

New

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Earth

The Magazine of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo

Breaking the shackles of pornography

How the Church is fighting for families

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A Eucharistic Lent

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NEW EARTH

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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.

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A Eucharistic Lent

We are well into the season of Lent now, and I hope it has been a time of grace for all of us. The 40 days of Lent are an image of the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert, praying and fasting to prepare for the mission he had received from his Father. During Lent we too enter into a spiritual desert, with prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, so that we may be purified and enter more deeply into communion with God.

Another important element of our Lenten journey should be the communion we experience with Jesus in the Eucharist. The practice of attending Mass more frequently during Lent is a powerful way to experience the grace of this holy season, because it brings us directly into the mystery of our Lord's death and resurrection. Daily prayer before the Eucharist is a sure way to experience the closeness and the sacrificial love of our Savior.

The Eucharist may be thought of as food for our journey, not only the journey through Lent, but also our entire journey through life. The disciplines of Lent are meant to purify us and stretch us. They help us to receive God's grace more fully and to respond to his commandment of love. We are not alone on that journey. Jesus accompanies us and sustains us, especially through his Body and Blood in the Eucharist. When we pray in his Eucharistic presence, we look on the face of Jesus, who never stops encouraging and lifting us up. When we receive him in Holy Communion, provided we are free from mortal sin, he joins his life to our lives and becomes spiritually one with us. Even beyond the 40 days of Lent, Jesus offers himself to us every day of our lives.

Last summer I visited the Holy Land, and one of our stops was at Mount Carmel where the prophet Elijah did battle with the false prophets of Israel. Afterwards, Elijah fled for his life into the wilderness. Spiritually and physically exhausted, he even prayed for death and then fell asleep. But an angel of the Lord woke him and offered him bread, saying, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you" (1 Kings 19:7). There is a chapel on that site, and the tabernacle is an image of that scene, the angel offering bread to Elijah. This Old Testament episode is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist for all of us. Jesus offers his Body and Blood, and says to each

one of us, "Take and eat, or the journey will be too long for you." Our Lord knows that the journey of this life can be arduous, so he offers himself to us along the way through the Eucharist as our spiritual food.

The Eucharistic Revival that we are now experiencing is a perfect complement to our observance of Lent and Holy Week. Jesus gave himself as a sacrifice for our salvation, and he makes that sacrifice present to us through the Eucharist. He calls us to repentance and conversion of life, and our encounters with him in the Eucharist can strengthen us along the way. When we approach Christ in the Eucharist, we become profoundly aware of our sinfulness, our need for conversion, and our need for God's forgiveness. Ongoing conversion is a key part of our Lenten journey, a turning away from sin and back to God, and the Eucharist fortifies us against the temptation to fall back into sinful ways. Through the Eucharist, Jesus gives us the resolve to make the decisions we need to make if we wish to persevere in holiness.

Perhaps this Lent will be the opportunity for you to return to attending Sunday Mass, or even to attend an additional daily Mass during the week. I started going to weekday Masses during Lent when I was in college, and that practice was life-changing for me. Maybe this Lent will be the occasion to begin a weekly holy hour before our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. If you can't manage a whole hour, perhaps a half hour would be possible. Whatever attention and time we give to our Lord in the Eucharist will be richly repaid many times over. There is no better way to meditate on the passion of Jesus or the Stations of the Cross than in his Eucharistic presence. Praying face to face with Jesus is also a powerful way to examine our conscience and to prepare for the confession of our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

We often think of Lent in terms of what we've "given up." But Lent is about more than giving up certain foods and drinks, television, electronics, or whatever. Lent is about conversion, turning towards union with God through Jesus Christ. The ashes and the fasting of Lent are meant to lead us to Jesus, but the Eucharist is Jesus. During these holy 40 days and beyond, let us turn to Jesus in the sacrifice of his Body and Blood. May we all have a Eucharistic Lent!



Decree

Commuting the Obligation of Abstinence
on the Memorial of St. Patrick
In Nomine Domini. Amen.

Whereas Catholics in the United States are required to observe abstinence from meat on each Friday of Lent (NCCB, *Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence*, n. 13);

Whereas the Memorial of St. Patrick falls on a Friday in Lent this year;

Whereas “during the Lenten season, certain feasts occur which ... local custom traditionally exempts from the Lenten spirit of penance...” which may be regulated at the diocesan level (*ibid.*, n. 16);

Whereas the Diocesan Bishop is competent to dispense or commute from universal and particular disciplinary laws (cc. 87 §1, 1245; *Regulae Juris*, 35);

Therefore, within the territory of the Diocese of Fargo, I hereby commute (that is, replace) the observance of abstinence from meat on Friday, March 17, 2023. Those who wish to make use of this optional provision are instead to observe abstinence from meat on any day between March 13-23, 2023.

+ Most Rev. John T. Folda
Bishop of Fargo

BISHOP FOLDA'S CALENDAR

Mar. 11 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Philip, Napoleon

Mar. 11 at 7 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Transfiguration, Edgeley

Mar. 12 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Aloysius, Lisbon

Mar. 14–15

Catholic Charities General Board Meeting and Retreat, Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 16 at 6:30 p.m.

Synod Regional Listening Session, St. John, Grafton

Mar. 21 at 5:30 p.m.

Operation Andrew Mass and Dinner, St. Joseph, Devils Lake

Mar. 22 at 3 p.m.

St. JP II Schools Board Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 23

Shanley First Nighter, Shanley High School, Fargo

Mar. 28 at 3 p.m.

Diocesan Finance Council, Pastoral Center, Fargo

Mar. 31 at 6 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

Apr. 1 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Anthony, Fargo

Apr. 2 at 10 a.m.

Palm Sunday, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 4 at 11 a.m.

Chrism Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 6 at 7 p.m.

Mass of the Lord's Supper, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 7–10

Pastoral Center closed, Fargo

Apr. 7 at 10 a.m.

Stations of the Cross, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 7 at 3 p.m.

Good Friday Service, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 8 at 8:30 p.m.

Easter Vigil in the Holy Night, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

Apr. 9 at 10 a.m.

Easter Sunday Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo



MONTHLY EUCHARIST MIRACLE

The Eucharistic Miracle of Paris, France

An anti-Christian man stabbed the Blessed Sacrament and was shocked by what happened next

Republished from therealpresence.org (edited for content)

In Paris, France, during the 13th century, there was a man who despised the Catholic Church. He held a festering hatred toward the Church, and this anger led him to lash out. He eventually acquired a consecrated host to fulfill his devious ends. He took the consecrated host and first stabbed it with a knife.

Immediately a stream of blood flowed from the consecrated host. This frightened the man, who never expected anything to happen. He quickly threw the host into the fire, hoping that he could get rid of the strange host. Then the host miraculously floated above the fire. In desperation, the man grabbed the host and threw it in boiling water. He thought the host was gone for

good, but then the host rose out of the water again and took the form of a crucifix.

Greatly troubled at what he witnessed, he entrusted the host to a parishioner, who then brought the consecrated host back to the parish priest. At first, the miraculous host was enshrined in the church of St. Jean-en-Grève, but then was lost during the French Revolution. A chapel was built at the house of the man who stole the Blessed Sacrament and where the desecration occurred, and is now known as the Cloître et église des Billettes.

The miracle brought many to a firm belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.



Prayer Intention of Pope Francis

For victims of abuse: We pray for those who have suffered harm from members of the Church; may they find within the Church herself a concrete response to their pain and suffering.



Dear St. Therese, as we celebrate this year the 150th anniversary of your birth, we pray with you to the Holy Face of Jesus.

"O Face, more beautiful than the lilies and roses of springtime! You are not hidden from our eyes... The Tears that veil Your divine look seem to us like precious Diamonds which we want to collect to buy the souls of our sisters with their infinite value."

We offer these tears of Jesus for the souls destined to be Carmelites in our Community.



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PRAYER FOR PRIESTS



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

How can I teach my children to pray?



ASK A PRIEST

FATHER STEVEN WIRTH

Pastor of churches in Fessenden, Esmond, and Maddock

Teaching our children to pray in today's world is no easy task. With new forms of communication and entertainment that seem designed to limit our children's attention span, how can we teach them to set aside a bit of time to spend with God in prayer? You help them form a habit of prayer.

First, we should start teaching prayer when our children are young. In fact, I think the earlier we start the easier it will be. Do you have a talkative preschooler? Teach her some prayers. Do you have a babbling toddler? Say some prayers with him. Do you have an unspeaking infant? Pray while holding her. Are you carrying a child in your womb? Pray with him (that would be awesome and super pro-life!). I don't think there is a bottom age limit of when we can start praying with our children.

What is the benefit of starting so young? It will help your child to form the virtue of prayer. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines virtue as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (CCC 1803). In other words, virtues are good habits. A large part of parenting is forming good habits/virtues in your children. Prayer is no different. If you're concerned that your child will not understand what he or she is praying, don't worry. Understanding can always come later, but the habit can be formed now. I remember as a kid while praying the Glory Be, I always wondered who Shelby was ("ever shall be" vs. "Shelby"). I figured it out eventually.

What do I teach them at such a young age? You can start with the basic memorized prayers: the Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Prayer Before Meals. Just as important as the words of the prayers is the habit of praying at regular times: praying before meals, while waiting for the school bus, after supper, before bed, or before doing homework (a virtue double-dip: they learn to pray and do homework at a reasonable time).

Children in later elementary years will be able to grow in their understanding of prayer. They can learn what the words of the prayers mean. They can develop a more conversational style of prayer. One form of prayer that we taught at our diocesan Young Disciples summer camps is praying in three steps to God as our PAL (Praise, Ask, Listen). First you and your children can

take turns offering praise and thanks to God. Then you can take turns asking God for the things you need or praying for other people. Lastly you spend some silent time to pause and listen to God, after which there can be a period of sharing. PAL prayer teaches our children that they can talk to God and that he can speak back to them.

