

# New

February 2026 | Vol. 47 | No. 2



# Earth

The Magazine of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo

## XIII

## Stations of the Cross

Why the Catholic faithful take part in the tradition



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**ON THE COVER:**

Twelfth Station of the Cross at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo  
(Paul Braun / New Earth)

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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.

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**Deadlines**

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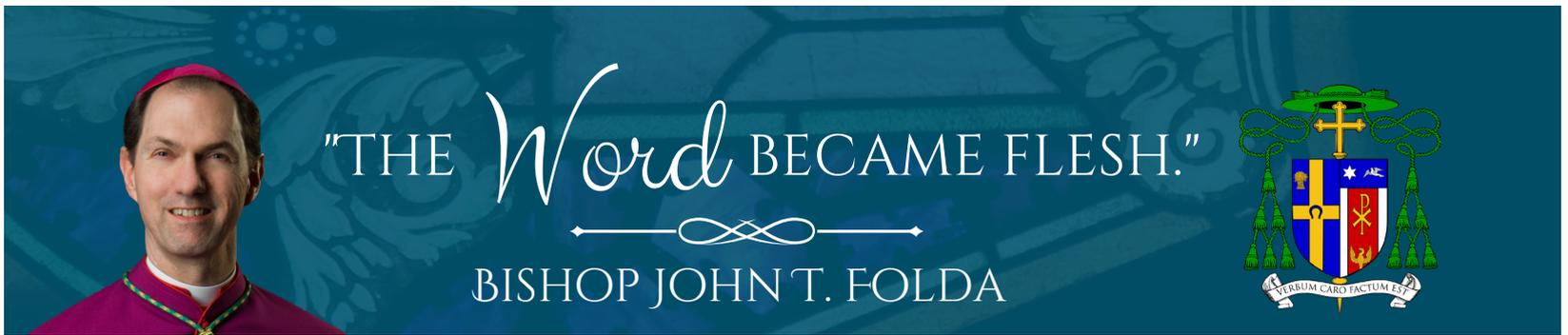
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"THE *Word* BECAME FLESH."

BISHOP JOHN T. FOLDA



## The lights and shadows of social media

In recent decades, electronic communication has become widespread and nearly instantaneous. We have access to information and can communicate with others in ways that were unimaginable not so long ago. Email, text messaging, and now social media have made mass communication remarkably easy, for good and sometimes for ill.

Without question, these contemporary forms of communication can be used to great advantage and for great good. Millions of people have been exposed to the truths of our faith, the rich spirituality, and the life of the Church through social media. Just think of the huge number who grew in their knowledge of the Scriptures through Father Mike Schmitz's Bible in a Year podcast series, or the vast number of people who have engaged the faith more deeply through the podcasts and videos of Bishop Robert Barron. The Church has always used various forms of communication to share her message, and with these recent developments in communication, you might say the sky is the limit. We can share the beauty of our faith and converse with people all over the globe. We can pass along information about the life of our parishes, our diocese, and the universal Church. At a moment's notice, we can communicate important news items, prayer requests, and notifications about opportunities for spiritual growth, like retreats or liturgical events.

Social communication allows us to share the wealth of our faith with countless souls and answer questions that might otherwise never be asked. You may have read that growing numbers of people, especially young people, are inquiring about the Catholic faith and entering the Church in the last few years. When asked why and how this is happening, many have responded that they came to know more about the Catholic faith through online resources and social media. Thanks be to God!

But, for all of its advantages and opportunities, social media can also be perilous. In its less edifying forms, social media can be a platform for idle chatter about nothing. Endless hours spent on social media can never be retrieved, and a wise person should

always ask what good will come from the time spent. The ease of communication also makes it possible to pass along false or misleading information very quickly, and to an unlimited number of people. This can happen through honest mistakes of fact, or it can happen through deliberate deception. Social media can also be a forum for gossip. In its most malicious forms, it can be used for detraction, calumny, and character assassination. These can be grave sins, and can cause great harm to others, especially when such communication potentially reaches an enormous number of people.

When we choose to participate in social media, we bear a grave responsibility. We are first called to abide in the truth and avoid any semblance of falsehood. To lie, mislead, or deceive others through social media can be a serious moral evil in itself, but it becomes even more grave by virtue of the number of people we reach and the harm that can result. A lie told to one person is sinful, but a lie told to multitudes through social media is magnified many times over. We also bear responsibility for incorrect information that we share, even if this is done unintentionally. As always, we should be very careful about what we say or write to others.

We are also called to charity and respect, and this is just as important in the sometimes-wild world of social media. I have been amazed on occasion at the uncharitable and simply ugly things that are said on social media, and the careless disregard for the reputations of others. It's far too easy to say things at a safe distance on social media that we would never say to a person's face. Charity and moderation are too often left behind in social media.

Freedom of speech and expression is enshrined in the civil culture of our country, and this is a right that deserves respect and protection. However, according to the teachings of the Gospel and our moral law, we do not have a right to communicate falsehood or attacks on the reputation and well-being of others. In its best versions, social media can be a means of sharing information, engaging in conversation and discussion, even

**"Social media can be a powerful tool and can help us to accomplish wonderful things for God's Kingdom. But power can be corrupted, and social media can be used in corrupt ways."**

**-Bishop John T. Folda**

hashing out competing viewpoints and opinions. In its less edifying versions, it can be a forum for ignorance and pettiness. In its most sinister form, social media is being used for blackmail, human trafficking, minor abuse, and other heinous crimes. We shouldn't be naïve about the dangers of social media, especially to those who are young and vulnerable.

Nevertheless, the Church uses social media in various ways to communicate the truth, goodness, and beauty of our faith in Jesus Christ. The Pope uses social media to communicate his messages and teachings. Dioceses all over the world use social media to stay in touch with the faithful. In our own diocese, we use different forms of social media—podcasts, Flocknote messages and emails, among others—to communicate with all of you, and I use it myself too. Social media can be a powerful

tool and can help us to accomplish wonderful things for God's Kingdom. But power can be corrupted, and social media can be used in corrupt ways. So let me offer a few suggestions about the use of social media. Always accompany the use of social media with prayer, and make sure our Lord is part of your communication. Do not turn to social media if you are angry or upset; it's too easy to put something out in the heat of the moment that can never be taken back. Make sure you have your facts straight before you post a message or comment, and don't believe everything you see or read. And most importantly, let us remember our Lord's command: "Love one another as I have loved you."

## BISHOP FOLDA'S CALENDAR

### Feb. 13–15

Vianney Discernment Weekend, Maryvale

**Feb. 18 at 12:10 p.m.**

Ash Wednesday Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

**Feb 22 at 3 p.m.**

Rite of Election, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

**Feb 25 at 3 p.m.**

St. JPII Schools Board Meeting, Pastoral Center, Fargo

**March 2- 6**

International Catholic Conference of Indigenous People

**March 14 at 10 a.m.**

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Philip Church, Napoleon

## Prayer Intention of Pope Leo XIV



### For Children with Incurable Diseases

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.



## Official Appointments/Announcements

Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo, has made the following appointments, announcements, and/or decrees.

I hereby grant:

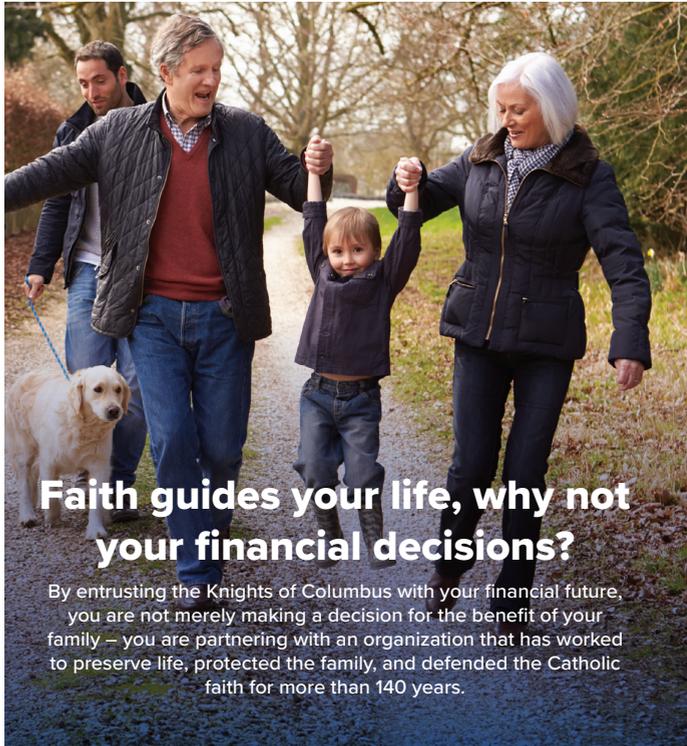
**Deacon Gary Schumacher** retirement from active ministry as a permanent deacon, effective December 4, 2025.

**Deacon James Hunt** retirement from active ministry as a permanent deacon, effective December 11, 2025.

I herewith appoint

**Rev. Steven Wirth** as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment is effective October 1, 2025 and concludes September 2028.

**Rev. Karmalraj Balasamy** as a member of the Presbyteral Council. This appointment is effective October 1, 2025 and concludes September 2028.



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Hello humankindness



# SEEK college student conference fires up North Dakota Catholics

By Kevin Jones | New Earth Assistant Editor

**N**orth Dakota college students joined tens of thousands of young Catholics at the SEEK conference's Columbus, Ohio venue, dedicating the days of Jan. 1-5 to prayer, spiritual growth and fellowship. Among the event surprises: a video speech from Pope Leo XIV.

The North Dakota State University (NDSU) group included 95 students, six missionaries and Father James Cheney, pastor of St. Paul's Newman Center in Fargo. The University of North Dakota (UND) group, for its part, had 44 students, five missionaries and Father Chris Markman, pastor of the St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center in Grand Forks.

SEEK is organized by FOCUS, a Colorado-based Catholic outreach with missionaries serving at more than 200 college campuses in the U.S., Mexico and Europe.

"This was five days where we joined 16,000 other Catholic college students from across the country for Mass every day, talks by well-known speakers, time in fellowship to grow in deeper community and time in Adoration where the Lord encountered each person in such beautiful ways," Madyson Hamling, UND team director for FOCUS, told New Earth. "These five days together really allowed us to see how alive Christ is in the Church and how deeply he desires to work in and through all of us."

"The SEEK Conference serves as a catalyst for deep conversion, and this year, bisonCatholic saw that fire ignite in unexpected ways," Aaron Filzen, NDSU team director for FOCUS, told New Earth. "Among our group was a Protestant leader from (Christian campus ministry) Chi Alpha; for the first time, he was able to encounter the beauty and depth of the Catholic faith in a way that challenged and inspired him."

At the conclusion of the event's opening Mass Jan. 2, Pope Leo XIV spoke to attendees in a video message.

"Dear young people: what do you seek?" the pope asked. "Why are you here at this conference? Perhaps your hearts are also restless, searching for meaning and fulfillment and direction for your lives."

"The Lord Jesus alone brings us true peace and joy and fulfills every one of our deepest desires," he said, encouraging them to "be open to what the Lord has in store for you." Filzen said students aim to bring home the energy and commitment they found at SEEK.

"Two NDSU football players returned to campus with a new conviction, committing themselves to the heart of the Church by attending daily Mass this semester," he said. "Furthermore, two young alumni from UND living in Valley City found exactly what they were searching for: a vibrant encounter with Catholicism that isn't always easy to find in the post-grad world."

