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ON THE COVER: (Photo from Cathopic)

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NEW EARTH
(ISSN# 10676406)

Mission
Our mission is to inform, teach, and inspire readers about the Catholic faith and the life of parishioners in Eastern North Dakota. New Earth is the official monthly publication of the Diocese of Fargo.

Publisher
Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo

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Assistant editor & designer
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Subscriptions
Parish contributions make it possible for each registered Catholic household in the diocese to receive 11 issues per year. Those outside the diocese are asked to consider a $9 yearly donation. To subscribe, change an address, donate, or see past issues of New Earth, go to: fargodiocese.org/new-earth.

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Fargo, ND 58104

Deadlines
Deadline to submit articles, events, and advertisements for the March issue is Feb. 14, 2023. All submissions are subject to editing and placement.

New Earth is published by the Catholic Diocese of Fargo, a nonprofit North Dakota corporation, 5201 Bishops Blvd, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104.

Periodical Postage Paid at Fargo, ND and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104.

Member of the Catholic Media Association
Remembering Benedict XVI

On the eve of the new year, the Church bade farewell to a great man of the Church, our past Holy Father, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. In a certain sense, we already said our farewell when he retired from the papacy nearly 10 years ago. But now, after a long and faithful life, he has gone to our Lord, and we pray that he is resting at last with our Father.

Whenever a pope departs from this life, there is a certain sense of loss and sadness in the Church. For good reason do we call our popes “Holy Father,” because they hold the role of the father of our Church family. And Benedict was indeed a faithful father who gave his life to our Lord and the Church without reservation. We are justified in feeling a measure of sadness at this parting from a man who was a good and holy father to us all.

But along with sadness there is also a sense of gratitude. In so many ways, Pope Benedict was a gift of God to his Church. He was a theologian, a great teacher, a scholar, and an evangelist. The young Joseph Ratzinger first came to public prominence when he served as one of the consulting priest theologians at the Second Vatican Council. In fact, he made a significant contribution to the Council, which he described as the most important event in the life of the Church of the last century. He had a talent for teaching and preaching the faith, and was eventually appointed by Pope St. Paul VI as Archbishop of Munich and Freising. Several years later, he was called to Rome by Pope St. John Paul II to serve as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He was a very close collaborator with John Paul II and played a key role in his long and fruitful pontificate. One of his many great accomplishments included the development and completion of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which continues to be a beautiful summary and exposition of our Catholic Faith.

After spending many long years in the service of the Church, when most people would have already retired, Joseph Ratzinger accepted an even more demanding call, his election as pope after the death of John Paul II. It was the last thing that he desired, and in fact he had tried on more than one occasion to retire from his duties and return to his native Germany. But he accepted his election because he saw it as God’s will and a further call to serve the Church. He continued to teach the faith with his usual clarity and depth, and he carried forward the project of implementing the vision of the Second Vatican Council for the Church. Although not widely acknowledged, Benedict worked hard to address the unfolding crisis of clerical abuse in the Church, and he was the first pope to meet with victims of such abuse. He traveled the world like a missionary and guided the Church through challenging times with wisdom and prayer.

Much has been said about the brilliance and theological learning of Pope Benedict, and there is no doubt that he was a great scholar and teacher. But first and foremost, he was a disciple, a follower of Jesus. In all things, he referred us to Jesus, and all of his teaching placed Jesus in the center. When he became our pope, he made it clear that Christianity isn’t an ethical system, it is not an ideology or a philosophy. Christianity is first and foremost a relationship with a person, with the living person Jesus Christ, our Savior. In fact, the last major theological writing that he completed was a series of three books about Jesus of Nazareth. This was the culmination of his scholarly effort, and he wanted nothing more than to lead us into a deeper communion with our Savior. Many have doubted that truth exists, or that truth can be known, but Pope Benedict recognized that there is truth, and that it can be known. When others wavered, he held fast to this truth, the truth revealed to us by God in Jesus Christ.

Over the years, Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict was unfairly attacked in the media and in certain theological circles as a rigid, harsh inquisitor, principally because of his fidelity to the faith of the Church. But this caricature of Benedict was far from the truth. He was a rather shy but warm-hearted man...

"Many have doubted that truth exists, or that truth can be known, but Pope Benedict recognized that there is truth, and that it can be known. When others wavered, he held fast to this truth... revealed to us by God in Jesus Christ." -Bishop John T. Folda
who remained true to Christ no matter the price. In times of uncertainty and turbulence, he was a steady presence in the Church, and he always helped us to hold fast to the truths of our faith. Many years ago, I started reading the works of Joseph Ratzinger when I was a seminarian, and I still do, because even now he unfolds the richness of our faith with beauty and grace. I never met him personally, but I did hear him speak, and in many ways, I feel that I knew him.

Throughout his life, he was known for his kindness and his humility. He was always deeply prayerful, and in his last years, after he stepped down from the Chair of Peter, he dedicated himself to a life of quiet prayer for the Church. So, as we make our final farewell, once again we give thanks for Pope Benedict, and for the blessing that he was to the Church. God sent us this man in our time, and the Church has been profoundly blessed because of him. We pray for him as he reaches the end of his labors here on earth, and ask our Lord to receive him and give him rest.

Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

For parishes
We pray that parishes, placing communion at the center, may increasingly become communities of faith, fraternity, and welcome towards those most in need.

Save the Date!
Holy Land Pilgrimage with Bishop Folda October 21-31, 2024
More information to come out in the next issue of New Earth

BISHOP FOLDA’S CALENDAR

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

Feb. 19
St. Vianney Discernment Weekend, Maryvale, Valley City

Feb. 21 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Philip, Napoleon

Feb. 22 at 12:10 p.m.
Ash Wednesday, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Feb. 22 at 3 p.m.
St. JPII Schools Board Meeting

Feb. 23 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. John, Grafton

Feb. 25 at 5:30 p.m.
Holy Family/St. Mary Winter Gala, Alerus Center, Grand Forks

Feb. 26 at 4 p.m.
Rite of Election, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Feb. 28 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, Holy Rosary, LaMoure

Mar. 1-3
St. JPII Schools Alumni Events, Mesa, Ariz.

Mar. 7 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Alphonsus, Langdon

Mar. 8 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Paul Newman Center, Fargo

Mar. 9 at 6:30 p.m.
Synod Regional Listening Session, St. Thomas Newman Center, Grand Forks

Mar. 10 at 6 p.m.
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St James Basilica, Jamestown

Mar. 11 at 10 a.m.
Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Philip, Napoleon

Mar. 11 at 7 p.m.
Confirmation/First Eucharist, Transfiguration, Edgeley

FROM BISHOP FOLDA

“The...became flesh.”

Word

Bishop John T. Folda
In 1597, a penitent bandit brought himself to confession at the Jesuit church of Alcalá. He was said to have been part of a band of Moorish gypsies who, after being dispersed from the nearby mountains, had sacked numerous churches and stolen monstrances and other sacred objects in different countries, committing many sacrilegious acts. The penitent brought with him some consecrated Hosts that he delivered to the confessor with many tears. The confessor, very moved, went immediately to his superior to inform him.

Initially it was agreed to consume the Hosts during a Mass, but later, fearing that the Hosts could be poisoned as had recently been done to some priests in Murcia and Segovia, it was decided to keep the Hosts in a box made of silver and to allow them to decompose naturally. Eleven years later the 24 Hosts were found still intact. The mystic Father Luis de la Palma, in his capacity as Provincial, ordered that the Hosts be placed in a wine cellar along with some unconsecrated hosts. A few months later, the unconsecrated hosts had decomposed from the humidity, while the consecrated Hosts remained intact. Six years later, Father Palma decided to make public the miracle of the Hosts that were still intact.

New academic and medical tests from the doctor of His Majesty, Garcia Carrera, as well as numerous illustrious theologians, identified this as a true miracle. In 1619 ecclesiastical authorities officially authorized the veracity of the miracle. The Holy Hosts were publicly adored before King Phillip III, who in 1620 presided over a solemn procession in which the whole royal family participated. When Charles III expelled the Jesuits from Spain, the Sacred Hosts were moved to the magisterial church. In 1936, when the communist revolutionists burned the church, the priests carefully hid the miraculous Hosts prior to being murdered. However, the hiding place of the Hosts has not been found even to this day. There have been many surveys in the church and in the crypt but to no avail.

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)
FOCUS ON FAITH

What is Lent and why do we celebrate it?

By Catholic Relief Services (CRS)

A story of hope from the Philippines

Raul and Rhodora get up at 5 a.m. each day to tend to the fishpond, pigs, and chickens before getting their granddaughters off to school. Education is important to Raul and Rhodora. Their dream is that Loraine and Kate will graduate from college and get good jobs. Loraine wants to be a doctor when she grows up.

For years, Raul and Rhodora worked hard as coconut farmers. After harvesting, they prepared the coconuts for making oil, but it took a lot of work before they made money. On top of that, periods of heavy rain caused flooding, making farming difficult.

Then Raul and Rhodora participated in a Catholic Relief Services program where they received training and assistance to build their own fishpond. They bought little fish to stock the pond, fish food, and a net. The fish grew bigger, and soon they were able to sell them at the market. The fishpond also provided food for their family so they could enjoy nutritious meals together.

“Life is so much easier now that we have the fish for our daily living,” Rhodora says.

In the program, Raul and Rhodora also learned how to better prepare for the increasing natural disasters in their area, like typhoons, flooding, earthquakes, and landslides. They made improvements to their house, using stronger, sturdier materials to protect their home and family.

Since joining the program, Raul and Rhodora added two more fishponds along with pigs and chickens. With the extra income from their farm, their granddaughters can enjoy their childhood and live a more comfortable life, giving them the opportunity to study hard and finish school.

“I have many dreams for my family and my grandchildren,” Raul says. “I hope I can give them something good.”

When does Lent begin and end?

Lent is a liturgical season that focuses on the three spiritual pillars of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This 40-day journey, beginning with Ash Wednesday (Feb. 22) and ending with Holy Week (Apr. 6-9) is a time for sacrifice and spiritual reflection preparing us for the joyful celebration of Christ’s resurrection on Easter Sunday.