Teenagers like to "graduate" from kiddy stuff. If your teenager (especially a high school junior or senior) has this desire when it comes to prayer, you might introduce them to something more advanced. When I was at Cardinal Muench Seminary, I was introduced to a type of scriptural prayer called *Lectio Divina*. The basic version is a slow, quiet reading of a small passage of scripture. As I pray with the scripture, I pay attention to the words that stand out. God can then speak using those words. For more information, check out www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/prayer/personal-prayer-life/different-ways-to-pray/lectio-divina.

Lastly, I advise praying together as a family. This is good for all ages. Pick a set time when you're typically all together. Maybe it's daily, maybe it's once a week. You can pray the rosary together (in whole or in part). You could pray PAL prayer together. You can take turns telling God one thing you're thankful for, one thing you want help with, one person you want to pray for, and maybe a moment for silent prayer. You can have the older children teach the younger ones their prayers. It can be a time of rest for your family from the busy world.

Giving your children the virtue/habit of prayer is one of the greatest gifts you can give them. You don't have to do it perfectly. You don't even have to be good at it yourself. You might even be learning how to pray alongside them. If you take the time to show them that prayer is important in your life and in theirs, you will help them develop a solid habit of prayer.



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Entering into the mystery of the Eucharist

By Steven Splonskowski | Office of Evangelization for the Diocese of Fargo

The Eucharist is described as the source and summit of the Catholic faith and of our lives. This great sacrament is prefigured throughout the Old and New Testaments. Yet, how do I understand this and make it my own? How do I enter into this mysterious concept? The word “source” makes me think of rivers and lakes. They are all connected to a reservoir and a source that makes them possible and sustains them. The word “summit” makes me think of mountains that we look at and admire from afar at times, and at other times, on which we stand and admire the view they provide.

As I ponder this great Sacrament of the Eucharist, recall that a sacrament is a visible reality that makes present an invisible reality. It is something visible that makes the invisible more knowable and accessible. In order to enter this great mystery I invite you to consider the following passage from Psalm 1:

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

The second half of this verse is what I think of when I hear the Eucharist described as the source and summit of our Catholic life. The Eucharist makes us that person who is “like a tree planted by streams of water” and allows us to yield good fruit and to prosper in the work we do to build up the kingdom. And how do we take this experience of the Eucharist at Mass with us to be that living stream? As Psalm 1 says: “blessed is he who delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night.” The law of the Lord is his Word. As mentioned, the Eucharist is pre-figured/pre-announced and slowly revealed to us in both the Old and New Testaments.

So how do we come to understand the Eucharist as this source and summit? I suggest that it’s through studying and praying with Scripture. I am not telling you anything new or revealing to you anything we don’t already know, because if we look at the structure of the Mass, this is already present. Each Mass begins with the penitential rite where we acknowledge that we are creatures standing before a benevolent creator, our source, our beginning, and our sustaining grace, and we acknowledge that we have fallen short of reflecting his goodness in our actions. We once had the tree of life in our midst when we were in the garden, but that wasn’t enough for our first parents. They, like us, desired more prestige and power and so in pride disobeyed God’s command and took fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because

(Photo by Cathopic)

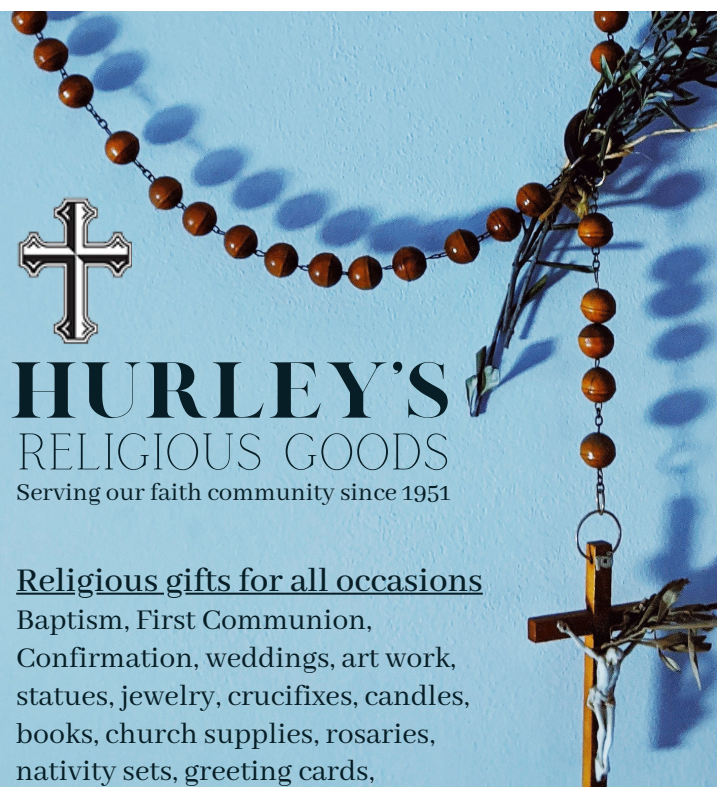


stood apart from this great God. But while we were yet sinners, he sent his son from the summit down to us to show us the way to eternal salvation. Next, we enter into the Liturgy of the Word. Here we encounter the law of God and we enter into a reflection and a dialogue with him, the source, so that we might delight in that law which frees us from the slavery of sin and guides us up to that summit of holiness.

Finally, we have the Liturgy of the Eucharist and we enter into Christ’s passion. Like Isaac, Abraham’s only son, Jesus, God’s only son, carries the wood on his shoulders for the sacrifice and is himself the sacrifice. He was raised up onto the cross to heal the world, as the seraph was put up onto a pole to heal the Israelites in the desert. Remember they had been bitten by serpents and were dying, but if they looked up and gazed upon the seraph, they were healed. So too we receive his precious Body and Blood as that source of life. Each part of the Mass points to this summit, this final act that saves us. Then we are sent out to proclaim this to the world and delight in it day and night.

How can we understand the Eucharist as the source and summit of our Catholic life? For me the most powerful thing has been at each Mass to ponder these mysteries and to take an active role of participating in the Mass with my entire being. I examine my week quietly before Mass so that at the penitential rite, I am truly acknowledging my faults and asking others to pray for me. I like to close my eyes during the readings and the homily and to ponder and meditate on what the Lord is saying without any distractions. When we enter into the Liturgy of the Eucharist, I place all my worldly cares on the altar as an offering when the priest says “lift up your hearts,” and I focus on the prayers he presents on our behalf to God. At the words of consecration, “this is my body; this is my blood,” I close my eyes and imagine Christ standing at the altar saying these words, and as the host is raised, I pray interiorly the words of St. Thomas: “My Lord and my God.” When the chalice is raised, I pray the prayer: “Lord by your most precious Body and Blood you have saved the world.”

How do we enter into this mystery and make it our own? We meditate on the Word of God. We ponder it at each Mass, and we let it seep into our hearts until we find ourselves pondering it day and night. This gives us a delight that is beyond compare, and through it, we bear fruit.



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Synod listening sessions highlight successes and challenges

By Kristina Lahr and Paul Braun | New Earth



By the time you're reading this, the synod listening sessions will be just about over. Sixteen parishes throughout the Diocese of Fargo hosted sessions for prayer and discussion about how parishes and the diocese can more effectively fulfill the great commission: "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

The sessions begin with adoration, a presentation by Bishop Folda, scripture, and reflection. Participants then gather in groups for small and large group discussion. The Synod will culminate with the Synod Assembly in April 2024. On average, about 50-100 people gathered for each session to share what's going well, what challenges we have, and how the Holy Spirit is personally calling them to respond to current needs of the Church.

"There's a lot of people concerned about the future of the Church," said Bev McAlister, parishioner of St. Bernard's Church in Oriska, "and this is our opportunity to be with likeminded people and discuss some of those concerns and what we can do to make things better."

Bev said she was "pleasantly surprised" by the listening session in Valley City Feb. 7.

"I was a little pessimistic coming in thinking 'is this going to be helpful?' And I really felt that it was. I felt inspired and hopeful. We have a beautiful church and we need to work harder to keep it alive and well. We have our work cut out for us."

Leela Grim, parishioner at St. Catherine's Church in Valley City, said she was happy to see a variety of parishes represented.

"When we get together to share our concerns and what we appreciate, then we inspire each other. It's edifying to see that people care and are involved in their faith. We'll make progress because the spirit is working. I love my faith. I love my church."

It's gifted me with many of the needs I had as a spouse and parent. My faith touches every aspect of my life. I've tried to be a part of whatever is offered because it's a pure gift."

Each listening session generates varied responses, depending on the parishes. On Feb. 15 at St. Ann's Indian Mission in Belcourt, there were parishioners braving the weather conditions to attend from neighboring churches, including members from St. Michael's Church in Dunseith and Immaculate Heart of Mary in Rock Lake.

What attendees thought were working well included adoration, availability of sacraments, and opportunities for daily Mass. They also appreciated going to confession while Mass is going on at St. Ann's Church. They also felt outreach for kids, the homebound, and youth ministry was going well.

Challenges facing many parishes across the diocese included welcoming people back to Mass after the COVID-19 shutdowns and drawing back those who left the Church when they were young. Other concerns include encouraging families to pray together and the need for more priests and volunteers. A unique concern for the Belcourt area was the need to provide transportation to the church. The overwhelming call to respond, according to participants, was prayer, prayer, prayer, along with inviting other people to volunteer and be involved.

The next step is for diocesan, deanery, and parish representatives to look over the information presented at the sessions and discuss the issues that will be brought forth at the Diocesan Synod, scheduled for April 11-13, 2024.



Listening session attendees gather for adoration prior to discussion on Feb. 7 at St. Catherine's Church in Valley City. (Mary Hanbury | Diocese of Fargo)

Shanley High School, Fargo, wins 2023 “Know Your Faith” competition

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth



Shanley Seniors Jacob Mayo, Keegan Walker, and Gio Nasello with their 2023 Know Your Faith championship trophy. (submitted photo)

The Shanley High School Know Your Faith team, made up of seniors Jacob Mayo, Gio Nasello, and Keegan Walker, took top honors at the state Know Your Faith competition, held on Feb. 1 at Dickinson Trinity High School in Dickinson. In the three regular rounds, the Shanley team missed only one question as they amassed 800 points. The final question was complex, and no team answered it correctly. The Shanley team’s shrewd wagering left them with 541 points, easily the best among the five Catholic high schools.

