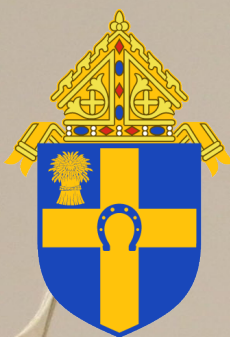


New

April 2026 | Vol. 47 | No. 4



Earth

The Magazine of the Catholic Diocese of Fargo

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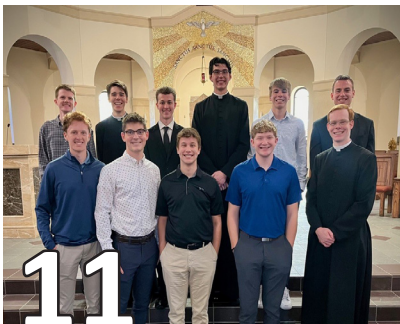
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ON THE COVER:

Bishop Folda greets a prospective Catholic and her sponsor at the Rite of Election.
(Paul Braun | *New Earth*)

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NEW EARTH

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Mission

Our mission is to inform, teach, and inspire readers about the Catholic faith and the life of parishioners in Eastern North Dakota.

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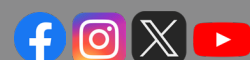
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New life and new growth in Christ

The celebrations of Holy Week and Easter are the high point of our Church year, and they are upon us! Depending on when you receive this edition of *New Earth*, we are in the midst of the Paschal Triduum, or perhaps we have already arrived at the joy of Easter. In any case, this is a time of great grace, and we can only be filled with wonder and awe at the sacrificial love of our Lord, who died on the cross and now lives in risen glory.

One of the more beautiful aspects of these celebrations is the welcome of newly baptized and confirmed members of the Church. In fact, in its earliest days, the celebration of Easter was all about the baptism of new converts to Christianity. Those who are baptized go down into the waters of death and rise up to new life, united with Christ, who went down to death and rose again victorious from the tomb. Every baptized Christian has reason to celebrate at Easter, because it is the anniversary of our rebirth in Christ.

Many people have noticed that something remarkable is happening in the Church. The number of those who are seeking to join the Church through the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist has jumped in recent years, not only in the Diocese of Fargo, but all around the country. This is happening in other countries as well, and it's especially noticeable in places that have become very secularized, like western Europe.

In our own diocese, the number who came to St. Mary's Cathedral on the first Sunday of Lent for the Rite of Election was the largest we have seen in many years. And from reports that I have heard, many of our parishes are seeing record numbers of new members, people who desire to share in the life of Christ and the life of the Church. Some places have seen the number of new candidates and catechumens double or even triple in the last few years. While some of these people come from other faith traditions, others have no religious background at all. But all of them have received the gift of faith and the peace that only our Lord can give.

Bishops, pastors, and many others are asking why so many are coming forward, and why now. The short answer is simple: God's grace. For quite some time, we have been hearing about the decline of church attendance, the decline of belief in God, and the decline of interest in religion. These are all real phenomena, and we need to pay attention and take them seriously. But something else is happening too. More and more people are seeing the emptiness of life without God, life without faith, and

life without a loving community. Our culture tells us in every imaginable way that God is a myth, faith is a waste of time, and truth is whatever we want it to be. But we are made for a relationship with God, and the false "religion" of our culture is leaving many people dissatisfied and searching for more.

By God's grace, they have found their way to Jesus and to the Church, which is the Body of Christ present in the world. They have realized that belief in God makes sense and offers us the hope and fulfillment that the world simply can't match. As our world has become more confused and lost, these brothers and sisters have found a safe haven in the community of faith that is the Church. As the world tells them there is no such thing as truth, they have discovered the truth of the Gospel, which the Church continues to proclaim as it has for two thousand years. And as the world offers food that doesn't satisfy, they find nourishment in the sacraments of the Church, especially the Eucharist, which is Christ himself.

The Church in our country recently held a Eucharistic Revival, which highlighted and hopefully deepened our Eucharistic faith and devotion. I firmly believe that the upsurge in conversions to the Catholic faith is due in large part to the grace of that Eucharistic Revival. The more centered we are on Christ himself in the Eucharist, the more the Church, which again is the Body of Christ, will grow and become fruitful. Various missionary initiatives at work in the Church undoubtedly have drawn many souls to Christ through personal witness and relationship. The amazing treasury of resources available to those who are interested in our faith has also contributed to the growth we are seeing.

Not every parish or diocese or country is experiencing this same kind of growth. And we have no guarantee that it will continue indefinitely. This isn't a time for complacency or smugness. But it is a time for gratitude to God. We can only be grateful and filled with amazement at the movement of grace we are seeing. By his grace, many people are discovering God's infinite love, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, and they are seeking union with him in the Church he founded upon the apostles. Let us give thanks for them and welcome them warmly. Our response should also be a renewed determination to share with others the great gift we have received, so even more brothers and sisters may be welcomed into our family of faith.

God is a god of surprises, and just as the followers of Jesus were surprised and overjoyed at his resurrection on the first Easter Sunday, so we are surprised and overjoyed at the new

life he is bringing forth through his Church. As we celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord in Holy Week and Easter, let us rejoice in the gift of salvation and in the brothers and sisters he has called to join us. May this Easter season be a time of grace and renewal for all of us.

Prayer Intention of Pope Leo XIV



For Priests in Crisis

Let us pray for Priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.

BISHOP FOLDA'S CALENDAR

April 5 at 10 a.m.

Easter Sunday Mass, Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

April 10 at 4 p.m.

Mass for Knights of Columbus Convention
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

April 11 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Holy Cross, West Fargo

April 11 at 4 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Holy Spirit, Fargo

April 12 at 12 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist
Cathedral of St. Mary, Fargo

April 12-14

Spring Education Days, Maryvale, Valley City

April 14 at 6:30 p.m.

Parish Reception, Holy Cross, West Fargo

April 16 at 10:30 a.m.

School Mass, St. Catherine, Valley City

April 16 at 2 p.m.

Diocesan Pastoral Council, Pastoral Center, Fargo

April 16 at 5:30 p.m.

Miryam Dinner, Bishop's Residence

April 17 at 7 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Benedict, Horace

April 18 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist
Sts. Anne and Joachim, Fargo

April 19 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Anthony, Fargo

April 21 at 3 p.m.

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

April 24 at 6 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. John, Wahpeton

April 25 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Holy Rosary, LaMoure

April 25 at 5 p.m.

JP II Schools Dinner Auction, Delta by Marriott, Fargo

April 26 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist
St. Charles Borromeo, Oakes

May 1 at 5 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Joseph, Devils Lake

May 2 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Cecilia, Harvey

May 2 at 5 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. John, New Rockford

May 3 at 2 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. James, Jamestown

May 5

Diocesan Pastors and Principals Meeting
Maryvale, Valley City

May 8 at 5 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, Nativity, Fargo

May 9 at 10 a.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Stephen, Larimore

May 9 at 5 p.m.

Confirmation/First Eucharist, St. Leo, Casselton



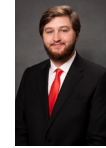
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How can I encourage my children to participate in Mass?



ASK A PRIEST

FATHER STEVEN WIRTH

Pastor

St. Augustine, Fessenden; St. Boniface, Esmond; and St. William, Maddock

My three parishes are blessed to have a good number of young families with little children. It is not uncommon for my homily to be interrupted by a crying or screaming child. I am so grateful that these families are making the effort to bring their children to Mass. And from the altar I can see that it is an effort indeed. I can't tell you how many times I wish I could do something to aid them and to make them feel more welcomed. This is why I am so glad you asked this question.

How you encourage your children to participate during Mass depends on their age. For infants, you just bring them and attend to their needs. Toddlers are curious. Sitting towards the front will help them to see what is going on in Mass. This will play towards their curiosity. However, the downside of curiosity is that they are going to want to explore. They are not going to be happy that they have to sit in the pew.

As a child reaches preschool years, he or she can start learning little things. You can point out things like the altar, the statues, the art work, or the priest in his colorful clothes. Maybe you can teach your children to sing some of the Mass parts like the Alleluia and the Great Amen (especially if your parish uses the same musical setting for every Mass). This can also help the child to learn the basic flow of the Mass: learning what comes next and giving an answer to that dreaded question, "are we almost done?"