"Back on the campus of NDSU men and women aren't just keeping this experience to themselves—they are returning to their peers with a renewed desire to make Christ known and share the fullness of the truth," Filzen added. "Pray for the campus to come alive in Christ and for this diocese to be set on fire!"



UND students at SEEK (Madyson Hamling / FOCUS)



NDSU students at SEEK (bisonCatholic)

# St. William's students explore the meaning of Christmas

By Rae Ann Lynne, parishioner, and Fr. Stephen Wirth, Pastor of St. William's Catholic Church

The students of St. William's Catholic Church of Maddock religious education participated in activities celebrating the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany.

Advent is a season of preparing, waiting and watching. Children from our parish were invited to decorate a small, lighted tree for our Jesse Tree. Each ornament children placed on the tree symbolized a key event in salvation history, from creation to Jesus' birth. Younger children in our parish were supported by their parents or older siblings to help hang the ornaments.

A narrator read a short script highlighting the significance of the ornaments event. The decorated Jesse Tree remained in the sanctuary through Epiphany reminding our parish of the Advent season and how historically the people waited and longed for the coming of the Messiah. This was our second annual decorating event.

As Christmas break approached, students participated in an activity focused on giving. Guided by teachers, each child selected a name from our community or local nursing home, prayed for that person, decorated a treat bag, added a note about God's love, and filled the bag with treats. Also, the children secretly drew the name of another student in our religious education program. They prayed for each other and decorated a goodie bag as an exchange gift of prayers and treats. This activity of praying and giving is a practical way to teach spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Finally, on the feast of Epiphany, students performed the Christmas story for our parish. The traditional story of our Messiah's birth included the arrival of the Magi. Though not all of our magi made it in time to our church, the tender performance touched the hearts of our parishioners and in small parishes, you go with what you got!

These seasonal liturgical activities extend the curriculum by involving students in parish and community life and make lifetime memories they will always remember. Involvement extending beyond the classroom adds to children's sense of belonging, serving and contributing to their parish here at St. Williams and provide activities to live out their faith as young members.



Students from St. William's parish in Maddock prepare to present their Christmas pageant. (submitted photo)



Students prepare their Christmas goody bags to be donated to the community. (submitted photo)

Though not all of our magi made it in time to our church...  
in small parishes, you go with what you got!

# Goodbye and God bless

By Kristina Bloomsburg | former assistant editor of New Earth

**A**t the start of the year, my son James was born. I can't believe what a delight and blessing he is in my life and my marriage! Now that he's here, I'm extra excited to be a stay-at-home mom and feel incredibly blessed that I have the means and opportunity to do so. While I'm still new at this whole mom gig, I can already see the fruit this time at home will be for my family.

I started my job with the Diocese of Fargo as a communications assistant as a mostly fresh college graduate. During my exit interview with this job, I found myself saying, "I'd do it all again." When I started, I never imagined I would be in this position for 12 years. It's the people that have always made it fulfilling. Thank you, readers, for all your encouragement, feedback, and support. Whenever I felt discouraged writing something, wondering if anyone was going to read it anyway, I was promptly reminded by one of you that my work was appreciated.

With Paul and Kevin at the helm, New Earth is in good hands. May the peace of Christ be with you always.



Kristina Bloomsburg and family (supplied photo)

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# Restoration project nearly complete at St. Boniface in Wimbledon

By Paul Braun | Editor of New Earth

To the casual visitor to St. Boniface’s Church in Wimbledon, the recent sanctuary restoration project is a beautiful sight to behold. For longtime parishioners, it’s a marvel.

A \$70,000 project to restore church artwork, statues, stations and the reredos (backdrops) located behind the altar was completed in just six months. The restoration has reshaped the entire interior of the church. North Dakota-based liturgical artist Dennis Norlack not only repaired and repainted the Stations of the Cross, he created from scratch additions to the reredos to place platforms on both sides for two statues once thought lost to St. Boniface parish.

“To the left you have St. Cecilia, to the right you have St. John the Evangelist. And those two statues were actually in an old museum in town here,” said Father Sean Mulligan, pastor of St. Boniface. “They were originally a part of St. Boniface and they were taken out. They did a renovation I think in the early 70s. Those were taken out at that time, along with the base of the statue stands. When you came in here, as you can see in the old photo, the high altar (reredos) looked chopped off on the sides, because it was.

Norlack took molds of the existing spires on the reredos backdrop and built from scratch the additions on each side, utilizing the old pedestals in the process. He restored and repainted the statues of St. Cecilia and St. John the Evangelist. He also restored and repainted the smaller statues of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and repainted the crucifixion scene to match the twelfth Station of the Cross that hangs in the church. In fact, St. John the Evangelist is portrayed three times on the reredos, and his images are perfect matches of each other. The only deviation is Mary’s clothing. She is dressed in dark clothing on the Twelfth

Station because she is Our Lady of Sorrows. But on the reredos she is dressed in bright blue. Father Mulligan says he hopes the completed restoration will inspire the faithful in attendance at Mass.

“The high altar of the sanctuary is pointing you up towards heaven,” said Father Mulligan. “You have the saints here because the angels and saints are with us at Mass. It’s not just us and the Lord, but also heaven is here at the Mass, the angels and the saints as well. And so the sanctuary, in a special way, points us to heaven, in a sense represents heaven, as this is a place where heaven and earth meet in a profound and intimate way of Jesus coming down from heaven to earth in the Holy Eucharist, who we get to receive.”

Even the church’s patron, St. Boniface, has been restored and relocated to a place of honor overlooking the altar from the side of the sanctuary. Father Mulligan said with the restoration, there really wasn’t a place to put the figure. So Dennis Norlack agreed to build a new stand on the wall for the restored statue.

“His eyes now lead you to the altar,” said Father Mulligan. “If you look at him, he leads you to the altar to Jesus. And of course, he was missing the knife in the book. That’s the symbol of his martyrdom.”

One addition to the sanctuary is a gift from the parishioners of the former St. Bernard’s Church in Oriska, which was closed a few years back. The golden angel statues from that church now have a place of honor on each side of the newly restored reredos. If you are passing through Wimbledon, Father Mulligan invites you to look in on the restorations. And, if you are there on a Sunday, stay for Mass.



The reredos at St. Boniface’s Church in Wimbledon before and after the reconstruction and restoration project. The altar has since been put back in place in front of the reredos. (submitted photo and Paul Braun / New Earth)

# ‘Empathetic’ retreat returns to help adult children of divorce and separation

By Kevin J. Jones | Assistant editor, *New Earth*

Adults ages 18 and older whose parents are divorced, separated or never married can find help and healing at the next Life-Giving Wounds retreat, to be held Feb. 27-March 1, 2026 at the Hankinson Retreat Center in Hankinson. The retreat aims to help participants reflect on the wounds caused by their family’s breakdown, with the help of retreat leaders and others who have experienced similar circumstances.

Teresa Danelski, a retreat volunteer coming from the Duluth, Minn. area, encouraged others to attend.

“You carry whatever you’ve been through as a child into your marriage and your family. Anybody who needs healing, or doesn’t even realize they need healing, will get something out of it,” Danelski told *New Earth*. “It’s just a great community of people who have shared your unique suffering and can walk with you and share your struggles.”

Nathan Carr, another retreat volunteer, told *New Earth* the retreat is “a venue that allows Adult Children of Divorce and Separation (ACODS) to unpack their experiences in a loving and empathetic setting, process the many thoughts, emotions, and experiences from their story, and find healing in Christ alongside others who are also wounded by the divorce or separation of their parents.”

Father Gregory Haman, who himself grew up in a family with divorced parents, has been involved with Life-Giving Wounds for the last two years.

“One of the common wounds experienced by children whose parents are divorced is that they may have felt like they were not able to talk about or freely explore the experience of their parents’ divorce, or just didn’t know how,” Father Haman told *New Earth*. “That can follow them into adulthood, even for years. The retreat gives people sometimes their first opportunity to explore that, and to do it with Jesus Christ.”

“We can gain some healing when we receive empathy from other people, but we often experience much more freedom when we bring our wounds to Jesus, and experience his love alongside the love and friendship of brothers and sisters in the Church,” the priest added.

Presentations and reflections will help begin transformational healing. The retreat provides guided journaling to help participants process emotions and grief; optional small group discussions; and prayer and sacraments.

Presentation topics are broad and include: how one’s parents’ divorce or separation affects one’s identity and relationship with God; its impact on trust, dating, and marriage; ways to navigate anger and anxiety; true Christian forgiveness; appropriate

boundaries with family members; and redemptive suffering; gratitude and joy.

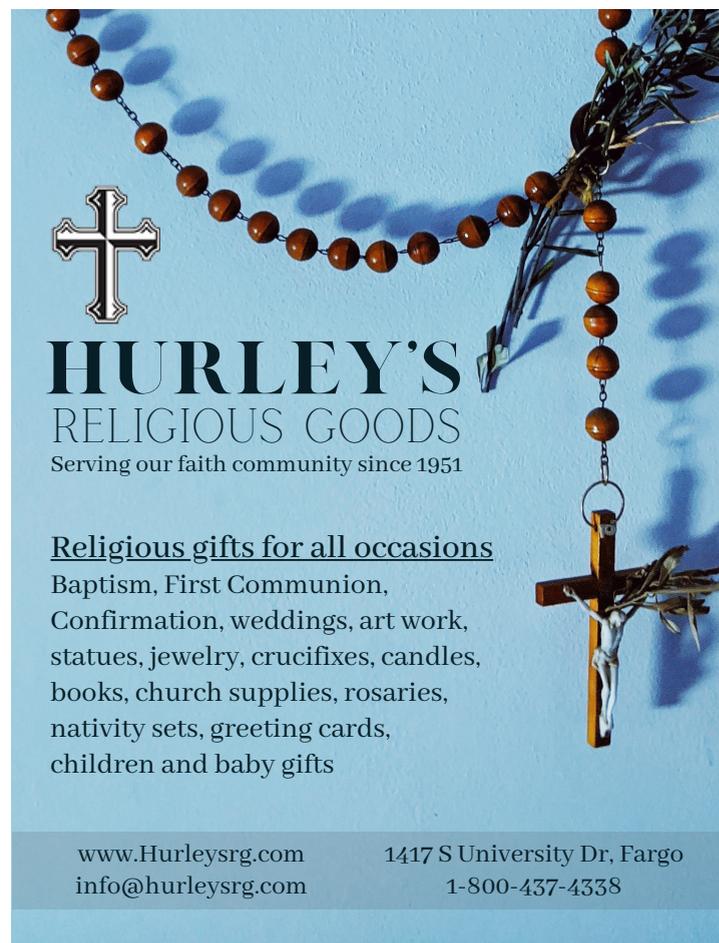
The Life-Giving Wounds ministry has chapter team counselors, but it is not formal counseling, the ministry’s national website says. Rather, it aims to complement professional therapy and encourages professional therapy where beneficial.

The retreat is Catholic-themed and provides Catholic prayer and sacraments, but it welcomes all adult children of divorce or separation regardless of their religious background.

The retreat costs range between \$275 to \$325, including a \$100 non-refundable deposit.

Partial need-based scholarships are available upon request.

For more information, visit the Diocese of Fargo webpage at [www.fargodiocese.org/lgw](http://www.fargodiocese.org/lgw).