One simple way to enhance your Lenten experience is to participate in the CRS Rice Bowl program. During Lent, Catholic families across the United States use a Rice Bowl, a small cardboard box, to collect alms. Each Rice Bowl also comes with a calendar that guides families through the 40 days of Lent with activities, reflections, recipes, and stories.

What is the meaning of Lent?

As Catholics, the spiritual pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving guide us in daily reflection on our own lives as we strive to deepen our relationship with God and neighbor no matter where in the world that neighbor may live. Lent is a time of personal and spiritual growth, a time to look outward and inward. It is a journey in mercy.

How to fast for Lent

The Catechism of the Catholic Church invites Catholics ages 18 to 59 to abstain from meat and to fast during Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, as well as abstain from meat on the Fridays during Lent.

Preparing meatless meals, like the ones we collect from countries around the world, is a great Lenten activity for families, offering an experience of global solidarity. In addition to meatless Fridays, Catholics are also invited to offer daily sacrifices. By giving up little things like coffee or candy, we make room for God to act in our lives in new ways, and we have the opportunity to give the money we save to those most in need. You may find more resources about Lent, CRS, meatless meals, and more by visiting crsricebowl.org.
Diocesan priests recall their encounters with the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

By Father Luke Meyer
Pastor of Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike” (Matt. 11:25).

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, who was elected Bishop of Rome in 2005, and took the name Benedict XVI, wrote and spoke with a voice that was at the same time marked by gentleness and strength. A voice of clarity and light in a chaotic and dark world, his radiant witness was grounded in a childlike faith and simplicity, burned with a deep love for Jesus, and expressed by a mind that was as sharp as a polished arrow in the Lord’s quiver. For me, his voice was a welcome and faithful echo of the voice of the Father in heaven, imparting a peace and confidence in my heart I had never known before.

As a young man, I read so many of his works, from his engaging book length interviews with the journalist Peter Seewald (God and the World, Salt of the Earth, Light of the World, Last Testament), to his theological and liturgical works (Spirit of the Liturgy, Principles of Catholic Theology, Eschatology) that were so lucid and relatable. As a priest, I found much wisdom in his papal encyclicals (God is Love, Saved in Hope, The Light of Faith, completed by Pope Francis), and charming reflections on the saints in his Wednesday audiences. Time spent with the voice of Joseph Ratzinger was always time well spent.

In 2012, I had the chance to briefly meet Pope Benedict in person after the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul in Rome. I was so moved by this encounter. This man, whose voice I had known so well from a distance, was now looking at me face-to-face, and I saw in his eyes, even with the burden of many years and responsibilities, the most sincere faith, care, and interest. I felt known and loved, encouraged and strengthened by this holy man of God and successor of St. Peter, who I knew to be truly a Holy Father.

“Our hearts are full of sadness, yet at the same time of joyful hope and profound gratitude,” are the words I now echo to you, as words spoken to us by Joseph Ratzinger at the funeral of St. John Paul II. The Church and the world have lost a great theologian, a great pastor, and a great Pope. I am grateful for all these gifts, but probably most of all I share a profound gratitude for a man whose spiritual fatherhood taught me childlike faith, to trust in the goodness of God, and how to be a beloved son of the Father in heaven, the source of the deepest hope and richest wisdom.

By Father Chris Markman
Pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center in Grand Forks

I have a fond memory of being able to pray vespers, Evening Prayer I of the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul, with Pope Benedict at St. Paul’s Outside the Wall during my first night ever in Rome when I was in seminary. I was also blessed to meet him three times in person. The first time for the NAC’s (North American College) 150th anniversary, the second time the day before my Diaconate ordination in Rome, and the third time when Bishop Aquila went to Rome for the U.S. Bishop’s ad limina visit, at which point I had just been ordained a priest.
By Father Jayson Lefor
Pastor of churches in Pisek, Bechyne, and Lankin

Some members of the Bethlehem Community of Benedict Oblates and I traveled to Rome in January of 2003 to meet with Francis Cardinal Stafford in regard to the laity’s role in the Church and his upcoming trip to the Diocese of Fargo.

During some down time Lydia Reynolds, Rosanne Sharpe, Nathaniel Sharpe, and I set out for an adventure. The four of us ended up seated in four gold thrones in a grand room being entertained by Monsignor Charles Brown (yes, his name is just like Charlie Brown). Monsignor Brown (now Archbishop Brown) was at that time Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger’s American secretary. He was so very gracious to us and gave us the most delightful treats. We stretched his hospitality by requesting to meet Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger as we had a gift of Bethlehem Books that we would like to personally give to him. Monsignor Brown explained that it didn’t seem possible as Cardinal Ratzinger was putting the final touches on Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical on the Eucharist that was to soon be released. However, Monsignor Brown took our phone number and said that if there was any way possible in the next three days he would call us and let us know.

Two days later, as the whole group of us were at lunch, and just as the large order of pasta and pizza arrived at our tables, the phone rang. It was Monsignor Brown. He said if we were at Cardinal Ratzinger’s office in 15 minutes we could meet him for a brief time as he was on his way to deliver the final draft of the Encyclical. We “crazy” Americans bolted from our chairs, threw money on the table to cover the cost of the meal without eating it, and sprinted across St. Peter’s Square to Cardinal Ratzinger’s office. It was an awesome experience to have the Swiss Guard formally acknowledge us and introduce us into the Roman Curia’s Offices.

We stood inside the building’s inner court and Cardinal Ratzinger descended the steps into the courtyard to approach a waiting vehicle that was to take him to Pope John Paul II. To me it seemed like a prince coming down to bless us. As he arrived to where we were standing, Monsignor Brown introduced us. We told him that we were friends of Father Joseph Fessio. Cardinal Ratzinger broke into a beautiful smile when he heard this. He asked if we were from Texas, as Jack Sharpe and myself were wearing cowboy-looking hats. We all laughed and said, “No, from Fargo, ND.” He laughed and mentioned how cold it must be.

He explained to us that it was a great day as the Encyclical on the Eucharist was now finished. Jack and Jean Ann Sharpe told him that it was their 29th wedding anniversary that very day. He broke into a devilish grin and teased Jean Ann about putting up with Jack for so many years. We asked him if he would be willing to bless them and he graciously agreed. He prayed a beautiful prayer of blessing over them. It was at this point that Jean Ann asked if he would allow us to sing a song for him. He smiled and eagerly agreed. We sang “Maria Walks Amid the Thorns.” As we sang a tear ran down Cardinal Ratzinger’s eye. When we finished, he explained that this was a song that his mother sang to him in Bavaria as a child. It brought many memories back for him, and he shared a couple of quick stories with us.

It was at that point that the driver demanded that they must be on their way. It seemed almost as if he was reluctant to leave us. To this day, I almost tear up myself when I recall this memory. We have remained friends with Archbishop Charles Brown as well.

By Father Michael Hickin
Pastor of churches in Moorton and Mantador

As a student in Rome, I lived with a group of men discerning their vocations in a house called Casa Balthasar. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (future Benedict XVI) was our “patron” who served as chief advisor and head of the board. We got to have Mass with him once a year, followed by a question and answer session. On one occasion, I worked up a load of courage and rehearsed some questions that’d let him know how theologically attuned I was. During the Mass, I had an experience during the chanting of the Creed that reduced me to tears, like real blubber. Afterwards, I just hugged the shadows and listened. It was as though Jesus stepped in to let me know, nobody here to impress but me, and I gottcha.

Ten years later, once ordained, I became a member of the Casa’s Board of Directors. At one of our meetings, Cardinal Ratzinger gestured with his hand and spilled a full glass of orange juice on my lap. My mom wished I’d have saved those pants, or at least the hanky I used to clean up. No relics, except the memory of his gracious kindness and phenomenally limpid expression of our Christian tradition.
What is this ache in our hearts for connection, for relationship, that even the good things of the world can’t seem to totally satisfy? This journey begins and ends with the gift and mystery of our creation as male and female and our encounter with God the world, and other people. Come and awaken the wonder and mystery of being human!

Register at: www.fargodiocese.org/awaken-retreat
jennie.korsmo@fargodiocese.org
(701) 356-7901

By Father Peter Sharpe
Pastor of churches in Steele, Medina, and Tappen

My vocation to the diocesan priesthood was influenced by the generosity of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Before I attended seminary, I lived for two years at a house of formation that he helped found. In my early 20s, I made a pilgrimage to Israel and had a strong sense I could be a priest. That didn’t fit with my plans at the time. Then several things adjusted in my life and I went and studied in 2001 at Casa Balthasar in Rome, an international house for young men who were discerning their vocations. The Casa was started by a group of friends of the Swiss theologian Hans Urs Von Balthasar, which included Cardinal Ratzinger. The Cardinal, busy man that he was, had little direct oversight of the house. He did visit once during my time there for an evening meal and discussion. (If I remember correctly, I made cream of spinach soup from scratch for a future pope. Using large amounts of the Italian version of sour cream is very important). We had a newly converted Christian from Lebanon staying with us at the time, and he asked the Cardinal a couple of questions to which Ratzinger gave a beautiful and concrete response in Italian. When he noticed the man was struggling to follow, he addressed his question in English. I don’t remember the full content of the conversation, but I was struck by Cardinal Ratzinger’s ability to focus on the questioner and try to give a genuine response.

We also attended a birthday celebration for Ratzinger held for him by his Bavarian countrymen in Trastevere in downtown Rome, and got to see the Cardinal be serenaded by a band, and even march a few steps with them. Lastly, we went in 2003 to a celebration up at St. Benedict’s birthplace in Norcia, and were there when he blessed part of the monastery. Who knew at the time that the papacy was only two years away and the name of Benedict would again rise to such renown? I am grateful for these brief encounters with a man who truly knew and trusted Jesus Christ.

By Father John Cavanaugh
Pastor of churches in Reynolds and Thompson

I had the privilege of concelebrating the Canonization Mass for St. Kateri Tekakwitha in Rome in October 2012. Pope Benedict was the celebrant of the Mass, and I was near the altar and was tasked with distributing the Holy Eucharist to those attending.