As your child reaches school age, he or she can really start learning. Consider buying an illustrated children's Mass book. I remember having such a book as a child. From the pictures in the book, I could tell how far along Father was in the Mass, which helped me learn what was happening and avoid the "are we almost done?" question.

As your child enters third grade, take an active role in his or her preparation for First Communion. Teach him or her about the truth and importance of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist, and maybe learn more yourself. Also, teach your children the importance of genuflecting. It's not just a secret Catholic code. It shows real reverence to Jesus who is really present in the Eucharist.

As your child ages, perhaps consider reading the Sunday Readings beforehand, or learning more about the special Sundays of Advent, Lent, Easter, and so on. Maybe your child can become an altar server. For a teenager, maybe there is another role he or she could play, perhaps as a reader or an usher. Talk to your pastor about the possibilities.

What if the child misbehaves? Do I take him or her out of church? That's the million-dollar question! We do want our churches to be distraction-free places of prayer. However, that's simply not possible. Our parishes are the places where the family of God meets, and that family includes children! Thus, I tend towards not taking kids out of the church. I know it can be embarrassing to have the loud kid in Mass, but you will have plenty of time to be the embarrassing mom or dad later as the kid grows older (insert maniacal laughter).

There does come a point when a child goes from a distraction to a disruption. And, yes, maybe at that time you might do something. But I caution you not to accidentally reward your child for being disruptive. Older toddlers and pre-K kids don't understand right and wrong; they understand action and consequence. If a child screams and then is given a toy to play with or food to placate him or her or gets to go to the gathering space where there are fun couches to crawl around on; he or she will learn that misbehavior leads to a reward. Getting pulled out of Mass should not be more fun for the child than staying in the church.

But maybe consider intentionally rewarding your child's good behavior. I've been considering implementing a reward system in my parishes in which a child gets one sticker for coming, another for behaving, and a third if he or she can tell Mom or Dad one thing about the Mass. Get enough stickers on your card and you get a little reward.

You can also establish a Sunday routine. Maybe it's a special treat or activity after Mass. Or maybe a group of families can get together after Mass, and the kids can spend time with other kids or friends (and you can get some adult company for yourself). Not only can these rewards be withheld for bad behavior, but they also make Sunday more enjoyable. Sunday Mass is not supposed to be a chore. It's supposed to be life-giving. If you can do additional things to make Sunday more fun, then do it! Oh, and this might work even better for grandparents who routinely spoil/bribe their grandkids.

Bringing children to Mass is hard! And some periods of life are harder than others. But it is absolutely worth it. Habitual Sunday Mass attendance teaches our children that God is the most important part of our week and our lives.

US Catholics Join the Church in Guatemala to Provide Safe Shelter to the Suffering Poor

Cross Catholic Outreach is asking U.S. Catholics to become part of a major effort to provide safe housing for destitute families in Guatemala.

The U.S.-based ministry, which has been recognized by the Vatican for its relief and development work in more than 90 countries, seeks to build storm-resistant homes while also reaching needy families with nutritional, educational and health care support. (See the related story on the opposite page.)

While this appeal has many technical objectives, Cross Catholic Outreach President Michele Sagarino is focused on the individual families that will be impacted.

“This is really about Santiago and Carmen and families like theirs. The challenges they face every day are heartbreaking. They live with their five precious daughters in a flimsy dwelling and fear for their health because rain often floods their house, turning the dirt floor to mud. It’s also easy for vermin like scorpions and rats to crawl through the gaps in its walls,” she said. “It’s a situation that must grieve God — so it should be unacceptable to us too!”

According to Sagarino, Cross Catholic Outreach is working alongside Catholic leaders in the dioceses of Santa Rosa de Lima, Sololá-Chimaltenango and Suchitepéquez-Retalhuleu to find solutions for families like Santiago and Carmen’s. The plans they have developed can produce life-transforming results — if U.S. Catholics will step forward to help support their work.

“Our primary goal is to construct durable



Father Garcia stands with the Ramirez family outside their leaky makeshift home — one of the many in his Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima that he hopes to replace with the help of Cross Catholic Outreach supporters.

concrete-block houses for the poorest families,” Sagarino explained. “The homes will have two bedrooms and a common area that can serve as a dining room and living room. Each will have a concrete foundation and walls, a galvanized metal roof, a sanitary latrine, a secure metal door and shuttered windows, providing a level of comfort and safety these families have never experienced.”

Because the design is simple, the construction of one of these homes costs less than \$9,000.

“That is a large sacrificial gift for one donor or family to make, but many have done that and were so happy they got involved. Most had been looking for something specific and significant they could do to bless others,” Sagarino said. “This outreach was exactly what they were looking for because a home does more than offer safe shelter. It gives families a foundation for building a better life.”

For Sagarino, serving the poor through the local Church also has an evangelistic purpose.

“When people learn local Church leaders love them and want a better life for them,

it strengthens their faith and restores their hope,” she said. “Many have felt isolated and unseen. They need to know we care about them.”

Father Alejandro Garcia, director of the local Caritas ministry in the Diocese of Santa Rosa de Lima, has these words of encouragement for U.S. Catholics: “We pray for you. We pray that you continue to be generous, that you continue to be a valiant hand to those who are so needy among us. As Jesus said, ‘What you have done for the least of these, you have done also for me.’”

Readers interested in supporting Cross Catholic Outreach’s housing programs and other outreaches can contribute through the ministry brochure inserted in this issue or send tax-deductible gifts to: Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06043, P.O. Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. Those interested in making gifts on a monthly basis can indicate that on the brochure in order to become a Mission Partner, or write “Monthly Mission Partner” on mailed checks to be contacted about setting up those arrangements.



Guatemalan Families Living in Extreme Poverty Look to the Church for Renewed Faith and Hope

In the rural Guatemalan community of Laguna Seca, a cluster of dirt-floor homes with scrap-metal roofs sits in the low spot of a valley. Steep hillsides send floods of water that inundate these makeshift shelters during the rainy season, turning floors into mud and soaking families' belongings.

Brenda and René have raised their daughter, Ana, in one of these unstable dwellings, rebuilding time and again as storms wreak havoc. Inside the house, a wood fire poses an extra health hazard. Looking at the soot-blackened sheet-metal ceiling, Brenda lamented, "Imagine what our lungs look like!"

Ana is a bright grade-schooler and takes this challenging way of life in stride. But after she put the family's new chicks into their cage, she sat on the dirt floor next to them and imagined what it would be like to live in a home like her dollhouse, with a solid roof and floor. She made her own clay figurines to stand in that toy house and enjoy the security within.

"It's heartbreaking to meet children like Ana who have never known what it's like to be protected from the elements. In rural Guatemala, many families are trapped in extreme poverty, with few opportunities to improve their situation," explained Michele Sagarino, president of Cross Catholic Outreach, a trusted Catholic relief and development ministry recognized by the Vatican for its effective humanitarian and spiritual programs. "When we witnessed the extreme needs of Ana's family and so many others, we felt compelled to provide help — and our hope is that compassionate Catholics in the U.S. will want to get involved too."

Sagarino said that many of the communities Cross Catholic Outreach wants to serve can only be reached by dirt roads. These villages have little or no infrastructure, so parents there are raising their children without running water, suitable sanitation facilities or reliable electricity.

Most of the men and women in these rural areas are subsistence farmers, defenseless against unpredictable weather as they work long hours planting, tending and harvesting corn and beans. Their hard work may provide simple meals for their children, but it is rarely enough to fully cover their housing, health and educational expenses.

Families without access to land for farming face even greater challenges. They often take



Ana's dollhouse represents her hope for a safe home in the remote village of Laguna Seca, Guatemala.

work as day laborers, earning about \$10 a day when jobs are available. The Church in Guatemala reports that those families typically earn between \$125 and \$190 a month — far too little to afford adequate housing. Ultimately, these families must make do with what they have, cobbling together plastic sheets, scrap metal and wood planks to build flimsy, unsafe shacks.

"Our ultimate goal is to improve living conditions in those communities. We want to help families break free from the cycle of poverty that has plagued them for generations," Sagarino said. "We've learned that providing safe housing plays a major part in improving lives, so we are making that our priority. As families move into safer, sturdier homes, their hope is restored and they have a foundation for building a better life."

Cross Catholic Outreach has been partnering with Guatemalan dioceses since 2013 to help rescue families from the poverty that keeps them malnourished, sick and devoid of hope. With the help of U.S. supporters, the ministry

has built more than 800 homes in Guatemala, in addition to providing educational scholarships for children, microenterprise investments for adults, feeding programs for the malnourished and more.