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# Fargo bishop's residence is huge home with humble history

By Roxane B. Salonen | The Forum, reprinted with permission

The Fargo bishop's home holds many stories. "It was built during the time of Bishop (John) Shanley, our founding bishop," explained the current main tenant, Bishop John Folda. He noted that the home, erected in 1901, followed the raising of the abutting cathedral in 1899, joining the complex running parallel to Fargo's busy Broadway Street. "Not only was it the home of the bishop, but it was where all the pastoral business of the diocese was conducted," Folda explained. The building housed the diocesan newspaper production, archival storage and the rest of its administration needs.

## The heart of the home

Though it wasn't constructed with the original build, the home's first-floor chapel is a highlight Folda called a "jewel" and "the heart of the home," explaining that the initial chapel, an addition typical of a bishop's residence, was once housed on the second floor. But in 1938 during Bishop Aloisius Muench's leadership, the newer chapel was constructed as a gift to Muench for his 25th priestly ordination anniversary. Crafted by a German wood-carving artist, Augustus Schmidt, it incorporates themes of both priesthood and sacrifice in its carvings and stained-glass windows.

"It's really extraordinary, a beautiful, intimate place of prayer, both for us and those who visit," Folda said.

The Rev. Eric Seitz, who shares the space with Folda as his secretary, said that when giving tours, he loves showing visitors the chapel, along with the vaults used in the past for diocesan administration, helping explain that "this home wasn't just built so the bishop could have a lavish place to live."

While the clergy sleep on the second floor, the third floor includes additional bedrooms, often used for seminarians who stay there in the summertime and over school breaks.

"Especially over Holy Week, having the boys around is very nice," Seitz said, noting that these visits often end up part of their priestly formation.

## A joyful existence

When he was first assigned to assist the bishop and was invited to move into the residence, Seitz said, he thought,

**Built in 1901, the stately home holds stories of local faithful in what began as 'mission territory.'**



The Bishop of Fargo's residence, located at 608 Broadway in Fargo (Paul Braun / New Earth)

"How many people live with their bosses?" He appreciates the extra space, especially after long road trips taken throughout the wide diocese when it's time to retreat, and for hosting his own smaller gatherings. As he works on his licentiate in canon law, Seitz expressed gratitude, too, for his "sitting room" office with its wood paneling and view of the front garden and Broadway.

"There's a lot of joy that comes from living in such a beautiful home," he said.

But there are also drawbacks.

"Sometimes, about midnight in the summer, people decide they're going to have a party on bishop's front porch," he said. They're free to hang out on the lawn, he explained, as long as they're well-behaved; the home does have a public dimension after all.

The public rooms are mostly contained on the main floor, where a large dining room, originally divided into three separate rooms, was renovated in 2004.

"It's a nice, open area, and we've had as many as 25 people seated for dinner in that room," Folda said, including auction dinners and other gatherings.

While waiting for guests to arrive, he'll often spend a little time relaxing in the room across the hall from there, where a piano regularly entices the busy prelate, a longtime pianist. Soon after Folda moved to Fargo, Monsignor Joseph Goering "very graciously moved the piano from the cathedral rectory" to his residence next door, he said. But on Folda's tenth anniversary, a large number of the faithful and some priests



Bishop Folda seated at his grand piano, a gift from the diocesan faithful to commemorate his tenth year as bishop. (Paul Braun / New Earth)

surprised him with a baby grand.

Sarah Ries (the home’s caretaker) loves when she’s busy preparing for a dinner party in the home and hears tunes lilting from the piano room.

“It just fills my soul to be in that beautiful old house, a house that is smelling pretty good by then, and to hear that; it’s such a treat!” she said.

Back in the dining room, one of the more unique pieces is displayed: a crucifix from Italy added during the time of Bishop Shanley. It comprises hundreds of tiny, colorful mosaic tiles depicting scenes of Jesus’ Passion, and below that, the major basilicas in Rome and some of its ancient ruins.

“That item is really exceptional and beautiful,” Folda said.

**Mission territory**

Folda explained that Shanley traveled to Europe a number of times, partly to raise money for the diocese.

“It was mission territory at the time, and he was struggling to make ends meet, so he would do these preaching tours, which took him back and forth to and from Europe,” Folda said.

A cabinet in the hallway displays a crucifixion scene made from alabaster, which was a gift to Cardinal Muench when he was the pope’s delegate to Germany after World War II.

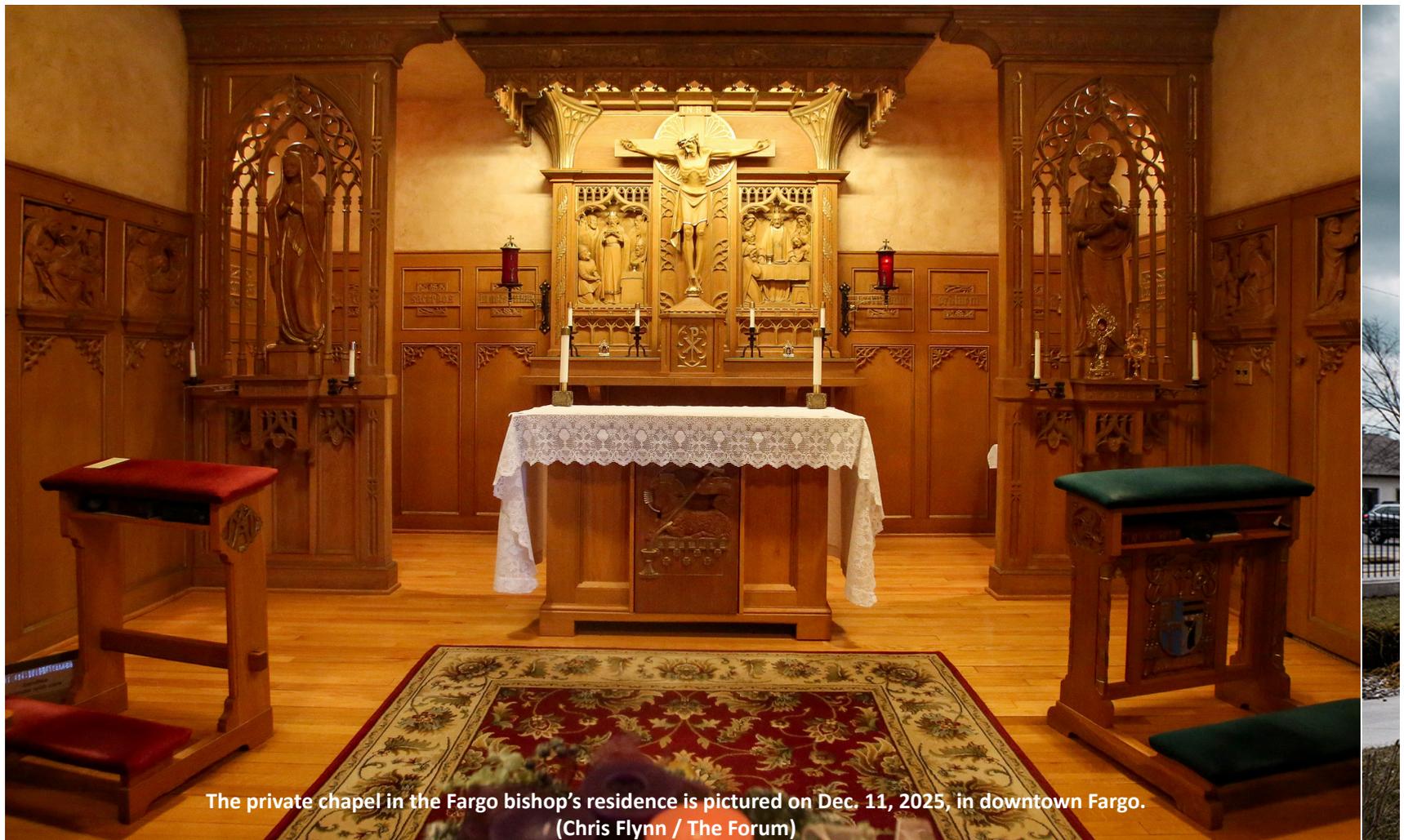
**“There’s a lot of joy that comes from living in such a beautiful home.”**

**-Father Eric Seitz  
Secretary to Bishop Folda**

“He was leading a lot of relief efforts, not just for the Church, but for the people in Germany in general,” Folda said, and a monastery there gifted that to him in gratitude. Folda also noted a reliquary containing relics of both the true cross of Christ, “though just a sliver,” and others from the 12 apostles — rarities to possess. In that same cabinet, a number of old prayer books and Scripture that would have been used in liturgies in the early days of the diocese’s existence are also kept, along with vestments and books that belonged to the first bishops.

“Every bishop for 125 years has lived in this house,” Folda said, noting that this spring will mark the home’s 125th year.

Before its major renovation several decades ago, there were talks of possibly tearing down the home and starting from scratch, but with the help of some private gifts and other contributions, preservation became possible.



The private chapel in the Fargo bishop's residence is pictured on Dec. 11, 2025, in downtown Fargo. (Chris Flynn / The Forum)

### A formidable history to follow

The home's wall hangings include large paintings of all the bishops who've resided there, offering frequent reminders to Folda that the home isn't just a structure, but a residence with an important history.

"When it was built, the diocese was in its infancy, still finding its way and struggling to grow, including during the Great Depression when there was no money anywhere," he said. Bishop Shanley was only 37 when he came to the area.

"Initially, he had responsibility for the entire state," Folda said, leading from Jamestown until the diocese was relocated to Fargo. "You get a sense of the challenges they experienced during their years as bishop, but also the great growth and graces that have come through the course of those years."

At times, Folda shared, he's wondered, "How did I wind up in this group of great men?" Most, he noted, "faced far greater struggles than I have." Yet they inspire him every day.

"I have a feeling that I stand on their shoulders and count on their prayers," he said. "They're great models of faith for me."

Seeing them daily in these works of art, with his face among them, Folda has been duly moved "to continue to trust in God's providence."

"He has a plan," Folda added. "He wanted me to be here in Fargo, and I feel very blessed to be part of the history of this diocese."

**"[God] wanted me to be here in Fargo, and I feel very blessed to be part of the history of this diocese."**

**-Bishop John T. Folda**



An outdoor display of Stations of the Cross (Catholic)

# Stations of the Cross

Why the Catholic faithful take part in the tradition

By Paul Braun

For centuries, Catholics have honored the passion and death of Christ through the Stations of the Cross. Nearly all Catholic churches have some version of the 14 stations displayed, and the faithful walk these stations usually on Fridays in Lent. Those who partake may be granted plenary indulgences if they meet certain guidelines, or they receive partial indulgences for themselves or for maybe a loved one who has passed on. But the common sight of the 14 stations displayed in a church or elsewhere wasn't the case back in the early days of the church.

In a 1994 article published in the Arlington Catholic Herald, Father William Saunders reveals the history of the stations, beginning with pilgrims who would walk the way of Jesus's passion in Jerusalem. Father Saunders writes: "Tradition holds that our Blessed Mother visited daily the scenes of our Lord's passion. After Constantine legalized Christianity in the year 312, this pathway was marked with its important stations. St. Jerome

(342-420), living in Bethlehem during the later part of his life, attested to the crowds of pilgrims from various countries who visited those holy places and followed the Way of the Cross."