By Father Matthew Kraemer
Pastor of churches in Velva and Karlsruhe

I was walking back from class to the seminary in Rome. I was with a few other seminarians, and we had to wait at an intersection because Pope Benedict XVI’s motorcade was going by. I think he had visited the mayor of Rome or something and was driving home. We were the only ones standing there, and when the Pope’s car passed by he looked right at us and waved. It was a quick moment, but also a special one. The Pope caught us in the ordinariness and routine of seminary life. Perhaps he found joy in seeing us, and we certainly found it in seeing him.

The Awaken Retreat

with Jen Settle and Fr. Sean Mulligan

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Listening sessions for the diocesan Synod underway

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

When Bishop Folda announced last year that the Diocese of Fargo would hold its third diocesan Synod, the first in 70 years, he envisioned active participation from the faithful to be an essential part of the process. The Synod’s goal is to prayerfully reflect on the state of the diocese and how we, the faithful, can carry forward the mission that Jesus has entrusted to his Church. Part of Bishop Folda’s plan is holding listening sessions around the diocese in order to gain the perspective of the faithful.

The first of 15 listening sessions took place on Jan. 17 at Holy Spirit Church in Fargo. About 80 people gathered to pray and discuss issues and ideas in order for the diocese to move forward. The ultimate goal of the listening phase of the two-year synod process is to:

• Gauge where the faith of the Church is at in the Diocese of Fargo
• Help the faithful reflect upon where they are and where they could be
• Begin the discussions about what the next steps are to help get us where the Holy Spirit wants us to be

Participants were asked to reflect on the following 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 we might be called to take to respond

“As I looked across the room, Luke 10 and Jesus’ sending of the 72 disciples came to mind and how they went out at the bidding of the Lord,” said Steve Splonskowski, Diocesan Project Manager for Evangelization. “The sharing and the discussions were enlightening and inspiring, according to the feedback I received from both laity and clergy in attendance. One thing that I am convinced of is that when we gather together in any shared experience to grow in relationship with the Lord in an effort to know and do his will, he shows up and offers blessings that we will be unpacking and benefitting from for a long time afterward.”

The sessions begin with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, a presentation by Bishop Folda, Scripture, and reflection. Afterwards, participants gather in groups for discussion and an exchange of ideas. The Synod will culminate with the Synod Assembly in April 2024.

Upcoming listening sessions include:

• Feb. 15: St. Ann’s, Belcourt
• Feb. 16: St. Therese, Rugby
• Feb. 21: St. Philip Neri, Napoleon
• Feb. 23: St. John’s, Grafton
• Feb. 28: Holy Rosary, LaMoure
• Mar. 7: St. Alphonsus, Langdon
• Mar. 8: St. Paul Newman Center, Fargo
• Mar. 9: St. Thomas Newman Center, Grand Forks

All upcoming sessions are 6:30 to 9 p.m. Learn more at www.fargodiocese.org/synod.
The seminarians claimed the coveted trophy at the Collar Classic, the annual priests vs. seminarians basketball game on Dec. 27, 2022 at Shanley High School in Fargo. This year’s game was a battle down to the final buzzer with a final score of 46-42. Previously, games were canceled due to a blizzard and COVID-19.

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10:30 a.m. - Fargo, WDAY, Ch 6 or Grand Forks, WDAZ, Ch 8
11 a.m. - Bismarck, KNDX, Ch 26 or Minot, KXND, Ch 24
Catholic Schools a positive option to current educational environment

By Father Kyle Metzger | Principal of Shanley High School, Fargo

It wasn’t long ago that the family, the school, and the Church shaped culture. Now that ancient wisdom is upside down. Today the culture shapes the family, the school, and the Church. It is a recipe for disaster. We’ve read what happens, for example, when schools abandon their responsibility to form students in time-tested virtue, and instead acquiesce to the changing winds of the present cultural moment. As a school administrator, I assure you, it is not good for our students.

Let me offer a few examples. Schools that fail to institute robust limitations on student mobile phone usage are complicit in the erosion of educational rigor. These schools lack the courage to curb student impulsivity. At my school, mobile phones are prohibited within classrooms. If visible, they are confiscated and returned at the end of the day. Such limitations, at one time, would have seemed reasonable and necessary. Now such a policy is, oddly, provocative.

Schools that fail to maintain robust standards for student attire are ignorant of the psycho-sexual development of teenagers. These schools fail to recognize that academic achievement would improve if students were less concerned about superficial appearances, nor distracted by the immodesty of peers. At my school, students are required to wear uniforms that mature adults have discerned are modest and conducive to intellectual pursuits.

Schools that fail to plumb the wisdom of ancient values are plagued to frantically chase after the newest fads in behavior management, each one less effective than the previous. At my school, each quarter students are educated on one of the four scholastic virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. We hold school assemblies to discuss the virtue, signage is displayed around school, classroom lessons are taught, and manifestations of the virtue are rewarded.

Virtue formation produces not merely productive citizens but ladies and gentlemen. This used to be the goal of every school but is less apparent today. Sadly, it’s even controversial, which only confirms the desperation of the situation.

Many recently published articles have expressed concern that public schools are struggling to maintain high academic standards, robust moral expectations, and respectful encounters between students and teachers.

There is an alternative. We just recently observed National Catholic Schools Week. The Catholic schools in the diocese offer a light in the darkness and a positive option in the current educational environment.

Join Bishop John Folda for the Regional Listening Sessions

Regional Listening Sessions 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 faithful are encouraged and invited to attend these events. For more information, go to: www.fargodiocese.org/synod.

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

All sessions 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Saying "I do" every day

Fifteen couples in the diocese share their thoughts on the joys and struggles of married life

By Kristina Lahr | Assistant editor of New Earth

Every time I ask for input from many people, I’m always concerned what kind of response I’ll get. Will any married couples in the Diocese of Fargo want to answer any of these questions about marriage? Will what they have to say be edifying?

Once again, I was pleasantly surprised by the responses I received. It turns out there are many holy and wise folks in our area.

New Earth asked married couples to answer one of three questions:

• What one piece of marriage advice do you have for dating/engaged couples or those discerning marriage?
• How have you seen God working in your marriage?
• What has gotten you through the difficult times during your married life?

With Valentine’s Day around the corner, let all married couples commit themselves to the promises made on their wedding day and be ready to give good witness to the beauty of married life.

What one piece of marriage advice do you have for dating/engaged couples or those discerning marriage?

We are sponsors for couples that are looking to get married at St. Catherine of Alexandria parish in Valley City. Recently, a young couple voiced they had a lack of interest in going to church every Sunday because they felt like the Mass is dead and the Catholic Church should change things up to bring some life back into it. We countered that the Mass is very much alive, but you will only get out of it what you put into it. If all you do is simply show up without participating in the singing or the prayers, without diving into the readings and understanding what was written before and after them, and without truly believing

David & Larissa Musgrave
St. Catherine of Alexandria, Valley City
Married 20 years

(Photo by Unsplash)
the miracle of the Eucharist, then the Mass will seem dead. Over time, the same could happen to a marriage.

On their wedding day the bride and groom will commit to each other with the words, “I do.” In marriage, there is an opportunity to say those same words and to show each other that level of commitment everyday. Songs have told us that, “All You Need is Love,” but it takes more than just love to get through the challenges of bringing two people together. It takes a daily devotion of choosing your spouse and trusting that they choose you. This devotion should be expressed in your actions, words, and thoughts. By having the intent of helping get each other to heaven and saying “I do” everyday, the marriage will be alive forever.

We are a blended family. Tim and I each brought two children to our marriage, and somehow we have ended up with 10 total, the oldest being 26 and the youngest just one year old. Let’s start with this: marriage is hard, and love is a choice. These two truths were presented not only during marriage prep, but during our respective Catholic upbringings as well. Neither of us can say, “Nobody warned us we’d be watching Forensic Files and completely understand the point of view of some of the killers on here.” I mean, maybe those exact words weren’t used, but we’ve come to figure that’s the gist of the advice. Nothing prepares you for the brutal reality of the grit and personal accountability required in married life. And nothing will, except marriage itself.

This brings us to the real advice we have to offer, four words for marital success: “Choose wisely; treat kindly.” This is the mantra those discerning their future spouse must adopt. If we do not choose our spouse wisely, no amount of “kindly” will relieve us from the difficulties of our marriage. But when we have chosen someone who is moral, dependable, reasonable, and kind, there is no limit to the amount of good fruit that stems from simple kindness toward our spouse. You feel it, your children feel it, your neighbors feel it, and strangers feel it. Choose wisely; treat kindly. This is how we have a marriage revival.

Chris & Julie Kaspari
Our Lady of the Scapular, Sheldon
Married 37 years

We met at a SEARCH retreat 40 years ago, so from the very beginning we were in the habit of practicing our Catholic faith with people our own age from across the diocese. As a young couple in college, we enjoyed attending Mass at St. Paul’s Newman Center in Fargo where we broadened our friendships with other Catholic young adults and area priests. We may not have realized then, but we know now how very important it was to surround ourselves with those who would help shape and strengthen our faith. When we started dating seriously, Chris introduced the idea of praying at the end of our dates. That act of praying together as a young couple, without a doubt, built the foundation we needed to begin our life together and see us through the ups and downs of marriage. We have continued to grow in our faith as members of Our Lady of the Scapular in Sheldon where we have been members for over 30 years. If we had to give advice to young couples, it would definitely be to share what has worked for us: attend Mass together, surround yourselves with people who will help you grow in your Catholic faith, and pray together every day.

Kory & Amanda Kunze
St. Catherine of Alexandria, Valley City
Married 20 years

In our marriage, God has not always been a priority. Before children, our jobs came before the Lord and each other. Once we started having children, our children moved to the top of the priority list. Boy, did we have the our priorities all wrong! Numerous times God tried to nudge himself to the top, but we did not respond. God is persistent and did not give up! We are thankful the Lord kept pushing. He has straightened the path of our spiritual and home life. He’s now at the top of our priority list.
Learn to communicate well and honestly, especially thoughts and feelings that you’d rather not talk about. One of the most important topics of communication is Natural Family Planning (NFP). Truly learn and embrace chastity, because this is a practice that you will use not only when dating/engaged but throughout your entire marriage. Learning the language, communication, discernment, and lifestyle of NFP greatly enriches your marriage and brings a peace and comfort when it comes to children and family planning.