This year, Cross Catholic Outreach aims to surpass 1,000 homes built since it began serving in Guatemala. It is rallying U.S. Catholics to serve as God's instruments of mercy by funding house construction and other important development and spiritual programs in three Guatemalan dioceses.

"The homes we will build are simple but sturdy, secure and sanitary," Sagarino said. "They will change the lives of these families in profound ways, and the benefits will be lasting. Generational poverty has been a major factor in the hardships these families have been facing. Opening this door to generational prosperity will be a major step in the right direction. My prayer is that Catholics in the U.S. will want to play a role in that restoration of hope. Imagine what a powerful testimony of God's love that would be!"

How to Help

To fund Cross Catholic Outreach's effort to help the poor worldwide, use the postage-paid brochure inserted in this newspaper, or mail your gift to Cross Catholic Outreach, Dept. AC06043, P.O. Box 97168, Washington, DC 20090-7168. The brochure also includes instructions on becoming a Mission Partner and making a regular monthly donation to this cause.

If you identify an aid project, 100% of the donation will be restricted to be used for that specific project. However, if more is raised for the project than is needed, funds will be redirected to other urgent needs in the ministry.



St. Benedict's in Horace continues Birthday Bag tradition

By Rae Ann Lynne | Parishioner, St. Benedict's Church

How do children in the Fargo area celebrate their birthdays if they are food insecure?

The Social Justice Committee at St. Benedict's in Horace recognized these children's needs 11 years ago and began the Birthday Bags Project, which continues today to supply frosting and cake mixes to support this project.

The last weekend in January saw the parish get together after Masses to assemble more than 1,000 bags for the Emergency Food Pantry (EFP) to distribute. Maggie Suda and Peter Morgan, youth members, organized this project.

In 2025, a total of 21,283 children got food assistance at the EFP in Fargo, the largest such agency in the Fargo-Moorhead area. Families who come to get food assistance are asked if they have a child celebrating a birthday. If the answer is yes, they get a cake mix and can of frosting to help with the celebrations. Families also have the option of selecting a birthday card to color.

The need for this project continues to grow, so if other churches would like to help, please reach out to Stacie Loegering at the EFP or to St. Benedict's.

St. Benedict parishioners also volunteer for a week every December to fill baskets at the EFP for families in need.



Maggie Suda and Jacob Suda pack birthday bags for delivery to the Emergency Food Pantry. (submitted photo)



Josie Morgan, Peter Morgan, and Matthias Morgan prepare birthday bags as Rilie Morgan packs them for delivery to the Emergency Food Pantry. (submitted photo)

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Seminary visits open minds and hearts to priestly vocations

I've served the diocese as vocation director for eight years. I've learned a lot about the obstacles to fruitful discernment in young men over those years. A common one is getting stuck in the trap of perpetual discernment.

"Discernment" is the holy buzz word on college campuses. A young person will hear many pious compliments when they share they're in the midst of discerning the priesthood or religious life. But too often that discernment remains intellectual. Sometimes it's exclusively spiritual, confined to prayerful holy hours but without any external manifestation in concrete action. It's like a man discerning marriage but never asking a lady on a date.

Therefore, discernment needs to involve not only prayer, but also action. Healthy discernment involves making decisions of increasing commitment. Perhaps it means seeking advice from a roommate. Then reaching out to a priest. Later one needs to attend a discernment retreat. Then call the vocation director. And at some point, a young man ought to visit a seminary to see what the landscape of priestly formation looks like.

Several times each year, therefore, I take young men to visit a seminary. Most often, we fill a van and make the seven-hour drive to St. Gregory the Great Seminary in Lincoln, Neb. where the Fargo diocese sends all of its college-aged men to seminary.

I took one such trip on the first weekend of March. The seven men who went with were men of deep prayer and natural virtue. They ranged in age from sixteen to twenty-three. Some were planning to apply to seminary, while others were simply curious, wondering what the choice to enter seminary would look like. I've found visiting the seminary, experiencing the daily rhythm of the seminary schedule, praying shoulder to shoulder with the seminarians and asking them questions at dinner can all be immensely fruitful for priestly discernment. The idea of seminary becomes very real. Discernment, therefore, moves forward from the theoretical to the practical.

Such an experience breaks a lot of stereotypes for the discerners. Most are concerned that attending a seminary will be a painful departure from the more typical path of university social life. They presume seminary to be a dull, sterile, even stark environment where one must sacrifice his joy and personality to do the serious and grave work of serving the Lord. By the end of the first day, those misperceptions are corrected. They meet seminarians of great humor, profound depth, committed friendship, and broad talent. The discerners are always surprised by the variety of personality in a seminary, but see that the seminarians are all united in deep fraternity by their common pursuit of personal holiness and fidelity to Christ and his Church.

The discerners are also very taken by the liturgical life of the

seminary. The power and volume of the baritone chant stir them. They've never heard men sing so confidently, so well. Back home, the discerners are often reluctant to sing openly in liturgy. But at a seminary, singing is universal.

The precision of all the altar servers is also very striking to the discerners. There is a military-like order to the liturgy that seems to attract their interest. Nobody looks confused in the sanctuary of a seminary!

It also happens that several of the seminarians will share their "vocation story," the series of events that lead them to conclude the Lord was asking them to apply to seminary. Through these stories, the discerners learn the variety of backgrounds the seminarians have. Some come from devout families, others from broken homes. Some were pious children, others had profound conversions from sin. Some heard the call in elementary school, while others not until college. The diversity of stories helps the discerners understand that his own vocation story doesn't need to fit a specific pattern. The Lord calls all kinds of men from all kinds of backgrounds. It's been that way from the beginning. That recognition alone can be consoling and move discernment forward.

Of our seventeen Fargo seminarians, twelve of them attended such a seminary visit. These visits are a big ask, a stepping out of the boat. But for those who want to move from discernment to decision, making such a trip reveals the maturity and courage needed in the men who will make up the next generation of priests.

For more information, see the Vocations page on the Diocese of Fargo website at www.fargodiocese.org/vocations.



Visiting discerners to Gregory the Great Seminary with current Diocese of Fargo seminarians. (Rev. Kyle Metzger)

What is the Good Friday Holy Land collection?

By Paul Braun | Editor, *New Earth*

As you read this, Holy Week has come and gone, and we are now in the joyful season of Easter, celebrating the resurrection of our Lord. If you attended Good Friday services on April 3, a second collection for the Holy Land took place, which is a tradition and requirement of every Catholic church around the world. Why is this collection taken up on Good Friday every year, and what are the collected funds used for?

In the late 13th century after the crusades, the sacred sites in the Holy Land were entrusted to the Franciscan order. According to the Custody of the Holy Land, the Franciscan institution serving the region, in the early 17th century, Pope Urban VIII declared to all clergy that three collections were to be taken up each year in their dioceses for the Holy Land. Later Popes issued similar decrees, changing the number and time of the collection. Pope Leo XIII ruled that all bishops throughout the world were bound by holy obedience to take up a collection at least once a year on Good Friday, or some other day, to be delivered to the Custos of the Holy Land. Pope St. Paul VI formally established the *Pro Terra Sancta*, or Holy Land fund, in 1974. In 2024, the last year international figures are available, \$7.1 million was given to the fund world-wide. The Diocese of Fargo contributed \$49,583 in 2024 and \$58,954 in 2025.