This same team won the competition in 2021 as sophomores. Congratulations to this two-time state champion “dream team!” Shanley has now garnered the esteemed State Know Your Faith Trophy five times in its 12 years of competing in the event.

The Know Your Faith competition is an annual event held during Catholic Schools Week, and features high school teams from Shanley in Fargo, St. Mary’s in Bismarck, Dickinson Trinity in Dickinson, Bishop Ryan in Minot, and Sacred Heart in East Grand Forks, Minn.



Quotable

**St. Dominic
Savio**

Feast day March 9

“Nothing seems tiresome or painful when you are working for a Master who pays well; who rewards even a cup of cold water given for love of Him.”

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(Photo by Cathopic)

Breaking the shackles of pornography

How the Church is fighting for families

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

Brandon knew he had a problem. Much of his time was spent viewing pornography over the internet. Despite the shame he felt, he stubbornly refused to get help by convincing himself that it wasn't that bad of a problem and that he could fix it on his own without struggling and dragging his marriage down. But after a major fight with his wife over the subject and her making an ultimatum that he get help or lose his marriage, Brandon decided he needed to take the problem seriously.

Brandon is typical of millions of adults, both men and women, who struggle with or are addicted to pornography. Recent studies reveal that 40 million adults in the United States alone regularly visit pornographic websites. Sixty-four percent of adult men and 42% of adult women say they view pornography at least monthly. Sixty-three percent of young men ages 18–30 say they view porn once a week, and 19% of young women say they also view porn at least once a week.

More alarmingly is the rising use of porn among teens and young adults, and their attitudes concerning the use of porn. On average, boys see pornography by the time they are 13, and girls by the time they are 17. Only 43% of teens and young

adults feel that porn is bad for society. In fact, some studies indicate that teens and young adults ages 13–24 believe that not recycling is worse than viewing pornography. Porn is a multi-billion dollar industry in the U.S. and is readily available on personal devices and computers. This makes nearly anyone of any age susceptible to pornography at some point in their lives.

In 2015, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at their general assembly recognized the problem that pornography was causing in society. The bishops approved the formal statement, "Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography." One response to the alarm sounded by the U.S. Bishops in that document is an annual observance in dioceses and parishes across the country called Safe Haven Sunday. Safe Haven Sunday seeks to draw attention to the harm done by pornography to individuals, couples, and families. It also seeks to help equip parents to



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safeguard their homes from the influence of pornography through prayer and practical tools.

The Diocese of Fargo participates in Safe Haven Sunday, and the event was most recently held March 4–5. The diocese's Safe Haven Sunday program is directed by the Office of Marriage and Family Life. Director Brad Gray says the effort is still in its infancy in the diocese, but some participating parishes have seen positive results.

"There are a few (parishes) that have responded with some really great results," said Gray. "A father who had learned that some of his sons were struggling with pornography began a routine plan of regular check-ins with his boys. That has been not only a valuable way of combatting the infiltration of pornography into their home, but it also has provided a valuable means of connection within the family. There are also institutions that, on account of Safe Haven Sunday, discovered that their cybersecurity with regard to pornography was inadequate and were able to make the necessary corrections to that vulnerability."

Brandon's struggles with pornography came between him and his wife, and even threatened to end their marriage.

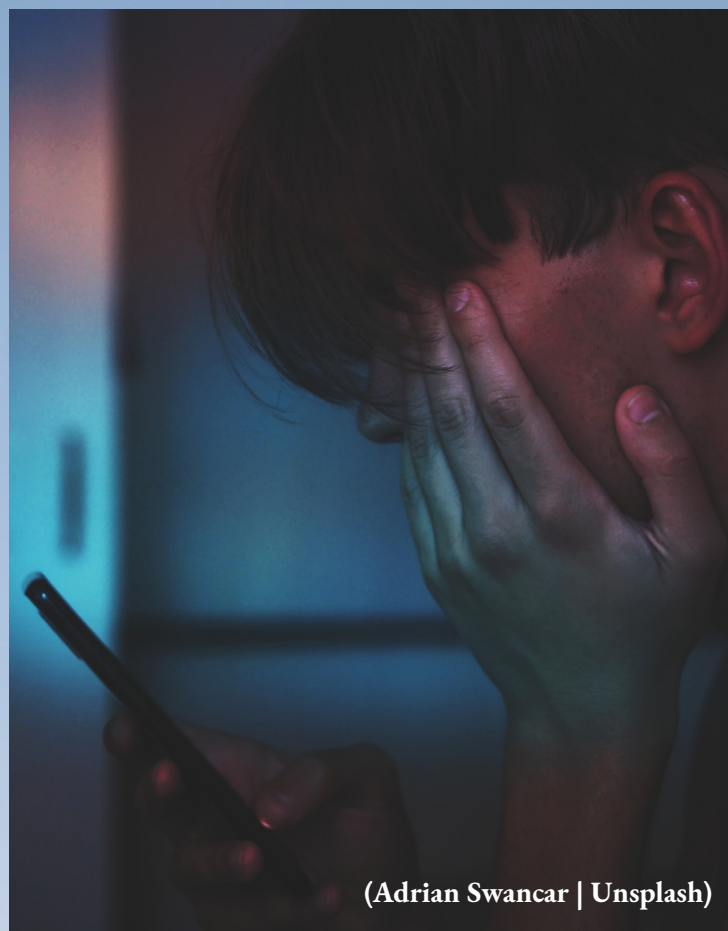
"My wife told me that I either needed to get help or move out," said Brandon. "In that moment, I saw everything crumbling, like when you pick up a handful of sand and watch it slip away from your grasp. It wasn't a difficult decision at that point. I was about to lose everything if I didn't take a corrective course immediately. This didn't mean that the work wasn't tough. I had to watch my wife unpack years of trauma, knowing that I caused much of that betrayal she was experiencing. Yet, I knew that this is the way it had to be if I wanted to have a healthy marriage again."

Through a friend, Brandon sought help through a program called Covenant Eyes, the company that was inspired to start the Safe Haven Sunday effort. Covenant Eyes provides support, information, and accountability software to help those struggling with pornography find the strength and wherewithal to break free from the habit of viewing porn.

"It was like a fog lifting after many years of struggle," said Brandon. "I could finally see clearly the impacts of what was happening. I saw that I had more time to pursue my wife's heart and step up more in areas that she needed me. I have seen a healing in our marriage that would not have been possible if I didn't take the ultimatum I was given seriously."

Working with Covenant Eyes, both Brandon and his wife learned how to heal from Brandon's addiction, through his taking ownership of the problem and her forgiveness and willingness to help Brandon through his struggles.

"Working together through this as a couple has been eye opening and healing," said Brandon. "It has brought us closer than we have ever been before. Trust has grown exponentially,



(Adrian Swancar | Unsplash)



(Nathan Dumlao | Unsplash)

and it has given us an empathetic heart for those who struggle as well. We see how much God's love and mercy has been present in our lives, and we know that he extends that same love and mercy to all his children. I deal with temptations to relapse by remembering what I have to lose. I don't foresee temptations going away altogether in this area, because I know that I am weak when it comes to the sin of lust. Yet, I know that falling back into this trap would tear down what we have worked so hard to build over the past five years. Having children now also brings this to the next level because I never want them to have the burden of what I struggled with for over 15 years of my life. I make sure I am transparent in all areas, and we both watch what we consume when it comes to media to avoid that near occasion of sin. I also keep accountability software on my phone and have an ally who I work with to provide an extra layer of protection."

Brandon is now part of the Covenant Eyes team, working closely with parishes in the Diocese of Fargo as a Church Marketing Specialist and co-host for the Covenant Eyes podcast. He openly talks about his struggles so that others may benefit from the program that has helped him. He says that pornography is an equal opportunity destroyer. Everyone is at risk because of how prevalent our oversexualized culture is in the many areas we come into contact with each day. He says he's especially concerned about how children are at risk.

"The internet, several video games, and social media are designed to lure youth into traps, and it is very easy to find pornography on each of them, even when they are not looking

for it," says Brandon. "Many people we work with (at Covenant Eyes) have pornography problems that began with exposure in their childhood. That's why it's so important for parents to be intentional in their parenting. Invest in relationships with your children. Know who their friends are. Know what they are consuming when it comes to media and put limits on technology use. Another important piece of the puzzle is keeping all devices protected, usually through accountability software and parental controls. At younger ages, we should be blocking all we can to prevent exposure. As our children grow older, we are able to introduce the conversations of accountability and being responsible, allowing us to back off on some of the parental controls. The goal is to train our children to be responsible with devices and to know what to do if they do come into contact with pornography. We don't want to set our kids up for failure by blocking everything for 18 years and not having conversations with them throughout those years. Because guess what happens when they encounter pornography when they are no longer in the home."

There is helpful information on the Diocese of Fargo website, under the office of Marriage and Family Life, for those who are struggling with pornography (fargodiocese.org/breakingfree), and for parents who want to keep the scourge of pornography away from their children (fargodiocese.org/safehaven). There are resources on the USCCB website about their "Create in Me a Clean Heart" anti-pornography initiative (usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/pornography) and information about Safe Haven Sunday, on the Covenant Eyes website (covenanteyes.com).



