

New

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Earth

The Magazine of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo



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Holy Spirit display at the Diocesan Synod on April 13, 2024 (Paul Braun / 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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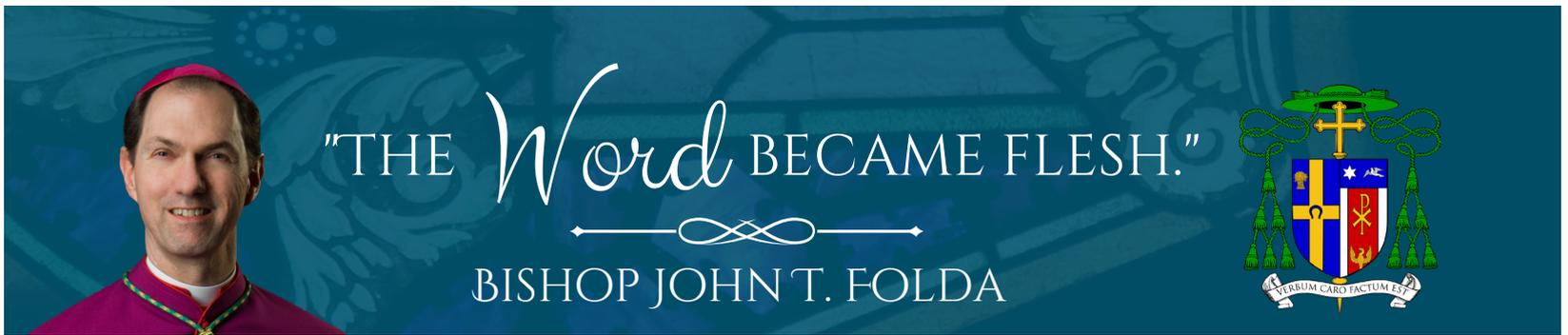
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The call to discipleship

Dear friends, you'll notice that I have a somewhat longer letter in this issue of *New Earth*, a Pastoral Letter to the entire Diocese of Fargo. The title of the letter is "Go Make Disciples," taken from our Lord's great command in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 28:19) at the end of his time on earth. Jesus was sending his apostles out into the world and asking them to "make disciples" by proclaiming the good news of his Kingdom to all peoples. And that same command is given to all of us even now, two thousand years later.

The call to discipleship is right at the heart of this season of Lent and the upcoming celebrations of Holy Week and Easter. During Lent, Jesus calls us to repentance and conversion. He invites us to follow him more perfectly, and to be his true disciples. Of course, a disciple is more than one who just tags along and stays in the background without getting involved. A true disciple gets right up there with our Lord and listens intently to his teaching. A disciple goes where the Master leads and tries to live as the Master lives. A disciple entrusts his life to the Lord and is one in mind and heart with him. Those first followers of Jesus encountered him at the Sea of Galilee and left their fishing boats behind, because they wanted to be part of the Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed. He formed them as his disciples, and then he sent them out to carry on the mission that he had begun.

I believe that describes well what we hope for in Lent. During this holy season, we have a unique opportunity to meet Jesus anew and enter into a deeper relationship of love with him.

We are formed by his teaching, but especially by the event of his death and resurrection. And then, we are sent out as his ambassadors to the world, as his disciples on mission. And once we have embraced this relationship and this mission, we will be able to welcome others into his Kingdom as well.

One of the most important elements of Lent is the call to charity that we read in the Gospel. Jesus tells us again and again to care for the poor, the sick, the homeless, and all those in need. But charity is more than giving a handout. True charity seeks the true good of another person, whether that is a material good or spiritual good. St. Teresa of Calcutta said the greatest poverty is spiritual poverty, the poverty of those who do not know God's love in their lives. With this in mind, perhaps the greatest possible act of charity would be to help another person – a family member, a friend, a neighbor - come to know Jesus and to be his disciple. So, it makes sense that we should do exactly that during this great season, that is, go out in a spirit of charity and "make disciples" just as Jesus commanded. By our prayer, our friendship, our example, and our witness, we can help others come to know Jesus as we do, and to be his friends and disciples.

I invite you to read my pastoral letter, "Go Make Disciples," and reflect on how it might impact your life as a follower of Jesus. Take your time, say a prayer to the Holy Spirit, and ask our Lord for his grace and wisdom for yourself and for our entire diocesan family. May God bless us all during this holy season and help us to become his true disciples.

"I invite you to read my pastoral letter, 'Go Make Disciples,' and reflect on how it might impact your life as a follower of Jesus.

Take your time, say a prayer to the Holy Spirit, and ask our Lord for his grace and wisdom for yourself and for our entire diocesan family."

-Bishop John T. Folda

BISHOP FOLDA'S CALENDAR

March 14 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Philip Church, Napoleon

March 15 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Catherine, Valley City

March 17 at 11:30 a.m.

Caritas Award Lunch, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

March 17-18

Catholic Charities Board Meeting and Retreat, Pastoral Center, Fargo

March 19 at 4 p.m.

All Saints Catholic Schools Board Meeting, St. Michael, Grand Forks

March 20 at 7 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. John the Evangelist, Grafton

March 21 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Michael, Grand Forks

March 21 at 5 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Jude, Thompson

March 24 at 3 p.m.

Diocesan Finance council, Pastoral Center, Fargo

March 25 at 3 p.m.

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

March 26 at 7 p.m.

First Nighter, Shanley High School, Fargo

March 27 at 12 p.m.

Diocesan Staff Retreat, Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

March 28 at 9:30 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Holy Family, Fargo

March 28 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Timothy, Manvel

March 29 at 10 a.m.

Palm Sunday Passion of the Lord Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

March 31 at 11 a.m.

Chrism Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary

April 2 at 7 p.m.

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

April 3 at 10 a.m.

Stations of the Cross, Cathedral of St. Mary

April 3 at 3 p.m.

Good Friday Service, Cathedral of St. Mary

April 4 at 8:30 p.m.

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

April 5 at 10 a.m.

Easter Sunday Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary

Ways to stay connected with the Fargo Diocese



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The shy evangelist



ASK A PRIEST

FATHER PETER SCHARPE

Pastor

Steele, Tappen and Medina

“I know we are supposed to evangelize, but I don’t know what to do. I’m shy, and I don’t feel like I know much about the faith. I know I’m a bad example at times. How do I evangelize?”

Some blessed people have a special gift to tell others about Christ, and they seem to bring people effortlessly to Jesus. What about the rest of us, especially the shy and not-book-smart type? Do we just cheer from the sidelines?

Evangelization is the work of the Holy Spirit. He can proclaim the truth about Jesus Christ through anyone he chooses. The good news is, he loves teamwork! When we make any humble attempt, he will multiply and enhance our stumbling efforts. Let’s focus on simple methods to make the most of our brief contacts with those with less faith than ourselves.

In my Christian life, I have noticed that any real dialogue—two people having a conversation that aims at what is true—can move to deep levels. One way to start a dialogue is to learn to answer questions so as to catch the other’s interest. One lady I know has a great response to a checkout clerk’s routine question, “How’s your day?” She replies, “I am blessed, trials and all. How about you?” And she smiles. Notice how she gives clues that she is a believer; but also acknowledges that life is difficult. This is designed to spark a response. A brief dialog can happen. If they respond with faith, you have encouraged a believer. If they respond with some sort of difficulty in their own life, that can lead to a moment of empathy or perhaps an offer of prayer.

Faith dialogues often begin with the courage just to ask questions and be interested in the other person’s answer. Both elements are important. No one likes to be lectured, even by shy people (how strange!). Being interested in someone’s response takes focus, but people appreciate it—it’s actually not a common experience. Once a person is talking, watch for clues that allow the subject to move towards faith, especially the chance to speak of God’s love for us.

Some questions I have asked are “What’s a challenge in your

life right now?” “What is something going well this week?” “Do you belong to a faith community?” “Are you able to attend often?” “What is your favorite way to pray?” “Is there a prayer need in your life?” And if it seems opportune, “Can I say a brief prayer for you right now?” Then with their permission, I do (I try to truly make it brief!)/ “Heavenly Father, please bless this situation and bring good out of it, in Jesus’ name Amen.”

“But I told you I am shy! All that sounds way out of my comfort zone!”

Okay, so here is another interesting tool. I heard about it recently listening to a non-Christian podcaster. He pointed out that if you want someone’s goodwill, one way of attaining this is to ask them a small favor. Not do them a favor but request it of them. This leaves them feeling benevolent towards you. This means when you have to borrow a tool, that’s an opportunity for dialogue. When you ask for directions, when you need help with homework, etc., these are not moments to avoid, but ones that are ripe for faith conversations. I had this happen after I had to ask a neighbor to help me move a heavy ladder at my church. They were then open to a few moments of real conversation.

In fact, Jesus himself uses this method to evangelize! In John 4, Our Lord is tired and hungry. He is alone at Jacob’s well; his disciples have gone to buy food. A Samaritan woman approaches with a water jar. The situation is awkward. Jesus does not lecture her, or even ask a question: instead, he asks for a favor. “Give me a drink.” This catches the woman’s attention, and she starts an initially snarky dialog that rapidly deepens. By the end her faith is so evident that Jesus acknowledges himself as the Messiah, something he only does in a couple of other places. And it all started with a small genuine need and Jesus having the humility to ask for a drink.

The beauty of a dialogue open to truth is that it opens up possibilities on both sides. If your ignorance is exposed, make a note, go follow up later. If the other person wants to continue the conversation at some point, be ready with your newly rediscovered truth. Let them know how glad you were to have the opportunity to learn more yourself.

Again, evangelization is the work of the Spirit. If we are actively trying to live a Christian life, confessing our sins, keeping the five precepts of the Church, wanting to deepen our relationship with Jesus, and are willing to ask questions and listen—it means there are going to opportunities everywhere for him to be at work.

Catholic Schools Week in pictures

By Paul Braun | Editor, *New Earth*

Diocesan Catholic schools took the opportunity to celebrate the successes of our institutions that provide a faith-based, Catholic education during national Catholic Schools Week, celebrated January 25 – 31, 2026. Students and teachers took a few breaks from academic studies to have a little fun, and to show pride in their schools.

Events included dress like a teacher/student day, outings, service projects, school carnivals, and of course all-school

Masses. The highlight of the week was the Know Your faith competition, hosted this year by Shanley High School in Fargo (see more information in this issue of *New Earth*).

We can be grateful to our Catholic schools especially teachers, staff and parents, for setting young people on the right track in life both academically and in their faith journey. God bless our Catholic schools! (submitted photos)



St. Joseph School and St. Mary Academy, Devils Lake



Holy Spirit School, Fargo



St. John's Academy, Jamestown



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COMMUNITY EXCELLENCE
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Hundreds cheer on Know Your Faith competitors

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

High school students from across North Dakota gathered in the high school gymnasium of Shanley High School in Fargo Jan. 28 to cheer on their school teams in the Know Your Faith competition, a main event of Catholic Schools Week where students compete to display their knowledge of their Catholic faith.

Hundreds of teens filled the bleachers of the darkened gym, under ultraviolet light. Some students dressed in reflective gear or fluorescent clothes. Others had applied fluorescent ink and face paint that glowed in the dark.

Music pounded. Lights flashed. Fog machines spread their haze. Students cheered school cheers, waved school flags, danced and stomped on the bleachers as beach balls surfed the crowd.

The students roared as the teams were introduced from Bishop Ryan High School of Minot, Holy Family High School of Mandan, Shanley High School of Fargo, St. Mary's Central High School of Bismarck, and Trinity High School of Dickinson.

The roaring crowd fell silent for an opening prayer from Bishop John Folda of Fargo. He prayed "that our competitors might be filled with wisdom and insight, and that they might represent their schools well, and that we might all be lifted up by this occasion."

Fr. Dominic Bouck, chaplain of the University of Mary, emceed the competition. There were three rounds of five questions each, worth a varying amount of points, followed by a final question.

First round questions concerned topics like the Israelite tribe of Jesus Christ (Judah), the saint who created a website to document Eucharistic miracles (St. Carlo Acutis) and four female Doctors of the Church (Sts. Catherine of Siena, Hildegard of Bingen, Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux).

Holy Family finished round one with a perfect score, followed by St. Mary's in second place. In third place there was a three-way tie between Bishop Ryan, Shanley and Trinity.

Between rounds, other students showed their moves in a dance competition. A later intermission contest placed students in human-sized inflatable bumper balls as the boys and girls separately competed to knock each other over.

The second round quizzed students about the common good in Catholic social teaching; the principles of the ethical concept of double effect; and the elements of a good confession. The teams began to stumble. Some questions drew no correct answers.

After two rounds, Holy Family still led, but Shanley rose to second place. St. Mary's was in third, while Bishop Ryan and Trinity tied for fourth.

The third round presented questions such as when the Gloria is omitted from the liturgy (Advent and Lent); the names of the four major prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Isaiah); and



Shanley High School's winning trivia team with Bishop Folda and trophy (Shanley High School)

the newest Doctor of the Church (St. John Henry Newman). Shanley took the lead, followed by St. Mary's and Holy Family tied for second, with Bishop Ryan and Trinity tied for third. Then came the final round.

Bishop Folda presented the final question: name the Pope who closed the Second Vatican Council (Pope St. Paul VI) and name four of the 16 documents by Latin title or subject.