The tradition continued to gain popularity through the fifth century, but by that time there were efforts among church leaders to erect stations elsewhere than in the Holy Land to allow the faithful who could not travel to Jerusalem to have a spiritual experience commemorating Christ's passion and death. By the mid-fourteenth century, Franciscan friars were appointed the guardians of the holy sites in Jerusalem. Only pilgrims who visited the actual holy sites were granted indulgence. But all of that changed in the late fourteenth century when the Ottoman Empire blocked access to the holy sites. That is when many alternative shrines were erected across Europe.

As Father Saunders recounts: "At the end of the seventeenth century, the erection of stations in churches became more



**Pope Innocent XI, painted here by Jacob Ferdinand Voet, helped spread devotion to the Stations of the Cross**

popular. In 1686, Pope Innocent XI, realizing that few people could travel to the Holy Land due to the Muslim oppression, granted the right to erect stations in all the (Franciscan-run) churches and that the same indulgences would be given to the Franciscans and those affiliated with them for practicing the devotion as if on an actual pilgrimage. Pope Benedict XIII extended these indulgences to all of the faithful in 1726. Five years later, Pope Clement XII permitted stations to be created in all churches and fixed the number of stations at 14. In 1742, Pope Benedict XIV exhorted all priests to enrich their churches with the Way of the Cross, which must include 14 crosses and are usually accompanied with pictures or images of each particular station.”

As we know them today, the Stations of the Cross begin with Jesus being condemned to death. They continue through Jesus carrying his Cross; his encounters with his mother Mary, Simon of Cyrene, Veronica, and the women of Jerusalem; and his three falls. The final stations include his Crucifixion and end with the laying of Jesus in his tomb.

**“The stations are a reminder that we are not alone in our suffering.”  
-Father Sean Mulligan**



**Pope Clement XII, painted here by Augustino Masucci, finalized the Stations of the Cross as we know them today**

### **Indulgences**

To obtain a plenary indulgence through the Stations of the Cross, the faithful must perform the following steps:

- Perform the devotion: Visit a church or an oratory where the Stations of the Cross are present and meditate on the Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ. One must move from station to station, if possible, but if you’re unable to move, remaining in one place while meditating on the stations is also valid.
- Go to confession: Receive the sacrament of confession, ideally within about twenty days before or after performing the devotion. True repentance and a firm resolve to turn away from sin are necessary.
- Receive Communion: Participate in the Mass and receive Holy Communion on the day of performing the Stations of the Cross devotion.



Around the world, the Stations of the Cross are sometimes depicted with live actors called “The Living Stations.” (Catholic)



One of the nineteenth-century stations at Holy Cross Church in West Fargo. The stations came from a church in France. (Paul Braun / New Earth)

## In 1742, Pope Benedict XVI exhorted all priests to enrich their churches with the Way of the Cross.

- Prayer for the pope’s intentions: This usually means reciting one Our Father and one Hail Mary, but any other appropriate prayers are acceptable.
- Have a complete detachment from all sin, including venial sin. This is often the most challenging condition, requiring sincere introspection and a desire for holiness.

A partial indulgence may still be received if some of these conditions cannot be met. You may also receive an indulgence for someone who has already passed on.

### Encouraging participation

Taking part in the Stations of the Cross is a tradition for many Catholics, especially during Lent, and clergy around the Fargo Diocese encourage even more of the faithful to return to the practice, including young people and Catholic school students.

“The stations are a reminder that we are not alone in our suffering,” said Father Sean Mulligan, pastor St. Boniface Church in Wimbledon and St. Mary’s Church in Dazey. “At times we may feel that God has abandoned us, but he hasn’t abandoned us. In fact, he’s very close and he’s actually suffering inside of us. Maybe you’re going through a profound struggle in your life, and you feel like you’re being crucified right now, in that Jesus is being crucified in us. So, as you walk through the stations of the cross, especially as you enter into it this Lent, maybe just allow for the Holy Spirit to work in you, and think about what is the one station that stands out to you. What is the one that you associate with? That may be Jesus’ invitation for you to join him in his passion.”

So during this Holy season of Lent, as you head off to a Friday fish fry, check to see if your parish is holding an observance for the Stations of the Cross, and be part of a centuries old Catholic tradition that may help bring new meaning to your Lenten season.

# With Roe Gone, We Still Need a Culture of Life



GUEST COLUMNIST

**DR. R. JARED STAUDT, PHD**

The Catholic Culturalist

Volunteering in the Pro-Life movement in the 1990s, I remember praying for the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* as if it would immediately end the abortion problem in the United States. As a high schooler, it seemed like a simple enough solution. *Roe v. Wade* caused the mess, so getting rid of it should take care of things. But now, after *Dobbs v. Jackson*, what has actually changed in the last three and a half years?

Even though abortion is now restricted to some degree in a majority of states (and throughout pregnancy in about a dozen), abortion rates have not fallen. In fact, there was a 1% increase in abortions in 2024 from the previous year, and sales of Plan B emergency contraception are through the roof, with one company experiencing “an incredible 3,000% surge in demand” after the Dobbs decision. Overturning Roe was not so much a solution as a new beginning.

The law certainly matters, but, to some degree, it follows the culture. It’s not that law can’t shape culture, as, according to Aquinas, it is meant to induce and restrain from action according to right reason, in a way that promotes both the good of the individual and that of society as a whole. But, when society has accepted personal autonomy as a sacrosanct principle, the way in which we think about law, the common good and happiness shifts more toward obtaining rights and accomplishing individual desires, whatever their nature. In this sense, Justice Anthony Kennedy pointed us to the crux of the abortion debate in 1992 when writing his decision upholding Roe in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*: “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe and of the mystery of human life.” We can laugh at the absurdity of the statement, yet it accurately reflects the pulse of our culture.

Culture, more than law, shapes the way in which we understand human happiness and its relation to the sanctity of life. This is why Pope St. John Paul II pointed us to a goal that transcends judicial decisions (while not forgetting their importance). He called us to build a culture of life, rightly understanding that our current culture bears an intrinsic tendency toward death by treating others as an infringement upon autonomy or even a commodity. John Paul’s description of a “profound crisis of culture,” certainly still applies, one “which generates scepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the

meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and his duties” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 11).

Freedom stands at the empty heart of the culture of death, yet, when properly directed, can shape a culture of life as well. God gave us the gift of freedom not to grasp after our own pleasure and power but to imitate him in self-giving love. Culture is a way of life, and we need to build one that prioritizes life above other goods. People mean more than things. People, and commitment to them, lead to a fulfilling life, not the accumulation of goods. Pope St. John Paul II gives examples of simple “daily gestures of openness, sacrifice and unselfish care which countless people lovingly make in families, hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly and other centres or communities which defend life” (27), and this selflessness provides a model for Christian love which can resuscitate culture.

I would include education as a key element in fostering a culture of life, even if the opposite ordinarily occurs. Public schools serve as leading agents of the culture of death for the young, teaching them “safe sex” and occasionally facilitating access for abortions. More generally, they are places where we emphasize material success above inner refinement. Bereft of moral or spiritual aspirations, they fail to form young people in discipline and sacrifice for others. Ideology serves as a false substitute for faith, claiming outrage over environmental and social issues, while inflaming the root cause of these crises by discarding the wisdom of the past that fostered the inner order of mind and soul and translated this order into society.

Culture is transmitted by education, learning patterns of thought and action that give a people cohesion and shape their collective aspirations. This kind of education largely happens outside of the classroom — in the home, through friendship, and by means of entertainment. This is where the young learn what truly matters in daily life and what is worthy of their love and commitment. And it is in education, understood broadly as initiation into culture, that we can begin to form a culture of life if we teach our children to value personal communion and to nurture it through responsibility. Discipline, above all else, no longer wanting everything to be given, with constant entertainment and distraction, will prove crucial for forming a disposition ready to receive life as a gift, rather than a burden.

The Christian home and school can become gardens that cultivate vocations to family life, ones that we can no longer take for granted, with young adults ready to make the joyful sacrifice of laying down their lives in love for their spouses and children. This slow growth from below is where we need to concentrate, rather than quick fixes from above, in order to build a culture of life, one family at a time.

*Dr. Staudt’s column is syndicated by the Denver Catholic, the official publication of the Archdiocese of Denver.*



# TATTERED PAGES

A review of books, movies, music

## The pilgrim's ascent to the heights of union with God

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

The pilgrimage of life is a great mystery. We often face so many perplexing circumstances that we cannot immediately comprehend. How do we reconcile the mystery of God's loving providence with the blunt suffering we find in our direct experiences? When we face the trials of life, we often wrestle with the dark and difficult emotions of fear, anger, bitterness, and despair, among many more! It is not a question of if we will encounter suffering, but rather how we will respond when we meet this inevitable fact of life in our fallen world.

To reflect on this question, I recommend the Christian classic *Hinds' Feet on High Places*, published by the English writer Hannah Hurnard in 1955. Her imaginative allegory captures the pilgrim journey we all must take as we depart from the fallen condition of the world, filled with sin and sorrow, to reach the heights of God's love, glory, and redemption. This is much like the hind (a female deer) leaps and bounds up a mountainside (c.f. Hab. 3:19).

The story's main character is named Much Afraid. Described as having twisted feet and an ugly twisted mouth, she dwells in the Valley of Humiliation among her other relatives in the Fearing family. Their names include Craven Fear, Dismal Foreboding and Lord Fearing. Although Much Afraid is held captive in this village of gloom and contention, her deepest desire is to follow the Shepherd who tends his flock in the Valley and travel with him to the High Places far above. The Shepherd, knowing her desire, invites her to receive the thorn of the seed of love. This allows her to embark on her exodus to the High Places. Accepting his invitation, Much Afraid follows him and trusts his loving guidance.

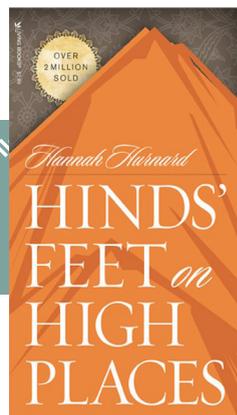
Unbeknownst to Much Afraid, the journey will be fraught with difficulties along the way that will challenge her resolve, strip her of her attachments, and purify her for the great gift in store for her in the High Places. To accompany her on the journey, the Shepherd entrusts to her two traveling companions: Suffering and Sorrow. These most necessary companions will help her often as she is assaulted by her relatives from the Fearing Family. At every stage of the journey, she is tempted to turn back. However, as long as her hands are firmly grasped to Suffering and Sorrow, she cannot be overcome. In times of deepest need, she is able to call out to the Shepherd who is ever ready to drive away her tempters.

Much Afraid's quest takes her through many unique lands that

teach her lessons punctuated with the words of the Shepherd. He invites her to build an altar, offer sacrifice and keep a stone as a memorial to what she endured. Traveling through the Desert, to the Shores of Loneliness, up the Precipice of Injury, through the Forests of Danger and Tribulation, down to the Valley of Loss, she is driven to drink from the Spring called Marah, which shares its name with the bitter oasis in the Book of Exodus.

Much Afraid's priceless lessons transform her heart and prepare her for the gift awaiting her. In the final stage of her pilgrimage, her strength wanes and she stands by the grave of her own hopes. She must willingly give her heart on the final altar at the edge of the High Places. Willfully suffering the death of her own self, her natural human love ripens and softens so it can be pulled out, whole and entire, and replaced with the gift of Divine Love. After this ultimate gift, she is no longer Much Afraid. She is given a new name: Grace and Glory. Her companions also receive new identities. Transformed by their trusting relationship in the Shepherd King, the three companions return to the Valley of Humiliation. There, they can help save those still in wretched misery, blinded by their own condition, yet destined for redemption!