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TATTERED PAGES

A review of Catholic books, movies, music

A story of three brothers and three fathers

By Nathan Carr | Director of Campus Ministry at St. Paul's Newman Center, Fargo

The importance of fatherhood has perhaps never been more apparent than in our current time. Jesus' mission itself can be understood as him revealing the Father's merciful love to God's fallen children (cf. Matt. 11:27, John 17:25–26). St. Paul brings further emphasis on the importance of fatherhood by teaching, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Understanding fatherhood from the vantage of theology is important, but knowledge alone may not move the heart. What the theologian lacks, the artist provides. Such is the case regarding the fruits of fatherhood portrayed in the classic Russian novel *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Dostoevsky weaves a compelling tale about three brothers Mitya (Dmitri), Ivan, and Alyosha (Alexey) and their relationships with one another and with their father Fyodor Pavlovitch. While the brothers are the central characters of the story in the narrative, underlying their complex and often extreme personalities is the impact their father had on them as boys and how the presence or absence of spiritual fatherhood later in life healed the damage done by their earthly father. In this light, this expansive novel can be understood, not merely as a story of three brothers but also a story of three fathers.

Fyodor Pavlovitch, a self-indulgent hedonist whose aim in life is to consummate one debauchery after another, gained his fortune mainly through marriages to his two deceased wives. Rather than securing a future and a heritage for his three sons, he neglected their upbringing, leaving them to be raised by the butler or sent them away to distant cities. The poisonous fruit born from this neglect is immediately apparent in the extreme caustic and often volatile personality of the oldest son Mitya, and in the arrogant atheism of the middle son, Ivan. However, the youngest son, Alyosha, is of a much different character.

In the beginning of the story, Alyosha is a novice in a nearby monastery and is under the guidance of his spiritual elder, Father Zossima. Alyosha's personality and character is a polar opposite from that of his brothers. He is described as a lover of humanity and one who sought escape, "from the darkness of worldly wickedness to the light of love." Throughout the novel, he brings peace and harmony to those he encounters through his constant appeal to mercy, reconciliation, and truth. As Father Zossima lay dying, he declared to Alyosha, "You will

have many enemies, but even your foes will love you. Life will bring you many misfortunes, but you will find your happiness in them, and will bless life and will make others bless it." This prophetic utterance from spiritual father to spiritual son bestowed a destiny upon Alyosha much as the prophet Elijah bestowed his mantle upon Elisha, or Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

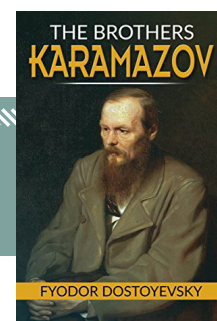
If the reprobate father Fyodor Pavlovitch is the first father and Father Zossima is the second father, Alyosha himself becomes the third father figure. Throughout the book, Alyosha encounters groups of younger boys who are often at odds with one another, and filled with their own pride and vices. As the book comes to a close, the final scene sees Alyosha lead these grief-stricken boys in mourning the loss of a local boy, Ilusha. Exhorting the group of boys, Alyosha proclaimed, "Ah, children, ah dear friends, don't be afraid of life! How good life is when one does something good and just!"

Asked by the boy Kolya, "Can it be true what's taught us in religion, that we shall all rise again from the dead and shall live and see each other again, all, Ilusha too?"

"Certainly, we shall all rise again, certainly we shall... and tell each other with joy and gladness all that has happened," Alyosha answered.

The father sows into the destiny of his children but does not determine it. Fyodor Pavlovitch sowed seeds of weeds from the enemy into his children. While Mitya and Ivan proceeded from their wicked father to a dark end, Alyosha did not. The good seed of righteousness sown in him by Father Zossima took root within him, and he himself grew into a shelter of fatherly love for the gang of young boys. Through the course of this great work of literature, both theologian and artist can agree, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

"The Brothers Karamazov"
by Fyodor Dostoevsk, 1880.





Gaze on the Lord's beauty

A look at Catholic images

Eucharistic Crucifixion by Raphael

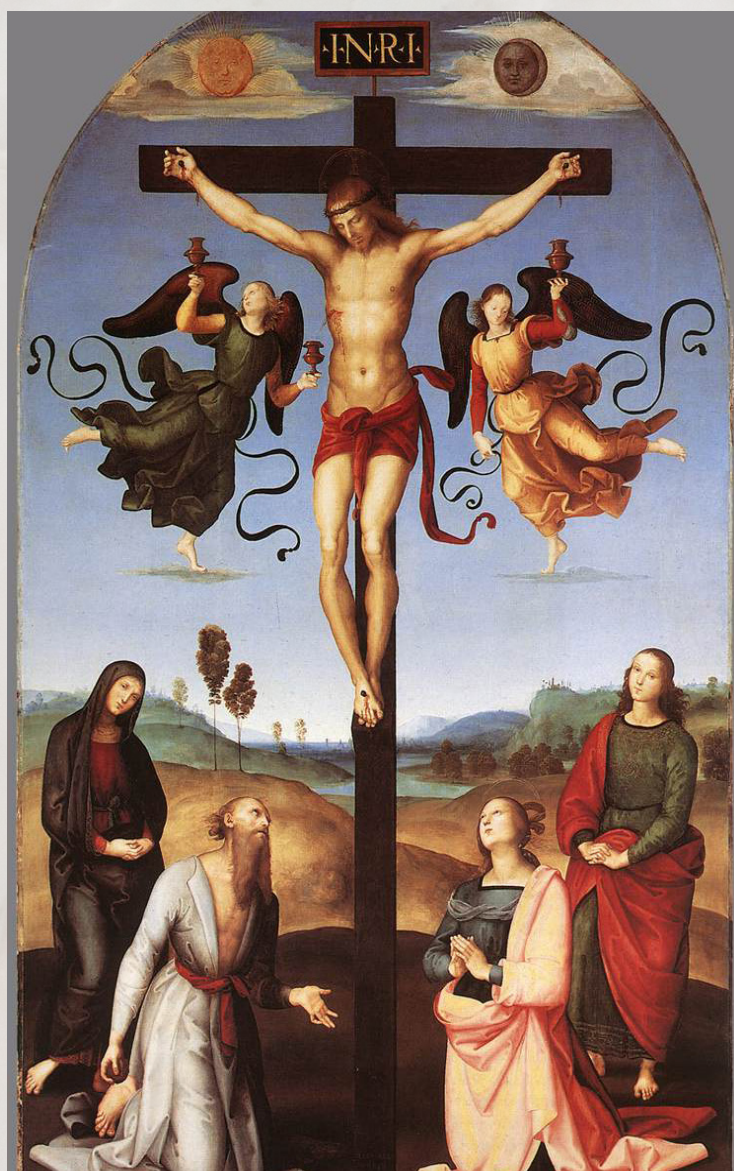
By Mary Hanbury | Director of Catechesis for the Diocese of Fargo

You might think at first glance that this is a typical crucifixion painting from the time of the Renaissance, but look closer and you will see the Eucharistic theme. This was one of Raphael's earlier works commissioned by a wool merchant who had a son named Jerome. The son died at a young age and this was painted for the son's burial chapel in Castello, Italy. This panel is part of a larger altarpiece dedicated to St. Jerome, thus he is shown in the picture kneeling at the foot of the cross.

Notice how the background behind the crucifixion scene is blue sky and rolling hills with a water source in the middle. It's pleasant and peaceful. However, as you get closer to the crucifixion scene, the darkness develops. We know from scripture that darkness came over the land until three in the afternoon (Matt. 27:45). Raphael does not show the whole land in darkness as the crucifixion takes place, perhaps because the painting would be too dark and Raphael generally worked with a lot of color. Regardless of the intention, it does help the viewer understand how the mood switched from happiness (entry into Jerusalem) to then the sadness and fear of the crucifixion.

The sun and moon at the top represent all of creation in the sorrow of the death of Christ and yet redemption for all. The water source in the middle of the cross was placed as a background focal point for a reason; it represents baptism. We are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are raised up out of the baptismal water with new life as we set out on our journey into fertile land as a new child of God, hence the blue sky and rolling hills. So from the darkness of the cross, we have hope of life to come. Also, notice how the two angels are using chalices to capture the blood that comes out of Jesus from his suffering. They too know what is to come and are a reminder to us that the wine becomes the Blood of Christ in the Mass.

It might seem to be a casual scene at the foot of the cross. No one seems particularly upset. Notice how each person at the foot of the cross is in a different position. This is our clue that there is much more going on here than the emotions of the moment. St. Jerome is the penitent asking for forgiveness. He is holding a stone to beat his breast in one hand. We do something similar at Mass when we strike our breast with our hand to show penance and sorrow for our sins. His other hand is outstretched to catch the blood coming from Christ on the cross. It shows he is seeking healing through the touch of Christ's blood. We too seek healing and life when we receive the Eucharist. Mary Magdalene is kneeling in adoration and



Raphael Crucifixion. National Gallery, London.
1502–1503

thanksgiving. She is thankful and full of love for our Lord. Look at her face as she looks up at him. She has received much from Jesus which shows from her body position, much like us after we receive communion. The Blessed Mother is standing and looking out at us. In sacred art when the figure looks out at the viewer, it is always an invitation to us. What could she be inviting us to? We are invited to enter into this scene as it is meant for us.



Love from the Sacred Heart

By Audrea McGee | Mother of four and parishioner of St. Michael's in Grand Forks

I grew up going to Mass only on Christmas and Easter most years. Even though faith was little more than “you do good, you get good,” every night, my mother would pray a Hail Mary and an Our Father with me. The simple act of praying before bed was comforting, and set a foundation for seeing Mary as my mother and comforter. After two years of community college, I moved across the country to attend the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks.

My time at UND was more than an education; it was a conversion of heart. The Lord knew I needed to be out on my own to see how I needed him, to recognize my lifelong desire to be loved, and to pursue that desire. After a Protestant friend asked me if I wanted to be baptized, I decided to start figuring out what Catholics actually believe. I started listening to EWTN, and whenever I was feeling homesick, I'd go to Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center. I began attending an inquiry RCIA class, and was fascinated with the Church and with what she taught. I attended a Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) conference, which was the push I needed to live the faith I needed. Having never been confirmed, I received the Sacrament of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil of 2013.

In June of 2014, one of my roommates mentioned the upcoming feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I hadn't heard of it before but was comforted by it. I felt sure of my vocation to marriage but was frustrated with dating, so I decided to ask Jesus to bury me and my future husband in His Most Sacred Heart. Then I left dating alone.