Embrace change. Plan on not being the people you are today. That sounds crazy, but in 10 or even 20 years you will not be the same people you are today. Maybe you will change physically. We all do in some way whether it is body size, some silver in our hair, or wrinkles. We also change mentally. What seems important to you when you first met might change as you mature, your jobs change, or you start to build a family together. What must remain a constant is the love that you share and your ability to communicate or more specifically, listen to each other. We have to work hard to find ways to block out the distractions of our busy lives and truly focus on our relationship. While we will all change throughout our lives in many ways and the noise of the world will get louder, never forget how to truly listen to each other and the Lord. We have found that routinely making time to pray together as a family has strengthened our relationship. Make your faith a priority in your parenting. We enrolled our three children in Catholic school. As they grow and strengthen their faith, it will bless your marriage and family in more ways than you will know.

Learn to forgive completely. We all sin. First, forgive yourself. Look at your own life experiences. How did you experience forgiveness in your own family? Talk to your partner. Maybe you have never been forgiven for something you did that hurt someone else. You can give forgiveness without being asked. You can forgive the actions of people who are deceased that impacted your life. Forgiving someone does not mean forgetting what they did. Holding onto the hurt and pain will hurt you more. Forgiveness brings healing. Be absolutely, brutally honest with yourself and your partner. Discuss this subject from the mind and heart. When you think of forgiving someone, how does it make you feel? Discuss that question with your partner. As you go through married life together, you will have many opportunities to forgive.
How have you seen God working in your marriage?

Mike & Pat Clemens  
St. Boniface, Wimbledon  
Married 41 years

About eight years ago, we attended Mass at the Basilica in Jamestown where Father Mulligan was presiding. In his homily, he suggested all married couples start praying just three Hail Marys together every day. Simple request, even this busy couple could do that! We are both cradle Catholics but had gotten comfortable where we were and didn’t think of changing anything because, no need to fix what’s not broken, right? We were lukewarm but didn’t know how broken that was until we got into the morning routine of three Hail Marys. Within a short time, we decided to do five Hail Marys, one for each of our children. Then, how about six Hail Marys to include ourselves? Then we prayed a decade, so we had four extra beads for others. We became Hail Mary maniacs.

This has become our morning routine. We wouldn’t think of starting our day any other way. Our marriage would feel sad and empty without us being prayer partners. This simple prayer journey has now prompted us to attend more daily Masses, adoration, and other church events. I know Mary is leading us to where we need to be as we fit in time to pray for each other. The joy, inner peace, and growth helps us feel truly blessed. Start your three Hail Mary prayer journey.

Deacon Ben & Jennine Seitz  
Sts. Anne & Joachim, Fargo  
Married 37 years

We both enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and met at a training base in Denver, Colo. Ben who was raised Catholic, asked Jennine early in their relationship if she had ever considered being Catholic. She responded without skipping a beat that she “had always wanted to be Catholic.” We both received assignments to the same duty station (RAF Lakenheath Air Force Base in Great Britain) where Jennine was baptized and we were married at the base chapel 37 years ago.

Over the next 22 years, we traveled the world and with each move and change in duty assignment, Jesus was leading us to a deeper relationship with him. In South Carolina, our family’s faith lives really launched as we learned the impact of having Catholic friends who were serious about their faith. We joined other families praying the Rosary and participated in faith study groups for the first time.

During a 12-month tour in South Korea, Ben lived his Cursillo and was introduced to the Divine Mercy devotion. In Great Falls, Mont., Jennine lived her Cursillo and was the Catholic Coordinator at the Base Chapel. After retiring in 2008, we settled in Fargo. God has continued to lead us into a deeper relationship culminating in Diaconate formation and Ben’s ordination as a Deacon.

God’s hand has been a guiding force in our marriage from the very beginning and his graces have led both of us to a truer love and appreciation for each other.

Michael & Jennifer Splonskowski  
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo  
Married 18 years

Marriage has been such a tremendous gift; I get to be with my best friend, and it’s a sacrament! We help each other in difficult moments and rejoice in each other’s victories. Marriage has shown us signs of God’s love, and an indication of how close He wants to be to us.
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What has gotten you through the difficult times during your married life?

Deacon Wallace & Colleen Dalman
Sacred Heart, Aneta
Married 45 years

Troy & Roxane Salonen
Sts. Anne & Joachim, Fargo
Married 31 years

The better question is, “Who has gotten you through the difficult times in your marriage?” Our marriage is between us: Wally, Colleen, and God. God is the key to our marriage. When difficult times arise, we do a great deal of praying and talking to one another. God always listens. He is the silent partner.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we focus on “God’s will be done. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” There are so many temptations in the world. By praying the Our Father, we are more aware of how we forgive others, and that this is how we will be forgiven. God knew what he was doing when he gave us this prayer.

As our children were growing up, we prayed with them. They loved it when we lit a candle and prayed the Rosary. Now that they’re adults, we pray for them and their families. We know God hears our prayers. In a world full of distractions, it is easy for families to forget to pray and believe they are in control. God is in control, not us.

God is there in the good times and in the bad. We’ve found great comfort and peace spending hours with God in Eucharistic Adoration. We’ve realized we can only pray about events. We may not see the outcome of our prayers in this world, however we believe that God hears and answers.

We started praying together soon after marriage, but after our first child was born, life took over, and we paused the practice—for decades. It would take a serious health crisis to wake us up—open-heart surgery. Troy went through two of these critical operations, and in the weeks leading up to each, we prayed the Surrender Novena together nightly. It brought us closer to one another and to God, as we placed our trust more fully in him.

Then, in January 2021, I heard Teresa Tomeo interview a couple from Michigan about their video series helping couples do daily prayer together. You’d think it would be easy, but emotional roadblocks can make couples prayer difficult. I gave this to Troy as a Valentine’s Day gift, and we learned how to pray together in a way that is respectful, gaining new ideas on different approaches. We’ve continued praying together nightly ever since, even when work or life separates us physically. Praying together before we end the day, in person or by phone, has brought such graces into our lives. Had we started this practice sooner, or not quit early on, perhaps the bumps we’ve experienced would not have been so rough.

Thankfully, God’s grace led us back to this helpful habit. We recommend it to all couples, no matter how long you’ve been married. You can find out more about this particular method at www.coupleprayer.com. But don’t be afraid to jump in either way. God can be the teacher.
As with any couple approaching marriage, we knew we were in love, ready to take on life together. We knew it was a lifetime commitment. Little did we know what lay ahead. One note that has stuck is the goal of marriage is to help your spouse get to heaven. God was and is the third person in our marriage.

Through disappointments, financial difficulties, heartbreaks, family dynamics, and the unexpected turn of events, life can be challenging without God, faith, and trust in each other. Be honest with each other, appreciate each other, and show that appreciation. Be willing to forgive and admit you are wrong. Share your dreams but also your disappointments. Never take each other for granted and be thankful.

We have been through some difficult times during our marriage, and what has helped us is prayer for one another along with praying as a family/couple, attending Mass weekly, and going to confession on a regular basis. We were having a really difficult time in our marriage, and we attended a Retrouvaille weekend. Since attending Retrouvaille, we’ve learned to communicate, listen, and understand each other better. We also have a great support group and reach out to others when in need. Being involved with the church community is also beneficial. Another thing that has helped us is putting God at the center of our marriage and holding strong to our faith and to the promise we made to each other before God.
Karl Keating remains an influential writer and thinker in the American Church over the last several decades. As the founder and first president of Catholic Answers, he’s overseen the largest Catholic apologetics organization in the United States. Besides this, he’s written books on a variety of apologetic topics, including Catholicism and Fundamentalism, which was instrumental in my own conversion. All this is to say that Keating is no slouch when it comes to providing excellent apologetic resources. In 1054 and All That, Keating turns his gaze inward, from refuting attacks on and questions regarding the Church, to a description of the history of the Church herself. The history of the Church is a frustratingly complex topic, given how many centuries, languages, and countries come into play, to say nothing of the significant people, events, and documents. Any student is likely to be immediately overwhelmed at the enormity of the task, not to mention the difficulty in even knowing where to start. Unlike Keating’s previous books, which are serious works on important apologetic issues, 1054 takes a much more humorous approach, allowing his lighter side to shine through, while still communicating serious, relevant information about each topic covered.

At only 125 pages, no one will mistake 1054 for a serious treatment on any topic. But for someone who wants to get a quick, general overview of two-millennium of Church history in an accessible, humorous format, this book provides an overview of about 200 pivotal players and events in Church history. 1054 would make an excellent catechetical resource for religious ed teachers providing a historical overview for their students or for parents who want to start educating their children about Church history, but without overwhelming them with a textbook-length treatment. I found it very enjoyable to read. The short treatments of each topic helped to keep the sequence of events in my mind and made the whole story fit together better. There are many beautiful illustrations by Kurt Kress throughout, which makes the book appealing to younger readers.

This brief treatment, however, shouldn’t be mistaken for not taking the topics seriously. Keating has a knack for humorously distilling down massively complex landmark people, events, and doctrinal developments into a few lines, so that by the end of each page, you have a clear understanding of what happened. Take, for example, Keating’s take on Arianism:

“Early in the fourth century there was a priest in Alexandria named Arius. He was a smart fellow who may have studied too much Greek philosophy... He found himself unable to understand how Jesus could be at once God and man. Arius concluded that Jesus was just a man, though the Best Man Ever. This was called Doctrinal Simplification and it proved to be very popular” (18).

Now, if learning more about this strikes your fancy, since Arianism has never really gone away, especially in our own century, you already have a brief understanding of its central ideas. Keating uses a lot of humor in this book, which I always find helps an idea stick better.