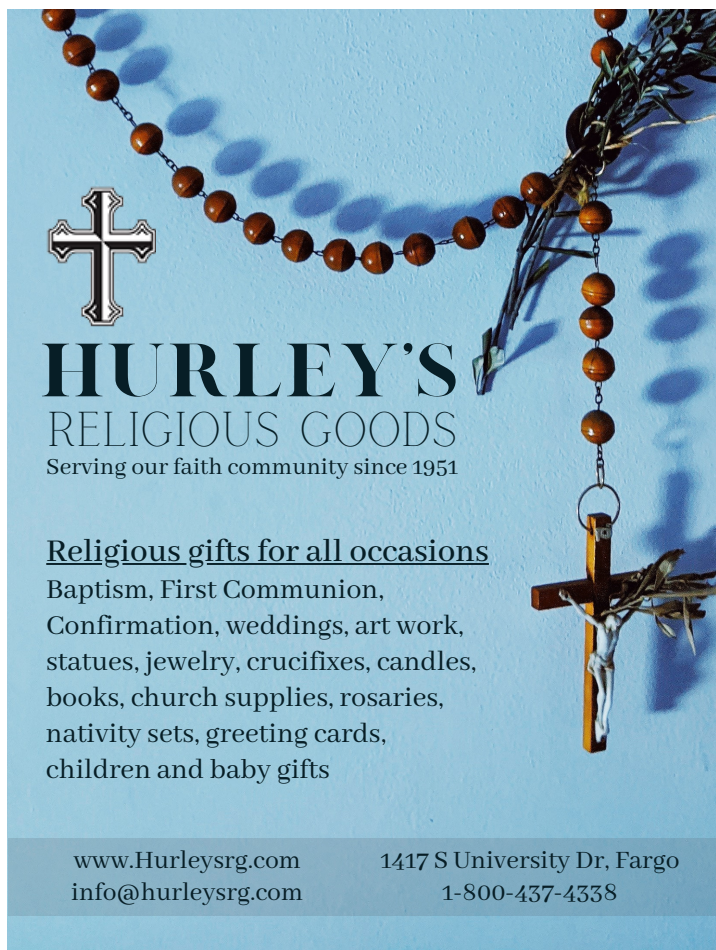
So how does the Custody of the Holy Land use the funds? According to a March 2024 Catholic News Agency report, the funds support efforts in Jerusalem, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Typically, 65 percent of the funds are earmarked for the Franciscan Custody to maintain the Christian holy places of the region. The Franciscan Custody also uses the funds for humanitarian and social activities. This helps defray families' health care costs and supports their basic necessities as well as providing housing for needy people and young families who pay symbolic rents. The remaining 35 percent is given to the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches to support seminarians and priests as well as educational and cultural activities.

The Good Friday Collection represents the main source of funding for the Custody of the Holy Land. In its message to the faithful prior to the 2025 collection, the Custos said "Thanks to your generosity, we will be able to care for and make the Holy Places places of prayer and welcome for the faithful and pilgrims; respond to emergencies; support schools, clinics, dispensaries, homes for the elderly and for young families; and promote humanitarian works for migrants, displaced persons and refugees. Help us to give hope and sow peace!".

Words to remember next Good Friday as the collection basket is passed.



Jerusalem at night. (Lupe Belmonte | Catholic)



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Late Nativity parish music director's song posthumously published

By Paul Braun | Editor, *New Earth*

Brent Hermans was the Music Director at Nativity Parish in Fargo when he died unexpectedly in April 2024. Before he died, Brent submitted an original composition entitled "Encountering Jesus Christ" to Oregon Catholic Press (OCP). Now, nearly two years after his death, this work has been arranged and published by OCP.

Brent was born in Minneapolis, Minn. He attended the University of North Dakota and graduated in 1990 with a major in business management and a minor in music. He was a musician at Holy Family Catholic Church in Grand Forks before spending 18 years at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Grafton as director of music and liturgy plus director of education for grades PreK-6. From 2019 until his untimely death due to a heart attack, Brent was liturgy and music coordinator and youth ministry coordinator at Nativity Catholic Church in Fargo.

His close friend Rose Marie Kerner described Brent as a person who brought joy into other people's lives through his music and faith.

"Brent was the epitome of joy and was always smiling," Kerner wrote to *New Earth*. "He had a great love for our Lord and expressed it so eloquently in 'Encountering Jesus Christ,' especially in the refrain 'The greatest moment of our lives is encountering Jesus Christ.'"

To listen to the OCP recording of Brent's composition, search YouTube for "Encountering Jesus Christ by Brent Hermans."



Brent Hermans
(submitted photo by Rose Marie Kerner)

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With joy and prayers, Vietnamese Catholics celebrate first Lunar New Year festival

By Father Vincent Pham | Associate pastor, St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Fargo

This year, St. Anthony of Padua's Vietnamese community hosted the very first Lunar New Year Festival on both Feb. 15 and Feb. 17. More than 600 participants, Catholic and non-Catholic, Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese, enjoyed this festival at the Fargo church.

We were so happy to see everyone in one mind and one heart joyfully working together, making sticky rice cakes and performing traditional dances, such as the lion's dance.

Festival attendees made colorful decorations coupled with receiving lucky money and Bible verses, which is said to bring good fortune for them in the whole year of 2026. People who attended truly enjoyed their festival and tasted traditional cuisines with great joy. Their faces shined with smiles and laughter. We do believe that next year there will be more people coming to this event, and we will try our best to support them so that their joy will be complete!

In Vietnam the Lunar New Year, also called "Tet," is the biggest and largest festival and holiday. It is much like Christmas in the U.S. It isn't just a simple "New Year" party, but a historical, cultural, traditional, and spiritual event, and above all it is a family and communal gathering in which people truly find their love and care for one another.

Each year all churches in Vietnam celebrate five days of Lunar New Year, including the New Year Eve to give thanks for the old year. The first day is dedicated to praying for a peaceful new year, the second day is to pray for ancestors, grandparents and



Children gather around a lion mask. (Submitted photo)

parents, the third day is to pray for blessings upon our labors, the fourth day is to pray for priests, seminarians, and religious brothers and nuns.

Because the celebrations fall around the start of Lent, a unique accommodation took effect in Vietnam. In November 1998 the Vatican gave a decree to Cardinal Paul Joseph Pham Dinh, the then-Archbishop of Hanoi, ruling that whenever Ash Wednesday falls on the first, second or third day of the Lunar New Year, the observance may be moved to the fourth day of Lunar New Year. That means this year, churches in Vietnam celebrated Ash Friday instead of Ash Wednesday!



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Father Vincent Pham and others take the stage. (Photo supplied)

Joining Christ during his 40 days in the desert

By Paul Braun | Editor, *New Earth*

The tempter approached and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread” (Matt. 4:3).

Imagine being out in the desert for 40 days, and you are fasting. You have the power to turn stones into bread, yet you do not give in to temptation. Jesus must have been absolutely starving when the devil approached him, but he stayed true to the will of God and rebuked the tempter. How strong are we to not give in to temptation, even at our weakest moments?

Many Catholics follow fasting and abstinence guidelines, especially during Lent, but a silent retreat held at Maryvale in Valley City in early March asked men not only to fast, but to confront their temptations as well.

“I think we need silence and penance in our world,” Father Eric Seitz, Liturgical Director for the Diocese of Fargo and the retreat’s facilitator, told *New Earth*. “We are constantly bombarded with messages from every corner, and we have the ability to feed our appetites nonstop. True spiritual power comes from listening carefully to God, doing as he says, and trusting Him above all things. Silence and fasting are great ways to dispose ourselves to whatever God has in mind for us.”

The Into the Desert retreat focused especially on the time that Jesus spent in the desert and what Catholic men can learn from Jesus’s experiences. According to Father Seitz, there is a deeper appreciation of the good work that God is calling us to do as men. The hope is that the men on the retreat realize that the silence and fasting are tools to grow closer to God and to hunger for his Word above all.

“I hope to gain a deeper understanding of fasting and what goes into that,” said Kelvin Daniels of West Fargo. “It’s always good to continue to grow in the idea of how we have to fight that spiritual combat against temptations. With the Lenten season, this retreat has a big focus on fasting, and all the things we get to give up. And I mean ‘get to’, not ‘have to’.”

“I just want to grow closer to Jesus and spend as much time as possible with him. [That’s] the main reason why I’m here,” said Jared Pokrzywinski of Devils Lake.

He reflected on the retreat title, Into the Desert.

“The title just fits perfectly with it being during Lent,” Pokrzywinski said. “Sure, it’s a time I have to be away from my family, but I’ve never been to a silent retreat that also includes fasting. When I saw this was available, I took the time to be here. I hope it gives me a clearer sense of God’s plan for me, and how can I get out of my own way and let God guide me in his steps for me.”



Father Eric Seitz, retreat facilitator, gives opening instructions to the men attending the three-day event at Maryvale. (Paul Braun | *New Earth*)

A promotional poster for D-Week High School Camp. The poster features a central logo with a cross and sunburst design, surrounded by the text "D-WEEK" and "HIGH SCHOOL CAMP". Below the logo, the text reads: "D-Week is a NEW camp for all incoming High School students to grow in their Catholic Faith". Further down, the location is listed as "RED WILLOW BIBLE CAMP, BINFORD, ND", the dates as "JUNE 7-10, 2026", and the cost as "\$350.00". A QR code is provided for more details, and the Diocese of Fargo logo is in the bottom right corner. The background of the poster shows a faint image of a group of people in a camp setting.

