy Cross Family Ministries. At the gala event, held at the historic Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel, Gilyard, with other accomplished actors, performed one of FTP’s classic radio programs for guests.

“Clarence Gilyard was a man whose faith led to renewed life with his dear family, friends, and his art. As an actor and director, he knew how to bring stories to life and so make our lives richer. I am grateful for the service he gave Family Theater Productions as a board member. I am grateful for his witness and friendship,” said Father David Guffey, C.S.C., National Director of Family Theater Productions.

“A funeral service will be held for Clarence Gilyard in Dallas at a later date,” Father Jenga stated. “Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.”

A devout Catholic, Gilyard served as a board member of Holy Cross Family Ministries from 2004 until his death. He appeared at numerous faith-based programs sponsored by the North Easton ministry, which encourages the spiritual well-being of families, especially by praying the Rosary.

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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 Goering, 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.

In World Peace Day message, Pope Francis asks, “What did we learn from the pandemic?”

By Courtney Mares | Catholic News Agency

In a message sent to heads of state across the world, Pope Francis has asked leaders to reflect on what lessons can be learned three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Vatican released on Dec. 16 the pope’s 2023 World Peace Day message in which he posed a series of questions:

“What did we learn from the pandemic? What new paths should we follow to cast off the shackles of our old habits, to be better prepared, to dare new things? What signs of life and hope can we see, to help us move forward and try to make our world a better place?”

Pope Francis wrote in the message that “certainly after directly experiencing the fragility of our own lives... the greatest lesson we learned from COVID-19 was the realization that we all need one another.”

He added: “We also learned that the trust we put in progress, technology, and the effects of globalization was not only excessive but turned into an individualistic and idolatrous intoxication, compromising the very promise of justice, harmony, and peace that we so ardently sought.”

The pope underscored that “in our fast-paced world, the widespread problems of inequality, injustice, poverty, and marginalization continue to fuel unrest and conflict, and generate violence and even wars.”

“We cannot continue to focus simply on preserving ourselves; rather, the time has come for all of us to endeavor to heal our society and our planet, to lay the foundations for a more just and peaceful world, and to commit ourselves seriously to pursuing a good that is truly common,” he said.

The World Day of Peace—established by St. Paul VI in 1968—is celebrated each year on Jan. 1, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. The message is sent by the Vatican Secretariat of State to governments around the world.

The pope’s message for the 2023 World Day of Peace, the 56th celebration, is titled “No one can be saved alone: Combatting COVID-19 together, embarking together on paths of peace.”

In the text, Pope Francis included one paragraph about the ongoing war in Ukraine, which he described as “a setback for the whole of humanity.”

“At the very moment when we dared to hope that the darkest hours of the COVID-19 pandemic were over, a terrible new disaster befell humanity. We witnessed the onslaught of another scourge: another war, to some extent like that of COVID-19, but driven by culpable human decisions ... Clearly, this is not the post-COVID era we had hoped for or expected,” Pope Francis said.

The pope also noted: “While a vaccine has been found for COVID-19, suitable solutions have not yet been found for the war.

At a Dec. 16 Vatican press conference presenting the pope’s text, Cardinal Michael Czerny repeated the pope’s question: “What have we learned from COVID?”

The Canadian cardinal, who serves as the prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, offered his own reflection on how the pandemic was handled.

Czerny said: “The world needed a well-supported international plan to deal with the pandemic. That was utterly lacking. Instead, massive misinformation, finger-pointing, false claims, and panic-mongering prevailed; while decision-makers gave higher priority to the claims of patent-holders than to people’s needs around the world.”
Violence worries church leaders, but tourists buoy Bethlehem residents

By Judith Sudilovsky | Catholic News Service

On the third Sunday of Advent the pews of St. Catherine Church were overflowing, with families and young children, teens and older parishioners attending Mass in anticipation of Christmas. Pilgrim groups waited outside in the courtyard and, in the Church of Nativity, adjacent to the parish church, more pilgrim groups gathered along the stairs leading to the grotto marking the place of Jesus’ birth, as Armenian clergy celebrated their liturgy.

Despite an uptick in violence between the Israeli army and Palestinians in the northern West Bank, the pre-Christmas atmosphere in Bethlehem was festive and optimistic and, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, Bethlehem hotels reported near full capacity during the weeks leading up to Christmas. The return of visitors to the city is like a breath of air for local Christians, said St. Catherine parishioner Flor Abu Slameh, 28.

“We are preparing in our hearts for Christmas and to welcome baby Jesus, and when we see the people come to visit us here, we feel more alive,” she said.