Victory went to Bishop Shanley's team of seniors, composed of Henry Liebel, Drew Schneider and Sarah Sim.

"It means a lot for the school," Shneider told *New Earth*. "I know we've had some struggles in the last couple of years and to be able to bring it home this year meant a lot for our whole school."

Liebl said it felt "very surreal" to win.

"We've seen our past classes go to this competition. Being able to represent our school and then win it for our school has been amazing," he said.

Bishop Folda joined the Shanley team for pictures with the Know Your Faith trophy.

The bishop praised the event.

"I love the enthusiasm for the faith that these kids have. I love the fact that they really do know their faith very well," he told *New Earth*. "I'm impressed with the knowledge that they have, and it's just amazing to see these young people as excited as they are about this event."



Pilgrimage coins inspire wooden display case design

Richard Muscha of St. Leo's parish in Casselton has created a unique way to display the coins he collected by visiting the designated diocesan holy sites during the Jubilee Year of Hope in 2025. The wooden case allows both the front and the back of each coin to be viewed.

Richard says if he can figure out a way to streamline the production process of his coin display case, he may make them available to others.

(Photo by Paul Braun / *New Earth*)

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Franciscan Sisters in Hankinson to welcome pilgrims during Year of St. Francis

By Sister Christina Marie Neumann | Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen

Along with our Franciscans throughout the world, we have been looking forward to 2026 for quite some time: it is the 800th anniversary of the death, or “transitus,” of St. Francis. As members of the oldest women's congregation of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis in continuous existence, this anniversary holds special meaning for us. Our community was founded in 1241, just fifteen years after the 1226 death of St. Francis, in Dillingen in what is now the German state of Bavaria.

In light of this, with great joy we welcomed Pope Leo's proclamation of a special jubilee in our patron's honor. This special Year of St. Francis began Jan. 10, 2026 and extends through Jan. 10, 2027. It offers all the faithful opportunities for obtaining a plenary indulgence for themselves or for someone in purgatory.

The Apostolic Penitentiary, the relevant tribunal of the Roman Curia, has set the requirements for this jubilee indulgence. Under the usual indulgence conditions (confession, communion, prayer for the Pope's intentions, and detachment from sin), one may obtain this indulgence by making a pilgrimage to a Franciscan convent or monastery's church or chapel or, in fact, any place of worship dedicated to St. Francis. While there, pilgrims are either to participate in the jubilee rites or spend “a reasonable period of time in pious meditation and raise prayers to God so that, following the example of St. Francis, feelings of Christian charity towards their neighbors and authentic vows of harmony and peace among peoples may spring forth in their hearts.” The prayers on a jubilee pilgrimage conclude with the Our Father, the Creed and invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Francis, St. Clare and all the saints of the Franciscan family.

Plenary indulgences associated with the Franciscan Order are not new. In fact, within St. Francis' own lifetime, a special indulgence was granted by Pope Honorius III. St. Francis had asked that an indulgence be offered to those who would visit the Portiuncula, the church he and his brothers had restored, on Aug. 2. Another indulgence connected with St. Francis' Order is the Stations of the Cross, which is deeply connected with the Franciscans and has a plenary indulgence attached.

Here at our convent in Hankinson, we are happy to help facilitate the opportunities for indulgences which this jubilee year offers to the faithful. We have created a pilgrimage guide for our visitors that includes information about the jubilee indulgence along with Franciscan prayers and our liturgical schedule.

We have opened our home and chapels to retreatants for many years. This past year, due to the fire at the neighboring St. Philip's Catholic Church, we have hosted parishioners for all parish liturgies. Now, in this Franciscan jubilee, we extend a special invitation to all the faithful to come to our convent on



A statue of St. Francis outside of the Franciscan Sisters of Dillingen's convent in Hankinson. (submitted photo)

pilgrimage.

Appointments are not strictly required, but calling ahead would be helpful (701-242-7195), especially if you are not familiar with the building. If you visit during business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), please come in through the main entrance (north side) along Highway 11. Outside these hours, the east entrance may be used. Our convent address is 102 6th St. SE, Hankinson.



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Redeemed retreat for men coming to Moorhead

By Paul Braun | Editor, *New Earth*

For men, the world is filled with challenges. Every man, young or old, married or single, needs an opportunity to step away from the noise, busyness, and relentless expectations of daily life and be reminded of his purpose and identity.

The Redeemed men's retreat taking place at St. Joseph's parish in Moorhead, Minn. March 19-21, 2026 gives men that opportunity. Co-sponsored by the Fargo and Crookston dioceses, the retreat offers an escape from life's worries and expectations through relatable testimonies from men who found strength, direction, and freedom by surrendering their lives to God.

The retreat is put on by the John Paul II Healing Center.

One presenter is John Edwards, whose podcast ministry "Just a Guy in the Pew" helps to ensure that no man has to go through life alone.

"We live in difficult times right now," Edwards told *New Earth*. "What I talk about a lot in my own ministry and what certainly carries over into this is this silent epidemic that's going on in the world and in the country with men. You look around and loneliness and isolation are more prevalent than they've ever been before. In the Catholic world, you can certainly see there's polls out there that say 31% of Catholic men don't even have one real friend. A lot of men have been raised in this mindset that to be a man means to have no weakness, to put your head down, to work hard, to never complain, to never have feelings, never have emotions. So many men are out there walking like one-man armies. What this conference by [the John Paul II Healing Center] really does is to invite men to go into the truth."

Edwards says the conference is broken down to help men to realize four basic truths.

"You were made good, God looked at everything and said, it is good, and that included everything in creation, including men," said Edwards, summarizing the first truth. The second truth is that "you're a broken man." This is "fall and what happened in the fall and the wounds that were created there, the inadequacy wound, which is the number one wound for all men."

"It's inadequacy," he continued. "But God made you for good."

"You look around and loneliness and isolation are more prevalent than they've ever been before."

The next truth is that man is redeemed, and the fourth truth is that he can be restored.

"The first three [truths] are you are a good man, you're a broken man, you're a redeemed man, and then the last one is you're becoming a restored man, because conversion is a lifelong process, and healing and restoration is a lifelong process," said Edwards.

"This conference is about entering into your own heart, entering into your own mess. and really clearing that up, because you can't give what you don't have," he continued. "We can go to church, we can receive the sacraments, we can do all those things, good things, but we can't give that away to other people until we start unpacking the messiness of our own hearts."

"This conference is really a place where you'll be met with healing and love, with mercy, with grace. a place where you can feel seen, loved, and heard, and you can feel like you matter."

Registration and more information on the men's Redeemed conference may be found on the Fargo Diocese website at www.fargodiocese.org/fm-redeemed. There is also a livestream option available on the registration page for men who wish to take part in the conference but are unable to attend in person.





Delegates to the Diocesan Synod gather for a group photo at Sts. Anne and Joachim Church in Fargo April 13, 2024. (Paul Braun / New Earth)

Go, make disciples

Bishop John T. Folda's Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Fargo

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

1. I greet you with joy in the words of St. Paul: “I continually thank God for you because of the favor he has bestowed on you in Christ Jesus...” (1 Cor 1:4). With thanksgiving to God, I address this Pastoral Letter to all the faithful in the Diocese of Fargo, and I ask our Lord to bestow his blessing upon us. The past several years have been marked by significant events and moments of grace. We recently completed a three-year Eucharistic Revival throughout our nation, which culminated in both a national and diocesan Eucharistic Congress. We just concluded a Jubilee Year with the theme “Pilgrims of Hope.” We mourned the passing of Pope Francis and rejoiced in the election of Pope Leo XIV, the first pope from the United States. And by many accounts we have seen an upsurge in the number of those entering the Church.

Encounter, Formation and Mission: the three main themes of the diocesan Synod

Third Synod of the Diocese of Fargo

2. On the Solemnity of Corpus Christi on June 19, 2022, I announced the Third Synod of the Diocese of Fargo, and with your help we began a period of consultation and preparation. After numerous listening sessions around the diocese and responses to surveys sent out to our parishes, I convoked a synodal assembly of representatives from our entire diocese in April 2024. Throughout the course of our Synod, the delegates listened to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and spoke from their hearts on the needs of the Church in our diocese. I once again offer my sincere thanks to all who gave their input and participated actively in our Synod, which was truly a moment of grace in the life of the Diocese of Fargo. After much prayer and discussion, the Synod adopted a number of proposals for my consideration and for the good of our diocesan Church. Based on those proposals and my own discernment regarding the life of our diocese, I offer you this Pastoral Letter, “Go, Make Disciples.” It is my hope that this letter will give direction to our diocese for the coming years, realizing that in all things we are guided by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

3. Our diocesan Synod was organized under three principal themes: Encounter, Formation, and Mission. The Synod delegates recognized and affirmed that all the faithful of our diocese are called to an encounter and a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ; all are called to be formed by the Gospel in the richness of our Catholic faith; and all are called to be witnesses and missionary disciples of Jesus Christ in the world.

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I. Encounter

“*Rabbi, where are you staying? ‘Come and you will see’*” (Jn 1:38-39).

4. During his pontificate, Pope Francis often quoted a statement of his predecessor of happy memory, Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote: “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1). That person is, of course, Jesus Christ. Our Christian faith has its origin in a personal encounter with the incarnate Son of God, the Word become flesh who dwells among us (cf. Jn 1:14). Pope Francis stated even more emphatically: “Christian faith is either an encounter with him alive, or it does not exist” (*Desiderio desideravi*, 10). Indeed, the life of our diocese and of every Christian is built upon this personal encounter, and a personal encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ is the foundation of our life and mission as the Church.

Our Encounter with Christ in the Eucharist

5. The Second Vatican Council teaches that the sacrament of the Eucharist is the “source and summit” of the life of the Church” (*Lumen gentium*, 11). Through the Eucharist, we enter into the Paschal Mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, his entire act of redemption. And so, the Eucharist must be paramount in the life and activity of our diocesan Church. The celebration of our Lord’s sacrifice in the Mass is essential to the life of the Church and the life of every member of the faithful. Without the Eucharist, we are impoverished and deprived of the life-giving Body and Blood of Christ, which Jesus gave to his disciples at the Last Supper and continues to give in every celebration of the Mass.

6. Pope St. John Paul II taught that “the Church draws her life from the Eucharist” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 1). And Jesus himself teaches in the great discourse on the Bread of Life: “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (Jn 6: 54, 56). For this reason, the primacy of the Eucharist in the life of our diocese must always be a priority, and every effort must be made to invite and welcome the People of God into the Eucharistic life of the Church.



Delegates to the Diocesan Synod discuss issues to be voted on April 13, 2024. (Paul Braun / *New Earth*)

The Lord’s Day

7. “On the first day of the week, at dawn, the women came to the tomb...” (Lk 24:1). “Sunday, the Lord’s Day, is the principal day for the celebration of the Eucharist because it is the day of the Resurrection. It is the preeminent day of the liturgical assembly, the day of the Christian family, and the day of joy and rest from work. Sunday is ‘the foundation and kernel of the whole liturgical year’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1193; *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 106).

8. The celebration of the Mass, the Paschal Mystery of our Lord’s death and resurrection, is essential to the life of the Church. In the Sunday celebration, the entire family of the faithful is called to gather as the People of God and as the Body of Christ in prayer and worship of our Lord. From the earliest days of the Church, Christians gathered on Sunday to recall with joy the Lord’s resurrection and to participate in the “breaking of bread,” a reference to the celebration of the Eucharist. (cf. Acts 20:7). Sunday is the Lord’s Day, and we manifest our communion with him most vividly by our participation in the Sunday liturgy, both for the proclamation of the Word of God and for the celebration of the Eucharist.

9. It is widely observed that attendance at Sunday Mass (including the vigil Mass of Saturday evening) has declined significantly in recent years. What was once the key event in the weekly life of every Catholic is now seen as one among many options. In recent decades, the calls of entertainment, commerce, and sometimes employment, have diminished our awareness that Sunday is first and foremost the Lord’s Day. Now, unfortunately, our obligation to worship is too often supplanted by other pursuits and activities, or it is forgotten altogether.

10. It is important to recall that no Catholic is exempt from the obligation to attend and participate in Mass on Sunday, except those who are unable to attend because of health, incapacity, family need, inclement weather, or another serious reason. As with every obligation we receive from God, this obligation to worship is for our spiritual enrichment and for

Beginning in spring 2027, the sacraments of First Holy Eucharist and Confirmation for children will be celebrated separately throughout the Diocese of Fargo.

our eternal salvation. To absent ourselves and our families from the celebration of Sunday Mass is to be deprived of the most powerful and grace-filled gift of God to his Church: the sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist. No athletic or school-related activity, no family gathering or vacation, no agricultural or commercial activity, or any other priority, can replace the centrality of our obligation to worship God on the Lord's Day at Mass.

11. Parents in a particular way have a serious responsibility to ensure that their entire family is able to participate in Sunday Mass. In this way, they inculcate in their children the spiritual sense of our relationship with God and his love for us. Our regular celebration of Mass, ideally as a family, is a clear demonstration of the priority of God in our lives. However, if we regularly choose other pursuits on the Lord's Day, we explicitly teach our children that God has less importance in our lives and the Eucharist is secondary to other activities. If parents fail to assure their children's participation in the Sunday Eucharist, they can expect that their children will be even less inclined to participate in the life of the Church when they reach adulthood and have children of their own.