On Nov. 2, 2014 after Mass a man came up to me and said, “Hi, Audrea, would you like to go on a date with me next Sunday?” I replied yes. His response was, “Great! See you then.” He then turned and walked away (remembering that moment still makes me laugh!). In August of 2015, he arranged to take me flying in a small airplane (we were both flight instructors for UND Aerospace). He told me we were flying to Hillsboro where a friend would pick us up and drive to a friend's farm for a bonfire. He gave me a tour of the farm. Afterwards, he got down on one knee and said, “I love you, Audrea. Will you marry me?” I was overjoyed! He caught me completely off guard. We then went inside, and many of our friends were there. The party was actually an engagement party!

We started looking at dates the next day, and I tried to find

a special feast day. Nothing stood out, so we settled on June 3, 2016, based mostly on the reception venue. In December, I picked up a new Catholic calendar, and naturally went straight to June to see what my wedding day looked like. Jesus always answers prayers. That year, the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart was on June 3! I had forgotten my earlier prayers to the Sacred Heart until that moment.

Jesus has continued to manifest the love of his Sacred Heart in our marriage. For example, our first child's name is Margaret. We did not like the name at first, but we later felt so much at peace with it that we kept it. It was only later that I discovered that the vision of the Sacred Heart appeared to St. Margaret Mary. Then on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart in 2018 and 2020, we found out that I was pregnant. We gave our relationship to the Lord, and he continues to transform it for his glory, showing us and reminding us of the love of his Sacred Heart.

The Promises of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary

1. I will give them all the graces necessary in their state of life.
2. I will establish peace in their homes.
3. I will comfort them in all their afflictions.
4. I will be their secure refuge during life, and above all, in death.
5. I will bestow abundant blessings upon all their undertakings.
6. Sinners will find in my Heart the source and infinite ocean of mercy.
7. Lukewarm souls shall become fervent.
8. Fervent souls shall quickly mount to high perfection.
9. I will bless every place in which an image of my Heart is exposed and honored.
10. I will give to priests the gift of touching the most hardened hearts.
11. Those who shall promote this devotion shall have their names written in my Heart.
12. I promise you in the excessive mercy of my Heart that my all-powerful love will grant to all those who receive Holy Communion on the First Fridays in nine consecutive months the grace of final perseverance; they shall not die in my disgrace, nor without receiving their sacraments. My divine Heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.

Some critics of religion need to pick up their game



WORD ON FIRE

BISHOP ROBERT BARRON

Theologian and evangelist, known for his Word on Fire ministry. Bishop of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, Minn.

Recently, I had the privilege of sitting down with Lex Fridman for a wide-ranging two-hour conversation. Lex is a professor of robotics and artificial intelligence at MIT and a popular podcaster. In this latter capacity, he has spoken to significant players in a number of fields—Joe Rogan, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and Sam Harris, to name just a few. Though his main interests are in the arenas of science and technology, he is quite open to discussing matters of a more philosophical and even religious nature. Fridman has an engaging style—not argumentative and confrontational, but rather curious, inquisitive. In the course of our two hours together, we talked about God, Jesus, life after death, morality, modernity, Nietzsche, Jordan Peterson, the Bible, faith, and the meaning of life.

Judging from the thousands of comments, the general reaction from his tech-oriented audience was quite positive. Many were pleased to hear a serious conversation about matters that went beyond what the sciences can describe. However, I don't want to focus on the encouraging reactions, but rather on the critical ones—and there were plenty of them—for they tell us about what young secularists are thinking in regard to religion.

The most common negative reaction was that I was speaking “gobbledygook,” or tossing a “word salad,” or “using lots of words to say nothing at all.” Much of this critique was focused on my opening exchange with the interviewer. Lex asked me very simply, “Who is God?” I responded, not sentimentally or piously, but rather in the technical language of philosophy. I said that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* (the sheer act of being itself), in contradistinction to anything other than God, in which essence and existence are distinguished. I went on to clarify the meaning of these terms in the manner of Thomas Aquinas, attempting to be as precise and technically correct as possible. To be sure, there are many ways to talk about God, but I chose, with Lex's audience in mind, to use a more intellectual approach.

What most struck me in regard to my critics is that none of them engaged the argument or endeavored to formulate a counter-position; they simply pronounced that what I was saying was gibberish. Anyone vaguely acquainted with the Western philosophical tradition would know that I was operating out of a system of thought developed by some of the most brilliant thinkers in the tradition: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Boethius, Plotinus, Bonaventure, and yes, Thomas Aquinas. It was, to be

sure, not scientific speech, but it was perfectly rational, philosophically disciplined speech. That so many commenting simply did not know what I was talking about was a sobering reminder of how narrow our educational system has become. In my responses to some of these critics, I said, “Would you accuse a theoretical physicist, who was using the technical language of his discipline, of ‘word salad,’ if you did not immediately understand him? Wouldn't you perhaps summon the humility to admit that you had a lot to learn?” I am reminded of something Cardinal Francis George used to say—namely, that before we can even broach the question of the relation between science and religion, we have to reintroduce people to philosophy, the rational discipline that effectively mediates between them.

The second most common criticism was that my very Catholicism disqualified me. “How can you listen to a representative of the most corrupt institution in history?” complained one commentator. “Religion—especially the Catholic religion—is responsible for the deaths of millions,” said another. Here is my favorite: “Of all the differing variations of Christianity, Catholicism is by far the most cynical, repugnant, crass variant. It's done more harm to the human species than any other religion, it's kept us back from progressing.” How anyone, after the murderous secularist and atheist regimes of the 20th century, which piled up tens of millions of corpses, can, with a straight face, argue that Roman Catholicism is the source of the greatest corruption in history simply beggars belief. This sort of canard can only be construed as the result of the intentionally distorted recounting of history far too typical in our colleges and universities. This is a cheap trick of our “woke” era: identify your opponent as a member of a supposedly oppressive group, cancel him, and thereby conveniently avoid any obligation to make an argument or respond to one. Also, even if we grant (as we should) that lots of Catholics have behaved badly in the course of a 2,000 year history, what precisely does this prove? That Catholicism is essentially corrupt? That its doctrines, sacraments, liturgies, saints, and culture are fatally compromised? Hardly. That human beings are a bad lot? Sure—and in point of fact, the Catholic teaching regarding the ongoing effects of original sin even in those who are baptized would lead us to expect as much. In a word, this sort of criticism is little more than a red herring, an intentional distraction from the issue at hand.

Over the years, I have made suggestions as to how we religious people can improve our evangelical strategies, but I wonder whether I might offer a challenge to those too ready to dismiss religious claims out of hand. First, don't cavalierly characterize philosophy as “word salad,” and perhaps even study it. And second, drop the woke posturing and have the courage to enter into real argument with those who don't share your worldview.



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SEMINARIAN LIFE

GREGORY SPLONSKOWSKICollege II at St. Gregory the Great
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When I felt the initial call to seminary, I was less than thrilled. At the time, I considered seminary to mean a dull life of prayer and studying, all in preparation to become a priest. Additionally, my previous experience of leaving home for an extended time consisted of Basic Military Training, followed by isolation and mentally challenging training. Looking back, I think that this experience had a significant impact on my expectations for seminary.

However, a huge turning point for me was to shift my perspective in prayer. Instead of constantly asking the Lord whether he was calling me to seminary, I prayed that if it were his will that I go, he would give me the grace and courage to say yes. This prayer yielded a significant amount of peace and helped me to move forward in my decision to go to seminary. In addition to this, I was able to spend time with some of my brother seminarians as a camp counselor and during the annual week of fraternity before leaving for St. Gregory's. This time and the stories of my brother seminarians helped to dispel some of my fears and preconceived notions of what seminary was like.

My first week at seminary quickly put whatever remaining fears I had to rest. The moment I arrived, I had two or three guys welcome me and help me unpack. The next day was spent playing outdoor games, tackling obstacle courses, and a high-wire challenge. All the returning seminarians were welcoming and quick to assist in any way and bonds quickly formed. This was followed by a two-day silent retreat, moving from human to spiritual formation. The first gospel reflection for our retreat was the Baptism of Jesus. What especially struck me from this were the words of God the Father, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." These words struck me instantly, and I felt that the Lord was speaking directly to my heart.

Fast forward a couple of months, and we were making a three-day silent retreat on our return from Christmas break. Sure enough, one of the verses given to me for meditation was the Baptism of Jesus and again, those same words struck me again, an overwhelming reminder that I was indeed God's beloved son.

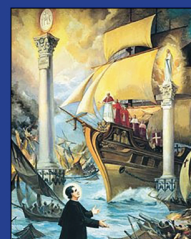
The beauty of surrender

We are now well on our way into the spring semester. Those bonds which were formed in the first few days have continued to grow, and I've found a true brotherhood that is firmly rooted in Christ in my fellow seminarians. In addition to this, those words that were so potent in my first few days, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" have continued to reverberate and take root in my heart. Thanks to my formation director, spiritual director, and daily prayer, the theme of surrendering to the love of the Father and truly becoming his son has been consistent throughout my time at seminary. Repeatedly, the Lord has shown me that I am indeed his son, and he has called me to "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."

I can say that, no matter what my vocation might be in life, my time at the seminary has been incredible. The Lord has been lavish in his generosity and has taught me the beauty of surrender to his will.

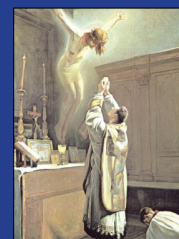
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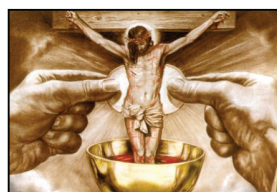
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How bishops take positions on bills



CATHOLIC ACTION

CHRISTOPHER DODSON

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

Every legislative session—except during the pandemic—the North Dakota Catholic Conference hosts a dinner for legislators. The dinner provides an opportunity for the bishops and conference board members to show their appreciation for our elected officials and enjoy a time of fellowship and a meal. As a rule, we do not engage in any lobbying and do not make the legislators sit through a presentation.