Even those who are well read in Church history will find some new stories and people in 1054, as Keating pulls from a seemingly inexhaustible list of Church councils, saints, heretics, popes, and world events, touching on even tangential issues like the loss of the Papal States and the development of Freemasonry:

“In truth, Freemasonry was less than watered down Christianity, it wasn’t Christianity at all... Freemasons denied the supernatural order and, as a logical consequence, were opposed to Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular, the later being the most supernatural form of Christianity because it was the truest” (103).

For those who would enjoy a fun, easy-to-read book that accurately sums up a great deal of important history in a very small amount of space, I would highly recommend 1054. By the end, you’ll have a grasp on the development of Christianity and many of the important figures and events which helped shape it through the ages.
The miracle during the Mass of St. Gregory the Great

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

This month’s image comes from an illuminated manuscript created in the 1500s. The image itself is only seven inches high, and it is all contained within the letter C as formed by the mythical dragon-like creature. The initial C begins an unidentified chant written on parchment probably in use for the feast of St. Gregory the Great. The image portrays a miracle from the 6th century in the life of Pope St. Gregory the Great.

He was celebrating the Mass one day when suddenly he witnessed a vision of the pierced Christ on the altar. Jesus Christ appeared to St. Gregory as the Man of Sorrows—a type of image of Christ, where he is shown above the waist, with his wounds displayed on his hands and side. Gregory kneels in reverence and gazes up intently. Jesus is revealing his presence to everyone but most especially his presence at Mass and in the Eucharist. Notice how this image actually shows Jesus as both crucified and risen. We see his blood, wounds, and the crown of thorns on his head, yet there is an aura of light around him as he comes out of a tomb-like piece on the altar. When we celebrate the Mass, we are celebrating his passion, death, and Resurrection. Jesus Christ is made present to us.

There are a few interesting details during this sacred moment in which time has stopped. The curtain pulled away is a medieval tool in art to show that something that was hidden is now being revealed. The gaze of Jesus is directed right at Gregory, who acts in the person of Christ at this point in the Mass. The flaming torch illuminates the sacred moment, the bells are rung and the thurible is swinging with the sweet smells of incense. The image is colorful, and although it appears a murky yellow, it is more likely gold leaf. This is what makes it illuminated; the gold leaf produces a gold shimmering effect.

Monks in abbeys produced illuminated manuscripts. The monks would copy scripture or prayer books and “illuminate” them with images. They used quill pens and boiled iron, tree bark, and nuts to make black ink. Other colors were gained from rocks and plants, which were ground down and mixed with a binding agent. The process took a very long time, but it was important work as the images were meant to give an aesthetic beauty to the sacred words. The tradition of illumination of texts is making a comeback today. The current missal the priest uses for Mass has very beautiful images in it along with the words of liturgy. The images can help us enter into the meaning of the text as well as give it a feeling of reverence or importance.
A “moving” faith experience

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

In my past career in television news, my wife Mary and I moved several times. In the TV business, most of the time in order to move up you had to move on. We became very self-sufficient movers, reaching near pro-ranks as packers, loaders, and unloaders. Most of these moves we did ourselves, to the point where we contemplated purchasing stock in U-Haul!

Over the years, my wife acquired an upright piano that not only was a necessary tool in her work as a church music director, but it also allowed her to give piano lessons in our home. Needless to say, moving this heavy piece of furniture proved at times to be quite challenging, but we always seemed to make it work... that is until one very difficult move.

We had decided to move out of one apartment and into another while living in Bismarck. Our apartment at the complex we moved out of was on the first floor, but we were moving into what was called a “garden-level” apartment. The move required us to take all of our belongings through the front door of the complex and down a flight of stairs. Everything went smoothly, until it came to moving the piano.

The stairs proved difficult. We tried everything we could imagine to get that piano down those eight stairs, but the weight of the piano was too much for us. We tried over and over again to coax the piano down the stairs, but it caught at the bottom and we couldn't budge it. Lots of grunting, exasperation, and some frustrated tears ensued, but that piano just would not budge. We were running short on time with our truck rental, and we were blocking the stairway, so in an act of faith, we prayed “God, please help us. We don’t know what to do here.” We just sat on those stairs, wondering what to do next.

About 10 minutes later, a very big, muscular man with blonde hair and a cable TV company helmet came walking through the hallway. He had been checking the building’s cable connections, and asked us if we needed some help. My wife and I said yes enthusiastically, and he proceeded to lift the heavy piano at the end where it was stuck at the bottom of the stairwell and dragged it down off the stairs as we pushed from the other end. Needless to say, it was effortless for him and an answer to our prayers. He helped us get the piano into our apartment, smiled, and went on his way.

The next day, my wife baked some cookies and brought them out to the cable TV repair crew working on connections outside of our building. Mary said they were for the blonde gentlemen who had helped us the day before. The crew had a puzzled look on their faces and said that no one fitting the man’s description was working the day before. In fact, they didn’t know anybody who worked for the cable company that fit the man’s description. Puzzled, my wife gave the crew the cookies, thanked them anyway, and proceeded to tell me about what they told her. We were both dumbstruck. Who was he? Did God send us an angel that day? Being people of faith, we like to think we encountered a heavenly presence, but all we know for sure is that man (or angel?) was an answer to our prayers.

Years later, I was again moving items into a rental truck to take them from one storage unit to another. I was working alone, and everything was going swimmingly... until it came to the last item. It was so heavy I could not get it up the ramp into the truck. After several failed tries, I sat down in the truck and said a prayer asking God once again for guidance and help. I had no sooner finished the prayer when I saw a man in a pickup truck coming towards me. It was a friend of mine, Brian Kingsley, from my Knights of Columbus council, who just happened to have a storage unit down from mine. He asked if I needed help, and we got that item into the truck in no time. Once again, this time working through a friend, God answered a simple prayer! Praise his holy name!

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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 victimassistanc@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.
This morning I recognized a shift in my journalism career that feels noteworthy. In the past two years, I’ve done more open-ended interviews than ever before. It’s partly because I’ve pitched more stories (vs. receiving commissions), granting me greater license over the shape of an article. It’s also because I’ve grown more patient, finally accepting the fact that a good interview simply cannot be rushed. As a result, I’m able to explore my curiosities during each interview. When I read the notes from past conversations, I see recurring questions—the same wonderings held up to different light, each time eager to glimpse something new.

I love to discuss creativity. Do you believe everyone is creative? What sparks your creativity? How do creativity and faith relate? As a Catholic writer, the answers to these questions matter to me.

I’m also drawn to lifestyle questions of wellness and rest. How do you recharge after a long day? What boundaries do you set up for social media? How do you guard your sense of wonder?

This question feels important. When I am filled with wonder, I am filled with faith—a profound, childlike faith that sees the good in all, awakened to the miracle of each new day.

There is so much chipping away at our sense of wonder—to great spiritual detriment. Identifying those forces becomes the first step.

But my favorite question is my closer. I used to pose it at random. Now, freed by my open-ended interviews, I raise it regularly. It’s a question I borrow from Oprah Winfrey, who borrowed it from the late film critic Gene Siskel. (You may borrow it too.)

What do you know for sure?

This question usually generates a pause. How good it is to pause and think before we speak, to not fear the silence, to not panic about the wait.

People respond with humility. Something about the “for sure” part, the expectation for expertise. They don’t want to assume too much. They don’t want to pretend their way into it. They choose their words carefully—and, by doing so, they choose few.

The older the person, the humbler their answer.

“When you’re young you think you know everything for sure,” a 74-year-old woman said. “The older you get, the more you realize that you really don’t know much for sure.”

What do you know for sure?

“Not a hell of a lot,” a bestselling Catholic author in her 70s told me.

“Not much,” my grandpa said a year before his death, chuckling.

Sometimes the not knowing is what we know for sure. The mystery is the certainty. Two retired 79-year-old Catholic men expressed this to me last year.

“What I know for sure is I still have a long ways to arrive at that point,” a well-read, widely traveled bishop said. “I have to learn more all the time.”

“I know that I don’t know what’s going on in people’s lives,” a former Catholic school principal told me. “Some people are in a terrible marriage, they’re in a terrible job, and I just don’t know. I know I have to be slow to judge.”

What do you know for sure?

A clear pattern emerged in the answers, coming from interviewees of all ages. Again and again, they landed on the same word: love.

“I know for sure that I love the Lord,” an empty nester said.

“I know the love of God in my life,” a bishop said.

“I know that I am loved,” a criminal prosecutor said.

“Love is real,” a high-school English teacher told me. “It’s worth fighting for. I know for sure it’s real.”

“The only thing I know for sure is that I’m loved,” a hospice CEO said. “That’s enough.”

And now these things remain. The greatest of these is love.
Commitment to agriculture a vocation given by God

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

Attempts to repeal or eliminate parts of the state’s anti-corporate farming law will reappear during this year’s North Dakota legislative session. The law prevents outside investor ownership of farms, ranches, and related operations in North Dakota. The last time legislators passed a change in the law was in 2015. Voters later overwhelmingly rejected the law by nearly 76% of the vote. One could be forgiven for asking what part of “no” did they not understand.

A person could also be forgiven for not understanding why the Catholic bishops of North Dakota oppose repealing or weakening the law. The position is not new. By my estimate, I have testified at least seven times on behalf of the bishops against bills to repeal or weaken the law. My predecessor did as well. Indeed, opposition from North Dakota bishops to corporate farming goes as far back as 1939 and maybe earlier.

As I wrote in an article published in the National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly, Fargo Bishop Aloisius Muench—the only North Dakota bishop named a cardinal—wrote in 1939 that practices such as “investor ownership and the use of wage laborers embraced concepts of ownership and labor more consistent with socialism and unbridled capitalism than the principles of economy proposed by Pope Leo XIII in Rerum novarum and Pope Pius XI in Quadragesimo anno.”

This constancy by our episcopal shepherds on this issue demonstrates that the bishops’ opposition to repealing or weakening the law is not the result of a particular bishop’s personal opinion. Instead, it is something deeply rooted in Catholic doctrine. Catholic social doctrine contains many principles that lead to this position, but there are several that are particularly relevant.