12. We must remember, however, that our participation in the Mass is not merely an obligation, but a gift and a privilege. The celebration of the Lord's sacrifice at Mass is, indeed, a pathway to heaven, because it draws us already into the divine life of God. The Mass unites us with Christ in a singular way that has no substitute. We can never marvel enough at the great gift that has been given to the Church in the Eucharistic liturgy, wherein we hear the Word of God proclaimed and enter into the mystery of our Lord's death and resurrection through the Eucharist. Even within the limitations of our earthly liturgies and those who participate in them, God generously reaches down to earth and chooses to be present among us in grace. With this in mind, I invite all the faithful in the Diocese of Fargo to rediscover the beauty of Christ's presence through participation in the Eucharist on every Sunday and Holy Day. I also urge our entire diocesan family to renew our commitment to Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day dedicated first and foremost to the worship of God through the sacrifice of the Mass.

Confirmation and First Eucharist

13. The celebrations of the sacraments of initiation are profound moments of encounter with God's grace in the life of every believer, and in a special way, in the lives of young people. For more than twenty years in the Diocese of Fargo, the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist for children and young people have been celebrated concurrently within

the same liturgy. While this practice has become customary in our diocese, many have expressed a desire to celebrate these sacraments separately. In particular, there have been persistent requests for the celebration of First Eucharist to take place in the home parish of the first communicants. Concerns have also been raised, by some parents, pastors, and catechists, that more time is needed for catechetical preparation of children for the sacrament of Confirmation. This desire for more thorough preparation of children for the sacrament of Confirmation is made difficult by the joint celebration of these two sacraments of initiation at a young age.

14. The delegates of the diocesan Synod expressed their preference that the so-called restored order of the sacraments should be retained, that is, the celebration of Confirmation followed by the celebration of First Holy Eucharist. However, the Synod also recommended that these sacramental celebrations should occur on separate occasions in order to give due attention to both. This would either require the celebration of Confirmation at an even earlier age or the celebration of First Eucharist at a later age, for example, fourth grade. In my judgment, neither of these options seems advisable.

15. Beginning in the spring of 2027, the sacraments of First Holy Eucharist and Confirmation for children will be celebrated separately throughout the Diocese of Fargo. First Holy Communion will be celebrated in third grade in the home parish of the first communicants. The sacrament of Confirmation will be celebrated in the following year, that is, in fourth grade. The bishop will continue to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in parish clusters, as has been our practice in recent years.

16. The current order of the sacraments acknowledges that the Eucharist is the fulness of initiation into the Christian life. It is an ideal that reflects the Church's practice for the initiation of adults. However, my observation as a bishop, and previously as a parish priest, leads me to conclude that children and young people will benefit from two distinct celebrations. They will have more opportunity to absorb the uniqueness of each sacrament and comprehend to a greater degree the sacramental grace they are receiving. While this change will alter the current practice, it will allow for distinct celebrations of these two sacraments, allowing young people to experience each in its own solemnity and beauty. Children and families will be able to celebrate First Eucharist in their home parishes. Catechists and parents will have additional time to prepare children for the sacrament of Confirmation.

17. The liturgies of the sacraments of initiation are, in my experience, powerful evangelical and catechetical moments both for the young people who receive them and for the family members and faithful who participate. I have observed that the ideal of celebrating these sacraments together is often overshadowed by the challenge it poses to the young people who receive them. It is my hope that the new practice to be implemented throughout our diocese will reinforce the unique grace of each of the sacraments for the children and for those who prepare them.

18. I believe this practice can also find justification in the experience of the apostles themselves, who first received Christ in the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and subsequently received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Having entered into personal communion with Jesus through his self-gift in the Eucharist, they were then given the grace of the Holy Spirit that would confirm and equip them for the mission that they had received when Jesus sent them out in the world as his witnesses. In a similar way, those who receive the Lord Jesus in the Eucharist and experience personal communion with him will then be blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit through the sacrament of Confirmation so they, too, may be faithful disciples and witnesses of Jesus Christ in the world.

19. Some have proposed an even later celebration of Confirmation for young people. This is common in certain parts of the country and would, of course, allow for even more time for preparation. However, I am convinced that the grace of Confirmation is essential as young people grow into adolescence and face the challenges of our secularized culture. In my judgment, it would be detrimental to further delay Confirmation and deprive our young people of these graces as they grow up into adolescence and adulthood. Experience demonstrates, too, that undue delay in receiving Confirmation often results in a failure to receive the sacrament at all. I have also observed that other dioceses around our country are choosing to celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation at an earlier age. I pray that this revised arrangement of the sacraments of initiation in the Diocese of Fargo will be a blessing for our young people and for our diocesan Church.

The Parish as a Place of Encounter

20. For most of us, the parish is the principal place, the spiritual home, where our faith is fostered and nourished. We participate in the liturgy, we receive teaching and formation, and we are sent forth to live our faith and carry out the mission of the Church. But all of this begins with our encounter with Jesus Christ, the person-to-person meeting of hearts that brings us into a relationship of loving friendship with God. The parish, which is a spiritual home and a family of faith, is also a place of encounter. In the parish we meet our Lord in prayer, worship, teaching, charity, and apostolate. Gathered together as a community of believers, a family of spiritual brothers and sisters, we meet Jesus in much the same way as the first believers,



Bishop Folda gives communion to the newly confirmed at St. Catherine's Church in Valley City last spring. (Kristina Bloomsburg / New Earth)

the apostles whom Jesus gathered around himself. It is true that our encounter with Jesus happens in a very personal way, sometimes hidden even from those who know us best. And yet, the parish, like the community of apostles and disciples gathered around our Lord, is the place where we meet him regularly and come to know him intimately. Surrounded by brothers and sisters who have also been invited to communion with him, we encounter the One who loves us and shares the divine life of God with us.

21. The parish is not an extraneous aspect of the life of the Church, but a necessary realization of our Lord's call to community. Jesus did not call his followers and then send them away to live in isolation from one another. He gathered them to himself and gathered them with each other. The members of the early Church "devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). In a similar way, he calls us together so that we may, as a community, live in his grace and his truth. The parish is a fundamental cell in the body of the diocesan church where all the faithful can experience our Lord's love and the love of a local spiritual family. No parish is without imperfections, but every parish is a place where the grace of God is at work and our Lord Jesus calls us to unity in charity. To put it simply, the parish is a place where we come to know God and love him more deeply.

22. There are some members of the Church who hold back from actively participating in parish life, or who are not registered as members of any particular parish. It is certainly possible for them to encounter our Lord and grow in faith without formal parish membership. However, they deprive themselves of the important communal life that Jesus desires for us, and they deprive the parish community of their presence and their gifts. Every parish should be a place where the members and visitors too may encounter Jesus Christ. And every parish should examine how this may happen more fully, as well as any obstacles that would hinder such an encounter.

The Encounter of Eucharistic Adoration

23. A singular experience of our encounter with Christ is through the practice of Eucharistic adoration. One of the great strengths of the Diocese of Fargo is widespread devotion to our Eucharistic Lord and the practice of Eucharistic adoration. The desire to rest in the presence of the Lord is most fully satisfied by receiving him in Holy Communion. But that desire for communion with him persists, and we are moved to seek him out in prayer, especially prayer before his presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Our recognition of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist leads us to worship and adoration, for we know by faith that we are in the presence of the Son of God. Many have discovered the peace that comes with such Eucharistic adoration, and they come to a greater intimacy with him. By our prayer in the presence of our Eucharistic Lord, we prolong the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass and the reception of Holy Communion. Eucharistic adoration can be an opportunity to encounter Christ in a new and profound way and to deepen our relationship with him.

24. A significant number of parishes in our diocese have an admirable program of regular Eucharistic adoration. This is a fruit of our Eucharistic faith and should be fostered. I ask that regular opportunities for Eucharistic adoration be made available in every parish of our diocese. This can take whatever form is most suitable and feasible in each individual parish, but it should be a regular feature of parish life everywhere.

25. Eucharistic adoration is uniquely experienced in times of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. This is a privileged and sublime occasion to gaze upon our Eucharistic Lord, and the custom of Eucharistic exposition should be maintained and even expanded wherever possible. However, adoration of our Lord in the Eucharist does not require exposition and need not be limited to those specific occasions. Our Lord is just as present to us when we approach the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle, and these times of prayer can be immensely fruitful.

26. It is most appropriate that reflection on the Sacred Scriptures, the Word of God, should accompany our times of adoration before the Eucharist, the Word Incarnate. These

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times of prayer can be individual or communal. To our prayer of adoration we may add intercession for the Church, for our families, for our nation, for peace, for vocations, and for every conceivable need. Eucharistic prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament can only enrich the life of individual believers as well as the parish and the entire diocesan Church. In a recent video conference with young people, Pope Leo XIV said, “During Eucharistic adoration, you can look at Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and know that he looks at you – and he looks at you with love” (National Catholic Youth Conference, Nov. 21, 2025).

Retreat as Encounter

27. During his earthly life, Jesus took every opportunity to step away from the crowds so that he could spend time with his Father in prayer. He expressed a need for solitude in the Father’s presence so that he could carry out the mission his Father had given him. Jesus “retreated” from the noise and activity of the world so that he could rest in the silence of his Father’s presence and his love. And we have that same need. Just as Jesus needed time for spiritual renewal, so too do we. In fact, Jesus led his disciples away for time apart so they too could experience this spiritual renewal. “Come away by yourselves ... and rest awhile” (Mk 6:31). In his presence, they could encounter God more personally, without distraction and interruption. And from the early days of the Church, faithful Christians have stepped back from the pressures of daily life in order to be spiritually renewed in the presence of our Lord.

28. The Diocese of Fargo has a long history of retreat ministry, and this practice of retreat has borne abundant fruit in the lives of the faithful, for both adults and young people. But as our world and culture grow more secularized and more distant from God, it becomes even more important that we seek out regular and extended times of spiritual rest and renewal. It is my hope that an even greater number of the faithful will take the opportunity for a regular retreat with our Lord. Annual retreats organized in our parishes can be a source of blessing for the entire parish family. We make time in our lives for many activities. A day or a few days set aside for prayer and reflection is a choice that we can also make that will potentially bear abundant fruit in our own spiritual lives. Retreat opportunities in our diocese are plentiful, and I invite everyone to take advantage of these opportunities for a time of encounter with our Lord, an encounter that can grow into something more. A retreat is not only for the select few or for

the “spiritual elite.” Retreats are appropriate for every person who desires a deeper relationship with God.

Encountering God in Silence

29. Our world and our culture have become so filled with sound and activity that we often fail to notice the presence of God or his voice in our hearts. Jesus sought the quiet of solitude so he could enter more fully into communion with his Father. Silence and stillness of heart are sometimes in short supply, especially for those who have busy personal and family lives. But following our Lord’s example in accord with our own particular states of life, we must all cultivate moments of silence in order to become aware of God’s presence and to hear his voice speaking to us. Even in brief moments of quiet, we can recollect ourselves and recall the presence of God, who is always with us. In these moments, we encounter our Lord more personally, and have an opportunity to share with him our joys and sorrows, our hopes and our needs. We hear not only our own voices or the sounds of the passing world, but the quiet voice of God who speaks to all who will listen.

30. The gift of silence is also important in the celebration of the liturgy. When we enter the church, we enter into the “Holy of Holies,” the sanctuary where our Lord is uniquely present. Some moments of quiet prayer before the celebration of Mass allow us to recollect ourselves and prepare for the sacred mystery about to unfold before us. Pastors should ensure that during every Mass, some moments of silence are observed so that all who are present may peacefully contemplate the extraordinary grace of the celebration. Times of silent recollection may occur between or after the scriptural readings, after the homily, during the preparation of the gifts and altar, or after Holy Communion. Certainly, after Communion or after Mass is concluded, it is fitting to pause in silence for a moment of thanksgiving. Without prejudice to the joy and celebration inherent in the liturgy, sacred silence is also suited to the liturgy and can be a profound moment of encounter with our Lord for the individual and for the entire assembly of the faithful.

II. Formation

“All the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them” (Jn 8:2).

31. After Jesus called his first followers, and after their encounter with him, he invited them to be his companions and to simply spend time with him. They walked where he walked, they heard his preaching, and they witnessed the miraculous signs of his divine power. He drew them to himself so that he could form them as his disciples. Even after an extended period of time, there was much that his disciples still did not understand. And yet, Jesus was patient with them and continued to open up to them the mysteries of our salvation. He taught them, he gave them example by his own actions, and he challenged

their earthly way of thinking and acting. Moreover, he assured them that after he was no longer walking the earth with them, the Holy Spirit would continue to teach them all they would need to know (Jn 14:16-17, 25-26). In fact, he formed them as witnesses and authoritative teachers, so that they could then share with the world what they had received: “Whoever hears you hears me” (Lk 10:16).

