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Ten years as a Bishop

On June 19 I observed the tenth anniversary of my ordination as Bishop of Fargo. It may sound trite, but those years have flown by! That kind of milestone leads one to reminisce and reflect, so I beg your indulgence as I share a few thoughts with you, the good people of the Diocese of Fargo.

At the risk of leaving something out, and in no particular order, certain events have been memorable and especially joyful. The Eucharistic Conference that we held last September was particularly blessed, and it was beautiful to see the love and devotion of so many people for our Lord in the Eucharist. Several years ago we held a Convocation of Parish Leaders, where representatives from all our parishes dug into the call given to all the baptized to evangelize, to share the faith with others. Breaking ground for new churches and schools, and then dedicating those new facilities has been a blessing and a source of encouragement. I was deeply moved last year by the outpouring of prayer when our Diocese joined our Holy Father and the universal Church in the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Speaking of the Holy Father, it was a privilege to meet Pope Francis during his visit to the United States in 2015 and again in 2020 during our *ad limina* visit to Rome. Walking with the students from Shanley High School as they led the 2015 National March for Life in Washington D.C. was also unforgettable. It was amazing to walk at the head of such a vast crowd, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, all marching and praying for the protection of every innocent human life. In 2016, I also traveled to Poland for World Youth Day, and spent time with over 200 pilgrims from the Diocese of Fargo. Our celebration of Mass in Krakow as a diocesan family was a special moment for all of us. Even as I write this, more and more events come to mind, and I could go on and on!

I can't deny that there have been hard moments too. The COVID outbreak in 2020 and its lasting effects on the Church and our society were especially difficult. Dealing with sexual abuse issues in the Church has been painful for everyone. Closing and merging parishes, though necessary, is always a sad occasion. But suffering has been a part of the Church's life since its beginning, so I put my trust in God and try to navigate through the challenges as they come.

People occasionally ask me what the best part of being a bishop is, and the answer is simple: visiting our people in parishes, schools, nursing homes, etc. I have been able to celebrate Mass in every parish of our diocese, and joining the faithful in our Lord's sacrifice is always a joy and a privilege. There are certain annual events that are also a highlight. The ordination of priests and deacons is a joyful occasion for the entire diocese, but especially for the bishop! It's a great sign of hope that God continues to call forth dedicated men who hear his call and lay down their lives in pastoral love for his people. It is always heartwarming to welcome catechumens and candidates from across the diocese at the Rite of Election on the First Sunday of Lent, when they begin their final preparation to receive the sacraments of initiation at Easter. It's uplifting to see that God continues to call people into the family of his Church! In recent years we have held an annual Rural Life Mass during the summer, where we give thanks for the blessings of our Creator and pray for a rich harvest in the fall. And of course the round of Confirmations and First Eucharist celebrations every spring gives me great joy.

As I continue my service as Bishop of Fargo, the next big initiatives will be our Diocesan Synod and the ongoing Eucharistic Revival. I hope to join with all of the faithful in a deeper love for our Lord in the Eucharist, especially through the celebration of the Mass. I pray that many who have drifted from joining the Church at Mass will soon find their way back. I am excited for our upcoming Synod, the first to be held in our diocese since 1951. I enjoyed the many listening sessions that we held throughout the diocese this past spring, and I appreciate the contribution of all who participated. Through the Synod, I hope we as a diocese can experience a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit and renew our dedication to the mission that Christ gave us to live our faith more fervently and share that faith with others.

I will always be grateful to our Lord for his call to serve as a bishop in the Diocese of Fargo. I certainly never expected such a mission, but he is a God of surprises! And I will also be forever grateful to you, the good people of this diocese, who welcomed me so warmly and live your faith so fervently. You are an inspiration to me, and I am profoundly aware of the many prayers you offer for me. We have done some good things together, and we have much more yet to do! May God bless us as we journey together in faith, and may our Blessed Mother Mary lead us always to her Son. Please pray that I will be a good bishop and shepherd for the Diocese of Fargo, and know that you are all in my prayers every day.