Faith in daily life is focus of Catholic Man Night

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

More than a dozen men came together at Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo on March 9 for Catholic Man Night, a longstanding series based on prayer, food, and Catholic conversation.

Father Gary Luiten, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church, welcomed the event.

“I think for Catholic men, it’s a great opportunity for men to learn more about their Catholic faith, and their calling, and how to live that out in their lives, to conform more to Christ, and to really carry their cross well, so that we may share in Our Lord’s Resurrection,” he told *New Earth*.

Catholic Man Night began about 12 years ago at Holy Cross Catholic Church in West Fargo and other churches in the Fargo-Moorhead area, series organizer Willie Gartner told *New Earth*. It has since expanded to Casselton and Lisbon. The series runs from September to May and is hosted by different parishes each month.

“We wanted for men to get together and share experiences of their lives to let them know they were not alone with their problems,” Gartner said. Speakers come from diverse backgrounds. They include clergy, judges, business executives, and coaches.

“What the men have learned is that all of the speakers have the same burdens to bear in their lives as we do. They are not alone with their burdens,” Gartner added. “That is what keeps the men coming back.”

The March 9 edition of Catholic Man Night began with silent prayer and Eucharistic adoration in the church sanctuary, followed by a light meal of chili, salad and desert in the social hall.

Paul Wilburn, Senior Director of Philanthropy Engagement at the college missionary organization FOCUS, spoke on the virtue of temperance. He characterized temperance as a virtue that allows the passions space in which to work, but not become dominant.

Jesus showed temperance in eating, in his work and ministry, and in displaying only virtuous anger, not sinful anger.

Fasting is another example of temperance. Jesus fasted ahead of a mission, Wilburn said, adding that many involved in Catholic ministry have adopted this practice. Through fasting, physical self-denial allows our spiritual awareness to awaken.

The next Catholic Man Night speaker will be Dave Richmond, head coach of men’s basketball at North Dakota State University.



Catholic Man Night attendees pray at Blessed Sacrament Church. (Kevin J. Jones | *New Earth*)

Temperance regarding food also involves not being picky but eating what is set before you. Furthermore, eating food too quickly can be a failure of temperance. Meals often have an important social context: one should engage in conversation with those around the dining table, Wilburn noted.

On the topic of work, there is a danger of working too much to the neglect of other duties. Jesus healed, but then withdrew to pray, Wilburn said. To practice temperance is to be ready to serve, balancing action and prayer in one’s life.

The next Catholic Man Night is April 28 at St. Benedict’s Church in Horace. The speaker will be Dave Richmond, head coach of men’s basketball at North Dakota State University.



Paul Wilburn speaks to Catholic Man Night attendees. (Kevin J. Jones | *New Earth*)

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The Future in Faith

New Catholic converts tell their stories

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

At the Rite of Election Feb. 22 at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo, 156 prospective Catholics, in the presence of their sponsors and their families, took one step closer to entering the Catholic Church. Their numbers included 37 catechumens, who have not been baptized, and 119 candidates, who have been baptized but have not received the sacraments of Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist.

Among those preparing to enter the Church is Kay McGirr, a 76-year-old parishioner of St. Mary's Cathedral.

"I am so blessed to have found the Catholic Church, or maybe she found me!" McGirr told *New Earth*. She is from Moorhead, Minn. but lived in American Samoa and spent 33 years in Hawaii before returning home.

"I believe the Holy Spirit has prompted me to become a Catholic. My sponsor has helped encourage me," she said, also crediting the work of Mary Hanbury, the Fargo diocese's Director of Catechesis.

"I try to read as much as I can about anything Catholic," McGirr added. She praised the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' emails which contain daily Bible readings, a podcast and video reflection. She also uses the Hallow app, a popular prayer app launched by lay Catholics.

Her prayer life includes the daily rosary and the chanted night prayers from the *Source & Summit* liturgical resource.

McGirr is far from alone in becoming Catholic.

In the previous five years, 777 people have entered the Church in the Fargo diocese, according to figures from the diocese's Office of Catholic Education and Formation.

In 2025 there were 171 people who entered the Church, including 38 adults who were baptized. The year 2024 was a recent peak, as 210 people entered the Church, including 92 adult baptisms. In 2023, some 142 people entered the Church, compared to 137 in 2022 and 117 in 2021.

In the Diocese of Fargo, 156 people plan to enter the Catholic Church at Easter. They join 777 other converts in the previous five years.



Prospective Catholics at the Rite of Election at St. Mary's Cathedral (Paul Braun | *New Earth*)

Elsewhere in North Dakota and the Midwest, others are preparing to become Catholic too. The Bismarck diocese told *New Earth* it did not have current numbers for people entering the Church there at Easter 2026. However, last year in the diocese, 141 people entered the Church: 36 children and 105 adults.

The Crookston diocese told *New Earth* it currently has 22 catechumens and 32 candidates for a total of 54 preparing to enter the Church. Last year, there were 47 total, 12 catechumens and another 32 candidates. While 2024 numbers were not immediately available, the diocese said that in 2023 there were 37 people who entered the Church at Easter, while in 2022 there were only 22.

In the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, 1,736 people will enter the Church at Easter: 605 catechumens and 1,131 candidates, archdiocesan officials told *New Earth*. This figure is hundreds more people than last year, when the combined total was 1,126.

The archdiocese is one of the largest in U.S. Catholicism, with over 920,000 of its 3.5 million people identifying as Catholic, according to the 2024 *Annuario Pontificio*, the Holy See's annual directory. By contrast, the Fargo diocese has about 74,000 Catholics in a population of 427,000.

Behind every number is a story.

MacKenzie Walter of Streeter is a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Medina. She is going through the Order of Christian

Initiation for Adults (OCIA), the process to join the Church.

"I was not raised a part of any church and felt the absence of it," she told *New Earth*. "After having my children, it became important to me that they be spiritually grounded. I felt if my husband and I didn't teach them about matters of faith they would be raised by 'the world'."

"It started as a journey to just explore faith by visiting local churches. After attending a few Catholic services, I felt drawn to know more," Walter said. "I enrolled in OCIA classes, my children started attending religion, and we continued to come to Mass regularly."

"During my time learning and prayerfully debunking previous beliefs, I found that what I was learning in OCIA made more sense than my former Protestant beliefs," she said. "My family feels welcome here and we are so thankful for our parish community. They have all played a part and helped on my (and my children's) journey! I'm eager to become Catholic and be in full communion. I know I'll continue learning along the way."

**"I'm so blessed to have
found the Catholic Church.
Or maybe she found me!"**

-Kay McGirr



**Bishop Folda greets a prospective Catholic and his sponsor
(Paul Braun | *New Earth*)**

One by one, the numbers of new Catholics add up.

In June 2025, the Pew Research Center reported that about 1.5 percent of all U.S. adults are Catholic converts. They make up about eight percent of U.S. Catholics, said the Pew report titled “47% of U.S. Adults Have a Personal or Family Connection to Catholicism.”

Overall, 20 percent of Americans say they are Catholic when asked about their present religion. Pew found a three-way split among another 27 percent of Americans. Nine percent say they are “cultural Catholics” aside from religion, citing ethnic, cultural or family background. Another nine percent say they were raised Catholic but do not identify as Catholic in a religious or cultural sense. Still another nine percent say they have a Catholic parent, spouse or relationship partner or say that they ever attend Mass.

Family background played a role in the journey of Joshua Smith, age 31, who now lives in Moorhead, Minn. He is a parishioner at St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fargo preparing to enter the Church.

“My father was raised Catholic, so we had a respect for the Mass,” Smith told *New Earth*. “After I finished my undergrad, I took a long hard look at different denominations and felt more drawn to the Catholic Church. I spent two years looking into it,

and then a surprise cancer diagnosis made it more urgent.”

“I am more at peace with the decision to become Catholic than I thought I would be,” Smith said. “During my time in OCIA, I found what felt to me to be a place where my spirit had a home and (could) come to rest. There is also building excitement for what God has planned in the years ahead.”

He is preparing by “reading a lot” and volunteering in his parish. He credited Father Frank Buck of the Orlando diocese, calling him “a wonderful priest” who first prompted him to think about entering the Church. He also thanked his mentor Dr. Paul Holman who “allowed me to explain and talk about my excitement about coming into the Church.”

Smith expressed gratitude for many other Catholic clergy, volunteers and others who had helped him, especially his mother Rhonda Duvall and Bishop John T. Folda for “their kindness and guidance.”