32. Every follower of Christ, like the apostles themselves, is called into a relationship with our Lord that entails formation in the mysteries of salvation. Through the Sacred Scriptures, through Sacred Tradition, and through the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church, our Lord continues to form his people as disciples and as citizens of heaven. Every day, he imparts to us the grace we need to grow in our love for God and our understanding of his truth. This process of formation does not end when we are children, but continues throughout our lives. As his followers and friends, he invites us to know him and to be one with him, but this union comes about over time with prayer, study, and faithful living of the Christian life.

33. Formation in the Christian life is a necessary part of our lives as disciples of Christ and as Catholics. Every one of us has need of ongoing formation and growth in our adherence to Christ and his teachings. This is why the Church dedicates so much time and energy to the ministry of teaching and faith formation both for young people and adults. This formation is especially important for the lay faithful, who often do not have the opportunity to receive a comprehensive religious education during their youth. As they live their lives in the world, they need a firm grounding in the truths of our faith and in the person of Jesus Christ.

34. A great need of our time is fuller catechesis both for adults and young people. The Synod recognized that many of our adult faithful are inadequately formed in the fundamentals of our faith, especially in contemporary issues and moral questions. For this reason, the Synod identified adult faith formation and catechesis as a priority for our diocese. One obvious example of inadequate catechesis is the misunderstanding that many Catholics in our nation have of the Church’s belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Our ongoing Eucharistic Revival has vigorously addressed this gap in the faith of our brothers and sisters, but additional effort is needed.

35. Research has also demonstrated a lack of understanding in other areas as well, for example, the nature of marriage, issues surrounding artificial contraception and fertility treatments, the sacredness of sexuality, Catholic social teaching, the priesthood, and more. This lack of understanding can be traced back to inadequate catechesis as well as diminished participation in the life of the Church, where such teaching is passed on.

36. To respond, at least in part, to the need for better adult faith formation in our diocese, I have directed our diocesan staff

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to develop the Catholic Formation Initiative in the Diocese of Fargo. This initiative will offer ongoing programs of catechesis in specific areas of our faith, both through in-person and remote instruction. Catechetical programs will be offered by diocesan personnel, but I also ask every pastor to arrange for regular and frequent programs of adult faith formation in their parishes as well. The Catholic Formation Initiative will provide resources for local faith formation programs and links to other resources that are available throughout the Church, both here and abroad.

Christian Formation at Home

37. Prayer should be a part of daily life in every home. Prayer time with one's spouse, prayer with parents and children gathered together, and personal prayer, too, are profoundly formative. The family and home, as the domestic church, is a place where God is present to us at every moment, and where his grace is constantly at work. Ordinary Catholic devotional practices, such as meal prayers, blessings of the home and the family, and observance of feast days and liturgical seasons, deepen our awareness of God's nearness and our nearness to him. Works of charity for neighbors, for the poor, for the elderly, and within the family, become a living and practical instruction in the Christian life. A vibrant life of faith in the home reinforces our conviction that our relationship with God is not only a reality for church on Sunday but for all times and places.

38. Every home should have a Catholic edition of the Bible, so that the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures can be known and cherished. In fact, I invite every household to open the Sacred Scriptures each day both for reading and prayer. Daily reflection on the Word of God not only fosters a personal encounter and relationship with our Lord, but it also deepens our understanding of his sacred truth and the grace that binds us together. The great Scripture scholar St. Jerome challenges us when he says, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ" (*Commentariorum in Isaiam*, xviii). The core of our Scripture reflection should always be the Holy Gospels, but the entire corpus of Sacred Scripture is an inexhaustible source for reflection and spiritual growth. Excellent Scripture resources are more available now than ever before, and these can be a great help to our formation, understanding, and prayer.

39. In a similar way, every home should have a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This landmark resource was described by Pope St. John Paul II as "a full, complete exposition of Catholic doctrine, enabling everyone to know what the Church professes, celebrates, lives, and prays in her daily life" (*Laetamur Magnopere*). The *Catechism*, or a similar compendium or summary version, is an important resource for



An attendee at the Feb. 15, 2024 synodal listening session speaks to others on an item of discussion. (Paul Braun / New Earth)

our reference, study, and meditation. It can help us come to a deeper understanding of the riches of our faith, and it offers answers to many of our everyday questions. Personal study of the faith is a key part of our formation as faithful disciples of Christ.

The Parish as a Place of Formation

40. The parish as a community of faith is a center of formation for its members, and for others as well. The parish provides religious education for children and youth, helping parents in their duty as the first teachers of faith. The parish is the place where most young people will receive the sacraments of initiation, and therefore it generally has an established program of sacramental preparation. Our diocese is blessed with a large and dedicated corps of religious educators in our parishes who give their time and talent to pass along the faith to young people. They deserve our thanks and all the support they need to carry out this vital work of the Church.

41. The liturgy is probably the most regular experience of parish life for its members, and the liturgy itself is formative of our faith and our lives as Christians. In the celebrations of the liturgy such as the Mass; the sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and Matrimony; and rites of Christian burial, we worship God and receive the grace of the Paschal Mystery of our Lord. We are formed in our relationship with God and in our lives of faith by our participation in the liturgy, which is the most important prayer of the Church. Central to that liturgical experience is the proclamation and preaching of the Word of God, which is the revelation of divine truth given to his Church. Whenever the Word of God is proclaimed, the faithful are formed according to the mind and heart of Christ. Their understanding of the faith

is deepened, and they are called to virtue and holiness of life.

42. The parish is thus a place of formation not only for children but also for adults, including those who have been members of the Church all their lives. In addition to the liturgy, the parish should be a center of teaching and learning for all its members. The pastor and parochial vicars, along with deacons, parish staff, and volunteers, all have an essential role to play in forming the faithful by offering regular opportunities for further study and enrichment, such as the Order for Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA), Bible studies, catechetical programs, and a variety of other offerings.

43. The life of faith is also formed by the devotional life of believers, especially as this occurs in the context of parish life. Well-known popular practices like the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, devotion to the saints, parish feast day celebrations, and many others, can enrich the lives of the faithful and deepen their sense of connection to God and the saints. Popular devotion in all its variety can reflect the many ways that God's blessing comes to his people and forms a stronger sense of community in the parish.

44. In every dimension of its life and activity, the parish must be a place of formation for its members and for all who participate in its activities. Together, the pastor and the members should evaluate the priorities and plans of the parish to ensure that they always contribute to the formation of its members in the faith that is its foundation. Every parish activity should, in some way, contribute to our formation as friends and disciples of Christ. Like the early Christian community, every parish must form its people in prayer, the sacraments, the Gospel, and in communal life and charity (cf. Acts 2:42).

Formation through Small Groups

45. During my years as a pastor and now as bishop, I have seen firsthand the value of small groups of the faithful who gather for prayer, faith sharing, and formation in the life of the Church. Groups of individuals from a particular parish or from various parishes will routinely come together for mutual support as they strive to grow in faith and in their relationship with God. A small group can allow individuals to form relationships of friendship and trust with a certain intimacy that might not exist in large scale gatherings. These groups might meet in homes, or at a parish, or in any other useful setting. And a "small group" might be a handful of people or more, depending on the needs and preferences of the members.

46. The Church offers a number of models that many of the faithful already use, and I have seen many of these already utilized in the Diocese of Fargo: Teams of Our Lady for married couples, various Bible study programs, rosary groups, women's groups, men's groups like Cor from the Knights of Columbus, charismatic prayer groups, Cursillo groups, book clubs, and many others. I firmly believe that the model of small group prayer and faith sharing can be an even greater blessing to our diocese as more of the faithful are able to experience a personal and intimate interaction with our Lord in the company of trusted

companions. We can take our lead from Jesus himself, who gathered a small group of followers—the Twelve—for more personal and intense formation. These followers then went out into the world, and they shared with others the fruits of their encounter and formation in the presence of Jesus. This has been the experience of the Church throughout its history, and I am convinced that it should also be our experience now.

47. I ask every parish in the diocese to facilitate some form of small group prayer and faith sharing for the members of the parish and anyone who is interested. The Diocese of Fargo will make available a variety of models for small groups, and will work with parishes to support groups with materials and ongoing formation. Pastors will have an animating role, offering their own presence and support whenever possible, but the faithful should have the freedom to adopt their own manner and pace. The principal value of such gatherings will not be measured by material covered but by the gathering itself and the spiritual fruits for the members. Small groups are not an entity unto themselves, but are part of the larger parish family, and should always remain aware of their relationship to the larger family of the Church.

Formation of Youth: Parish Religious Education, Catholic Schools, and Homeschooling

48. The education and formation of children and young people is a solemn responsibility of the Church. Parents, as the first educators of their own children, have a God-given duty by their vocation to educate and pass on the faith to their children (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3, 6). This obligation cannot be emphasized enough, and has ramifications for the eternal destiny of children, who depend on their parents to receive the same gift of faith that we have received. The Church, too, as the family of faith established by Jesus Christ, shares in this responsibility to pass on the faith and form young people in their calling as children of God and followers of his Son. Once again, the Church does not replace or supplant the role of parents, but has its own obligation to assist parents and share the faith in a systematic way with young people. For this reason, the Church has historically regarded education and faith formation as one of its highest priorities, and it has gone to great lengths to assure that Christian formation happens in the lives of all young people (*ibid.*).

49. Even before its founding in 1889, Catholic schools were established in the Diocese of Fargo to provide a quality education for youth and clear formation in Catholic life and doctrine. That apostolate has continued to this day and remains a high priority for our diocesan family. The Catholic schools in our diocese are a treasure to be cherished and supported, and they are one of the principal means by which the Church carries out its mission of Christian formation. Our Catholic schools are an integral apostolate of our parishes and our diocese, and they deserve and require support, both moral and material, for the advancement of their mission. There is no question that Catholic schools require sacrifices on the part of all the faithful, but they



**Students, staff and parents of St. Joseph elementary school and St. Mary Academy in Devils Lake attend the September 2023 dedication Mass for the school's new chapel.
(Paul Braun / New Earth)**

offer an incomparable service to our children, our families, our parishes, and the entire diocesan Church. After a period of contraction, we have been blessed to see the network of Catholic schools in our diocese actually grow in recent years, thanks to the commitment of pastors, educators, and families. This commitment must remain strong and vibrant so that integral Catholic education may thrive and become even more available to every family who desires it.

50. The large majority of our children and young people receive their faith formation through parish programs of religious education. Under the guidance of our pastors and through the efforts of parish catechists, our young people are given a thorough catechetical formation in the setting of their own parish family. The multitude of parish directors of religious education and catechists are a great blessing to our parishes and our diocese, and they ensure that the faith formation of our young people continues year after year. They deserve and require our heartfelt support as they strive to share our Catholic faith with our children every week. While the pastor has an essential role in the work of parish catechesis, the responsibility is not his alone. All parishioners, especially parents of children, should make every effort to share in the work of catechesis, especially by serving as teachers or teacher assistants.

51. In 2016, I mandated a uniform religious education curriculum throughout the Diocese of Fargo, along with a catechetical series to be used in all our parishes and schools. This ensured that religious education would be consistent across the many parishes of our diocese, and it would also enable pastors and catechists to have reliable and consistent resources for their teaching ministry. After ten years of use, and at the recommendation of the diocesan Synod, I have initiated a process of review of the curriculum and the catechetical materials. This review will allow updating of the curriculum and the possible adoption of new catechetical resources. It is my intention that the curriculum and materials adopted will be used throughout the diocese, so that children, families,

catechists, and pastors may all benefit from a thorough and consistent program of religious formation across all ages and in every parish.

52. A growing number of families in our diocese have chosen to homeschool their children, and this often includes faith formation. Parents who have the freedom and the ability to educate their own children are living out in a particular way the Church's understanding of parents as the first teachers of their children. This is a laudable endeavor, and it deserves the support of our diocesan family. Parishes should assist homeschooling families by sharing faith formation materials and offering opportunities to support the education of their children. Homeschooling families often seek curriculum and teaching resources that will assist them in their efforts. Many national organizations produce homeschooling programs and materials that make this work feasible for parents. While some of these materials come from Catholic sources, many others do not, and some are incompatible with our Catholic faith. Homeschooling parents should therefore be especially vigilant to choose only those materials that are in full harmony with Catholic teaching and the Magisterium of the Church. Pastors and diocesan catechetical staff can offer guidance whenever questions arise about the suitability of catechetical materials.

Formation of Young Adults

53. The ongoing formation of young adults must be a priority for our diocesan Church. Personal observation, as well as statistical research, indicates that many young adults, both single and married, have absented themselves from active participation in the life of the Church. This certainly affects our parishes, but more importantly, it affects the lives and spirituality of young adults themselves. It is often said that youth and young adults are the future of the Church, but Pope Leo XIV, in an address to young people, said, "You are not only the future of the Church, you are the present. Your voices, your ideas, your faith matter right now, and the Church needs you" (Video Conference with Young People, Nov. 21, 2025). Young adults, in particular, have launched into the world with new responsibilities and hopes for the life that awaits them. It is necessary for the Church to accompany them on this journey and to recognize the gifts and contributions they have to offer.