This year was different. The new ethics law, ironically, requires such events to include lobbying, which the Ethics Commission calls “an educational component.”

To comply with the new law, I gave a short talk on the sources and the process that the bishops use when they take a position on a bill. Because Catholics in the state might also wonder how the process works, what follows is a revised version of my talk.

It starts with Sacred Scripture. All of it, from Genesis to Revelation, divinely reveals the truths about the human person, the ordering of society, and our interactions with each other. This is especially true for the Gospels because Christ is the complete Revelation.

In fact, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which was promulgated by St. John Paul II to summarize the Church’s social doctrine, cites Scripture over 600 times. Everything the North Dakota Catholic Conference does is rooted in Scripture. This is the first “rule” of the Conference.

Through the years, the Church gained a greater understanding of the foundational teachings found in Scripture. The *Compendium* puts it this way: “[Social Doctrine] has its roots in Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels and the apostolic writings, and takes on shape and body beginning from the Fathers of the Church and the great Doctors of the Middle Ages, constituting a doctrine in which, even without explicit and direct Magisterial pronouncements, the Church gradually came to recognize her competence.”

This brings us to the Church Fathers, such as St. John Chrysostom—probably the only saint I have quoted in legislative testimony. And, St. Basil the Great, who as a bishop appealed to the local Roman governor to build a bridge, not because Scripture said “build a bridge,” but because, applying the principles

of Scripture, he concluded that it was needed for the common good.

Among the western Church Fathers, there was St. Augustine. St. Augustine not only wrote *City of God*, but, with his fellow bishops in North Africa, created what could be called the first Catholic conference. The bishops hired a layperson, who was also a lawyer, to protect the rights of the church and the poor before the Imperial Courts.

In the Middle Ages, we have St. Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas showed how the governing of society can be expressed in the Natural Law. The Natural Law can be knowable by people of goodwill with the use of reason and without appeal to Divine Revelation alone. For example, the Ten Commandments state “Thou shall not steal,” but people who have never heard of the Ten Commandments can conclude that stealing is wrong.

This is the second “rule” of the North Dakota Catholic Conference. A position must be knowable in the Natural Law.

Later in the history of the Church, we have the social encyclicals. They provide magisterial teaching about the economy, labor, the environment, social conditions, peace and war, and more. All the teachings of the encyclicals are rooted in Scripture and expressible in the Natural Law. Along with the encyclicals, we have the documents of Vatican II, the *Catechism*, and finally, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

The result is the body of Catholic social doctrine. The bishops then examine contemporary issues, including bills in the North Dakota legislature, in light of this doctrine. The North Dakota Catholic Conference’s role is to provide the bishops with information and carry out their decisions. The conference, therefore, contributes the Church’s voice to legislation and issues facing our lawmakers.

At times, a legislator may disagree with the bishops. This brings us to the third rule of the Catholic Conference. Disagreement does not mean that the legislator is a bad Catholic, a bad Christian, or a bad person. The conference’s role is to contribute to the development of public policy, not to judge whether someone is a good or bad Catholic, Christian, or person.

In summary, the positions taken by the North Dakota Catholic Conference must be rooted in Scripture, expressible in the Natural Law, made by the bishops of North Dakota, and done in a manner that judges the bill, not the legislator.

On a personal note, I want to share what I told the legislators at the North Dakota Catholic Conference dinner. “For me, someone who loves the law, the political process, and the Church, I cannot imagine a better vocation. And I cannot think of a better place to exercise that vocation than North Dakota.”



STEWARDSHIP

STEVE SCHONS

Director of stewardship and development
for the Diocese of Fargo

Most people seem to agree that having a last will and testament is important... and that every will, to be worthwhile, needs to be good.

If this is so, the question naturally arises: What makes a will good? How does one know whether his or her will is right?

Here are three features that help to answer these questions. Apply them to your own situation to discover whether or not your will can accomplish what you expect it to do.

Accurate. A good will conforms to the legal requirements of the state in which you reside. It is prepared and signed correctly, and it fully expresses your desires regarding the disposition of your estate. It also adequately cares for such things as guardianships, trusts and trustees, business succession, final declarations, and other important matters your situation may require. When your will is completed and tucked away for safekeeping, you want to have the confidence that it was done accurately.

Thoughtful. A good will does good. That is, it addresses the needs of your spouse, dependents and others who are within the circle of your responsibility. Further, it does good by providing support for those organizations that reflect your most important values and concerns. Hopefully, that means you've made plans for your own Catholic parish or program.

Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse

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

The basics of a good will

Current. A good will is up-to-date. It incorporates the most recent changes in tax law and reflects changes in your own life. Actually, professional advisors recommend that you review your will at least once a year. For example, you may no longer have minor children at home, and perhaps someone close to you has died or become dependent. You may have new grandchildren, and changes may have occurred financially that have changed your estate tax status. Whatever the case, it's mighty good to have a current will.

For those needing a place to get started, the Diocese of Fargo has partnered with FreeWill. You can simply click on the FreeWill link at www.fargodiocese.org. This is a wonderful tool to make a simple will, or at least create a worksheet to take to a legal professional.

Also, we have a helpful will information kit we would like to send you free of charge. It includes a checklist for reviewing your will, as well as important information about other facets of estate planning. If you would like a copy, contact me at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org or (701) 356-7926.

MADE FOR GREATNESS

"My flesh for the life of the world." -John 6:51

Men's Retreat	July 14-16 2023	Stiklestad Lodge, Fort Ransom	Cost \$250
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In a fully masculine context, this event will help men encounter God in a deeper way, through the gift of the Eucharist. Guided by Bishop John Folda, we will dive into what it means to have life in Jesus as men and how the Eucharist is that path to a fulfilling life. The retreat will feature profound spiritual insights by His Excellency, Mass, confession, prayer and reflection, and time for growing as brothers in Christ.

Stiklestad Lodge is a corporate hunting retreat lodge that features trap shooting, campfires, and outdoor games. Food will be cooked on an outdoor smoker throughout the weekend.

Register at:

www.fargodiocese.org/mfg-retreat
brad.gray@fargodiocese.org
(701) 356-7903



DIocese of
FARGO

Worldwide Marriage Encounter coming to Grand Forks March 17-19

By Kristina Lahr | Assistant editor for New Earth



For over 50 years, Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) has helped over 3.5 million couples unlock the power of their relationships. The Marriage Encounter experience helps couples listen, share, and connect more deeply. There's no group discussion. It's just about the couple learning how to better love each other and thrive together.

"Steve and I went on our WWME weekend about 10 years ago," said Sara Schultz of Fargo, who is part of the presenting team for the weekend. "We had three small children all under age five and had our hands full with parenting, leaving little time to connect as husband and wife. We heard about WWME and thought a weekend away focused on just us and our marriage sounded like what we needed to reconnect and rekindle the flame of our love. After the weekend, we were able to keep our marriage a priority and stay connected with each other much better. We are coming up on 20 years married, and our marriage is better than ever thanks to the tools we learned."

A weekend will be held at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks March 17–19. The presenting team includes Father James Gross, pastor of St. Mary's Church in Grand Forks, Steve and Sara Schultz of Fargo, Kennen and Diane Huck of Bismarck, and Ryan and Kate Bleth of Bismarck.

"We were married for eight years when we decided to do something for our marriage and attended a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend," said Ryan and Kate Bleth of Bismarck. "Our marriage was not in crisis—we were both just looking for some time away together. The weekend was private and intimate. The presented talks led us on a journey of learning more about ourselves, each other, and how we were called to share our love with the world. We were also taught a tool called 'dialogue,' which took our communication to a new level. We experienced infertility issues, a cancer diagnosis, job changes, and many ups and downs after our weekend, and we were



Kate and Ryan of Bismarck, a presenting couple for the Mar. 17-19 weekend. (submitted photo)

equipped with the tools we needed to face those things head on. Our involvement with WWME has been a huge blessing in our lives and we encourage all married couples to enrich your marriage by attending a weekend."

According to the WWME website: "If you have a 'normal' marriage, you know that the 'honeymoon' doesn't last forever. Long-term relationships inevitably have moments of disillusionment, boredom, or isolation. But that doesn't have to be the end of the story! Make the time to come closer together and learn the tools to keep nurturing your love."

"If you have a good marriage and want a great one, check out Marriage Encounter," said Sara. "You will not regret it!"

To register or for more information, visit wwme.org or call (701) 347-1998.



Sara and Steve of Fargo, a presenting couple for the Mar. 17-19 weekend. (submitted photo)

LIFE'S MILESTONES



Ron and Sandy Cartwright, parishioners of St. Cecilia's in Harvey, celebrated their 60th anniversary on Feb. 10. They have 3 children, 10 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren. They were married at St. Francis Xavier in Anamoose.



Donald J. Hager, parishioner of St. Boniface of Esmond, will celebrate his 85th birthday March 15. He and his late wife, Marie, were blessed with 5 children, 1 granddaughter, and 1 great-granddaughter (pictured).



James Schulte, parishioner of St. James Basilica in Jamestown, celebrated his 90th birthday on March 2. Jim and his late wife, Yvonne, have been blessed with 5 children, 10 grandchildren, and 3 great-grandchildren.



Donna Wanzek, parishioner of St. James Basilica, will celebrate her 85th birthday on March 21. Donna and her late husband, Marvin, are blessed with 6 children, 16 grandchildren, and 16 great-grandchildren with 1 on the way.



Winifred Savageau, parishioner of Sts. Anne and Joachim in Fargo, will celebrate her 90th birthday on Apr. 2. She and her husband Jim, who passed away in 2000, were blessed with 8 children. Winnie now has 27 grandchildren and 36 great-grandchildren.



Congratulations to Ruth Geske who will turn 95 years old on Apr. 7. Ruth has been a parishioner of the Cathedral of St. Mary for 68 years. She was married to Bob Geske for 66 years. She has 4 children, 14 grandchildren, and 10 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 April issue is Mar. 14, and the deadline for the May issue is Apr. 25.