“I have enjoyed getting to know many wonderful people throughout the parish and the diocese this past year, and I look forward to the future in the faith,” he said.

**About 1.5% of American adults
are Catholic converts—
about eight percent of
all U.S. Catholics.**

**“I’m more at peace with the
decision to become Catholic
than I thought I would be.”**

-Joshua Smith



**Friends and family fill St. Mary’s Cathedral for
the Rite of Election (Paul Braun | *New Earth*)**



TATTERED PAGES

A review of books, movies, music

Sacred stones versus Greek statues: searching for the face of God

By Benton Schmidt | Director of Music, St. Paul's Newman Center, Fargo

Clive Staples Lewis' final novel, *Till We Have Faces*, is all about love and union with the Divine. Written in collaboration with his wife Joy in their last years together, it retells the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche from the perspective of Psyche's ugly half-sister, Orual.

Orual grows up as a princess of a little pagan kingdom called Glome whose primary female deity is called Ungit. Her tutor, a Greek prisoner of war dubbed "The Fox" for his red hair, tells Orual that Ungit is her people's version of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. The Fox is a student of Stoicism and Platonic philosophy. His views of the gods are highly symbolic and humanistic. He has a rational explanation for everything, such as the rain relieving the land of a drought after a human sacrifice. The Fox doesn't believe that the gods desire sacrifices and he thinks that miracles are simply natural coincidences. The Fox sees Glome as primitive in comparison with the sophisticated culture of Greece.

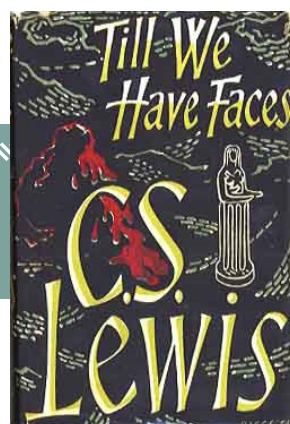
Princess Orual's childhood is overshadowed by her dark view of the gods. She sees them as evil forces which seek to entrap humans with their pettiness and lies, gorging their appetites on the sacrifices of mortals. Eventually, she becomes Queen. Highly influenced by the Fox's Hellenism, she attempts to "enlighten" the worship of Ungit in her kingdom. The temple's original image of Ungit is a "sacred stone" which is "uneven, lumpy and furrowed." It causes the viewer to "always see some face or other." The priests pour blood over the stone, making the perceived faces even more pronounced: "once you had seen it, not to be evaded." Queen Orual has a new statue of Ungit made in the Greek style and clothed it in robes as "the loveliest thing our land has ever seen" (though the Fox says it is nothing of the sort).

One day, a peasant woman in deep distress comes and offers a live pigeon to the goddess.

After a priest sacrifices the bird and sprinkles the blood over the old Ungit stone, Queen Orual asks the woman if she always prays to the "shapeless stone" Ungit, rather than the new statue. The woman replies: "Oh, always this, Queen... That other, the Greek Ungit, she wouldn't understand my speech. She's only for nobles and learned men. There's no comfort in her."

Reading this passage as a Catholic musician, I can't help but think of the many differing thoughts I hear about liturgical music. Once, when I was working in a different diocese, I taught the congregation "O God, Beyond All Praising." They had never heard it. Even though this approximately one hundred-year-old hymn tune is relatively "old," it was completely new to them. It was perhaps a "new Greek statue" and their old "stone" was something like singing "Let us build the City of God." I find similar things when I teach Gregorian chant to congregations and choirs. They all know the regular "Our Father" chant, but something like the Kyrie "*Orbis factor*" from Mass XI is probably new. In this case, both pieces are in the same style (Gregorian chant), but singing something unfamiliar versus familiar can still be jarring or confusing.

The experience of sung liturgical prayer is varied and dependent upon the personal experiences of individuals. Although the Church has teachings on sacred music and what constitutes it, in this essay I am focusing on how different people react to different forms of prayer. In the end, the peasant woman in the temple of Ungit is much closer to God with her simple faith than Queen Orual is with her fancy "enlightenment." It takes the latter her entire life to make peace with the gods and her sister, Psyche. Not that the extended length of time this takes is necessarily bad. As she asks near the end of the book: "How can [the gods] meet us face to face till we have faces?"



Till We Have Faces
by C.S. Lewis



OUR BODIES TELL HIS STORY

Theology of the Body and You



Finding freedom within the lines (part one)

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

“Hey, that’s not fair... you can’t do that!” If you spend any time around a typical school or a busy household, you hear this a lot. This common refrain is both a red flag and a glimmer of hope. On one hand, it reveals a frustrating human tendency: we love for rules to be applied strictly to others, but we’d prefer a “hall pass” for ourselves. On the other hand, it proves even the most rebellious teenager possesses an innate sense of justice.

To claim something is “unfair,” one must have an underlying standard of what is “fair.” There is a recognized law, even if it’s contested. Teen culture can be intimidating, but it is precisely here that we find a profound opening for the Theology of the Body (TOB). Building on teens’ inherent desire for justice can help them move past seeing rules as shackles and begin seeing them as necessary for true freedom.

I speak to thousands of teenagers every year. Surprisingly, the “law” is one of my favorite topics to tackle. Picture a typical Catholic high school assembly. Students wander into the gym, suspicious and slightly bored. They wonder if I’m just another adult coming to lecture them on why not to have fun. I ask for a show of hands: “How many of you think there are too many rules in your life?” Nearly every hand shoots up. “How many think rules restrict your freedom?” The hands stay up. The faculty in the back row start to look nervous. “How many of you think you’d be happier if you could just do whatever you wanted, whenever you wanted?”

By this point, the energy in the gym is electric. Students cheer. They think I’m leading them toward a glorious, rule-free utopia. I’ve stirred them into a frenzy that looks like the brink of a revolution. But this exercise serves a vital purpose: it acknowledges our fallen human nature. On the surface, it truly feels like total autonomy is the path to happiness. But as we dive deeper, we discover that this is a dangerous illusion.

To ground the conversation, I bring a volunteer down to the floor—usually a basketball player. I pull a ball from my bag and propose a quick game of one-on-one. But as soon as the whistle blows, I tuck the ball under my arm and sprint full speed toward the hoop without a single dribble. The gym erupts. “Hey! You can’t do that! That’s traveling!” I stop, looking puzzled. “Wait a minute. I thought we just decided we didn’t want any more rules. Why are you telling me how to move?”

A heavy silence follows. Students realize the trap, but they also realize the truth. Without the rule against traveling, without

the court boundary, or the rim’s set height, basketball ceases to exist. It’s no longer a game; it’s just a group of people bumping into each other.

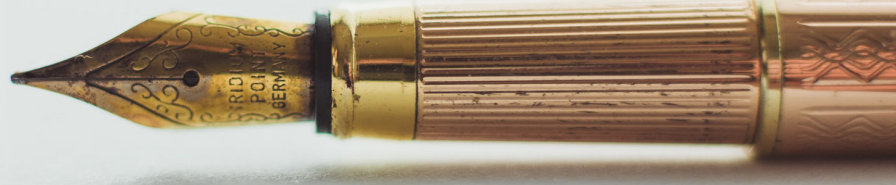
We realize that we want rules in the areas of life we care about: sports, music, driving, games. These rules aren’t there to kill the fun. They exist to help live the experience to the full.

I push further. “What if I decide I want to change the rules so I can travel? It’s my ball, after all.” They quickly point out I don’t have that power. I didn’t create basketball. I am not free to redefine it. If every player could modify the rules at will, the game would collapse into chaos. Only the governing body has the authority to define the game. Even the “signs” of the game—like the referee’s hand signal for traveling—have an objective meaning. Whether I know the signal or not, or whether I agree with it or not, the reality of the violation remains. If I am ignorant of the rules and I travel, I am still not playing basketball to its full potential. I am hindering the game and potentially hurting the experience for others.

This leads us to the most “counter-cultural” realization of the day. I ask the volunteer if they spend their practice time obsessing over how to avoid traveling. They laugh and say no. They’ve internalized the rule so thoroughly that they don’t even think about it. This is the pinnacle of the TOB principle: Freedom and the Law. The volunteer is “free from the law” of traveling. It is not because the law has been abolished, but because they no longer desire to break it. They have moved beyond the law because they have fallen in love with the excellence of the game. The law has been written on their heart.