54. In early adulthood, the new challenges of schooling, employment, family, relocation, and a new community can be overwhelming. Some young adults experience isolation and loneliness, and others become deeply immersed in the secular culture that surrounds us. Through all of this, the Church, in our parishes and throughout our diocese, must give special attention to young adults and offer the riches of our faith and friendship in the Christian community. Faith formation, which may have extended into the high school years, often diminishes in early adulthood or before as other activities and responsibilities take center stage. But like all members of the Church, young adults have great need for ongoing formation

in our faith, not only in an intellectual sense, but also through engagement with our community of faith. Opportunities for involvement in the parish, for fraternal gatherings, for faith enrichment with Scripture and catechesis, should be offered in a way that takes into account the particular life situation and needs of young adults.

55. Campus ministry is a vital and fruitful ministry to young adults in the Diocese of Fargo. As they navigate through the life of higher education, they wrestle with questions of faith, relationships, future careers, and the ordinary challenges of daily life. Our diocese is blessed with strong campus ministries at our major universities, and these campus parishes are crucial places of outreach and formation to thousands of young adults, both Catholic and non-Catholic. It is during their college years that young adults often make some of the most significant decisions of their lives, especially regarding their vocations. Countless vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and Christian marriage have come forth from our campus parishes, and many faithful leaders within our diocese have been formed in these settings. Our campus ministries, entrusted to the patronage of the newest Doctor of the Church, St. John Henry Newman, serve young adults from all parts of our diocese, and therefore they deserve the support of all the faithful in our diocese as well.

Mass Media and Social Media

56. Mass media and social media have grown in importance as a means of formation in the Church. The multiplication of media sources and outlets in recent years has changed the way we communicate and receive information, not only in matters of the secular world, but in matters of faith as well. This has important ramifications for our formation as followers of Christ. A vast array of media sources and social media outlets offer news, information, and resources specifically oriented to the Catholic faith and the Church. We can access sources and information that once were unavailable to us, for example, Scripture commentaries and courses, catechetical resources, coverage of national and international events, and opportunities to see and hear from great witnesses of our Catholic faith. We are immeasurably blessed and enriched by these opportunities, and parishes and families should wisely take advantage of them. As the number of those seeking to learn about the Catholic faith and even enter the Church has grown, many report that they were drawn by information they found through electronic media. Clearly, this is a tool that can be used to good effect for building up our Lord's Kingdom.

57. Conversely, we must also be aware of those mass media and social media outlets that invalidly claim to represent the Catholic Church and its teaching. Far too often, these commentators present a narrow agenda that is not in harmony with Catholic teaching and discipline. Sometimes what we read and hear through social and mass media is simply untrue. To echo the words of our Lord, let the consumer beware of "false

prophets" (cf. Mt 24:11) who present themselves as authentic sources of information on all things Catholic, but who often distort the truth in its fulness and create discord and division. All of us, both clergy and faithful, should carefully consider the content that we absorb through mass and social media, especially anything that is at variance with the teaching and pastoral governance of the popes and bishops, who have been given full authority to teach, govern, and sanctify by Christ himself (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 21; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1558).

58. Our own use of mass media and participation in social media should always be governed by Gospel charity and adherence to the truth. Our quest for information or relationship through the various forms of media must always be guided by the truth as it is taught authentically by the Church. Through our use of the media, our witness to the truth in charity can help us to grow in virtue, and it can also be formative for others.

III. Mission

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

59. Finally, where does our encounter and our formation in Christ lead us? It leads us directly into the mission that Jesus has given to each of us as his friends and disciples: to live our faith and to be witnesses of that faith to others. In his January 2, 2026 address to young people gathered at SEEK 2026, the annual conference of the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, Pope Leo XIV said: "After meeting Jesus, Andrew could not help but share with his brother what he had found. Indeed, missionary zeal is born from an encounter with Christ. We desire to share with others what we have received, so that they, too, can come to know the fulness of love and truth found only in him. I pray that... all of you will be moved by this same missionary zeal to share with those around you the joy that you have received from a genuine encounter with the Lord."

60. It is widely observed that our culture no longer supports the faith, and in many ways actively opposes it. Like the early followers of Jesus, we now live in apostolic times, a time when knowledge of God and the Christian faith has diminished. But in this context, every baptized Catholic, and every member of every parish in the Diocese of Fargo is called and sent to be a witness of Jesus Christ and to participate actively in the mission that Jesus entrusted to his Church. To use a phrase used often by Pope Francis, every Christian by virtue of Baptism is called to be a "missionary disciple" (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). In other words, we are disciples—followers of Christ—who are sent out by him on mission.

61. This call to mission is urgent. Recent history and demographic data indicate that many of our parishes will no longer exist in a generation unless we rediscover the sense of mission that Jesus gave to all his followers. Our diocesan

Synod recognized this urgency and this renewed call to mission. I believe we can all agree that a gradual decline is not what our Lord desires for his Church. And so, it is necessary for all of us to embrace the mission given us by our Lord, that is, to be his witnesses and to share the gift that we have received. Referring again to the exhortation of Pope Francis, the Church must seek out the people of our time. We must be a “Church on her feet,” a Church that “goes forth,” a community of missionary disciples who take initiative, engage, accompany, and bear fruit. This is especially true as our culture becomes more indifferent, and people are more isolated from one another, either by choice or by circumstances. Although fewer people identify with religious faith, this opens up great opportunities to witness to our faith and hope in Christ. As Jesus said, “The harvest is abundant...” (Mt 9:37).

62. This notion of mission and evangelization is not new. In 1975, Pope St. Paul VI issued this important call to action: “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize...” (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 4, 14). The Church exists to proclaim the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus above all our other proclamations and ministries. The Church has an essential mission to lead all people into a personal and lifelong relationship with Jesus Christ, a relationship that transforms everything in our lives—our hearts, our minds, our desires, our plans, and our decisions. And every one of us has a part to play in this great mission.

The Parish as Center of Mission

63. Every parish, as a local community of the diocesan Church, shares in the mission given by our Lord to the universal Church: “Go and make disciples...” A parish is called together as a community of faith and charity, but is also placed in the world as a center of evangelization and mission. The parish is a place where the faithful encounter our Lord, and where they are formed through the grace of the Holy Spirit as committed disciples of Jesus. But the parish is then a place of mission whose members become witnesses to others of the gift they have received. We are sent by our Lord to each other with love, but we are also sent by the same Lord to those who are not part of our community, who have not yet learned about Jesus Christ.

64. The parish, as a community of those baptized into the life of the Trinity, is ipso facto a community of “missionary disciples.” Every member is commissioned by our Lord to go out and proclaim Christ to others, each according to his or her state in life. We are equipped by the grace of our Baptism to live out our faith in such a way that others will be drawn to our Lord and his Church. The communal character of the parish also gives assurance that we are not alone in this

mission. We are surrounded by brothers and sisters, fellow missionaries who also are sent by our Lord as his witnesses. Like the apostles whom our Lord sent out two by two, we are in the company of others who share our faith and who were sent just as we are.

65. The parish also has a mission to those who have grown distant from Christ or are for some reason estranged from his Church. Reliable research and our own personal experience indicate that a great number of people who once were members of the Church have chosen to separate themselves and live apart from the Church. Some have joined other faith communities, and others have continued without any new religious affiliation. In every parish, there are those who have drifted away from active participation in the Church. But as ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor 5:20), we are called to reach out with loving concern, to befriend and to invite those who are no longer among our number to rejoin the parish family and to take part in the life of the Church.

66. In light of this great mission of the Church, every parish should have a core group or team whose principal ministry is evangelization, that is, reaching out to neighbors in Gospel charity and inviting them to faith in Christ and to the family of the Church. This team can be a distinct group in the parish, or it can be an aggregate of other groups, but its focus should always be the mission outreach of the parish, a deliberate practice of witnessing and reaching out to others and sharing the gift of our faith. This mission team should be formed in the work of evangelization, which is not merely a matter of academic study but is more importantly a practice of forming relationships. The diocesan offices will prioritize this work of support for parish training and mission formation.

67. By virtue of his office, the pastor has the principal leadership role in the parish’s mission, but this work is not his responsibility alone. Every member of the parish has a responsibility for the parish’s mission and a part to play in carrying out the work that Jesus gave to his Church. Together, the pastor and parish faithful should strive to ensure that every aspect of parish life is grounded in the underlying, essential mission that Jesus gave to his Church.

The Eucharist and Mission

68. Pope St. John Paul II told us: “From the perpetuation of the sacrifice of the Cross and her communion with the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the Church draws the spiritual power needed to carry out her mission. The Eucharist thus appears as both the source and the summit of all evangelization, since its goal is the communion of mankind with Christ and in him with the Father and the Holy Spirit” (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 22).

69. It should be readily apparent to all that the Eucharist is at the heart of our life and mission as a diocesan family. As the Eucharist gives life to the Church, it also enlivens the Church’s mission. Indeed, the Eucharist and the mission of the Church are inseparable. In the Eucharist, we encounter Jesus

Christ in an incomparable way. We enter sacramentally into his Paschal Mystery—his passion, death, and resurrection—and we share in the victory he won for us upon the cross. Our communion with Christ in the Eucharist changes us by drawing us into the divine life of God. Through the Eucharist Christ joins us to himself and thus joins us to his own mission. This communion with Christ also sends us out to carry forward the mission Jesus gives to his loved ones: “Go and make disciples.”

70. Our love for Christ, manifested especially in our Eucharistic worship and communion, moves us to love for others. And that love in turn moves us to desire their union with Christ. Jesus said to his apostles, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you...” (Jn 20:21). Through the grace of the Eucharist, he continues to send his followers into the world as his witnesses, and as his co-workers in the vineyard. We become “Eucharistic missionaries,” nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord, and sent out to continue his mission among our family members, neighbors, co-workers, and everyone we meet. This Eucharistic mission is a call to intercessory prayer, a call to charity and service, and a call to speak openly of God’s presence in our lives. Our communion with Christ in the Eucharist helps us to put aside fear. It sustains us and enables us to persevere in the mission we have received. As he gives himself to me, I am then able to go to others, filled with his life and touched by his mercy. The call to be a Eucharistic missionary is not only for a zealous few. It is for all who hear this commission at the end of each Mass: “Go in peace” or “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.”

71. In short, our celebration of the Eucharist in Mass and adoration impels us to mission, the mission of Christ for the life of the world. He gives himself to us and then sends us out so that all will be invited to abide in his Kingdom. Pope Francis spoke of this relation between the Eucharist and our mission: “Once we have encountered Christ in adoration, once we have touched and received him in the Eucharistic celebration, it is no longer possible to keep him to ourselves; instead, we become missionaries of his love to others” (Message to Eucharistic Congress of Madagascar, Aug. 23, 2024).

Sent to the poor, like Christ (cf. Lk 4:18; Is 61:1)

72. “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, that you do to me” (Mt 25:40). These words of our Lord underline the call to mercy and charity we have all received. As followers of Christ, we are sent to those in need—the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the sick, the immigrant, the elderly, the lonely, and the spiritually lost. What we do for them we do for Christ. Pope Leo XIV summons the entire Church to heed our Lord’s commandment of love, and specifically to have preferential love for the poor. Drawing from the teaching of Christ, he affirms that “Love for the Lord, then, is one with love for the poor” (*Dilexi te*, 5).

73. Our diocesan Church has a long and admirable history of outreach to the poor, and I can say with confidence that

every one of our parishes has actively participated in that mission. Indeed, our mission as a Church must include love and care for the poor and all those in need, whether that need is material, physical, social, or spiritual. Mindful of the generosity and active love of our people and parishes for the needy, I simply exhort our pastors and faithful to ensure that every parish family is dedicated in a specific way to assisting those in need. Perhaps each parish could make an annual commitment of support in time and treasure for a particular group or organization. Certainly we must be attentive to the needs of our own parishes and the wider Church, but we should not become so self-directed that we neglect to reach out to others, especially the neighbor on our own doorstep (cf. the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lk 16:19-31).

74. By the “law of the gift,” which was a favorite theme of Pope St. John Paul II, “man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (*Gaudium et spes*, 24). The more we give of ourselves, the more we receive back and discover our true identity and greatness in the eyes of God. In a similar way, the more we look outward and extend the hand of Christian charity beyond our own walls, the more vibrant in love and faith we may become as a Christian community. Of course, the life of the Church and of the parish cannot be reduced to mere philanthropy. Our works of charity and compassion for the poor must always be rooted in our worship of God and our commitment to formation in the faith. In a particular way, our Eucharistic worship, especially through the Mass, animates us for a mission of charity and compassion, and one must never exclude the other.

Vocations

75. The Second Vatican Council taught that the call to holiness among God’s people is universal. Whether as clergy, religious, married, or single, all are called to holiness in their own state of life (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 39). Within this call to holiness, however, there are certain vocations, or callings from our Lord, that are oriented to the mission of the Church and the building of God’s Kingdom. Among these is the call to the priesthood. The priests of the Church and of our diocese are called by our Lord to shepherd his people by proclaiming the Gospel and celebrating the sacraments. In a unique way, priests are entrusted with the spiritual well-being of the faithful in the roles of pastor and spiritual father. The Diocese of Fargo has been greatly blessed over the years by the many men who have heard God’s call to serve him as his priests. And yet, we face the ever-present need for more priests who will fill the ranks of those who went before them to serve as shepherds in the years to come.