Events

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.

- Mar. 23: Holy Spirit, Fargo. Speaker Mark Holcraft.
- Apr. 20: Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. Speaker Brad Gray.

Fish Dinners each Friday of 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, veg-

etarian lasagna, and mac and cheese. Dinner is served from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at the Holy Cross Church social hall.

I Thirst retreat at Maryvale, Valley City

The Sisters of Mary of the Presentation are sponsoring an "I Thirst," women's retreat at Maryvale in Valley City. Come for the weekend and enter the spirit of St. Teresa of Calcutta through prayer, dialogue, adoration, and an input session led by Sister Anne Germaine Picard, SMP and Sharon Eversvik, SMP Associate on March 17-19 or July 7-9. Cost is \$130. To register, contact Amanda at (701) 845-2864 or maryva-lesmp@gmail.com.

Spring dinner at Holy Trinity, Fingal

Holy Trinity Church in Fingal is hosting a spring dinner April 16 from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Pork loin, au gratin potatoes and all the fixings. Homemade desserts and a bake sale.

Father Edward “Ed” Sherman passes away Feb. 4



Father Edward “Ed” Sherman, 92, died peacefully Feb. 4 under the wonderful care of the staff at St. Gerard’s Community of Care in Hankinson.

A Mass of Christian Burial was held Feb. 11 at St. Francis Convent Chapel, Hankinson. Burial will be at Calvary Cemetery, Lidgerwood, at a later date.

Edward John Sherman was born Aug. 22, 1930 in Salem, Ore., the son of William A. and Ellen K. (Lynch) Sherman. He attended grade school in Salem and Bryson, N.C. He attended high school and graduated from St. Francis Academy in Hankinson. Father Sherman felt blessed to attend the Academy and appreciated the sisters, priests, and coaches, along with the good people of Hankinson. He went to college and the seminary at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minn. and seminary at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. Father Sherman was ordained a Catholic priest on June 9, 1956 at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fargo and served as a priest for the Fargo Diocese for 66 years.

Father Sherman’s first assignment was to serve as parochial vicar of St. Anthony of Padua, Fargo. He then served as parochial vicar at St. Alphonsus, Langdon; St. John the Baptist, St. John; Sacred Heart, Hansboro; Assumption, Starkweather; and Sts. Peter and Paul, Webster. He was then pastor of Holy Rosary, Bisbee; Immaculate Heart of

Mary, Rock Lake; and Sacred Heart, Hansboro. Following a year to recuperate from a heart attack, Father Sherman was parochial vicar at St. Joseph’s in Devils Lake. He then served as pastor at Sacred Heart, Cando, and St. Michael Indian Catholic Mission, St. Michael. Upon retirement in 2008, Father moved to Grand Forks, where he helped parishes in the Diocese of Fargo and the Diocese of Crookston. He ministered to native people in Grand Forks for ten years and worked with the Sioux and Metis of Belcourt. He continued hospital ministry at Altru Hospital in Grand Forks and ministered to shut-ins until his health no longer allowed him.

During these years, Father Sherman traveled, worked, and studied to aid in the canonization of St. Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Native American to be recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church. He also wrote and published a book about her life. Father Sherman was blessed to be at her canonization on Oct. 21, 2012 in Rome.

Prior to his move to Hankinson, Father resided at St. Anne’s Living Center in Grand Forks. There he continued to celebrate Mass for the residents of St. Anne’s. He loved and admired his many close friends, Sister Rebecca, Sister Elaine, Sister Christina, Al and Kim Hager, fellow priests, and many other friends and family who loved and cared for him.

Father Ed Sherman was preceded in death by his parents, his sister Sister Ann Sherman, O.S.F., and his brother, Father William “Bill” Sherman, along with many friends and relatives.

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

Parishioners of St. Lawrence’s Church in Jessie are completing a new parish hall, work on which was begun after the threshing season. The new hall, 30 by 60 and costing about five thousand dollars, will be equipped with a kitchen, oil furnace, and other accessories indispensable to a parish hall. Parish organizations will have a fine meeting place once the paint is dry.

50 years ago — 1972

Diocesan Vocation Week, March 25 - April 1, will be a week of special prayer and discussion in order to help young people and their parents come to a deeper appreciation of the need and value of religious vocations. The theme will be: The challenge

of Answering Christ’s Call to Dedicated Service. The diocesan prayer was: “Lord, help me to be open to the guidance of your Holy Spirit. Show me clearly the work you are calling me to do in life. Grant that I may give myself generously to that work for your honor and glory. Please give me every grace I need to answer your call with courageous love and lasting dedication to your will. Amen.”

20 years ago — 2002

Expectant mothers who come to seek the help and loving guidance of caregivers at Blessed Gianna’s Maternity Home may find additional comfort in knowing they’ll be under the watchful eye of St. Gerard. The pro-life residential center’s chapel will feature the only Shrine to St. Gerard—“the Mother’s Saint”—in the Diocese of Fargo. Many miracles have been attributed to St. Gerard Majella, who died in 1755 and was canonized in 1904, but because so many involved mothers and babies, he was recognized early on as “the saint of happy childbirth.”

Pope Francis: Bring the Gospel into the world without becoming worldly

By Courtney Mares | Catholic News Agency

Pope Francis said Feb. 15 that Christians are called to bring the Gospel into the world without becoming worldly.

“For the Church, falling into worldliness is the worst thing that can happen,” the pope said.

Speaking in his general audience in Paul VI Hall, Pope Francis reflected on Jesus’ words to his disciples: “Behold, I am sending you like sheep among wolves” (Matt. 10:16).

Many Christians will be tempted to think “let us become relevant, numerous, prestigious, and the world will listen to us and respect us and we will defeat the wolves,” the pope said, but instead, the Lord asks us to “be humble.”

“He asks us to be like this, to be meek and with the will to be innocent, to be disposed to sacrifice. This is what the lamb represents: meekness, innocence, dedication, tenderness. And he, the Shepherd, will recognize his lambs and protect them from the wolves,” Francis said.

Pope Francis quoted a homily by St. John Chrysostom in which the late fourth-century Church Father wrote: “As long as we are lambs, we will conquer, and even if we are surrounded by many wolves, we will overcome them.”

“But if we become wolves ... we will be defeated because we will be deprived of the shepherd’s help. He does not shepherd wolves, but lambs.”

The pope also noted that it is striking that Jesus told his disciples “what not to bring” rather than what to bring on a mission: “Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick” (Matt. 10:9-10).

“The Lord makes you lighten your load. ... He says not to lean on material certainties, but to go into the world without worldliness. That is to say, I am going into the world, not with the style of the world, not with the world’s values, not with worldliness,” Francis said.

The livestreamed address was the fourth in Pope Francis’ cycle of catechesis on “the passion for evangelization.”

Pope Francis said that the Church is “completely missionary and in the mission it finds its unity.”

“So, go forth, meek and good as lambs, without worldliness, and going together,” he said.

At the end of the audience, Pope Francis asked Catholics not to forget to pray for the people of Ukraine that “their cruel suffering” may soon be over.



Pope Francis greets pilgrims at his general audience in Paul VI Hall on Feb. 15. (Vatican Media)

He also thanked musicians from a youth orchestra who performed at the general audience and greeted pilgrims who traveled from England, Vietnam, France, Portugal, Italy, the United States, and other countries.

“Inspired by Sts. Cyril and Methodius, apostles of the Slavs and co-patrons of Europe, whose liturgical feast we celebrated yesterday, I invite you to witness daily to the Gospel, spreading around you the fragrance of Christ’s charity, which wins hearts over for the good,” he said.



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South Dakota bans trans drugs, sex-change surgery for minors

By Tyler Arnold | Catholic News Agency

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem signed legislation that will prohibit doctors from prescribing drugs or performing surgeries on minors that are intended to transition the child into a gender that is different from his or her sex.

“South Dakota’s kids are our future,” Noem said in a statement. “With this legislation, we are protecting kids from harmful, permanent medical procedures. I will always stand up for the next generation of South Dakotans.”

House Bill 1080, which passed the House 60-10 and the Senate 30-4, will take effect on July 1. In addition to banning the drugs and surgeries, it sets penalties for doctors who refuse to follow the law and allows minors who are subjected to the drugs or procedures to recover civil damages.

With some exceptions, the new law will ban the administration of drugs to minors that halt the normal puberty process. It also bans the prescription of testosterone, estrogen, or progesterone at levels greater than what would normally be produced in a child of the same age and sex. It also prohibits sterilization or altering sexual organs to artificially make them appear like the sexual organs of the opposite sex. It would further ban the removal of any healthy or non-diseased part of the body.

While most states do not have bans on transgender surgery or drugs for children, lawmakers throughout the country have begun introducing such bills amid a growing conversation about the effects these measures could have on minors.

Two weeks ago, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox signed legislation that bans transgender surgery for minors and pauses the allowance of transgender drugs for minors until further research is conducted on the long-term effects. Four states—Texas, Arizona, Alabama, and Arkansas—imposed rules to restrict transgender health care for minors last year, but judges in Alabama and Arkansas have prevented those bills from going into effect. Lawmakers in nearly a dozen states are considering similar legislation.

The South Dakota law includes exceptions for medically necessary procedures used to treat an injury, infection, disease, or disorder. It also makes exceptions for children who are born with both male and female sexual organs, as well as any child who is born with a disorder related to sexual development.

Doctors will be banned from providing these drugs or surgeries to new patients. If a patient is already receiving certain drugs or hormones before the ban goes into effect, the doctor must either terminate those treatments or, if an immediate termination could cause harm to the child’s health, systematically reduce

those treatments. The systematic reduction must end by Dec. 31.

If a certified or licensed health care professional violates the law, his or her certification or license will be revoked. Any person who receives these

surgeries or drugs as a minor, in violation of the law, will also have legal recourse through civil litigation. Damages can be sought up to the day of the person’s 25th birthday or within three years of the time the person discovered or should have reasonably discovered that the violation caused injury or damages, whichever is later.