A coach who lets you do whatever you want isn’t a “nice” coach; he is a bad coach. A good coach pushes you, makes you run sprints and do drills. Not to make you miserable; but because he wants you to be successful in the heat of the battle. A coach who “lovingly” corrects me isn’t being a jerk; he’s being a guide. They want me to actually play the game, not just wander around the court. Young people are incredibly receptive to this. They understand that victory requires sacrifice. They understand that a “fair” game requires a firm law.

By the end of the hour, the “rebellion” has turned into a realization: God’s laws aren’t a list of “don’ts” designed to keep us from fun. They are the “rules of the game” designed by the One who created us, ensuring we can live our lives to the absolute fullest. The stage is set. Once they value the law, they are ready to meet the Lawgiver.



Finding God's grace through the journey of raising my daughter

By Tammy G. DeSautel | Wife, mom and parishioner of St. Anthony of Padua in Fargo

Like most faith journeys, mine has had its share of peaks and valleys over the past 50-plus years. Thankfully, there have been far more peaks than valleys. Through it all, I am deeply grateful for my Catholic faith. During life's greatest challenges, my faith has been the crutch that helped me stand when I felt like I couldn't take another step.

Over time, I've learned that many of the moments that once felt like my deepest valleys eventually revealed themselves to be some of life's greatest blessings.

The moment that represents both the highest peak and the deepest valley of my life is the birth of my daughter, Macy.

Macy's delivery was very traumatic. After she was born, she spent five weeks in the NICU. For the first three days, her kidneys did not function. Doctors quickly gave us a diagnosis of cerebral palsy, but at the time we had no idea what that would truly mean for her—or for us.

Like every parent, we wanted the very best for our child. We soon realized the world is not always as accessible or accepting for those with disabilities. Macy's well-being often depends on services outside of our control, and that is where faith steps in—trusting God's plan and learning what we can do and what we must place in His hands.

Through the years I have learned to ask questions and, most challenging of all, ask for help. Many of my prayers begin with simple requests: "Give me the strength!" "Give me the wisdom!" "Show me the lesson!"

When Macy was born, we were living in Hillsboro. Our small-town parish, St. Rose of Lima, and Macy's classmates embraced her in a way that still fills my heart with gratitude.

One moment stands out. When Macy was in sixth grade, there was an end-of-the-year school dance. I brought her, not knowing what to expect. During the last song, her classmates wheeled Macy onto the dance floor, placed her in the center of a circle, and danced with her. I didn't want to be "that mom," but I ugly cried. In that moment, I saw love and acceptance in its purest form.

As Macy's needs grew, so did our need for additional services, and we made the decision to move to Fargo.

Shortly before that, I went through a divorce and annulment—one of the valleys in my journey. Our priest at the time, Monsignor

Vetter, helped guide me through that difficult period. Looking back, I see another God moment in the fact that the priest who brought Beginning Experience to North Dakota was serving in Hillsboro at that time. Beginning Experience is a support ministry for the separated, divorced and widowed, and it has had such a positive effect on my life!

After my divorce, I was content moving forward with just Macy and me. We made a great team. But God had other plans. My mom once joked that I worked in the worst place to meet a man—Job Service of North Dakota, where most of our clients are unemployed. But as the saying goes, God laughs when we make our own plans.

Ross came to Job Service after moving back to North Dakota following the death of his wife from cancer. As we got to know each other, we discovered many things in common. We were both military veterans, both active in Beginning Experience, and both had loved ones who used wheelchairs. Ross and I were married in 2008.

Today, my daughter Macy is a young woman in her thirties who lives at home with Ross and me. She lives a full and active life and continues to teach us about perseverance, joy, and unconditional love.

Macy attends day habilitation services through Easter Seals Goodwill of North Dakota. Our goal has never been to focus on her diagnosis, but rather to create a world where she will always be loved, supported, and accepted.

One of the places where that has happened most beautifully is within our church community at St. Anthony of Padua. Our parish is a place where Macy is not simply accommodated, she is embraced.

I know Macy is my purpose, and I also know many parents feel the same about their children. We know the pain of seeing our child struggle and the helplessness when they look to us for help and we don't know where to begin.

Those are the moments when faith can feel challenged and prayer can feel like it isn't enough. Yet even in the lowest moments, I am reminded that prayer and faith are everything. Through Macy, God continues to teach me that even in life's valleys, His blessings are never far away.

The emperor's new clothes and the transgender movement



CATHOLIC ACTION

DAVID TAMISIEA, J.D., PH.D

Executive Director
North Dakota Catholic Conference

When I was a young boy, I was fascinated by the folktale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen. Like every good folktale, it contains important lessons, and in this case warns about the power of peer pressure and social contagion to convince people to deny even reality itself.

As the story goes, a vain emperor is approached by two con artists who promise to create for him magical clothes that only intelligent and competent people can see. The swindlers set up looms and pretend to weave clothes for the emperor. Although the emperor sends his ministers to check upon their progress, each one, not wanting to appear foolish or ignorant, reports back how beautiful the clothes are. When the rogues finally complete the outfit, the emperor and his entire retinue, despite seeing nothing at all, compete with one another in praising the invisible clothing.

Before they depart, the two scoundrels convince the emperor to wear his new outfit in a public procession through the town. Convinced he is dressed in beautiful new clothes, the emperor parades through the streets to the acclaim of the townspeople, each not wanting to be thought a fool for not seeing anything. But finally, a young boy who is too innocent to accept what is obviously false, points at the emperor and cries out, “The emperor has no clothes!” Soon all the townspeople begin to cry out in laughter that the emperor is wearing nothing at all. Though the emperor suspects they are right, he proudly and foolishly continues the charade, walking naked through the streets with a train of sycophants following closely behind.

“The Emperor’s New Clothes” offers a useful lens for understanding the rapid societal shift toward accepting transgender ideology over the past few decades. Gender dysphoria refers to the persistent distress that some individuals experience due to the perception that their male or female body does not correspond to their inner sense of gender identity. People suffering from gender dysphoria deserve our respect, compassion, and concern. Many seek mental health counseling to resolve their distress and grow to accept their born sexual identity. Others, influenced by transgender ideology, “transition” to the opposite sex corresponding to their internal gender identity by choosing a new name, dressing as the opposite sex, receiving puberty blockers, taking cross-sex hormones, and undergoing sex-change surgeries.

Transgender ideology asserts that a person’s gender identity has no connection to their sexual anatomy. Activists claim that sex is not a given of nature but rather a social construct that can be changed. Despite lacking sound scientific evidence, transgender ideology carries enormous social pressure to accept its claims. Powerful supporters in government, entertainment, media, medicine, law, and education demand that everyone assent to its doctrines as orthodox truth.

Contrary to transgender ideology, the Catholic Church teaches that the human person is a body-soul unity. As *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity... Spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature (CCC 364-365). The Church rejects dualistic accounts of human nature like that proposed by transgender ideology: the human person is not a soul in a body, and does not merely have a body, but rather is composed of both body and soul, inseparably united. It therefore makes no sense to speak of a female soul, spirit, or identity trapped in a male body, or a male soul, spirit, or identity trapped in a female body.

The Church also teaches that God creates the human person as either male or female (CCC 369-373; 2331-2336). As opposed to the claims of transgender activists, God did not create non-binary, third sex, or gender-fluid human beings, but rather a binary complement of male and female (Gen. 1:26-27). The Church also teaches that the human person’s femaleness or maleness permeates their entire being through and through: “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul” (CCC 2332). Rather than engaging in futile attempts to change one’s gender—something that in reality cannot be done—the Church encourages every person to accept their intrinsic sexual identity revealed in their bodily nature as male or female, “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” (CCC 2333). No matter how loudly activists claim to the contrary, it is simply a fact that harmful medical and surgical mutilations of the body cannot alter one’s innate sexual nature as male or female.

Consider the following facts surrounding the transgender controversy:

The human body contains approximately 37 trillion cells, and every person with a normal genetic makeup has either XY (male) sex chromosomes or XX (female) sex chromosomes in every cell of their body. These cellular chromosomes determine the person’s biological sex. Does it make any sense to say that someone with XY male sex chromosomes is really female, or that someone with XX female sex chromosomes is actually male?

Transgender interventions entail the surgical mutilation and removal of perfectly healthy body parts and the construction

of artificial sexual organs to mimic those of the opposite sex. Females transitioning to male typically require lifelong injections of testosterone to masculinize the body, and males transitioning to female typically receive lifelong injections of estrogen to feminize the body. The person becomes a permanent medical patient to maintain the appearance of the opposite sex and to monitor the many health risks. Over the course of a lifetime, the costs of these medical treatments can reach up to \$100,000. Does all this seem normal?