This poetic portrayal of the Christian journey reveals something beautiful and transformative. The power of the Incarnation means that in Christ our human experiences—ugly, burdensome, filled with sorrow and suffering—paradoxically become the crowning jewels of our royal crowns. Life's sorrowful mysteries are the necessary entry points to the glorious mysteries we are destined to receive in the Lord Jesus Christ. Entrusting ourselves to his care, will always take us from our own Valley of Humiliation into the marvelous Kingdom of Love!



*Hinds' Feet in High Places* by Hannah Hurnard



# OUR BODIES TELL HIS STORY

Theology of the Body and You



## The ‘three Rs’ of Theology of the Body

By Timothy Mosser | Respect Life Director of the Diocese of Fargo

**A**h, we can all fondly remember the “Three R’s” from our school years. Can’t you just hear the song? Go ahead, sing it! “School days, school days, dear old golden rule days; readin’ and ‘ritin’ and ‘rithmetic...”

That song was a great tool to help us remember three very important aspects of our education. We can apply this same concept to our study of Pope St. John Paul II’s Theology of the Body (TOB).

To help understand our freedom of choice that is so important to the Theology of the Body, I suggest that we use the “Three R’s” of TOB. As we know our bodies speak a language of which we are not the author. When we are faced with a temptation to speak lies with our bodies, we have basically three choices as to how we can respond: Revel, Repress, or *Redeem*.

The first choice is to give in to the temptation. Let’s call that “reveling” since we allow ourselves to indulge our lower appetites—much like an animal satisfying an urge by instinct—without engaging our higher faculties (reminiscent of the Israelites’ behavior with the Golden Calf in Exodus 32). Reveling gives a momentary pleasure but soon rings hollow and empty. It doesn’t truly satisfy us, it only enslaves us more to our passions. This is beneath our dignity as human persons and thus leaves us less peaceful and less free.

The second choice is to respond by “repressing” the urge. This is usually a very noble effort because we desire to avoid sin, and it can be a helpful tool. However, merely repressing an inordinate desire does not allow us to live the full meaning of our humanity. Why? Because repression is largely following some external rule (a good rule to be sure!) that may not change the desires of our heart. We can find ourselves constantly “repressing” or “stuffing” our disordered desires – acting in a certain way “because some rule tells me to.” This too is beneath our dignity as human persons because this type of action is much akin to a caged animal who behaves only because of the restraints put on it. If the restraints were taken away, revelry would ensue!

There is a third way. We can call this “redeeming” the desire. We acknowledge that the urge is there and that because of our fallen human nature we may feel drawn to act in a sinful or unhealthy manner. What God made good, Satan has twisted. What God spoke in truth, Satan speaks in lies that can appear—at some level—good to us (“The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for wisdom.”

Gen 3:6). Satan tries to convince us that trusting him and not God is the way to happiness. It is here that we need to cry out, “Lord, redeem this desire. Untwist it. Help me to see the truth of your plan and how I can live this truth in and through my body!”

When seen in this light, we are drawn to act not simply because of some rule or urge, but from our hearts. We realize our true dignity as human persons. We are not merely fallen, we are also redeemed in Christ. We are truly children of God (cf. 1 Jn 3:1) and partakers of the divine nature by escaping from evil desire (cf. 2 Pt. 1:4). Yes, that’s right – escaping from evil desire! It is by availing ourselves to this grace of redemption that we experience a true conversion of heart. And here is where Pope St. John Paul II reminds us that in this subjective experience where we encounter the living and true God, we also find authentic freedom and peace. Aha! Subjective experience that is verified by the objective norms of Christ’s teaching!

We are now “free from the law,” not because the law is gone (the objective norms are still there), but because we no longer desire to break it. The desires of our heart are conforming to God’s desires. We are becoming purer images of God! (See the article “TOB, Freedom and the Law” for a more in-depth analysis of freedom from the law.)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church speaks to these three choices as well. In paragraph 2339 we read, “Chastity includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery which is a training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy. Man’s dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within,” (this is ‘redeemed’), “and not by blind impulses,” (‘revelry’), “or by mere external constraint” (‘repressing’). “Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end.”

Wow! The way to true peace and freedom—the way to live our true dignity as human persons—is through self-mastery, governing our passions, and freely choosing the good from the heart! Remembering the “Three Rs” of TOB will help us on that way.



## How God's miracles happened to me

By Hope Hageman | Parishioner of Sts. Anne & Joachim Catholic Church in Fargo

**W**e believe in miracles—or at least, we say we do. We read about them in the lives of the saints and hear them proclaimed from the pulpit. Yet when God intervenes quietly in our own lives, we hesitate. We explain it away. We tell ourselves it doesn't count. For years, I did the same—until I could no longer deny that God had worked not one, but two miracles in my life.

I grew up healthy, save for the occasional injury. That all changed when I was fourteen, during a family trip to Florida. I was walking through the Universal Studios theme park when my right ankle and calf suddenly began to swell like a balloon. There was no injury we could see and no pain to explain it. We were completely confused.

Upon our return home we began what would become years of doctor visits. I saw podiatrists, vascular specialists, cardiologists, OB-GYNs, radiologists, psychologists, and many more. Finally, later that year, a doctor in Sioux Falls discovered that I had a rare birth defect in my pelvis' iliac vein called May-Thurner Syndrome. This condition causes reduced blood flow and would likely have killed me by my eighteenth birthday had it not been discovered and treated with bypass surgery. Most patients are not diagnosed until an autopsy following a mysterious early death. This was my first miracle.

My joy, however, was short-lived. Although I would live to see my twenties, May-Thurner Syndrome was not the true culprit. I visited hospitals in Fargo, Sioux Falls, and eventually the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. Meanwhile, the swelling worsened, traveling up my right leg past my knee and beginning in my left leg. The pain began. At just sixteen years old, I was going to bed at 7:30 each night simply to avoid the soreness—pain that no medication could touch. I avoided dressing up and stayed away from social events due to my appearance.

At 17, while at the Mayo Clinic, I was diagnosed with lymphedema, a chronic lifelong condition affecting the lymphatic system. Doctors told me I would need to be diligent to keep my limbs at a manageable size, and that failure to do so could, at worst, risk amputation. They prescribed a strict regimen: a month of daily physical therapy, intense daily compression, and a specialized lymphatic massage machine that was supposed to alleviate my pain. Spoiler alert: it did not!

By the grace of God, I was still able to continue my extracurricular activities, finish high school, and earn a scholarship to South

I told myself, “Miracles don’t happen to me. They happen to other people.”

Dakota State University. At that point, I was attending Mass, but my relationship with God was in its infancy. God's hand guided me to the Newman Center on campus, where my faith began to blossom. In March of my freshman year, I was scheduled to return to the Mayo Clinic due to the lack of progress in my condition.

One late night in January, I found myself in the chapel alone. I was in so much pain and deeply discouraged about my future. How would I chase children with this condition? Would a man be willing to marry a woman like me, with such an uncertain physical future? But most importantly, would my pain ever be eased? I vividly remember falling to my knees in that chapel, crying to God for help.

Around that time, I had recently learned about the St. Jude Novena. I prayed, “Please, heal me. If I pray this novena and am healed through the intercession of St. Jude, I will name my first child Jude. I would never forget that kindness.” For nine days, I prayed the novena, begging for relief if it was God's will.

At the Mayo clinic, I underwent repeat scans. My mother, as she had done for years, attended every appointment with me. She and I were not expecting great news. To our astonishment, the doctor told us there was no longer any evidence of lymphedema. He tried to explain it away. Perhaps it was recent weight loss, or maybe the original diagnosis had been incorrect. But I knew. I knew that St. Jude had interceded for me, and the grace of God had prevailed. This was my second miracle.

For a long time, I didn't call this a miracle. I told myself, “Miracles don't happen to me. They happen to other people.” But they do happen, to me and to you. God works miracles every day if we take the time to notice his hand at work. My pain is gone. I can do whatever God wills without fear for my legs.

Better yet, I can share this story with my children.

Like I promised in my prayers, my eldest is named Jude.

# The history of the North Dakota Catholic Conference



## CATHOLIC ACTION

### DAVID TAMISIEA, JD, PHD

Executive Director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, which acts on behalf of the state's Catholic bishops to respond to public policy issues of concern to the Catholic Church.

In the summer of 1969, Bishop Hilary Hacker of Bismarck and Bishop Leo Dworschak of Fargo began discussions with several priests and laymen about the possibility of forming a state Catholic conference in North Dakota. After some preliminary discussions, a committee was formed to explore this further, and at their first meeting the committee members unanimously agreed there was a real need to create a North Dakota Catholic Conference.

The committee invited John Merkert, the executive director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, to attend their next meeting later that summer to share his knowledge and expertise. A few months later, on Sept. 25, 1969, the North Dakota Catholic Conference incorporated as a non-profit organization in North Dakota and became the twenty-second state Catholic conference in the United States.

After its legal formation, the North Dakota Catholic Conference's board of directors, composed of the two bishops and three laymen, moved to appoint Edwin Becker as the Conference's first executive director. The North Dakota Catholic Conference officially opened its doors on January 5, 1970. The North Dakota Catholic Conference set as its two highest priorities opposing the liberalization of the state's abortion law and advocating for public funds to support non-public schools. Alas, some things never change.

Although they are found in most states, state Catholic conferences are often referred to as one the best-kept secrets of the Church in the United States. A state Catholic conference is an organization established by the bishops of a state to communicate public policy positions important to the Church in that state and to educate Catholics and the broader public on Catholic moral and social teaching and its bearing on these policy issues. State Catholic conferences provide a mechanism for the bishops in a state to act together in a unified and coordinated manner to advocate before government officials for the Church's position on issues like abortion, school choice, homelessness, human trafficking, social welfare programs, immigration, and other important issues.

State Catholic conferences emerged in the United States shortly

after the Second Vatican Council as a new form of collaboration among bishops within the same state. While a handful of state Catholic conferences existed before the Council, they began proliferating after its conclusion, so that today 44 states have Catholic conferences. The inspiration for this new phenomenon is the theology of Vatican II which emphasizes inter-ecclesial collaboration among bishops, lay participation in the Church's mission, and the Church's engagement with the modern world.

Since the North Dakota Catholic Conference began operating in 1970, it has had only five executive directors. The first executive director, Edwin Becker (1970-1975), was a farmer, businessman, and state senator from Willow City. Becker worked to establish the structure and operations of the Conference and to educate the Catholic faithful and legislators about this new work of the Catholic Church in North Dakota. Most notably, in 1972 Becker, as head of the Conference, led the campaign to defeat a ballot measure that would have legalized abortion up to 20 weeks gestation in a landslide victory garnering 77% of the vote. Sadly, two months later, the U.S. Supreme Court issued *Roe v Wade*, wiping out the hard-fought victory.

The second executive director, Kitty Englestad (1970-1987), was the first woman state Catholic conference director in the nation. Englestad played an important role helping state legislators and the general public respond to the Roe decision and established standing committees to assist her political advocacy work. Englestad also initiated the Legislative Action Network, an organized network of North Dakotans whom the Conference calls upon to lobby state and federal legislators when important bills are under consideration.