Joelle Mohrez, 15, who attended Mass at St. Catherine Church with her three siblings, mother, and grandmother, had a message for Christians abroad: “We still keep our traditions, we celebrate Christmas when Jesus was born, and I am glad to be born here. Life here isn’t just (the violence) you see on the media. We go out, we go shopping, we have places where we eat out, we have a social life, we have fun.”

While Christians make up less than 2% of the population in the Holy Land and many young Christian Palestinians emigrated in recent years due to the economic crisis of the pandemic and the difficult political situation, Mohrez’s grandmother, Randa, said she was proud that all of her four children have remained in the Bethlehem area. “We are staying here in Bethlehem, hoping for peace,” she said.

While welcoming this increase of pilgrims to the Holy Land, in a Dec. 12 statement, the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land also expressed “great concern” about a situation they said is “progressively and rapidly deteriorating.”

“We have witnessed an upsurge in violence this year, with the highest Palestinian death toll in more than 20 years. Settler violence in the settlements is always more on the rise. The living area available to the Palestinian population continues to shrink, due to the sustained growth of settlements. We are also witnessing attacks to the Jewish population,” it said in the statement.

The absence of a real peace process based on international law will lead to more suffering and violence as a consequence of “deep distrust and perhaps even hatred that is taking root in the hearts of the two populations: Israeli and Palestinians,” it added. The Assembly called especially on religious and political leaders to “foster mutual respect and not division or sentiments of hatred.”

In addition, the leaders said they were worried about the arrests and detentions of Palestinian minors, the violence and lack of security within the Arab community in Israel, the legal limbo many foreign workers and asylum-seekers who are members of the church find themselves in and the weakened educational system, both in the Jewish and Arab environments.

Commenting on the newly elected Israeli government, the assembly noted that while it hoped the government would bring political stability, “certain statements” made by members of the coalition are “very divisive toward the Arab or otherwise non-Jewish community.”

“They are contrary to the spirit of peaceful and constructive coexistence among the various communities that make up our society,” it said. “Such statements favor those in this country who want division, create distrust and resentment. They lay the groundwork for further violence. Violence in language inevitably, sooner or later, turns into physical violence as well.”
The assembly also noted the importance of recognizing the positive work of groups and individuals working toward “friendship and solidarity.”

“Their love gives us hope and belief that there are ... those who still want to react to the ever-strong temptations of closure and refusal to dialogue and encounter with initiatives of encounter and solidarity open to all,” the assembly said.

In Bethlehem, Yousef Khalil, 37, said the act of attending Mass during Advent with his family and gathering to pray with other members of the community brings him feelings of peace and comfort in uncertain times.

“We feel more together, and this gives us a warm feeling spiritually. It is part of our culture. We can’t be alone,” he said, balancing his 10-month-old son, Rafael, in his arm. “Jesu, who was born here, came to bring us together. It is sad to see the Christian community shrinking, but at the same time we have hope.” Khalil urged visitors not to just visit the churches and holy shrines, but to also make an effort to meet the “living stones,” or the people. “Both are important here,” he said.

One older parishioner who asked that his name not be used said he was pessimistic about the future of Christians in Bethlehem.

“In 10 years, there will be no Christians left here. We are sandwiched between two religions—the Muslims and the Jews,” he said. He pointed to the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and also charged that Christian lands in the Bethlehem area are being bought illegally by Muslim residents.

Travel agent Suheil Hazboun, 31, who came to Mass with his wife, Sandi, 28, and 7-month-old daughter Marielle, noted that in addition to the political problems and the shrinking Christian population, economically he struggles to support his young family. Sandi, a radiologist, is unable to find work in her profession, he said.

“Maybe in five or six years we will have to leave but we will see,” he said, adding that seeing the pilgrims arriving again in Bethlehem has buoyed their spirits this Christmas. “This is what Bethlehem should be like. The Hazboun family is a big family in Bethlehem. So we will continue to stay in Bethlehem until our last breath.”

Matrimony: A calling to forgive

Retrouvaille offers a welcoming and loving space to couples who have been living with the misery of a failing marriage. Retrouvaille offers hope: hope that it is not too late, hope of a different and better marriage. Retrouvaille helps couples to show each other mercy through the opportunities it provides to listen, to forgive, to be reconciled and to move into their futures believing that God loves them and with His help and their efforts, their marriages can be healed and restored. Retrouvaille provides help for marriage problems/difficulties/crisis.