“Denying the truth that we are either male or female hurts real people, especially vulnerable children,” Matt Sharp, a senior counsel for the conservative legal advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom, said in a statement.

“By enacting this legislation, South Dakota has taken critical steps to protect children from radical activists that peddle gender ideology and pressure children into life-altering, experimental procedures and drugs,” Sharp continued.

“Science and common sense tell us that children aren’t mature enough to properly evaluate the serious ramifications of making certain decisions; the decision to undergo dangerous and likely sterilizing gender transition procedures is no exception. We commend Gov. Noem and the South Dakota Legislature for standing up for the truth by enacting these vital protections for our children.”

The legislation received opposition from Democratic leadership. Senate Democratic leader Reynold Nesiba and House Democratic leader Oren Lesmeister released a joint statement calling the bill “unconstitutional.”

“We were incredibly disappointed to see HB 1080, a bill putting the government in the middle of medical decisions between parents and their children, pass with so much support through the House of Representatives,” the lawmakers said. “This bill is unconstitutional and seeks to intervene in the decisions made between patients, parents, and medical providers.”



South Dakota state capitol.
(oleprophoto | Shutterstock)

Atlanta airport gets a 24/7 Eucharistic chapel

By Peter Pinedo | Catholic News Agency



(Sidney de Almeida | Shutterstock)

Archbishop Gregory Hartmayer of Atlanta dedicated and blessed his archdiocese's newest chapel while on his way to catch a flight Feb. 13.

Airline workers and travelers flying through the busiest airport in the world can now spend time in the real presence of Christ thanks to the efforts of the Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport's chaplains and the cooperation of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Located in the international terminal, the Eucharistic chapel will be a permanent fixture at the airport and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

After receiving approval from the archbishop, the tabernacle was installed in November of last year. But because only travelers and airline workers can get past security to access the chapel, the archbishop was not able to officially bless it until Feb. 13, shortly before his flight departed.

The chapel was sorely needed and perfectly located given the sheer number of people arriving from all over the world to make connecting flights, chaplain Father Kevin Peek told CNA.

The Atlanta airport sees an average of nearly 300,000 passengers flying through daily, according to Business Insider.

"There's about 64,000 employees at the airport at any given time," Peek told CNA. "That's like a small town or city."

The chapel has already touched many lives, allowing them to encounter Christ in the most unexpected place, Peek said.

Since the Eucharistic chapel opened, Peek has already seen visitors weeping and even jumping for joy to find the presence of Christ in the airport.

The chapel allows airline workers and travelers to "bring Christ out into their lives and into the world," Peek said.

One of the greatest parts of having a Eucharistic chapel, Peek explained, is that it allows the airport's three other Catholic chaplains, who are deacons, to offer Communion services when a priest is not available to celebrate Mass.

"I go out there and offer Mass on Saturday night and Sunday night for all the travelers in order to give them two opportunities to make their Sunday obligation. But I can't get down there every day," Peek explained.

Now the deacons hold Communion services at 11:30 a.m. on Thursday and Friday, while Masses are offered at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

Blair Walker, head of the Atlanta Interfaith Airport Chaplaincy, worked closely with Peek to make the idea of a permanent Eucharistic presence at the airport a reality.

Because it is an interfaith chapel, Walker explained, the airport chaplaincy staff had to get creative in designing the space.

"The space is designed for shared sacred use," Walker told CNA, "so we don't want any one thing in there that overpowers the faith groups that are using it."

Multiple design ideas were proposed but didn't work out. Finally, one day while Peek was reflecting in the airport chapel, he realized an area being used for storage that was covered by frosted glass could be used to house the Eucharist.

"We realized, 'Oh, we can remove the frosting off it,'" Walker said.

Now just behind the cleared glass is a tabernacle and a lamp to signal Christ's presence.

The final design of the chapel serves the dual purpose of keeping the interfaith sense of the space while also protecting the Eucharist from any who would potentially abuse it.

For Peek, whose father, Joseph Peek, was an airline pilot, the project became a labor of love.

"I did it really for the airline personnel," Peek said. "My dad was a commercial airline pilot and flew out of Atlanta for many, many years. He had a great devotion to Our Lord in the Eucharist."

In the chapel's sacristy area, Peek placed a few pictures of his father, one of him with his mother in front of a statue of Our Lady of Fatima, another of him at the helm of a Boeing 727, and another shows his father giving Peek Communion.

"I put all that there kind of as a statement to summarize how much he incorporated faith and family into his life and in his work, and to inspire other aircrew to do the same," Peek said.

Beatification date announced for married couple with seven children martyred by Nazis

By Courtney Mares | Catholic News Agency

The beatification date has been announced for Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children, who were killed by the Nazis for hiding a Jewish family in their home.

The Archdiocese of Przemyśl announced Feb. 14 that the entire Ulma family—including one unborn child—will be beatified on Sept. 10.

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, the prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, will preside over the beatification ceremony in Markowa, the village in southeast Poland where the Ulma family was executed in 1944.

Pope Francis recognized the martyrdom of the couple and their children in a decree signed in December. The World Holocaust Remembrance Center has honored the Ulmas as Righteous Among the Nations for the sacrifice of their lives.

On March 24, 1944, a Nazi patrol surrounded the home of Józef and Wiktoria Ulma on the outskirts of the village of Markowa. They discovered eight Jewish people who had found refuge on the Ulma farm and executed them.

The Nazi police then killed Wiktoria, who was seven months pregnant, and Józef. As children began to scream at the sight of their murdered parents, the Nazis shot them too: Stanisława, age 8, Barbara, 7, Władysław, 6, Franciszek, 4, Antoni, 3, and Maria, 2.

Father Witold Burda, the postulator for the Ulma family, has said that a Bible was found inside the Ulma house in which the



Wiktoria Ulma with six of her children. (The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II.)

parable of the Good Samaritan had been underlined in pen.

The postulator added that Józef and Wiktoria were known in their community for being “willing to help anyone who knocked on their door.”

“They built their family on the foundation of faith with fidelity to the two essential commandments: the commandment to love God and the commandment to love one’s neighbor,” Burda said.



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Mark Houck's victory is a triumph for all of us



SIDEWALK STORIES

ROXANE B. SALONÉN

Mother of five, writer for *The Forum* and *CatholicMom.com*, speaker and radio host for *Real Presence Radio*

My discovery of the first reports concerning pro-life speaker and father of seven Mark Houck of Pennsylvania, and his shocking apprehension by a U.S. federal S.W.A.T. team that stormed onto his lawn one morning last September, brought on an instant wave of nausea.

While I can only imagine how truly terrifying it must have been for Houck and his family to experience this moment, and what followed, after more than a decade of standing vigil near our area's abortion facilities, I find it a scene that sadly seems all too possible in today's world.

Immediately, my mind tried to extrapolate what might have provoked this turn of events. From initial accounts, the raid seemed severely excessive. Was there more to the story? Was Houck really deserving of such treatment?

The human mind naturally drifts to filling in the missing pieces. Sometimes, we have to use our gut instincts, based on the little we know and our own related experiences, to form at least a partial conclusion.

Learning of the source of the eventual raid, I came to understand how Houck's 12-year-old son, who'd joined his father that day to peacefully pray for an end to abortion, had been persistently bothered by the older escort before Houck finally intervened. To force the escort to back off, Houck pushed the 72-year-old man away from his child.

How many times had my friends and I been in the middle of such provocations ourselves? In tight quarters, when the spiritual battle is at its height and the earthly implications palpable, emotions careen quickly toward the edges.

No matter how calm a posture one might arrive with, when someone adversarial gets in your face and begins hurling verbal insults, it takes gargantuan strength to remain steady. Men and women differ in general in our responses to such incites. While some women have a St. Joan of Arc fighting spirit, we also tend toward a more maternal protectiveness. Men, however, have a constitution that can easily lead to a stronger defensive position to shield the innocent.

I could easily imagine Houck, a father trying to teach his son about the realities of abortion, but also, who would naturally protect him from harm, moving in to defend and protect his child in such a scenario. In fact, I would expect it.

In its last year of operation, just prior to the reversal of *Roe vs. Wade*, which sent the local abortion facility across the river, the former Red River Women's Clinic in Downtown Fargo and surrounding space had grown to be an especially volatile area on Wednesdays, the days abortions were performed. Verbal insults and insinuations from abortion escorts, along with the occasional elbow, knee shove, or umbrella "tap," frequently roused normal defense mechanisms.

I've written here about how I was assaulted, punched in the head, by a potential abortion client after offering her help, and have other stories from friends of threatening physical contact. With these experiences in hand, despite not knowing every details of Houck's story, I surmised that this was likely a case of a father rightfully coming to the aid of his young son as any good father would in such a moment.

Using logic, I also knew that, between the two—a pro-life father who has spent his life defending life, and a pro-abortion escort doing the opposite—the dad likely had been the one at the short end of the justice stick. Though showing much restraint, he finally had to act.

So, when the verdict came out recently that Houck had been acquitted on all charges, I praised our good God, who made heaven and earth. This court case was only visibly made of earthly participants and actions. Beyond that veil, another court was in session; a heavenly one. And it intervened in what was clearly an evil plot to take down a good man and his family. Yes, Mark Houck is a sinner, like all of us, but not deserving of the fate the Evil One had plotted.

The case reminds us that God can always bring good from evil. The family has suffered deep mental anguish because of what the federal government unjustly set in motion here. He was facing 11 years in prison. Now, Houck is being afforded an even bigger platform to share about his mission for life. The Devil's tricks are not sustainable. He forgets that he didn't create this good world; God, his Master and Lord, did.

Let us exhale with the Houck family, offering prayers of thanksgiving for them, the pro-life movement, and each of us. The victory for Mark Houck is a victory for all humankind. May we never grow weary, for God is truly on our side.

NEW EARTH

Catholic Diocese of Fargo
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*Do you know
where we are?*

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in the April *New Earth*.



Where in the diocese are we?

Last month's photo is from
St. Helena's Church
in Ellendale.