The third executive director was Sr. Paula Ringuette (1987-1995). Sr. Paula was a member of the Presentation Sisters in Fargo. Sr. Paula expanded the work of the North Dakota Catholic Conference to include more advocacy for policies to help the poor and once said, "If it was not for the Church, sometimes there would be no one to speak for the poor." Sr. Paula also increased the number of committees assisting her advocacy work and put into practice the Church's love for the unborn child and the poor and marginalized.

The fourth executive director was Christopher Dodson (1995-2023). Dodson moved to Jamestown from his native California with his wife, Rosi, a North Dakotan, and began as the healthcare liaison at the Conference in 1994 under Sr. Paula when healthcare reform was being debated across the country. After Sr. Paula retired, Dodson became executive director and the first attorney to lead the North Dakota Catholic Conference. During Dodson's long tenure, the North Dakota Catholic Conference helped enact conscience protections for adoption agencies, one of the nation's first Alternatives to Abortion programs, an

advance directives law that respects the dignity of human life and individual decision-making, criminalization of assisted suicide and human cloning, and protections for religious freedom. Dodson also became a respected leader and strategist on the issue of abortion and worked with others to craft a law criminalizing most abortions in the event *Roe* was overturned and, after it did, advocated for laws to help pregnant women in need.

Dodson's time also coincided with the creation of the internet, and under his leadership the North Dakota Catholic Conference became the first state Catholic conference with a website, a news feed, and an e-newsletter. In recognition of his work, in 2023 Pope Francis awarded Dodson with the Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice ("Cross for the Church and the Pope"), the highest honor a pope can give to a layperson, for his distinguished service to the Church. Under Dodson's direction, in 2011 the Conference hired Stacey Pflieger as an Associate for the Conference. Pflieger, who had previously served as director of North Dakota Right to Life, continues to serve an invaluable administrative role for the Conference throughout the year and, during the legislative session, assists with pro-life advocacy work.

I currently serve as executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference. I am also an attorney, have a doctorate in

theology, and previously served as a professor and dean at the University of Mary. Christopher Dodson assisted me in my first year as co-director and continues to serve as general counsel and a part-time policy consultant. Please pray for the North Dakota Catholic Conference to continue to serve faithfully in advocating for policy positions important to the Church in North Dakota now and for many years to come.

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# Embryo adoption: an open question?



## GUEST COLUMNIST

**FATHER TAD PACHOLCZYK, PHD**

Senior Ethicist

National Catholic Bioethics Center

When it comes to the plight of the hundreds of thousands of IVF embryos frozen in the U.S. and elsewhere, it is often claimed that the Catholic Church has never definitively addressed the liceity, or moral allowability, of “embryo transfer” (also known as embryo rescue or embryo adoption).

In a recent public debate on this topic in Indianapolis, I argued that the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has, in fact, settled this question. If we scrutinize the two major teaching documents of the Church dealing with this issue, the immorality of the practice of embryo transfer becomes clear.

The 2008 document *Dignitas Personae* states: “The proposal that these embryos could be put at the disposal of infertile couples as a treatment for infertility is not ethically acceptable.” It identifies a specific situation, namely, attempting to treat a couple’s infertility by embryo transfer, as being always immoral. The document then goes on to point out that these moral objections extend beyond this single case, so that the same set of concerns will apply in other instances where embryo transfer might be proposed or considered:

“It has also been proposed, solely in order to allow human beings to be born who are otherwise condemned to destruction, that there could be a form of ‘prenatal adoption.’ This proposal, praiseworthy with regard to the intention of respecting and defending human life, presents however various problems not dissimilar to those mentioned above.”

This passage reveals that even when we face the stark prospect of the outright killing of frozen human embryos (“otherwise condemned to destruction”), this does not allow us to bypass or ignore the substantive moral objections inherent in embryo transfer proposals.

The final section of the passage concludes with a forceful and unambiguous assertion: “All things considered, it needs to be recognized that the thousands of abandoned embryos represent a situation of injustice which in fact cannot be resolved.”

Despite the tragedy of the countless embryonic humans “frozen in time” (with thousands more each day being added to the stockpiles), *Dignitas Personae* rejects the practice of embryo adoption.

A second, older Church document released in 1987 and entitled *Donum Vitae* references the “absurd fate” to which human embryos have been exposed by freezing them, and then

notes that there is “no possibility of their being offered safe means of survival which can be licitly pursued.” Hence, it would seem even as far back as the late 80s, a negative judgment had already been made by the teaching authority of the Church regarding the question of embryo adoption.

In addition to there being no morally permissible means of a path to survival for these embryos, *Donum Vitae* declares the basic human right of every person “to be conceived and to be born within marriage and from marriage.” For embryos to be “born from marriage” points also to the moral significance of the circumstances of our gestation.

Interestingly, *Donum Vitae* repetitively employs the phrase, “IVF and ET” (in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer). This conjoined phrase appears a remarkable sixteen times throughout the document as it seeks to explain the ethical concerns surrounding assisted reproductive technologies.

The deliberate inclusion of “ET” points to the fact that it is not merely the “in vitro” or “extracorporeal conception” aspect that renders the procedure immoral, but also that the ET step itself violates sound ethics.

In other words, it seems that a double moral evil can be identified in each instance of in vitro fertilization and embryo transfer: 1. The manufacture of human beings in glassware, outside-the-body (and outside-the-marital-act); and 2. The importation/implantation of an outside-the-body generated embryo into the uterus.

Number two, of course, would constitute an action largely synonymous with “embryo adoption” or “embryo rescue.”

Taken together, these documents point to the fact that transferring a stranger’s embryo into one’s wife violates the inner structure of marital fruitfulness. Based on these texts, we can also begin to grasp how embryo transfer, even motivated with the best of intentions, nevertheless involves a form of “pirating” the wife’s body for designs that are not proper to its intrinsic order within marriage. *Dignitas Personae* also compares embryo adoption to “any form of surrogate motherhood,” which the Church teaches to be morally unacceptable.

Couples who have done IVF and ended up with frozen children face an excruciatingly difficult situation as they try to figure out what to do with their “leftover” embryonic offspring. I offered some possible approaches to this situation in a previous article (see “Orphans in Liquid Nitrogen,” November 2016).

So it is clearly problematic to assert that embryo adoption remains an “open question” for Catholics. Close scrutiny of key magisterial texts and reflection upon the explanations provided by those documents indicate that the practice of embryo transfer involves fundamentally unethical actions.

# What breaking my arm taught me about priorities



## SEMINARIAN LIFE

### DEACON GARETT ABERLE

Theology IV  
St. Paul Seminary  
St. Paul, Minn.

**N**ow that I am in my last year of seminary, I have found that formation has taken on a quite different feel. What has been most difficult has not been the academics but rather the internal transformations which the Lord desires to work in me. This has brought to mind the words of an old Dominican: “Most of you are entirely useless in the eyes of the world, but you can pray.” While this may sound somewhat harsh, there is great truth in it.

All the countless years of schooling in seminary are not intended to be primarily practical. They are not primarily a trade school preparing you for the “real world.” For example, the first time we ever discussed how to do things that deacons do was the semester right before we were ordained. While it is true that some priests and some seminarians do have great natural talent and skills, none of these are prerequisites for the priesthood.

## The consequences of prioritizing prayer and the work of God are real.

A recent accident has helped me to meditate upon this further. On my way to Christmas Eve Mass, with my vestments in hand, I slipped on a piece of ice and landed on my elbow. This broke my arm! While medical attention, thankfully, ensures that my arm will heal, the accident has forced some changes in my life.

I am left-handed, and so I am able to write and do schoolwork. However, my right hand is what I would use for most liturgical actions. Therefore, I find myself in a position where I am able to do the things of the world, while being incapable of doing the things of God: the very things I have been ordained to do!

This has helped me understand a truth in the spiritual life, which, though true for all, is especially necessary for seminarians. The spiritual life, the life of grace, is always primary. Would it be better if I were to serve in the liturgy yet be incapable of other work? Or would it be better to be incapable of serving in the liturgy yet still capable of doing all other work?

To me, the answer is clear. While it may be easy to say that the life of grace is more important, not being skilled in the ways of the world has its real consequences, too. By spending my time in prayer and learning about the things of God and how to serve in his liturgy, I naturally have less time to learn about other things. A choice needs to be made. One cannot learn all things...this is impossible. The consequences of prioritizing prayer and the work of God are real. For example, if I have to choose between finishing my homework well and saying the office, I will choose the office. However, the fact that I chose the better part does not mean that my grade is unaffected. Putting God first has real consequences.

I found that although seminary is a place where prayer is the focus of life, it is still far too easy to be concerned about what others think. Pleasing others first also has consequences. One may appear successful, diligent, and engaged. One may be well liked. Now, it is not always necessary to decide between pleasing others and pleasing God, but these situations do occur. However, during this trying time of seminary, I have the support of a spiritual director and a priest formator. The role of these two priests is to help me keep God as my priority in my spiritual life and in my life with others and in my engagement in schoolwork. The Lord has also been quite active during this time.

Now, I have more confidence that the Lord has been with me in these difficulties from the beginning. I can now say that I would rather lose my ability to do the work of the world than to do the work of the Lord. Seminary is a time to learn how to put the Lord first in all things. As I learned from breaking my arm, sometimes it is necessary for the Lord to teach this through more extreme means.



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# Listening and responding to God's call to stewardship



## STEWARDSHIP

### STEVE SCHONS

Director of Stewardship and Development  
Diocese of Fargo

A pastor once stood at the pulpit and spoke plainly to his parishioners.

"We have a problem," he said. "The roof is leaking—again. It's been patched more times than we can count, but now it must be replaced. The cost will be \$200,000."

You can imagine the reaction. The room went quiet.

Then the pastor smiled and continued, "I have good news and bad news. The good news is we have the money. The bad news? It's still in your pockets."

It's a story that makes us laugh, but it also makes us think. Because in real life, there are always "roofs" that need fixing, real needs in our parishes, our communities, and our Church. And time and again, God has already given us what we need to respond. We are far more blessed than we often realize.

Another familiar story reminds us that listening to God also requires paying attention to how he works. A man refused rescue as floodwaters rose around his home. Neighbors came. Emergency crews arrived. Even a helicopter hovered overhead. Each time, he declined help, insisting that God would save him.

When the flood finally overtook the house and the man reached heaven, he asked God why he hadn't intervened. God simply replied, "I sent your neighbors. I sent emergency responders. I sent help. What more were you waiting for?"

The message is clear. God often answers our prayers through the people, opportunities, and invitations placed right in front of us. The real question is not whether God is calling, but whether we are listening and willing to respond.

As we approach the 2026 God's Gift Appeal, we're invited to pause and reflect. What gifts has God placed in our lives? And how is he asking us to use them? Stewardship isn't just about a donation or a moment of generosity. It's about how we live every day as people who recognize that everything we have is a gift meant to be shared.

For Catholics, stewardship isn't optional. When we choose to follow Christ, generosity becomes part of who we are.

Within our parishes, our diocese, and the ministries that serve our families and neighbors, the needs are real and ongoing. But so is God's generosity. He continues to provide, often through us.

May we take time to listen carefully, recognize God's call, and respond with open hearts and willing hands.

For Catholics, stewardship isn't optional. When we choose to follow Christ, generosity becomes part of who we are.