76. Our diocese is greatly blessed in the young men who are currently in seminary formation, preparing for the day when they will approach the altar of the Lord as his priests. But our current number of seminarians will not replace the number of priests who will retire from active ministry in the next ten to twenty years. Hence, we must beg “the harvest

...the beautiful mosaic of small rural parishes that covers our diocese is a treasure to be preserved as far as possible.

master to send out laborers to gather his harvest” (Mt 9:37-38). Priestly vocations come from the Lord, so we should never fail to ask him to raise up laborers, future priests, from among our families and parishes who will one day minister to his flock. In every parish, regular prayers for priestly vocations should be included in the Sunday liturgy. Masses, Eucharistic holy hours, and rosaries should be offered for the intention of priestly vocations. Catechetical lessons on the priesthood should be regularly included in our religious education programs. Priests should give witness about their own priestly calling, and as spiritual fathers, be ready to personally invite a young man to actively consider this vocation. And finally, parents should encourage their sons to be open to our Lord’s call to the priesthood if it should come to them. As our culture becomes more secularized, resistance to this call may become stronger, but God’s grace in a receptive heart can overcome every obstacle. It is my hope that a culture of priestly vocations can grow in our diocese, wherein families and parishes will joyfully foster such vocations with prayer and support, so that we will have the priests we need to serve our diocesan church in the coming years. As Pope St. John Paul II reminded us, “We are all responsible for priestly vocations” (cf. *Pastores dabo vobis*, 41 ff.).

77. The Church is also blessed by the ministry of our permanent deacons. Since the Second Vatican Council called for its revival, the ministry of deacons has grown in our own diocese for the past fifty years. Our parishes have benefited from the generous ministry of deacons, who commit themselves to proclaiming the Gospel and their unique call to service after the example of Christ, who bent down to wash the feet of his own disciples (Jn 13:1-17). Our deacons, supported by their wives and families, have an important and beautiful place in the life of a parish, and they have a unique ability to reach those who might otherwise remain distant from the Church. Pastors and parish members should pray for their deacons and deacon candidates. They should also pray for vocations to the diaconate and encourage possible candidates, so that the rich ministry of service exercised by our deacons may continue and flourish.

78. Throughout the Church’s history, men and women have dedicated themselves to God and been consecrated to him through sacred vows. Those in religious life offer a powerful witness to all the faithful of unqualified love for our Lord through prayer and selfless charity. The call to consecrated life is a treasure of the Church, and we give thanks for the presence,



Bishop Folda blesses farm machinery, animals and soil at the 2025 Rural Life Mass held at the Leyendecker farm near Marion (Paul Braun / New Earth)

prayer, and fruitful apostolic service of consecrated religious in the Diocese of Fargo. Since its earliest days, consecrated men and women have played a critical role in the growth of our diocesan Church, and they remain an essential part of our spiritual family. Religious vocations have declined significantly in recent decades, but our need for consecrated religious is as great as ever. Once again, every parish and every family should offer regular prayers for vocations to consecrated life, and encourage potential candidates to consider this holy calling from our Lord. The religious vocation comes from God, but he often works through us to cultivate such a vocation in another person’s heart.

79. The vocation of marriage and family life is a sacred calling from our Lord. Men and women who give themselves to each other in married life are a reflection of the love that Christ has for his Church (cf. Eph 5). So great is the call to marriage and family life, that the Son of God chose to be born and to grow into manhood under the loving care of Mary and Joseph. This vocation has been, from the beginning of human history, a central part of God’s plan for the human family and for our salvation. Thus, marriage and family life are essential to the life of the Church in the Diocese of Fargo. Husbands and wives, along with their children, form the domestic Church, where the life of faith is lived in the intimate setting of the family.

80. The vocation of marriage, however, has been undermined in recent decades, and families are struggling under the weight of many pressures, most notably the decline in marriage itself and the decline in the practice of the faith. Spouses are encouraged to renew their love for God so that they may selflessly love one another and help each other attain holiness and eternal life. And from that spousal love, they can welcome and fully love their children, providing the care that only a parent can give. Spouses and their families have an indispensable place in the life of the Church, both in the parish and in the diocese. Pastors and the parish faithful must support couples as they prepare for marriage, opening up for them the fulness of our belief in the sacredness and fruitfulness of marriage. Parishes should do everything possible to support

spouses, especially in the early years of their married lives and as young parents. The Diocese of Fargo will continue and strive to enhance its spiritual and programmatic support for married life and families. The fostering of marriage and family life must remain a key priority in the life of our diocese going forward.

Parish Planning

81. It is well known that over the last several decades populations have shifted within our diocese. And along with this change in population has come a change in parish membership as well. This is especially true in our rural areas and communities. Some communities and parishes have declined in population to the point that a parish is no longer viable and must be merged with another neighboring parish. Although disappointing and even painful, this is not a new reality. From the time of its founding in 1889, the Diocese of Fargo has seen the establishment of parishes that thrived for a period of time and then declined for various reasons. Many people are surprised to learn that, throughout our diocesan history, well over one hundred parishes have been merged or closed because of demographic changes or simple changes in transportation. With better transportation and ease of mobility, it is no longer necessary or even feasible to have a parish church every six or seven miles, as was once the case in certain parts of our diocese.

82. As a diocesan Church, we must continue to evaluate the viability of our parishes in light of local populations, availability of priests, and material resources. However, the beautiful mosaic of small rural parishes that covers our diocese is a treasure to be preserved as far as possible. Having been the pastor of several small parishes myself, I know the importance and fruitfulness of small parish communities and the contribution they make to the wider church. Our Lord began his Church with a handful of believers who then shared the gift of faith with others. These then multiplied, mostly as small groups of the faithful in the early years, and soon the Church, with its multitude of local faith communities, covered the earth. Even when local populations decline, we should never assume that the decline or closure of the local parish is inevitable. In every small community, there are many who do not know Jesus Christ and have no relationship with a church. They await an invitation to join with us in worship, charity, and community. Perhaps without knowing it, they await the grace of God that can be found in his Church. In such circumstances, the call to mission is even more emphatic, and should never be forgotten by clergy or the faithful. Recalling our Lord's words, we know that the harvest is great! If we are willing to witness our faith and go out to others, then even the smallest parish communities can be renewed with the presence of new brothers and sisters in faith.

Conclusion

83. Dear friends in Christ, the Diocese of Fargo is enormously blessed, and we are living in a time of great opportunity. Our Lord invites us to encounter him and to abide in his presence. He desires to form us as his disciples, just as he formed a group of fishermen to become his apostles. And, he sends us into the world as his witnesses so that all may come to know God's loving presence in their lives. Without question, our diocese faces many challenges, as it always has. But with every challenge there is an abundance of grace from God. From the days of its infancy, the Church has struggled but persevered on our earthly journey. Jesus promised that he would not leave us orphans (Jn 14:18), and he assured us that he will be with us always (cf. Mt 28:20). May the promptings of the Holy Spirit, who was so present to the delegates at the Synod Assembly in 2024, continue to inspire our minds and hearts.

84. It is this promise of Christ that renews us and gives us hope. Pope Leo XIV offered these encouraging words as he began his pontificate: "For our part, we want to be a small leaven of unity, communion, and fraternity within the world. We want to say to the world, with humility and joy: Look to Christ! Come closer to him! Welcome his word that enlightens and consoles! Listen to his offer of love and become his one family: in the one Christ, we are one. ... This is the missionary spirit that must animate us..." (Inaugural Mass, May 18, 2025).

85. With a spirit of faith and docility, and echoing the great acclamation of Mary, our Mother, I am confident that our Lord will accomplish great things with us and for us in the days to come (cf. Lk 1:49). Mary, who was the first disciple, is a model of faith and holiness for all. She willingly accepted God's call and invitation: "May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). She directed others to her Son when she said, "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). And she remained with the Church to offer her motherly prayer and support (cf. Acts 1:14). Let us ask Mary under her title of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of the Diocese of Fargo, to intercede for us as we strive to follow her Son.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray for one another! May the Lord bless you with his peace!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



+John T. Folda

Bishop of Fargo

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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Questions and answers on the updated policy of Confirmation

By Office of Catechesis, Diocese of Fargo

The following are answers to questions the faithful may have in regard to the updated policy on the reception of First Eucharist and Confirmation.

1. What is Confirmation?

Confirmation is one of the sacraments of Christian initiation. It is the completion of Baptism and the sacrament by which the baptized faithful are anointed with chrism by the laying on of hands. The grace received is the fullness of the Holy Spirit and his gifts. We also describe this fullness as the completion, strengthening, perfection or aug-ment-ation of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism.

2. Who can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation?

Any baptized person who has not already received Confirmation can receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is the custom of the Catholic Church in the West (the Latin Church) and the policy of the Diocese of Fargo, to administer Confirmation after the age of reason.

3. How has the practice of Confirmation changed in the Diocese of Fargo over time?

Prior to 2003, the age for Confirmation varied throughout the Diocese of Fargo. Children were confirmed from late elementary school through High School. In 2003, Bishop Aquila lowered the age of Confirmation so that it would be celebrated along with First Eucharist. He also desired to unify the age of the reception of Confirmation across the diocese.

4. What is changing now?

The norm established by the Church for adults is the celebration of Confirmation before First Eucharist. During his twelve years of celebrating the Sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist with third grade students, Bishop Folda noticed that they were often overwhelmed and confused by the reception of the two sacraments in the same ceremony.

Considering what would be best for them, he determined to separate the celebrations of Confirmation and First Eucharist. So, beginning in the Spring of 2027, children will receive First Eucharist in third grade and the Sacrament of Confirmation in fourth grade.

5. Why is this change happening now? How did Bishop Folda reach his decision?

Bishop Folda came to his decision after many years of extensive consultation and prayer. Once he was installed as the eighth Bishop of the Diocese of Fargo in 2013, some faithful asked him whether he would consider changing the age of confirmation.

Why is this change happening now? How did Bishop Folda reach his decision?

In June 2022, Bishop Folda announced the Third Synod of the Diocese of Fargo. The age of confirmation was a topic of discussion at all 17 listening sessions, which were conducted across the diocese between January and May 2023. Three propositions for the diocesan Synod held the following April concerned the Sacrament of Confirmation. Delegates recommended conflicting courses of action: restoring the practice of celebrating First Communion in children's local parishes, while maintaining the practice of confirming them at a younger age. In the subsequent months, Bishop Folda discussed this issue with various consultative bodies, including the Priests' Council, the Deans, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, and others. Of all the options proposed, he decided to separate the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation from First Eucharist and to move it to the fourth grade.

6. Why is the policy of the Diocese of Fargo different than the neighboring dioceses?

The Church established a broad age range in which to celebrate Confirmation for children. The bishop of each diocese decides on the practice within his diocese.

7. How is the change being made? When will it begin?

The celebration of Confirmation and First Eucharist in 2026 will take place as scheduled. As has been the custom, Bishop



A child receives the Sacrament of Confirmation
(Paul Braun / New Earth)

Folda will celebrate them in a combined ceremony.

Beginning in the spring of 2027, children in third grade will receive First Eucharist in their home parish. That year, the Bishop will not celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for those children.

Beginning in the spring of 2028, the Bishop will celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation for children in the fourth grade.

8. When will the celebration of First Eucharist be held in 2027? What will it look like?

Students in third grade will receive their First Eucharist at their home parish on a day set by the Pastor. It is recommended that it be a weekend Mass during the Easter Season. Children are encouraged to wear formal attire to reflect the importance of the celebration. The tradition of young ladies wearing white dresses may be kept.

Each parish will determine how to commemorate the First Eucharist of their young parishioners. For example, they could host a luncheon or reception after Mass to honor the children.

9. When will Confirmations happen in 2028? Will they be in individual parishes or regionally?

Beginning in the Spring of 2028, the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation of children in fourth grade will be celebrated by the Bishop during the Lent and Easter seasons (March–May). The ceremony will always occur during the celebration of Mass.

Parishes that have a large number of children to be confirmed will have an individual celebration or host a regional celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation. Children of smaller parishes will receive Confirmation at a regional celebration of the Sacrament.

10. Will the requirements for the reception of First Eucharist or Confirmation change?

The requirements for the preparation to receive First Eucharist or the Sacrament of Confirmation are not changing. Parents will receive the Parent Handbook and attend catechetical sessions; students will attend class, complete the required textbook, attend a retreat, and be interviewed regarding their readiness. Additionally, for Confirmation students must choose a sponsor, and may choose a confirmation name.

11. How can a young child be expected to make an adult commitment to the Church at a young age?

All sacraments are a gift from our Heavenly Father, who desires to give us His very life, which we call grace. Sacraments are not earned or merited. For this reason, Confirmation should not be perceived as the sacrament of adult commitment to the Church. In fact, the Church requires priests to confirm infants and children younger than the age of reason when they are in danger of death so that they may receive the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Confirmation does not mark the end of a child's religious

education. Growth in the understanding of and living out our faith is a life-long effort. Parents and siblings have the responsibility of being examples of Jesus Christ to each other and living the Gospel each day. Children will stay engaged in the Church if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness through family prayer, Scripture reading, Sunday Mass, regular confession, and living a life of charity. Parents have the responsibility of seeing to the education of their children in all areas of life, including their Faith.

Confirmation does not mark the end of a child's religious education... Children will stay engaged in the Church if they see their parents striving to grow in holiness...