First is the dignity of the human person. This is the fundamental principle of all Catholic social doctrine. Everything in the social order, whether it is government, economics, business activity, or the community should be centered on the human person.

Second, the dignity of the human person is best protected and fostered within the family. Families play a role that cannot be replicated and that role extends to our economic activity.

Third, the principles of subsidiarity and the dignity of work teach that decisions, whether they are governmental or business, should be made by those closest to the activity itself.

Finally, Christian tradition recognizes that there is something unique about farming and ranching. We can find the roots of this recognition in Sacred Scripture, starting with God’s charge to man to “cultivate and care” for the land (Gen. 2:15). This special nature of farming stretches throughout Scripture and through Catholic teaching.

For these reasons, the Church calls farming a vocation, rather than a mere economic activity or business. Indeed, the International Catholic Rural Association and Catholic Rural Life prepared a several-page long “reflection” entitled Vocation of the Agricultural Leader. Bishop John Folda of Fargo serves on the board of Catholic Rural Life.

That document explains it this way:

“The farmer, therefore, holds a crucial place in the common family of man and a unique role in the fulfillment of God’s plan. Through their determined labor, those who work in agriculture cooperate with divine providence and make manifest God’s care for each one of his children. Their work is not merely an effort to meet a basic human necessity. Nor is it just an economic endeavor, reducible to solely questions of profit and cost. Instead, at its core, the commitment to agriculture is a vocation given by God, a unique and privileged way of life. Indeed, of all the occupations undertaken by men and women, the task of “cultivating and keeping the earth” (Gen. 2:15)—farming and ranching—reaches to the depths of our relationships with God the Creator, with creation and with all of humanity.”

As Pope Francis said, farming is different because it is “characteristically and fundamentally human.”

The further we move away from family ownership of the land and operation, the further we move away from that uniquely human connection inherent in God’s charge to cultivate and till the earth. The further we move the decision-making of how to engage in agriculture from the people who do the actual labor, the further we move away from respecting the dignity of labor and respecting the local community. The further we embrace the notion that farming is only about profit, the further we move away from God’s call to steward land and resources for the common good and for future generations.

As the Vocation of the Agricultural Leader puts it, the danger is that the farmer or rancher will become “a mere economic agent of production” rather than someone engaging in a vocation to humbly cultivate and keep the earth and play a critical role in creating an authentic culture of life.
One thing that is common in seminary formation is to participate in silent retreats throughout the academic year. Some of these are very brief, perhaps only a day, while others can be quite lengthy. Many seminaries in the United States, like Mount St. Mary’s where I am, begin the spring semester with a five-day silent retreat. Firstly, this fulfills obligations set by Canon Law. Men seeking ordination later in the spring need to make a retreat before being ordained, plus all other seminarians need to make an annual retreat. More than just fulfilling obligations, however, these retreats offer us the time and the silence needed to help us grow closer to the Lord.

These silent retreats at seminary are generally led by either a priest or a bishop. The retreats can vary, but at Mount St. Mary’s they usually offer two different talks per day for the seminarians to pray with in their free time. They also offer daily Mass, confessions, and spiritual direction. The rest of the day is left to the seminarian during the retreat. He can pray, exercise, read, take a nap, or as I like to do, go hiking.

In early January, our five-day silent retreat was led by a Discalced Carmelite priest from Washington D.C. He led a retreat that focused on the life of St. Therese of Lisieux who was a Discalced Carmelite nun in the late 1800s. His talks went chronologically through St. Therese’s life, and he related her life and struggles to that which we might be struggling with during the retreat and our lives. He did a great job with his talks and many seminarians enjoyed them. Despite having good talks and an environment conducive to prayer, I—like many others—struggle with prayer during silent retreats.

Often times for me, prayer is dry during silent retreats. Just like anyone who has ever prayed before, I get distracted and struggle to calm my soul and mind and don’t seem to feel or hear God. Providentially, this is something that our speaker addressed. He referenced St. John of the Cross often, who was also a Carmelite, and talked about the purification that happens to us when we struggle in prayer. St. John of the Cross calls this the dark night of the soul. It is a process where God allows us to experience dryness and to struggle in prayer in order that we learn to more fully trust in him and not in the consolations that he gives us.

I’ve heard this idea plenty of times before. However, one additional point our speaker made was that when we undergo dryness, we will begin to experience a greater thirsting for God deep within our souls and that this will help us fix our desires on God and help us to break away from unhealthy attachments to things of this world. His talk brought about a much greater understanding of these movements in prayer for me. I’ve become more aware of these movements and have started to see the fruit from them and from silent retreats as a whole.

Every seminarian has a different experience with silent retreats. Some men really thrive during the silence and others greatly struggle. Regardless, it’s important that all of us make time for silence in our lives. It is the place where we truly nurture our relationship with the Lord and where he works most profoundly in our lives.
The Sermon on the Mount isn’t the only time Jesus’ teachings have been recorded. His desire to follow his example but too often we end up falling short. The Beatitudes (Matthew 5) are examples of oxymorons when read merely through human eyes. Though I am aware there are often multiple layers of understanding and experiencing things in the spiritual life, I never thought a reflection on the Beatitudes would bring about the opportunity to use such a fun word as “oxymoron.” Not only is it fun to say, it’s a great Scrabble word too (more feasible when playing with 9-tiles), and the definition is just as fun (juxtaposition of two seemingly contradictory terms). Nonetheless, I’m writing about smallness which is much more rewarding than using sophisticated words. The Sermon on the Mount isn’t the only time Jesus’ teachings appear to contradict themselves in the modern world. In reality, it is ourselves who do the contradicting—we say we believe in God’s Kingdom that we are called to pursue, but in our daily lives we don’t always live up to that calling.

In cases where poverty is imposed on us by our situations, God allows it for our benefit and the benefit of those around us. There is the familiar story about a man who experienced the poverty of a flat tire on his way to a meeting and arrived 15 minutes late only to find that others never arrived at all since they were involved in an accident along the way. The point being, that God used the poverty of a flat tire to protect this man from the accident. This little story helps me to be more patient as I run into unexpected obstacles and things that need to be taken care of around the convent. Poverty in the area of planning my day allows me to be available and present to those who simply need someone to listen to them, and frequently I am blessed simultaneously.

There is also a poverty that comes with old age and poor health imposed on us by human nature challenges, which are opportunities for growth in virtue that can be used powerfully by our Creator. When I was growing up, my neighbor, who had cerebral palsy, didn’t choose poverty, but she lived it well. She could not talk, walk, or eat, or any of the things I liked to do, but she could communicate in her own way and she was happy (she thoroughly enjoyed having visitors). She died in her early 20s, but not before transmitting her message of simplicity and joy.

My most vivid memory from several months in South America is the dramatic difference I experienced between the joy of families with very little and those who had plenty. However, those with an abundance can live the virtue of poverty through good stewardship of their blessings. As Franciscan Sisters, we live our poverty through simplicity, generosity, and detachment. We recognize that everything we have is pure gift and strive to use it for the glory of God.

In the early stages of formation, I came to appreciate St. Francis of Assisi’s love of poverty as I began to grasp how important poverty is to the spiritual life. Now that I have been professed for 11 years, I continue to grow in that appreciation. Recently, I was reminded that gluttony is an enemy of the virtue of faith. A little reflection recalled my experience with fasting and I realized that when I overindulge in things of the world, I do not depend completely on God.

Every choice creates a poverty, since choosing something eliminates the alternative, creating a poverty of that thing. Just as a glass filled with water has no space for anything else until some of the water is removed, I have more space to enjoy heavenly treasures when I let go of earthly things.
As I write this column, we’re in the final stages of preparing the 64th annual God’s Gift Appeal. Sixty-four years! The year was 1959 and Bishop Leo Dworschak was the diocese’s auxiliary Bishop and appointed administrator, as Bishop Muench still remained in Germany on special assignment at the Holy Father’s request.

I found two paragraphs in a book *Beyond the Red River: Centennial Book of the Diocese of Fargo 1889-1989* which describes the first year of our diocesan appeal. Many of you may remember that it was originally named the Diocesan Development Program (DDP). Here is a segment of that article:

“Bishop Leo Dworschak made two important decisions in the years just before the Vatican Council. One of them concerned the finances of the diocese. Like many American bishops at this time, Dworschak decided to consolidate all diocesan collection into one appeal, called the Diocesan Development Program (DDP). This collection would be taken up each spring and handled by teams of lay-volunteers in each parish. The diocese set a goal each year, based on the foreseen needs and also the ability of the people to help. The idea was to relieve the parishes of multiple collections and also to better focus attention on diocesan financial needs.

“The first DDP collection was taken up in May of 1959. There was a great deal of advance publicity in the Catholic Action News, as there would be every year. A chairman was chosen for the diocese, with representatives for various regions as well. In the parishes, 7,000 worked as direct contacts to their fellow parishioners. The goal set was $250,000, but the actual collection exceeded that by over $100,000. No doubt the bishop was delighted.”

There have been a number of changes to our diocesan appeal over the years. One thing that hasn’t changed is the need for funding our diocesan ministries and programs, many of which exist to support all the parishes and all the members in our diocese.

This year’s God’s Gift Appeal will be begin with a mailing to each household sometime during the last week of February. I encourage you to take a moment to sit down with the God’s Gift Appeal packet you’ll be receiving and prayerfully consider how best you can participate this year.

For more information about God’s Gift Appeal, visit www.fargodiocese.org/godsgiftappeal.
**Events**

**Mardi Gras at St. John’s, Wahpeton**
St. John’s in Wahpeton will host a Mardi Gras event Feb. 12 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event provides a wonderful dinner, theme basket silent auction, carnival games, and a bake sale. All are welcome. Contact St. John’s Church in Wahpeton at (701) 642-6982 or visit www.stjohns-wahpeton.org.

**Catholic Man Night at 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.
• Feb. 16: St. Anthony’s, Fargo. Speaker Father Luke Meyer.
• Apr. 20: Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. Speaker Brad Gray.