## Tithing

Tithing is just one spoke in the big wheel of stewardship living. There are many biblical references about tithing (giving one-tenth or 10% of one's income) and the importance of doing so. Supporting the Church for divine worship, apostolic and charitable works is a necessity according to the Church's Code of Canon Law, canon 222: "The Christian faithful are obliged to assist with the needs of the Church so that the Church has what is necessary for divine worship, for the works of the apostolate and of charity, and for the decent support of ministers. They are also obliged to promote social justice and, mindful of the precept of the Lord, to assist the poor from their own resources."

The following, based on the Catholic Church's teachings, is a simple schedule to help you formulate your own plan.

Your Income	_____
(5%) Your Church	_____
(1%) Your Diocese	_____
(4%) Other Charity	_____

## Gratitude

So many of us give with an "attitude of gratitude." We are thankful for all that God has done in our lives. Some of us have gone through periods of material or spiritual deprivation and want to ensure that people who suffer this poverty get the help they need.

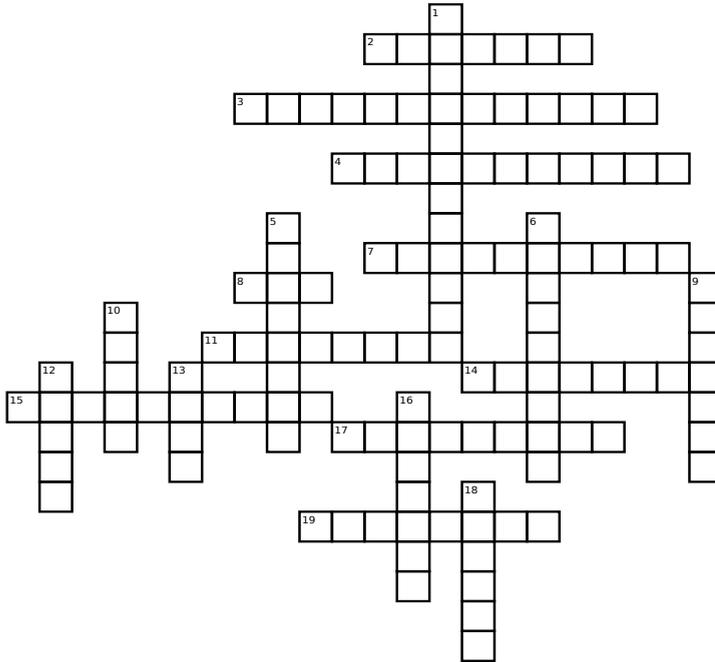
Together, we support others who do the important work of preaching, teaching the faith and sanctifying the world. Our support empowers those who in turn give merciful help to the sick, the poor, and the lonely. Together, we rejoice in God's blessings and look to the future with hope.

Your own giving makes these blessings possible. That deserves gratitude too. Thank you for your generosity!

## Gifts (g) and Fruits (f) of the Holy Spirit

Level: Hard

Answers on page lorem ipsum



### Down:

- 1 loyalty and trustworthiness, both in relationships and in commitment to God (f)
- 5 desire to do what is right, motivated to please God and serve others (f)
- 6 provides strength and courage to persevere in faith (g)
- 9 humble and unassuming attitude, recognizing that all good come from God (f)
- 10 fosters a sense of reverence and devotion to God (g)
- 12 a state of clam and tranquility, especially during conflict (f)
- 13 \_\_\_ of the Lord, encourages reverence and humility in the presence of God (g)
- 16 make wise decisions and give good advice to others (g)

### Across:

- 2 a foundational element of Christian love and service (f)
- 3 enables people to grasp the deeper truths of faith (g)
- 4 ability to resist temptation and check one's impulses, thoughts, and emotions (f)
- 7 virtue characterized by freely giving of oneself, resources, and time (f)
- 8 peace and contentment that is not dependent on circumstances (f)
- 11 concern for others, expressed through generosity and compassion (f)
- 14 willingness to endure hardship/delay/provocation calmly(f)
- 15 meek and humble spirit, characterized by kindness and compassion (f)



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| ROLLA       | SMP Health - St. Kateri          |
| VALLEY CITY | SMP Health - St. Raphael         |

# LIFE'S MILESTONES



Dave and Carolyn Blaser, parishioners of St. Mary's in Dazey, celebrated their 65th anniversary Jan. 28. They were married at St. Joseph's in Beaulieu, Minn. They are blessed with three children, eight grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.



Rodney and Paulette Bosh, parishioners of St. Joseph's in Lankin, celebrated their 60th anniversary Jan. 29. They have four children, eight grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.



Roger and Charlotte Burt, parishioners of St. Joseph's in Devils Lake, celebrated their 75th anniversary Feb. 2. They are blessed with four children, six grandchildren, ten great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandson.



Michael and Karen Frisch, parishioners of St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center in Grand Forks, will celebrate their 50th anniversary Feb. 28. They were married at St. Peter's in Dumont, Minn. They have four children and 12 grandchildren.



Gladys Fluge, parishioner of Sacred Heart Church in Cando, celebrated her 95th birthday Jan. 27. Gladys and her late husband, Arnie, were married for 38 years until his passing in 2013. They lived on the farm in Egeland until 2010. They adopted three children and have four grandchildren.



Jean Ann (Lamb) Kouba, lifetime parishioner of St. Lawrence O'Toole in Michigan, N.D. celebrates her 95th birthday Feb. 4. She was married for 49 years to Albert, who died in 2003. They were blessed with six children, eight grandchildren, and 12 great-grandchildren with one on the way!

**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 only accepted for milestones occurring during the month of publication, two months prior, or one month following.  
 Send photo and text announcement to [Susan.Noah@fargodiocese.org](mailto:Susan.Noah@fargodiocese.org) or to Diocese of Fargo, New Earth, 5201 Bishops Blvd S, Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 with a stamped return envelope (that fits your photo) and phone number.  
 Deadline for the March issue is Feb. 10. Deadline for the April issue is March 10.



*Quotable*  
**St. Peter Damian**  
**Feast Day Feb. 21**

**“May Christ be heard in our language,  
 may Christ be seen in our life,  
 may he be perceived in our hearts.”**

## Events

**Pork & Dumpling Dinner** St. John Nepomucene Catholic Church in Pisek, Feb. 15. Drive-thru at 10:30 a.m. Dine in at 11 a.m. Mass at 10:30 a.m. Free will offering.

**Holy Cross Fish Fries** Knights of Columbus Council 9642 at Holy Cross Church social hall in West Fargo will hold a fish fry dinner each Friday during Lent, starting Feb. 20. Dinner served from 5:15 to 7 p.m. Five varieties of seafood, along with baked potatoes, veggie lasagna, macaroni and cheese and desserts.

**St. William's Fish Fry** St. William's Men's Club will hold their 21st Annual Fish Fry at the Argusville Community Center, Argusville, N.D. on Friday, Feb. 20 4:30 - 7:00 PM. Free Will Donation, (Suggested \$15 donation, Seniors \$10, Children 6 and under are free). For questions, contact Tim Keckler at 701-261-4800 or tim.keckler@gmail.com.

**Wild Game Feed** at Holy Cross Church, West Fargo. Annual dinner. Feb. 28: 5-8:30 \$35 / ticket

### Day of Reflection - Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen

Join us Saturday, Feb 21 (online or in-person at 102 6th St SE, Hankinson, ND). This month's theme, as we continue our Franciscan Spiritual Pilgrimage, will be the San Damiano Crucifix. The event lasts from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Register at <https://www.sfcretreats.org/register-online/> or contact Sr. Mary Ruth with questions at [srmmaryruth@sfcretreats.org](mailto:srmmaryruth@sfcretreats.org) / 701-242-7195.

**Catholic Man Night:** Men share in prayer and fellowship. Evenings begin at 6 p.m. with adoration and confession. A light, free-will offering meal is served at 7 p.m. Speakers begin at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Feb. 19: Nativity, Fargo. Speaker Father Kevin Lorsung.

Mar. 9: Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. Speaker TBD.

Apr. 28: St. Benedict's, Horace. Speaker TBD.

**Rachel's Vineyard Retreat: Hope and Healing** A safe, non-judgmental and confidential weekend retreat for anyone – including women, men, couples, grandparents or siblings - who struggle with the feelings of loss or guilt that can accompany an abortion experience. Weekend begins Friday evening and concludes on Sunday afternoon. Two retreats are scheduled for Fargo diocese: April 17-19, 2026 and Nov 6-8, 2026. For more information, contact, Sherry at 701-520-1229 or Tim at 701-799-2051 or email [rvregister@yahoo.com](mailto:rvregister@yahoo.com). All inquiries are strictly confidential.

## A glimpse of the past

These news items, compiled by Susan Noah, were found in *New Earth* and its predecessor, *Catholic Action News*.

### 75 years ago -- 1951

Interior decoration and complete insulation of St. Louis' Church in Dunseith finished successfully, according to the report of Pastor Francis Lorscheid, S.A.C. The Hanssen Decorators of St. Paul directed the painting of the walls and ceiling. Mr. Hanssen also designed the large painting of Christ in the apse. A new organ was installed, and other church furnishings renewed. Due to the zeal of Father Lorscheid and the cooperation of his parish, the entire work was fully funded before the job was completed.

### 50 years ago -- 1976

Many parish groups in the Fargo Diocese join their brothers and sisters throughout America to discuss the Bicentennial theme "Liberty and Justice for All." Although the Bicentennial is an occasion for joyous celebration, these groups believe it is also an opportunity for critical examination and thoughtful discussion of America's past, present, and future in light of its Christian heritage. Parish discussion group topics number eight: the Nation, the Church, Humankind, Ethnicity and Race, the Neighborhood, Work, the Family, and the Person.

### 20 years ago -- 2006

The annual Priests vs. Seminarians Basketball game was held Feb. 24 at the Cardinal Muench Seminary gymnasium in Fargo. After a tense competition, the seminarian team won the game 46 to 38. Bishop Samuel Aquila presented them the traveling trophy. The suspense was heightened by music, a game announcer, team introductions, a mascot and a three-point shot half-time competition. The stands were filled with spectators waving CMS pennants, shouting through megaphones and doing cheers, including "the wave."

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# Give up candy? Mother Angelica's five tips for your Lenten sacrifices

By Andrés Henríquez | Catholic News Agency

**W**ith the season of Lent, Catholics around the world enter into a time of prayer, almsgiving, and penance in preparation for Holy Week. There are many varied sacrifices that the faithful choose to adopt during these days, but which ones are most beneficial for our souls?

Mother Angelica (1923–2016), the foundress of EWTN, explained that the season of Lent is an invitation from the Church to consider the end of our lives and to orient ourselves toward ultimate realities. “You’re gonna go. We don’t like to think about when you’re going to go. Eventually the person that was in that casket is gonna be a couple of handfuls of mixed bones and ashes,” the nun said in a year 2000 EWTN broadcast.

Here are Mother Angelica’s various tips about Lenten resolutions and how we can grow in faith and prepare ourselves to accompany the Lord in his passion, death, and resurrection.

## **Tip #1: Offer things that will last over time.**

Mother Angelica pointed out that Lenten resolutions should be those that last. “I need to give up something that I know is wrong in me,” she explained. Instead of “giving up candy,” she continued, it’s more worthwhile to give up a defect that has a negative impact on us and the people around us.

“Why don’t you give up your temper? That’s what I’m going to do for Lent: I want to give up my temper... and then perhaps these 40 days will get you in a habit, a habit of not losing your temper, a habit of being nice, a habit of being kind. And begin with your family,” she said.