Keeping all of you in our prayers during the season of Lent and Holy Week.


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Educational Choice Comes to North Dakota



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.

This exciting new program helps all students have real options for educational opportunities that suit their needs

Just this past January, Governor Kelly Armstrong announced that North Dakota will participate in a new federal program that offers tax credits for certain donations made to organizations that provide educational scholarships to K-12 students in our state. North Dakota is now numbered among 23 states planning to participate in what is now being called the Education Freedom Tax Credit program. Over the past several months, the North Dakota Catholic Conference and the State Association of Nonpublic Schools have been advocating with the Governor's office to opt in to this exciting new program so that all North Dakota students might have real options to access educational opportunities that suit their needs.

The Education Freedom Tax Credit program marks the first time the federal government has specifically incentivized charitable giving through federal tax credits to support educational choice. Educational choice is the idea that families should have the freedom to choose the educational setting and tools best suited to their children. It also entails the notion that, for families to be truly free in making these choices, they should be given adequate financial resources. This new federal tax credit program is a big step towards increasing educational freedom in North Dakota.

The Education Freedom Tax Credit program was part of the Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill that was signed into law on the Fourth of July last year and will take effect beginning on Jan. 1, 2027. The program has no sunset provision and is now a permanent part of the federal tax code. It aims to make a broad array of educational choices more affordable for families and it will be administered by the U.S. Treasury Department.

Under the Education Freedom Tax Credit program, individual taxpayers can receive a dollar-for-dollar tax credit up to

Under the tax credit program, taxpayer donors can designate funds to support students at a specific school or school system

\$1,700 for cash contributions made to approved Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs), which in turn grant educational scholarships to eligible K-12 students. Although donors cannot earmark funds for any particular student, donors can designate that the funds be used to support students at a specific school or school system. If for some reason the taxpayer cannot use the full tax credit that year, it can be carried over to future tax years for up to five years. While donors could give more than \$1,700, the credit is only available for \$1,700 per year. Even so, any amount donated over that amount might still be treated as an itemized charitable deduction to reduce taxable income. One area that the Treasury Department will need to clarify is married couples filing jointly. The law states "any taxpayer" can use the tax credit but it does not address married joint filers, so it is unclear right now whether each spouse on a joint return could separately claim up to a \$1,700 credit (for a potential \$3,400 combined credit) or if a joint return is limited to a single \$1,700 credit.

What this means is that, instead of North Dakota taxpayers sending all their federal tax dollars to the federal government in Washington, D.C., they can instead direct the funds to stay in North Dakota to support educational choice for families in our state.

Under the program, a participating SGO must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is approved by the governor. It cannot be a private foundation. The SGO is required to provide scholarships to at least 10 or more students who do not all attend the same school. The SGO must also run lean and spend no less than 90% of all donations on funding student scholarships. The SGO must provide scholarships to children to attend the school of their choice or to access other qualified education-related services and products.

To be eligible for a scholarship, a student must be eligible for enrollment in a public K-12 school and have an annual household income at or below 300% of the "area gross median income." This is a high threshold that would cover the majority of North Dakotan families. SGOs are also allowed to narrow eligibility requirements within this general framework to prioritize assisting those in greatest need. Thus, for example, an SGO

could establish means-testing levels where needier students from poorer families would qualify for more funds or would be first in line for the scholarships. Although the amount of a donor's tax credit is limited to \$1,700, scholarship amounts given to students are not capped and will be determined by the SGO awarding those scholarships based on its mission.

Education freedom scholarships in this program can be used for any qualified education expense of an eligible student, which includes a broad set of expenses incurred in connection with K-12 education for students in public, private, charter, or home schools, located in urban, suburban, or rural areas. These qualified educational expenses include things like tuition, fees, tutoring, special needs services, books, supplies, uniforms, transportation, computer technology, internet access, and the like, as long as it is used for educational purposes. The SGO, however, could narrow this list to focus more specifically on funding scholarships that align with its mission. Thus, for example, an SGO with a mission to support students wishing to attend nonpublic schools could offer tuition-only scholarships.

For a state to participate in the program, two things must happen. First, the governor or other state official or agency designated by state law must opt in to the program, which our governor has already done. Second, the governor or other state official or agency designated by state law must submit a list of approved SGOs to the Treasury Department. At this time, the North Dakota Catholic Conference and the State Association of Nonpublic Schools are working together with other experts in the field to form an approved SGO that will fund scholarships to support families who wish to send their children to nonpublic schools in our state. Setting up this SGO will not happen immediately but will take significant time, effort, and resources. Once the SGO is in place, we will disseminate information to those wanting to participate.

While the state of North Dakota does not yet offer financial support for K-12 students attending nonpublic schools, the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit program is a good first start. Educational choice has come to North Dakota.




Women's Silent Preached Retreat

May 7-9th 2026
Maryvale Retreat Center
Valley City, ND

Cost:
\$300-350
Space is Limited.

May 7
 2:00 - 4:00pm: Registration and get settled
 4:00pm: Mass
 5:00pm: Dinner
 6:00pm: Silence starts
 6:00pm: Conference
 7:00-9:00pm: Adoration
 8:00-8:50pm: Confession

May 8
 6:00-9:00am: Continental Breakfast
 11:15am: Mass
 12:00pm: Lunch
 5:00pm: Dinner
 6:00pm: Conference
 7:00-9:00pm: Adoration
 8:00-8:50pm: Confession

May 9
 6:00 - 9:00am: Continental Breakfast
 11:15am: Mass
 12:00pm: Lunch
 1:00pm: Conference
 5:00pm: Dinner



This retreat is inspired by the prayer methods and exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola led by Fr. Sean Mulligan at Maryvale Retreat Center in Valley City, ND. A silent retreat is a time to listen to God in a new way, while getting some rest.

Questions? Contact Jennie Korsmo:
jennie.korsmo@fargodiocese.org | (701) 356-7901
www.fargodiocese.org/womens-retreat

Not willing to let go of your marriage?





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Healing Through Accompaniment



SEMINARIAN LIFE

KADE PALMER

Theology I
St. Paul Seminary
St. Paul, Minn.

There I was... A little six- or seven-year-old kid, fearful for my life. I was standing on the edge of a seemingly endless flood of deadly liquid. Only one step stood between me and impending doom. And everyone around me was coercing me to jump. I alone could save myself from swift and certain demise.

Or at least, that must have been what was going through my little mind as I stood on the edge of the pool during my first (and only) year of swimming lessons. My swim instructor was going down the row of my classmates, asking them what kind of tree they were. Once they responded, she would say “chop, chop, timber!” and one by one they enthusiastically jumped into the pool.

When she got to me, however, I simply shook my head and refused.

“Are you a pear tree?” she asked. “No,” I said. “An apple tree?” “No.” “Ok, what do you like?” That question sparked my interest. “Bob the Builder!” I replied excitedly. “Do you want to be a Bob the Builder tree?” she asked.

Now that was an offer that my little self simply could not refuse. I nodded, closed my eyes, and prepared to jump. “Chop, chop, timber!” However, with all of my little strength and internal encouragement, I could not get myself to jump. Disappointed and a little ashamed, I looked around expecting to see a crowd of faces frowning, even enraged at my weakness, just as I was.

Right then, my eyes met my mom’s. And in that moment, in the midst of shrieking children and ear-piercing life-guard whistles, everything was silent. There was nothing in the world but me and her. She was smiling, her eyes soft and excited. She was cheering my name.

Then, my eyes met my dad’s. And with a tender, confident smile, he nodded his head. At that moment, my little body became emboldened, motivated by that unique, gentle, unconditional, and encouraging love of a parent. I backed up to the wall and, like Captain America pulsing with super soldier serum, jumped over the insurmountable wall of my doubts and fears.

That memory, for me, is a good analogy for seminary life.

There are four dimensions of formation for the priesthood: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral. In all of these, I have been patiently accompanied and assisted in learning to use the strengths and weaknesses that God has blessed me with.

All of us walk through life with paralyzing fears and crippling, self-deprecating voices that keep us from living in the freedom and boldness of a beloved child of God. Most times, they are internalizations of voices and looks that we have received from others, telling us that we are awkward, unworthy, bad, and someone to be rejected. That’s why we build habits of shame, self-reliance, and self-condemnation. We are so accustomed to this that it becomes indistinguishable from the normal head noise.

Only someone outside of us can pierce through this deceptive veil and reveal the truth of who we are and the world that we live in. This is done primarily through Jesus, the Beloved, our Wounded Healer. In prayer, especially in Adoration, we sit in silence long enough to notice the internal maelstrom. And there, in that ache of total weakness and shame, we catch sight of the eyes of our beloved Mother Mary and our Heavenly Father. There we hear the voice of Truth and hear of a peace that defies all understanding.

However, sometimes we find that the thought of God and his Goodness is another source of shame for us. He loves us, we know that, but we can’t bring ourselves to look him in the eyes. This is where we need human mediators: the fathers, mothers, and friends who can see “all the beauty in the broken glass,” and who can speak God’s truth to us in a more receivable way.

Since many of the lies came through human mouths and eyes, God often uses the same means to heal them. These are the spiritual and human dimensions of formation: receiving faithful accompaniment of spiritual directors, formators, therapists, brothers, and Jesus himself. From these, I have received the freedom and joy to run and jump into the daily circumstances because I know who I am.

Through the intellectual formation, I’ve learned the Truth about who God is, what the world is like, and who I am. In every truth that we learn, we become conformed in mind and heart to the Word, who is Light and Life.

Finally, with this newfound freedom, what can we do but run with joy to share it with every human we encounter? Through our pastoral formation, we learn how to share him who has healed our hearts by his ever-present love.

This is the beautiful life of every Christian and, in a special way, the priest.

How To Goof Up Your Will



STEWARDSHIP

STEVE SCHONS

Director of Stewardship and Development
Diocese of Fargo

It's one thing to have a will; it's another to have a will that works well. In fact, there are some cases where it is probably better not to have a will at all than to have one that is defective or that fails to accomplish your wishes.

There are several ways you can goof up your will. Here are four of the more common ones:

1. Do it yourself.

State law dictates what is and what isn't legal in drafting and signing a will. A universal will form obtained at a stationery store or a homemade will based on hearsay advice is risky, to say the least. A good estate planning attorney can ask the right questions to help you make sure you cover all the bases in planning the disposition of your estate. To make sure things are done right and for your own peace of mind, it seems well worth the cost to obtain professional help in preparing your will.

2. Provide incorrect or unclear information.

If you are making a bequest to charities like your church, cemetery, diocese or school, it is important to use the full legal name of the organization and I further recommend using the organization's tax id number. This will avoid confusion and possible delays during probate.

And be as clear as you can. If you are making a bequest for a specific purpose, spell out your wishes so the recipient will know exactly what you intended. Charitable organizations generally prefer unrestricted bequests, since this allows the board of trustees to apply the gift where it is needed most. So, if you have a specific purpose for the gift, make sure that a complete description of your intent is given.

3. Hide your will.

What's the use of having a valid will that expresses your wishes exactly -- only to have it so well hidden no one can find it at your death? In addition to storing your will in a safe place, make sure you tell the appropriate people where to find it.

4. Overlook other transfer arrangements.

A will provides only one way to transfer assets at death. If this document is not coordinated with other transfer arrangements, enormous problems may result.

For example, what happens if your will provides for an equal division of your estate among family members and your life insurance policy earmarks the death benefit for, say, the oldest child? The life insurance proceeds would go to the older child

as well as a portion of the estate identified in your will. Hence, one family member would receive far more than the others—probably not probably not what you would desire.

To help you create a valid will, we have put together a will kit that includes brochures and suggestions to prepare you for a visit with your attorney. This kit is interesting and informative, and it is free for the asking.

Do you have an estate planning attorney who can assist you? If not, there are many to choose from. Or you can talk to your trusted friends and see who they use.

Another possibility is to contact a local bank or a financial advisor for their recommendations. In any case, I urge you to get legal assistance so you can have peace of mind, knowing your will has been done right.

If you would like a complimentary will kit, please send a request to Steve Schons, Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd S., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104. Or email steve.schons@fargodiocese.org

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Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse

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

Sister Maris Stella Korb passes away Feb. 16 after decades of faithful service



Sister Maris Stella Korb of the Union of Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary died Feb. 16 at St. Catherine's South in Fargo.

She was born July 27, 1937, near Calio. At her baptism her parents, Peter and Anna (Janowski) Korb, named her Marjorie Ann. In 1953 she joined the Presentation Sisters in Fargo and entered the novitiate in 1955, receiving the name Maris Stella. She professed perpetual vows in 1960.

A graduate of Shanley High School and of the College of St. Scholastica, Sister Maris Stella was an avid reader. She participated in many programs focused on enhancing skills for her ministries and on enriching her spiritual life.