**Life in the Spirit Retreat in Harvey**
Come attend a Life in the Spirit Weekend Feb. 17 at 6 p.m. through Feb. 19 at 3 p.m. at St. Cecilia’s Social Center in Harvey. The seminar serves as an introduction or renewal to a life in the power of the Holy Spirit leading to a new and deeper relationship with the Lord. The weekend includes praise and worship, talks and testimony, discussion groups, healing of memories prayer, and more. Father Kevin Boucher will be the spiritual director. Assistant Spiritual Director is Deacon Jonathan Brewer. Register by Feb. 14. Meals provided. Free will offering. For more information and to register contact Rosalie at raxtman@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2706 or the parish office at stcecilia@gondtc.com or (701) 324-2144 (Tues-Thurs). No cost housing available in St. Cecilia’s Social Center (arrange with Rosalie prior to weekend).

**Lenten Parish Mission at in Valley City**
Father Kyle Metzger will preach the Lenten Parish Mission at St. Catherine of Alexandria Church in Valley City. The Mission will be March 5–7 beginning at 6:30 p.m. each evening.

**Fish fry at Argusville Community Center**
The St. William’s Men’s Club would like to invite everyone to join us for our 20th annual fish fry at the Argusville Community Center in Argusville on Feb. 24 from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Free will donation goes toward special projects for the parish.

**Fish Dinners Fridays in Lent in West Fargo**
Knights of Columbus Council 9642 at Holy Cross Church in West Fargo invite you to a fish dinner each Friday during Lent. The menu includes baked fish, shrimp, fish tacos, vegetarian lasagna, and mac and cheese. Dinner is served beginning at 6 p.m. at the Holy Cross Church social hall.

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**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**
Eighty-six converts were confirmed in a unique ceremony by the Most Rev. Leo F. Dworschak, Auxiliary Bishop of Fargo. As far as the record can be traced, this is the first time in the history of the Diocese of Fargo that an entire confirmation class consisted of adult converts. Now members of St. Mary’s Cathedral and St. Anthony’s parish, every person in the class confirmed on February 8 was a recent convert to the Faith.

**50 years ago — 1972**
The Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Fargo, with approval by the chancery, released guidelines pertaining to the new Rite of Confirmation for the universal Church. Pope Paul VI noted “the gift of the Holy Spirit itself is expressed [in the new wording] and the outpouring of the spirit that took place on the day of Pentecost is recalled.” The new guidelines emphasize the relationship between baptism and confirmation where the laying of hands on the confirmand’s head and the anointing of the forehead with sacramental oil in the sign of the cross confers the fullness of the privileges gained by baptism and the grace that will provide strength for the profession of the faith. At present, the proposed age for the Sacrament of Confirmation is between grades four and eight, with grades five and six being considered probably the most appropriate.

**20 years ago — 2002**
Cross-Eyed Rally draws more than 600 to Christ. The Shanley Deacons hosted other students from almost every school in the Diocese of Fargo for music, talks, workshops, and Mass. Topics included prayer, friendships, and struggles in life, amongst many others. Students were challenged in one of the talks that day to embrace that it is indeed “Cool to be Catholic” because it’s our faith that helps us be Cross-Eyed. By keeping our eyes on the cross of Christ, our priorities are kept straight and our hearts will have the right perspective to navigate life well.
LIFE’S MILESTONES

Stanley and Evelyn Gendreau, parishioners of St. Alphonsus in Langdon, celebrated their 70th anniversary Jan. 6.

Remi Beauchamp, parishioner of Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo, will celebrate his 90th birthday on Feb. 28. Remi is blessed with 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

Ben Axtman, parishioner of St. Therese Little Flower Church in Rugby, will celebrate his 90th birthday Feb. 21. He is blessed with his wife Betty of 64 years, 6 children, 11 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren.

MaryAnn Burckhard of St. Cecilia’s in Towner will celebrate her 95th birthday on Feb. 20. She and her husband Joe, who passed away in 1987, were blessed with 13 children. MaryAnn now has 32 grandchildren and 53 great-grandchildren.

Mary Stein, parishioner of St. Philip’s in Hankinson, celebrated her 95th birthday Feb. 6. She and her late husband Milton were blessed with 3 children, 5 grandchildren, and 11 great-grandchildren.

Cliff and Karen Ludwig, parishioners of St. Joseph in Devils Lake, will celebrate their 60th anniversary on Feb. 23. They were married at St. Joseph and have 2 sons, 5 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren.

Jay Heinz, parishioner of Sacred Heart in Rolette, will celebrate his 80th birthday on Feb. 26 with his wife Carrie. He has 3 children, 4 step-children, 5 grandchildren, 9 step-grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren.

Remi Beauchamp, parishioner of Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo, will celebrate his 90th birthday on Feb. 28. Remi is blessed with 3 children, 8 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

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

“Jesus Christ, Lord of all things! You see my heart, you know my desires. Possess all that I am—you alone. I am your sheep; make me worthy to overcome the devil.”

Quotable

St. Agatha of Sicily
Feast day Feb. 5
Sister Rebecca (Gale Marie) Metzger, OSF, 78, of Grand Forks, passed away Jan. 17 at home. She had heroically lived with cancer for ten years, far surpassing expectations of her medical teams.

Sister Rebecca, daughter of Joseph Leonard and Esther (Fischer) Metzger, was born on October 4, 1944, in Langdon. She was the oldest of seven children and grew up on a farm west of Wales. Following high school graduation in 1962, Gale entered religious life with the Sisters of St. Francis at Hankinson. She was given the name Sister Rebecca when she became a novice July 10, 1963. She made her perpetual profession on her birthday, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi in 1969.

Over the next nine years, Sister Rebecca was educated in the area of occupational therapy, culminating in a Bachelor’s Degree from the University of North Dakota in 1978. She was a natural for the work her community asked her to do at St. Anne’s Guest Home in Grand Forks. Except for five years in Cando as the administrator of Towner County Memorial Hospital (1987–92), Sister Rebecca served as St. Anne’s activity director for seven years, then 44 years as the facility’s administrator. Until the last weeks of her life, she was still handling administrative responsibilities.

Sister Rebecca is survived by her Franciscan Community, Grand Forks and Hankinson, her mother Esther Metzger, sisters: Mary Eddy, Moorhead, Minn.; Jan Rieck, Mapleton; Helen Borgen, Fargo; Karen Kolbinger, Fargo; brother: Darrell (Bev) Metzger, Wales; and sister-in-law, Renae Metzger, West Fargo; and many other family and friends who were touched by her generous life.

She is preceded in death by her father, Joseph Leonard Metzger and brother, Donald Metzger.

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There is no freedom without the truth: Religious Freedom Day 2023

By USCCB


“Catholic Christians engage political life in various ways and at different levels. Lay Catholics vote, advocate, and serve in public office. Bishops and clergy seek primarily to form consciences, both of lay voters and officials.

“What informs this engagement? Are we motivated by a desire for power—to control the levers of government? Are we a political party, working to protect our own interests?

“Much of the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, whose legacy especially comes to mind in these recent weeks, was dedicated to these questions. He sought to show how the Church’s mission in political life is to bear witness to the truth, particularly the truth about human nature and the dignity of all persons.

“As he put it, ‘Fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom and of the possibility of integral human development. For this reason the Church searches for truth, proclaims it tirelessly and recognizes it wherever it is manifested. This mission of truth is something that the Church can never renounce.’

“Prioritizing reason and truth in politics is a challenge. As Pope Francis observes, ‘What is now happening, and drawing us into a perverse and barren way of thinking, is the reduction of ethics and politics to physics. Good and evil no longer exist in themselves; there is only a calculus of benefits and burdens. As a result of the displacement of moral reasoning, the law is no longer seen as reflecting a fundamental notion of justice but as mirroring notions currently in vogue. Breakdown ensues: everything is “leveled down” by a superficial bartered consensus. In the end, the law of the strongest prevails.’

“We do well to remember the priority of truth and the right exercise of reason in political life when we celebrate religious freedom. The purpose of religious freedom is to allow individuals and communities space to seek the truth and to bear witness to the truth. When we advocate for religious freedom, we must never forsake that mission.

“Truths about human nature—about conjugal marriage, the right to life, the equal dignity of every individual—can be known by reason without the aid of faith. When these truths come under attack, religious freedom is not an escape route, as if we could watch the common good be harmed so long as we obtain religious exemptions. Indeed, if we abandon the priority of truth, natural law, human nature, and the common good, then we abandon freedom itself.

“And on this Religious Freedom Day, may all Catholics dedicate ourselves to the cultivation of virtue to which freedom calls us, particularly the virtue of fortitude, that we may patiently and courageously bear witness to the truth in our public life. In this way, we will promote true freedom and bless our great country.”
Pope Benedict XVI: Doctor of the Church?

By Matthew Bunson | Catholic News Agency

There are currently 37 Doctors of the Church, four women and 33 men, spanning the course of Church history, from Irenaeus of Lyon in the third century to Thérèse of Lisieux in the 19th century.

It is a classically Catholic pastime to speculate who might be named the next member of this extraordinary and extraordinarily exclusive club. Long before his passing, the name Pope Benedict XVI has been proposed as a worthy candidate to become a Doctor of the Church. What exactly would this entail, and is he, indeed, a suitable candidate?

It might be useful to ask first what is a Doctor of the Church?

Traditionally, the title of Doctor of the Church has been granted on the basis of three requirements: the manifest holiness of a candidate affirmed by his or her canonization as a saint; the person’s eminence in doctrine demonstrated by the leaving behind of a body of teachings that made significant and lasting contributions to the life of the Church; and a formal declaration by the Church, usually by a pope.

Every Doctor, then, is first and foremost a saint. That does not mean they are sinless, or impeccable. The lives of St. Augustine and even St. Teresa of Ávila would demonstrate rather clearly that some Doctors had powerful conversions from sin.

The Doctors are also required to have to show that they possessed profound knowledge and were superb teachers in some sense of the word. St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Albertus Magnus, and St. Robert Bellarmine are just three examples of brilliant teachers and writers. Nevertheless, there is no suggestion that their writings were completely free from mistakes, nor are they deemed infallible.