## **Tip #2: Offer each sacrifice with joy.**

Lent is a very special time in which the Church offers us the possibility of receiving many graces. In a 1999 broadcast, Mother Angelica said we should offer our sacrifices cheerfully because we want to offer them to please Jesus more.

“And be sure that you are cheerful. I’d rather you eat three eggs and be cheerful than not eat any eggs and be a grouch. Some people get very grouchy when they’re hungry. I mean they’re just not liveable. Go eat something for goodness sake, who wants to live with you?” she joked.

## **Tip #3: Remember that we offer sacrifices because we are sinners.**

Mother Angelica in her March 7, 2000 program said that Lenten sacrifices, in addition to helping us imitate Jesus, should strengthen our will. When we sin, she commented, sometimes it’s a mistake, sometimes it’s deliberate because “it’s a lack of willpower, you can’t say no to yourself.”

“There’s a twofold advantage to doing penance. Real penances, that’s not giving up candy, for goodness sakes. You’re hard up



**Mother Angelica. (Credit EWTN)**

if that’s all you can give up. If you gave up something that cost you, not money, but cost you something in here [pointing to her heart], then by the end of Lent you’re stronger, you’re stronger to say no to more important things,” she explained.

## **Tip #4: Mortifications are internal acts.**

In another program, this time from 1994, Mother Angelica commented that Lenten sacrifices have to do with the interior of the person, with the movements of his or her soul.

“Give God your whole self this Lent. Just say: ‘Lord, I have done a lot of terrible things in my life. This Lent I’m going to go to confession, I’m gonna live a whole new life.’ Wouldn’t that be great? That’s not hard to do,” she said. “There are so many things you can do that will enhance your spiritual life just by being loving, compassionate.”

## **Tip #5: Resolve to deepen your faith during Lent.**

As early as 1994, Mother Angelica said in a program that there is “much deceit in the world today” and so it was becoming increasingly essential to stop being “gullible” in the face of trends and sects that seek to “corrupt your mind and your heart” and instead to be strengthened through prayer and sacramentals.

For Mother Angelica, one of the best resolutions that Catholics can make during Lent is to go to confession and receive the Eucharist as well as to resume in our daily lives a devotion to the rosary and to sacramentals, such as holy water.

“We need to pray. Go and eat a box of candy, for goodness’ sake. Why do we always think it’s our stomach that’s wrong? It’s our soul that is wrong, forget your stomach!” the nun repeated. “Do really nice and pious things for Lent. At no other time have we needed so much prayer and penance. Praying is a penance for many of you, so is giving up your life of sin. It is a penance to act like a Catholic. Defend your faith! That is a good penance.”

# Pope Leo XIV proclaims Franciscan Jubilee Year

By Almudena Martínez-Bordiú | Catholic News Agency

**P**ope Leo XIV has proclaimed a “Special Year of St. Francis” to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the saint’s death. During this time of grace, which will extend until January 2027, the faithful are granted the opportunity to obtain a plenary indulgence.

This Franciscan Jubilee Year, considered a gift for the entire Church and an occasion for authentic spiritual renewal, was inaugurated on Jan. 10 with a decree issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary of the Holy See. Until Jan. 10 of next year, the faithful can obtain this grace under the usual conditions — sacramental confession, Communion, and prayer for the intentions of the pope — by making a pilgrimage to any Franciscan conventual church or place of worship dedicated to St. Francis anywhere in the world.

Furthermore, the elderly, the sick, and those who, for serious reasons, cannot leave their homes can obtain the plenary indulgence by spiritually joining in the jubilee celebrations and offering their prayers, pains, or sufferings to God.

In a world where “the virtual takes over the real, disagreements and social violence are part of everyday life, and peace becomes more insecure and distant every day, this Year of St. Francis spurs all of us, each according to our possibilities, to imitate the poor man of Assisi, to form ourselves as far as possible on the model of Christ,” the decree states.

For the Order of Friars Minor, this time is also an opportunity for the faithful to become “models of holiness of life and constant witnesses of peace.”



**St. Francis of Assisi. (Paolo Gallo/Shutterstock)**

On the occasion of this anniversary, Pope Leo XIV addressed a letter to the ministers general of the Franciscan Family Conference in which he emphasized that “in this era, marked by so many seemingly endless wars, by internal and social divisions that create distrust and fear, he continues to speak. Not because he offers technical solutions, but because his life points to the authentic source of peace.”

In this regard, he highlighted that St. Francis reminds us that “peace with God, peace among people, and peace with creation are inseparable dimensions of a single call to universal reconciliation.”

“...this Year of St. Francis spurs all of us,  
each according to our possibilities,  
to imitate the poor man of Assisi,  
to form ourselves as far as possible  
on the model of Christ.”

**-Pope Leo XIV**

# Here's how to make a Seven Churches Visitation on Holy Thursday

By Katie Yoder and Peter Pinedo | Catholic News Agency

Every Holy Thursday, groups of Catholic faithful across the country and the world embark on what's known as the Seven Churches Visitation.

In this special tradition, pilgrims adore Christ in seven different altars of repose while praying and reflecting on the passion of Christ.

At the end of each Holy Thursday Mass, the priest strips the altar and removes the Eucharist from the tabernacle to place it in repose on another nearby altar.

The Seven Churches Visitation (or Pilgrimage) is credited as beginning in Rome with St. Philip Neri in the 1500s. Neri would lead groups of faithful to visit each of the seven basilicas of Rome on Holy Thursday night as a way of keeping watch with Christ as though at the Garden of Gethsemane before his passion.

Today, the devotion is primarily practiced in Latin America, Italy, Poland, and the Philippines.

Each visit calls on the faithful to reflect on the seven final places Jesus went from his arrest on Holy Thursday to his death on Good Friday.

At each church, pilgrims kneel before the altar of repose, meditate on a scriptural excerpt, and offer prayers and adoration.

## How do pilgrims going on this seven-church journey meditate on the passion of Christ?

Here are the Scripture excerpts to reflect on at each church:

1. Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Lk 22:39-46)
2. Jesus before Annas (Jn 18:19-22)
3. Jesus before Caiaphas (Mt 26:63-65)
4. Jesus before Pilate (Jn 18:35-37)
5. Jesus before Herod (Lk 23:8-9; 11)
6. Jesus before Pilate again (Mt 27:22-26)
7. Jesus's crucifixion and death (Mt 27:27-31)

## Reflecting on the passion of Christ

At the first church, the faithful recall Jesus going from the upper room, where he celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he earnestly prayed and sweated blood in his agony over what was about to take place.

In the second church, the pilgrims meditate on Jesus being taken from the Garden of Gethsemane by the armed crowd to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the high priest, where he was interrogated and slapped in the face.



An altar of repose on Holy Thursday (Catholic)

In the third church, the prayer focuses on Jesus being brought to the house of Caiaphas, where he was beaten, spat upon, insulted, and endured a painful night in captivity.

The focus of the reflection for the fourth church is the first time Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor of the region. There Jesus was accused by the Jewish religious authorities of being a rival king to Caesar.

In the fifth church, the pilgrim follows the Lord as he is taken to King Herod, who along with his guards mock him.

The sixth church recalls Jesus being taken from Herod and brought before Pilate for the second time and then scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, and condemned to death.

The last church commemorates Christ carrying the cross on his shoulders from the Praetorium, where Pilate yielded to the crowd's demand for his crucifixion, to Mount Calvary where he suffered excruciating pain, died, and was laid to rest in a nearby tomb until his resurrection from the dead on Easter Sunday.

In the 1500s, St. Phillip Neri on Holy Thursday would lead groups of the faithful to visit the seven basilicas of Rome to keep watch with Christ before his Passion.



## Wednesday tragedies highlight abortion tragedy



### SIDEWALK STORIES

#### ROXANE B. SALONÉN

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

It seemed a bit déjà vu. I was just about to leave for the sidewalk on Jan. 7 to pray for those seeking abortion and influence a redirect when I caught a highlight on social media.

An acquaintance from Minneapolis had posted that a woman, a 37-year-old mother named Renee Good, had been shot by ICE agents that morning, suggesting anyone who would defend the agent to unfriend her.

Immediately, my heart went out to hear of a young mother's death, and just as quickly, I realized the connection with four months ago when Charlie Kirk, at age 31, was also shot in the public square—also on a Wednesday just before I left for the sidewalk to pray.

Like then, I didn't have time to learn more. But a little while after I arrived at our area's only abortion facility, a friend who'd been following the news about Renee Good's death said it was sounding like things could erupt in Minneapolis like after George Floyd's death.

The confluences are interesting, but what does this have to do with abortion in our part of the world? Maybe more than we realize at first glance.

I wrote a column here about Charlie's death because he was definitely in the camp of fighting for the lives of the innocent, so learning about his murder on a Wednesday seemed providential in some strange way.

The abortion escorts didn't miss it, either. Just days after that afternoon, we gathered again, this time on a Saturday, to partake in the Life Runners movement to "Remember the Unborn," and were met by an escort wielding a microphone and speaker, spouting words to the effect that, as Charlie Kirk's likely supporters, we were complicit in his provocations that led to his death.

Though I realize it's coincidence that these two unfortunate deaths both happened on a Wednesday, I see a direct tie-in with abortion and with those two tragedies and the resulting emotional outbursts surrounding them. In all three, a question arises: Who deserves to live? Do we have the right to kill our

fellow human beings, and if so, in what circumstances?

Differences also exist. In the case of abortion, the victim is always innocent. An unborn child can't offend anyone by their actions; their only offense is inconvenience. As for the culpability of Charlie or Renee for their own deaths, that is being argued, but God alone knows and will respond accordingly.

At the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 5, 1994, Blessed Mother Teresa implored that "if we accept that a mother can kill even her own child, how can we tell other people not to kill one another?" adding later in the same speech, "Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want. This is why the greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion." In the aftermath of the most recent tragedy, some on social media began clamoring for me to weigh in publicly. But in the early hours of the incident, I chose a different response: "Stop. Pray. Wait." For a time, this motto became my Facebook cover image.

Though accused by a local citizen who emailed me of being weak by not speaking out, I have felt affirmed in that initial, more measured reaction, for I had nothing noteworthy to contribute to the outburst that could bring peace, except to hold fast, as Jesus had done at times in his life on earth.

As for the killing of the innocent, on that hill, I am willing to set my stake in the ground: to say, no matter what, this is not, and will never be, okay. On this I will not refrain from speaking out at every opportunity.

As such, I am grateful to have learned that our pro-life community will have the opportunity to engage on abortion through the first-ever spring 40 Days for Life campaign. In an email sent through the organization's local branch, organizer Bonnie Spies said she's excited about the upcoming event.

The campaign will start with a prayer gathering for all invested in this cause at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, Feb. 18, near the Women's Care Center in Moorhead, 220 Hwy 75 N, located across from the abortion facility, with the closing set for 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 29. Bishop Andrew Cozzens of the Diocese of Crookston has agreed to be a speaker at the closing ceremony.

We need more local pro-lifers to get involved in this ministry, so please reach out to Bonnie at [Bonnie.Spies@plam.org](mailto:Bonnie.Spies@plam.org) if you or anyone you know might be interested in taking a more proactive role in this beautiful mission of saving lives, and, potentially, souls.

# NEW EARTH

Catholic Diocese of Fargo  
5201 Bishops Blvd, Ste. A  
Fargo, ND 58104



Do you know  
where we are?

The answer will be revealed  
in the February *New Earth*.



Where in the diocese are we?

Last month's photo is from the  
chapel at Shanley High School.