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Pope appoints Father Patrick Neary to lead St. Cloud, Minnesota, flock

By Peter Pinedo | Catholic News Agency

“Father Neary is tremendously qualified with his experiences as a pastor, seminary rector, formation director, and missioner,” Kettler said following the announcement. “I am very appreciative that he said yes to the call to serve the people of this diocese as their bishop, and I welcome him warmly to Central Minnesota.”

Neary is set to be installed as the bishop of St. Cloud on Feb. 14.

“No one is more surprised than I am to be asked to serve as bishop of the Diocese of St. Cloud. Yet I have always trusted that Christ has guided me through every stage of my life as a priest,” Neary said in response to his announcement.

Addressing his soon-to-be flock, Neary said: “Please pray for me that I can be a faithful and loving servant to all of you.”

According to its website, the Diocese of St. Cloud consists of 131 parishes in 16 central Minnesota counties and has a population of more than 125,000 Catholics.
My hopes of praying at the Red River Women’s Clinic the first week in December went afoul when, a day before “abortion day” here—on the Feast of St. Nicholas—I received a phone call that changed my course.

“Mom, I’ve been in a bad accident.” It was our 17-year-old son calling from his car, now upside-down, after he’d lost control of it on slick roads heading to school. It would take a while before I’d understand what happened, and where he was. I only knew that his back was injured, and he was in shock.

A short time before, he’d left our home, backpack slung over his shoulder. “Happy St. Nick’s day, Nick,” I’d said, after warning him about the fresh blanket of snow, and to be careful. But the black ice underneath laid in wait, and as he tried changing lanes, his car fishtailed, plunged through a walking-bridge fence, flipped over, and dropped 20-some feet into the ravine below near Rose Creek.

It’s a parent’s worst nightmare in these parts; something we pray about every day. “Please, Lord, keep my child safe.” We can’t be there every moment. I couldn’t be there in that terrifying moment. But God, St. Nicholas, and an army of angels apparently were.

Traveling down 25th street, still in my pajamas, I could see the ambulance ahead. After frantically calling my husband, I noticed the text from my friend. “I was there. It’s a miracle.” These blessed words were like the breath of God to me, and gave me courage to continue moving forward.

Because of the precise way the car had fallen, it was cushioned on either side; packed snow to the rear and a metal fence in the front. If not, the impact would have been straight into cement. Had the car fallen a little further to the south, it might have rolled into the creek. And had the fencepost that plowed straight through the passenger side been a little closer to the driver’s side...well, I can’t go there.

None of the front or side windows were damaged, nor did a scratch appear on our son’s phone or backpack, not to mention his body. If you were to have seen him shortly afterward as I had, sitting up in the ambulance answering questions, you’d have thought it was just another day.

So many different scenarios have played through my mind as we’ve helped our son through recovery of a fractured vertebrae. And every day, I pass by the spot—the only area that isn’t flat along that stretch—on the way to school or church, not realizing until I’ve reached the end that I’ve been holding my breath.

“Roxane, it was as if angels carried his car down,” my friend said later. When she stopped to help, working her way down the snowy hill, she had every expectation of finding “a bloody mess.” Instead, she found my son, emerging from a turned-over car, aright. “I hope you believe in angels,” she said to him, “because they were all around you.”

Years ago, this same child and his older brother accompanied me to the sidewalk several summers to pray with me for an end to abortion. Afterward, we’d grab lunch, then catch the kids’ movie at the Fargo Theater. I remember when he, our youngest of five, first learned what abortion was, and his stunned reaction. He has continued to hold firm in the belief that abortion marks one of society’s greatest ills.

Before the accident, Nick had planned to journey to Washington, D.C., this month with Shanley High School’s March for Life pilgrimage, joining the refrain of voices reminding the world of each life’s value. Instead, we’ll be home, seeking other ways to honor all lives, and in the words of poet Mary Oliver, in particular, this “one wild and precious life.”

It could take years for him to understand how exceedingly close God was to him that day—and still is. I’m continuing to grapple with it all myself. But I’m determined to know what God wants to reveal to our family, and others, through these saving moments, which came undoubtedly from his divine hand.

What I feel certain of is that, for several jolting moments, God said, “No!” to death, and “Yes!” to life. The gift he gave us cannot be adequately described in words, but will be deeply felt forever. Grasping to receive the immediate takeaways, I hear phrases like “merciful love,” and “the incredible power and might of God.”

Enjoy the gifts you received this Christmas, but do remember the most exquisite of them: the wholly sublime, irreplaceable, unrepeatable gift of life.
Do you know where we are?
The answer will be revealed in the February New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from St. Philip’s Church in Hankinson.