And then there is the requirement that a Doctor of the Church be proclaimed officially. This can come from an ecumenical council, but in Church history, every Doctor has been declared by a pope. The decision is normally accompanied by a letter from the pope explaining why the choice was made. This is important in giving the context to the decision. Such a letter was valuable in 1997 when Pope John Paul II named Thérèse of Lisieux and issued Divini Amoris Scientia (The Science of Divine Love) to explain how a saint who had died in a cloister and had authored only one tome could warrant being named a Doctor of the Church. As John Paul wrote, “During her life Thérèse discovered ‘new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings’ and received from the divine Teacher that ‘science of love’ which she then expressed with particular originality in her writings.”

What about Benedict?

Considering these requirements, the question can be asked again: Is Pope Benedict XVI a worthy candidate, and will it happen?

Benedict himself understood deeply the requirements and the highly unusual nature of the Doctors. After all, he named two of them himself in 2012: the 12th-century abbess and mystic St. Hildegard of Bingen and the 16th-century priest St. John of Ávila.

On the issue of his qualifications to be a Doctor of the Church, then, the answer is that he is, arguably, one of the most eminently qualified candidates in Church history. Benedict XVI authored more than 60 books, memorable and important encyclicals, more than a thousand academic articles, countless speeches and commentaries, and even prayers. He is considered one of the greatest and most faithful theologians in the history of the Church, and his vast body of teachings only continued after his election as pope in 2005. The argument can be made that he stands alongside several Doctors of the Church for his learning, including St. Gregory of Nazianzus, St. Basil the Great, St. Leo I the Great, and even St. Bonaventure, of whom Pope Benedict was an expert.

In addition, like several Doctors of the Church, Benedict also had the remarkable ability to bring the most profound teachings of the faith down to the level that anyone can understand, a feat possible only when a teacher has absolute mastery of the subject. This places him in the great company of St. Francis de Sales, St. Ambrose, and St. John Chrysostom.

And then there is Benedict’s place as a teacher. A professor of theology whose sweep of knowledge included fundamental, dogmatic, biblical and spiritual theology, Pope Benedict was so gifted as a teacher that his doctoral students established what is called the Schülerkreis (Student Circle) to honor him and celebrate their experience. As a teacher, Benedict shares company with such Doctors of the Church as St. Albert the Great and even St. Thomas Aquinas.

Sainthood comes first

Clearly, Pope Benedict possesses the proper credentials of learned and faithful scholarship for the faith. The other requirement, of course, is that the candidate be a canonized saint. Certainly, at Benedict’s funeral there were signs proclaiming “Santo Subito!” as there were at John Paul II’s funeral. Only
time will demonstrate whether such calls and such sentiments lead to a cause for canonization being opened.

Typically, there is a requirement to wait at least five years before a cause can be opened, although this was waived—by Pope Benedict XVI—in the case of Pope John Paul II. A normal cause for canonization would take many years, even centuries. The towering figure of St. Albert the Great, who died in 1280, was only beatified in 1622 and only canonized in 1931, an event that cleared the way for him to be made a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI that same year.

Should Pope Benedict one day be canonized a saint and declared a Doctor of the Church, he would be only the third pontiff (as of today at least), with St. Leo I the Great and St. Gregory I the Great.

There are many obvious and important steps to be taken before Pope Benedict XVI could become a Doctor of the Church. For now, however, there is the opportunity for Catholics and all people seeking the truth to dedicate themselves to his teachings. His gifts to the Church and the knowledge and wisdom of humanity do not need the title of Doctor of the Church to be appreciated and cherished. That he might some day be granted the title would be only the final affirmation of what many have known and believed for a very long time.

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**BE NOT AFRAID**

**DO NOT BE SATISFIED WITH MEDIOCRITY. PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP AND LET DOWN YOUR NETS FOR A CATCH.**

-ST. POPE JOHN PAUL II

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Pope Francis invited Christians on Jan. 18 to pray for the grace to have a “pastoral heart” like Jesus that “suffers and takes risks” out of love for others.

At his weekly public audience, the pope said that Jesus provides “the unsurpassed model of evangelization.”

“Christ not only has the words of life, but he makes his life a Word, a message: that is, he lives always turned toward the Father and toward us,” Pope Francis said in Paul VI Hall.

“Indeed, if we look at his days as described in the Gospels, we see that intimacy with his Father—prayer—occupies the first place. ... Specifically, within this relationship in prayer which connects him to the Father in the Spirit, Jesus discovers the meaning of his being human, of his existence in the world as a mission for us,” he said.

After praying each day, Jesus dedicated his time to proclaiming the Kingdom of God and serving people, especially the poorest, the most vulnerable, the sinners, and the sick, the pope added.

Pope Francis said that one of the best images to represent Jesus’ style of life is that of “the Good Shepherd” who “lays down his life for his sheep” (John 10:11).

“By being with Jesus, we discover that his pastoral heart always beats for the person who is confused, lost, far away,” he said.

In this, Jesus the Good Shepherd provides a model against which “to evaluate our pastoral care,” Francis added.

The pope recommended rereading often chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, which contains the parable of the lost sheep, to come to truly understand apostolic zeal.

“There we discover that God does not contemplate the sheep pen, nor does he threaten them so they won’t leave. Rather, if one leaves and gets lost, he does not abandon that sheep but goes in search of it. He does not say, ‘You got up and left—it’s your fault—that’s your business!’ His pastoral heart reacts in another way: it suffers and takes risks,” Pope Francis said.

“Yes, God suffers for those who leave, and while he mourns over them, he loves even more. The Lord suffers when we distance ourselves from his heart. He suffers for all who do not know the beauty of his love and the warmth of his embrace. But, in response to this suffering, he does not withdraw, rather he risks. He leaves the ninety-nine sheep who are safe and ventures out for the lost one. ... This is God’s zeal.”

The pope’s general audience message was the second in a new weekly series of catechesis, or teachings, on evangelization and apostolic zeal.

At the end of his general audience, Pope Francis asked for people to join him in praying for a Catholic priest who was killed in Nigeria and for persecuted Christians around the world.

“I ask all of you to join me in praying for Father Isaac Achi, of the Diocese of Minna in northern Nigeria, who was killed Jan. 15 in an attack on his rectory,” he said.

“So many Christians continue to be the target of violence: let us remember them in our prayers!”

Pope Francis also urged people to pray for peace in “martyred Ukraine,” where a Russian missile strike on an apartment building Jan. 14 killed 45 people, including six children.

“A new missile attack claimed many civilian victims, including children. I make the heartbreaking grief of the family members my own,” the pope said.

“The images and testimonies of this tragic episode are a strong appeal to all consciences. One cannot remain indifferent!”
Abortion manager receives humanitarian award

Recently, Tammi Kromenaker, manager of the Red River Women’s Clinic, was bestowed a humanitarian award by the Moorhead City Council after a unanimous “yes” vote by the Moorhead Human Rights Commission.

Though Kromenaker didn’t show up to receive the award herself, at an earlier council meeting before Christmas, Sarah Hader, a local abortion worker, smiled before cameras in receiving the humanitarian award on behalf of her supervisor.

You read that correctly. The manager of our area’s only abortion facility has been publicly honored for her “good works” to facilitate the ending of little lives. No, that isn’t the way the nomination was put forth, but it is the truth.

Deeds such as this seem often to be accomplished in quiet. We didn’t learn of the award until someone happened to see the Moorhead City Council notes from Dec. 12, and noticed the section naming humanitarian award recipients.

One of our local sidewalk advocates felt a response was needed, so she helped organize a petition to protest the move, and began making plans to attend the council’s Jan. 9 meeting to thoughtfully state our grievances.

Shelly Bill was joined by Janine Hanson to represent the pro-life community, but before they were able to offer their three minutes each of testimony, the council’s recently-elected members were sworn in. A TV camera was on hand to record this momentous event, but left as soon as the four mayors from previous terms, the evening’s special guests, had exited the room.

To us pro-lifers, the most urgent item of the evening had yet to come. Unlike the other formalities, we had no smiles or accolades to share; only the fact that babies die and women cry every week, just a few miles down the road.

As Hanson noted in reading the petition, “...we are voicing our opposition to this award,” serving as a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves, “the unborn and the post-abortive women who are too traumatized (to do so).”

Bill noted how changing words, such as from “abortion access” to “healthcare access,” sugarcoats the truth, and that healthcare is technically defined as “various services for the prevention or treatment of illness and injury,” and that abortion doesn’t qualify.

The local abortion facility, she continued, ended the lives of 20 to 25 children weekly last year, and offers two methods for this: by burning or starving them to death by chemicals, or tearing them apart surgically and sucking them from their mother’s womb. “That is not protecting human rights.” Bill invited the council members to come to the facility to witness for themselves the women walking out in tears. “In every abortion, a woman walks in, and someone dies,” she said. “The babies have no form of self-defense.”

Recently, hundreds of thousands gathered at our nation’s capital to speak out on the egregious practice of abortion, as they have been doing since the Supreme Court case Roe vs. Wade was decided in 1973. Despite that case’s revocation in June 2022, our land remains tarnished by the blood of the innocent, and the millions—nay, billions—of dollars exchanged for human souls.

In the nomination letter, a clinic worker of eight years wrote that Kromenaker “didn’t skip a beat when Roe fell.” Instead, “she just dug in and knew she needed to do something to ensure abortion access in our area.”

Not only did she “put herself out there” for abortion access, the letter continued, but “risked her own home life and finances to purchase a location across the (Red) river,” prioritizing patients by using funds raised to help them with fees, hotel, gas, and daycare. “She and her partner have worked almost every single day to make this clinic a reality.”

What if we took all of those tireless efforts to help women and men in these situations, along with the piles of money, and, instead of killing off the children we find inconvenient, seek solutions for aiding the flourishing of life?

Though frustrating to air our views that day and receive only blank stares and awkward grins, I’m glad the 20 or so of us pro-lifers showed up. It’s been said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

God willing, and with his grace, if each of us does something, we can help change the course of the abortion stream filled with dead bodies and broken hearts, once and for all.
Do you know where we are?

The answer will be revealed in the March New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from Our Lady of Peach Church in Mayville.