She spent her early years in ministry (1957-1972) teaching elementary and junior high students at Holy Spirt, St. Anthony's and St. Mary's parochial schools in Fargo. She also provided religious education classes on Saturdays to children in Hillsboro and Mayville. She served in the Fargo Diocese Office of Religious Education for three years. She was inspired by the writing of Catherine de Hueck to serve with people made poor and went to Appalachia where she resided in Jellico, Tenn. for four years while providing social support services. In 1979, her religious community assigned her to pastoral ministry for four years in

Oriska and Buffalo. She was then elected to administration in her religious congregation, serving through 1983. She directed religious education programs in Montana. From 1986 to 1991 she was a pastoral minister on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota. From there she crossed the country to Jersey City, N.J., where she cared for babies born HIV positive until they went home or were placed in foster care. In 1994 she assumed administration of the Dorothy Day House in Moorhead, Minn. In 1998 she joined Sacred Heart Southeran Missions to serve people in and around Hernando, Miss. until 2004 when her congregation asked her to be director of its Peace and Justice Office in Fargo. She served in this position until 2014 when she experienced the onset of Alzheimer's Disease.

She is predeceased by her parents and her siblings, Ethel Hettwer, Jeanette Korb, Harvey Korb and Eileen Beck. She is survived by four generations of nieces and nephews, Presentation Sisters and Associates.

Over her 57 years of active ministry, she positively touched many lives and made many friends. She also ruffled some feathers. She was kind and gentle but not soft and fuzzy. While not by nature confrontative, she spoke truth to power as she saw need to do so. During her 12 years of illness, she modeled acceptance, gratitude and love.

She lived the Beatitudes. May she now live seeing the face of the God she faithfully served.



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LIFE'S MILESTONES



Robert and Judith (Bob & Judy) German, parishioners of St. Charles Borromeo in Oakes, were married 50 years ago March 6 at St. Margaret Mary Alacoque in Lomita, Calif. They are blessed with 33 nieces and nephews, 56 greats and many great-greats!



Ray and Diane Leier, parishioners of St. Therese in Rugby, celebrated 60 years of marriage Feb. 19. They were married at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Balta. They are blessed with four children, three sons-in-law, seven grandchildren and one great-grandson.



Mori and Bonnie Pung, parishioners at St. Michael's in Grand Forks, celebrated their 50th anniversary Feb. 29 (12.5 in leap years!). They were married in Powers Lake. They are blessed with three children and 13 grandchildren and one on the way.



Wayne and Darlene Rutledge celebrated their 60th anniversary Jan. 22. They were married at St. Alphonsus in Langdon, where they are still parishioners. They have three children and four grandchildren.



Gerald Davis, parishioner of St. John's Church in Wahpeton, will celebrate his 95th birthday March 17. Gerald and Bernice also celebrated their 74th wedding anniversary Jan 3. They are blessed with eight children, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



Joseph Richard "Dick" Hamann, lifelong parishioner of St. Alphonsus Parish in Langdon, celebrated his 100th birthday Feb. 8. He graduated from St. Alphonsus School and later served on the school board. He married Catalina "Lina" Celeste in 1974 and is the proud father of two, Leah and John.



Liz Johnson, parishioner of St. Catherine's in Valley City, will celebrate her 95th birthday March 31. She was married for 58 years to Don Johnson, who passed away in 2015. She is blessed with one son, one daughter-in-law, and two grandsons.



Maxine Shockman, parishioner of Holy Rosary in LaMoure, will celebrate her 95th birthday March 26. Maxine was married to her late husband Calvin for 72 years. They were blessed with 13 children, 41 grandchildren, 79 great-grandchildren, and four great-great-grandchildren.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Life's Milestones includes anniversaries for marriages, ordinations, and religious vows for 25, 40, 50, 60, 65, and 70+ years and birthdays for 80, 85, 90, 95, and 100+ years for those in the Diocese of Fargo. Submissions 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 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.

Events

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

Gwinner: Please join us for our German Feast. Sunday March 8 11 am-1 pm at St. Vincent's Church in Gwinner. Serving knoephla soup or borscht soup, cabbage casserole, knoephla, kraut and sausage, cheese buttons, kuchen bars. All made from scratch for you to enjoy! Adults \$18, kids age 7-10 \$10, kids 6 & under free.

West Fargo: 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 about 7:30 p.m.

Mar. 9: Blessed Sacrament, West Fargo. Paul Wilburn of FOCUS.

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

May 12: St. Joseph, Moorhead, Minn. Speaker TBD.

Carrington: Sacred Heart Church hosts Spring Dinner March 22 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Turkey and all the trimmings served. Adults \$12, Ages 6-12 \$5.00, Ages five and under free.

Take-out and delivery available.

Hankinson: Franciscan Sisters Come & See Weekend. Young women invited to "Come & See" life as a Hankinson Franciscan. Learn more about the religious life as lived in our community.

Explore your vocation. March 27-29, June 26-28, and August 21-23. 102 6th St SE, Hankinson

Sign up at <https://ndfranciscans.org/vocation-events.html>

Other times available, contact Sr. Mary Ruth at

smaryruth@sfcretreats.org

Rachel's Vineyard Retreat: Hope and Healing. A safe, non-judgmental and confidential weekend retreat for anyone – 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 Sunday afternoon. Two retreats scheduled for Fargo diocese: April 17-19 and Nov 6-8. For more information, contact Sherry at 701-520-1229 or Tim at 701-799-2051 or email rvregister@yahoo.com. All inquiries are strictly confidential.

For all diocesan events,
go to www.fargodiocese.org
and click on the "events" tab.



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

Hurley's, the only religious goods store for Catholic patrons in North Dakota, held its formal opening this week at 107 Roberts St, Fargo, under the proprietorship of Henry J. Hurley. The new business offers a complete line of supplies for churches, priests, sisters, and the Catholic home. Religious articles, pictures, statues, and books are a part of the stock on display, while larger sanctuary equipment can be ordered. Mr. Henry Hurley is well known to North Dakotans as a former sports columnist for the Fargo Forum. A native Fargonian, Mr. Hurley served with the Army in the Pacific Theater, and after his discharge joined the editorial staff of Billboard magazine and recently returned to Fargo to organize his present business.

50 years ago -- 1976

During the Eucharistic Rally in Fargo, Bishop Driscoll imparted the blessings of God over the priests, who in turn went among the people to pray over and bless them. This imposition of hands was part of all Eucharistic Rallies in Fargo, Grand Forks, Rugby, and Jamestown. Each rally had a threefold message: Repent and reform; Accept Jesus as Savior and be personally committed to Him; Receive the Holy Spirit. Each rally emphasizes Baptism--a call to Jesus and His Way, Confirmation--receiving the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharist celebration.

20 years ago -- 2006

A permanent earthen dike constructed around the grounds of St. Benedict's Church in Wild Rice helped parishioners and Father Dan Pilon, the parish's pastor, breathe easier this spring. They experienced their third major flood in the past 10 years. This month, as overland flood waters crept toward the rural parish once again, the parishioners confidently watched and waited. The earthen dike they had built the previous July protected their church grounds on the south, west and north. The road served as a water barrier on the east. Within parish grounds the only hint of flooding is in the roadside ditch where the few inches of water reflect the image of the church's steeple that towers high and dry above it.



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Archbishop Aquila voices gratitude as he begins retirement

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

Pope Leo XIV on Feb. 7 accepted Denver Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila's resignation, prompting the former Fargo bishop to give thanks for his time in Colorado and for "the countless acts of fidelity, generosity and courage" he has witnessed. Under canon law, Catholic bishops must submit their resignation to the Pope on their 75th birthday. Aquila turned 75 on Sept. 24, 2025.

Archbishop Aquila was a priest of the Denver Archdiocese in 2001 when Pope St. John Paul II named him as the Coadjutor Bishop of Fargo. He served as Bishop of Fargo from 2002 through 2012, when Pope Benedict XVI named him Archbishop of Denver.

"As I prepare to enter retirement, my heart is filled above all with gratitude — to God, to the priests and deacons of this local Church, to consecrated women and men, and to the lay faithful who have walked together as missionary disciples in Northern Colorado," Archbishop Aquila said in a Feb. 7 message to the Catholic faithful of his archdiocese.

"In my years as your archbishop, I have often returned to the truth that the renewal of the Church does not begin with programs, but with encounter — an encounter with Jesus Christ, truly present in the Eucharist, alive in his Word, and active in his people," he continued. "When we place Christ at the center, and stay attached to the Vine who is Christ, the Church becomes what she is meant to be and bears fruit: a sacrament of God's love for the world, sent forth to proclaim the Gospel with joy and conviction."

Pope Leo has named Bishop James Golka of Colorado Springs, Colo. as the next Archbishop of Denver. Archbishop-designate Golka was born in Grand Island, Neb. on Sept. 22, 1966, the fourth of ten children of Robert and Patricia Golka, according to the Denver Catholic. He is a graduate of Creighton University and was a Jesuit lay missionary volunteer for the Native American Missions in South Dakota from 1989 to 1990. He studied at St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. before being ordained a priest for the Diocese of Grand Island. He was serving as vicar general of the Grand Island diocese when Pope Francis named him the



Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila of Denver and his successor, Bishop James R. Golka of Colorado Springs. (Daniel Petty/Denver Catholic)

Bishop of Colorado Springs in 2021.

Bishop Golka is a member of the board of directors of Cross Catholic Outreach and serves on the board of trustees for St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Seward, Neb. He is episcopal moderator of the Diocesan Fiscal Management Conference and has worked closely with Catholic stewardship organizations, the Denver Catholic reports.

At the Feb. 7 press conference in Denver announcing Golka as Denver's next archbishop, Archbishop Aquila described him as "a man of prayer, with a deep love for Jesus and the Blessed Mother," the Denver Catholic reports.

"He understands well many of the challenges that we face today in our country and world, with immigration, the precarious global situation, and all of the challenges undermining the dignity of human life," Aquila said. "He approaches all of these through the lens of the Gospel."



Quotable

St. Katharine
Drexel

Feast Day March 3

"If we wish to serve God and love our neighbor well, we must manifest our joy in the service we render to Him and them—serve in joy. God is Joy; true devotion is joy; the cross is the condition of solid joy. Let us open wide our hearts. It is Joy which invites us. Press forward and fear nothing."



If it's numbers for the win, it seems we're losing



SIDEWALK STORIES

ROXANE B. SALONÉN

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

During a recent visit to the sidewalk of our area's only abortion facility, a few of us prolife advocates tried waving a car across the street toward the Women's Care Center, where the couple could have received a free ultrasound, counseling and other resources, along with a chance to calmly discern their child's fate.

One of the escorts mocked us, pretending to motion in the same direction once the car had passed, then muttering something to the effect that, based on the number of cars in that other lot, it's a failed effort.

If this was only a numbers game, we'd certainly be wasting our time. It's true that on Wednesdays, the Red River Women's Clinic seems to have a lot more activity going on than the nearby pregnancy-resource center and seems to be attracting more supporters if we're counting abortion escorts versus prolife advocates.

But let's think about this more. If they were outnumbered, and we boasted a substantially larger count of committed folks on our team, would that automatically assume we're "winning?"

I'll bet any of the regular prolife advocates would agree that having more people showing up on Wednesdays to speak and pray for the voiceless would be welcomed. When my life gets busy and I can't be there, it weighs on me. Our numbers have been thinner on average in the Moorhead location, further removed from the heart of the city than the previous Fargo operation downtown. At times, I've been tempted to wonder if Christ's presence might be diminished in my absence.

But it's a mistake to believe God can't handle this challenge. Over the years, he's proven, time and again, that he stands ready with reinforcements. For instance, in the summertime, we sometimes have young teachers and college students on summer vacation who join us, along with youth on break. New faces show up often when we need them most.

People come and go in this ministry and that's understandable. It's a volunteer effort, and many who'd like to join us have paid jobs during abortion hours and days. Additionally, not everyone

is matched for sidewalk advocacy. One must be moved in a particular way to commit to praying there, not to mention to take on a more direct advocacy role.

While it would be nice to have a depth of fortification every week, our success doesn't ultimately depend on numbers, any more than it did for the heroes in scripture who were outnumbered, or those who lacked perceived strength, like David as he faced Goliath.

The measure of our success on the sidewalk requires more than numbers for determined victory. We're not only counting bodies, after all, but souls, and only God has dominion over that tally. Additionally, there's a lot we don't, and in fact can't, see. What about the people who never show up for their appointment? Or those who, faced with our smiles and signs, simply drive past?

The day the escort commented about their more populated parking lot, I whispered to a fellow advocate, "If we judged our success on how many cars were in the parking lot, I would have quit coming here long ago." He agreed.

It's tough to keep battling something that may never have a definitive end; to be on the frontlines of a war that has been going on for decades with no signs of stopping anytime soon. But if we're called there by the Lord himself, we have little choice. Our job isn't to argue with God but to show up and be his presence to a world that has turned away.

Recently, a college friend shared about her decision to train to protest against ICE deportation efforts in the Fargo-Moorhead area. As she told me about her new endeavor, I sensed she didn't understand how my weekly prayer in Moorhead was as urgent as what she felt was a new calling from God. The sad truth is that it's far too easy to ignore the unseen child in the womb, whose death comes not with whistle warnings but only a deafening silence.

It can be discouraging to live in these challenges, but then I think of what Mother Teresa said about how we're not called to be successful, only faithful. In the end, God will add up the wins and losses. It's our job to trust in him, not the numbers.

NEW EARTH

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*Do you know
where we are?*

The answer will be revealed
in the April New Earth.



Where in the diocese are we?

Last month's photo is from the St. Francis Chapel in Hankinson.