Children as young as toddlers are now being identified as transgender. Puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and irreversible gender-reassignment surgeries are being performed on minor children long before they have the maturity to make such life-altering decisions, and sometimes without parental knowledge or consent. Transgender interventions are being presented to troubled teenagers as a cure-all solution for a wide range of personal and social problems. The diagnosis of being transgender is also often hastily made, with reports of health care providers determining a child is transgender after just one appointment. Instead of treating gender dysphoria as a mental disorder, which many so-called experts now discourage, the illness is being affirmed, normalized, and indulged in. Does any of this seem responsible, wise, or compassionate?

Biological males who transition are now allowed to compete

against female athletes in sports at every level like swimming, track and field, weightlifting, cycling, soccer, and volleyball. Unsurprisingly, trans athletes dominate these sports, winning championships, breaking records, and taking awards and opportunities from female athletes. Some female athletes have even been seriously injured in competitions against biological males who are trans. Girls and women have also been forced to share locker rooms with biological males claiming to be female and told to prioritize the trans athlete's feelings over their own. How is any of this fair?

The transgender debate is playing out in real time in North Dakota. Currently, North Dakota makes it a crime for a health care provider to give drugs or perform surgeries for the purpose of changing a minor's biological sex to match the child's internal gender identity. Three families and a pediatric endocrinologist in Fargo filed a lawsuit in a Bismarck court against the State of North Dakota challenging the law but lost at trial. Undeterred, the physician recently filed an appeal of the decision with the North Dakota Supreme Court. Let's all pray the North Dakota Supreme Court makes the right decision consistent with reality.

Transgender ideology is false and dangerous and stands completely opposed to reality. It is time for people to exercise common sense, resist social pressure, and call a spade a spade: the emperor has no clothes.



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I'm a Sister of Mary of the Presentation. Here's my rhythm of prayer.



SISTER'S PERSPECTIVE

SISTER ELAINE LANGE, SMP

Assistant Sector Leader

Sisters of Mary of the Presentation

My day revolves around the rhythm of prayer, both communally and individually. I get up at 5:30 a.m. most days, a bit later on the weekends. I go to the kitchen, get a little pre-breakfast snack and a delicious cup of coffee: espresso and almond milk, my own version of Starbucks. I return to my bedroom and get settled for my time of personal prayer with Jesus.

My prayer area in my bedroom consists of a comfortable rocking chair, a small bookcase filled with prayer resources, and a daylight lamp that sits on a beautiful wooden table made by my dad. This special table also holds my crucifix, which is made from the branches and twigs of old ash trees by our former resident priest, Father John Odermann. It is in the center of my prayer space because Jesus, who I profess to follow throughout my life, is the center of my life. I have only to look upon that cross to see how much God loves me and I give my love back to him.

As I sip my coffee, I listen to the day's Mass readings. This keeps me grounded in the scriptures, especially the Gospels. Then I read them for myself, pausing wherever Jesus wants me to pause. Sometimes I am drawn to a certain word or phrase, sometimes to the people in the passages. These thoughts become prayers, often for someone or something that has been on my heart and in my mind recently. I surround myself with objects or sayings that help me recall the nearness of Jesus. There is a holy card of St. Helen, my patron saint. Other cards or bookmarks say "out loud" what my heart and soul want to speak to Jesus.

After I am finished with my own prayer time, I get ready for the day. Then there's Morning Prayer, part of the Divine Office daily prayers of the Church. Morning Prayer consists of songs, antiphons, psalms, a reading and responses and intercessions. We take turns leading the prayers, intoning the antiphons, starting the psalms, and reading the scripture or reflection. We sisters pray Morning Prayer in our oratory together every day except Saturday. We pray by ourselves that day. This sets the tone for my day.

Holy Mass follows. We are blessed to be able to attend Mass every day with Father Don Leiphon, our current resident priest.

Daily Mass has become for me so central to my life that I liken it to married spouses who "need" to be with one another because their love is so deep and strong. When I miss Mass for some reason, my day feels incomplete.

Meals are taken together in our dining room. We always pray a meal prayer before and after we eat. When I stop and think about it, it really is a way of bringing the sacred into something as common as breaking bread with one another. The sharing that happens at the table enriches all our lives.

Having taught or worked with children for over 30 years, my ministry now is to assist the leader of our religious community however and wherever I am needed. This takes on a different look every day! There are meetings, appointments, and helping the other sisters with anything they need. As we were preparing to hand over Maryvale to the Fargo Diocese, my main job became cleaning out every nook and cranny of the building, and deciding what we needed to keep and what we needed to give away. This has been a work in progress! Needless to say, I came across many treasures that we kept and many that found a new home!

**"Jesus... is the center of my life.
I have only to look upon that
cross to see how much God
loves me and I give my love
back to him."**

My workday ends between 4:30 and 5 p.m., but my "prayer day" continues. We gather once more in the oratory for Evening Prayer. It is a time to thank Jesus for the day and to pray for the needs of the world. Actually, I have been praying all day, often sending up intentions throughout the day. Jesus has been my companion through it all.

Spending time visiting with the sisters who live here is an ongoing pleasure. After supper we recreate together, consisting of some TV... the news and Wheel of Fortune in particular! We also have a puzzle going most of the time. Other sisters read or exercise as part of their recreation.

Before retiring for the night, I try to take time to think and pray about my day. Was I the presence of Jesus to those I encountered today? Who needs my prayers the most tonight? What do I need to do to get ready for tomorrow? With these thoughts in mind, I gently drift off to sleep. The rhythm of prayer has carried me through the day.

Living the faith as a chaplain for college baseball



SEMINARIAN LIFE

MATTHEW SAMSON

Theology I
Mount St. Mary Seminary
Emmitsburg, Maryland

“Strike three!” is called as I swing and miss on a 93-mph fastball. Little did I know that being in formation at Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary afforded me the opportunity to face NCAA Division I baseball pitchers. This opportunity exists due to my role as a baseball chaplain for the Mount Saint Mary’s University team here on campus in Emmitsburg, Md.

Mount Saint Mary’s University, located on the same campus as the seminary, has 24 Division I programs. Most of these programs have at least one seminarian assigned to them as a chaplain. The role of a sports chaplain here at the Mount varies depending on the needs of each team. For baseball, we have 46 players and two chaplains.

When I was asked to join the baseball team as a chaplain, I gladly accepted. Baseball was my favorite sport to play in high school, and it is such a blessing to be a part of the team here in seminary. Since meeting the team for the first time this fall, this ministry has provided many new experiences and moments of grace.

“It is such a privilege to work with these men who are striving to grow in their faith.”

A major part of being a chaplain is fostering a ‘ministry of presence’ with the team. The best opportunity to spend time with the entire team is to participate in their baseball activities. Some activities from this fall include running in their annual conditioning test, playing against the current team in an alumni game, and watching their games from inside the dugout. Getting to know the players in these activities helps to build relationships and opens the door for more spiritual conversations outside of these events.

An additional component of this ministry is hosting a Bible study for the players once a week. This is something I look forward to every week. The players who make the commitment to attend this Bible study, despite their busy schedules, are such an inspiration to me in my own spiritual journey. To be a

part of and to witness these men engaging with the Word of God brings great joy and a desire to assist them in their own journey as much as I can.

We recently hosted a team retreat at the seminary which was attended by all 46 baseball players. I was asked by the other chaplain to give a talk to the team regarding my own faith journey and how God has worked in my life. This was a special opportunity to share with them how God works in our lives throughout all our successes and failures by drawing on some examples from my own experience. The retreat concluded with a Mass attended by the whole team. While enjoying a pizza dinner after Mass, many players expressed their gratitude for participating in this retreat.

It is such a privilege to work with these men who are striving to grow in their faith. Some examples of this are when a player asks a question seeking to learn more about the faith, or when a player reaches out seeking practical ways in which to grow in his faith. Their questions and desire to grow is a testament to their openness to God working in their own lives in a profound way. Hearing updates from them of ways they have grown after implementing new spiritual practices is always a cause for celebration. It is a great responsibility to direct them as best I can, and the only way this is possible is through grace.

This whole ministry is supported and maintained through prayer. I try to remind the players and coaches each chance I get that I am praying for them, not to garner thanks, but that they know we are supporting them and willing their good for their sake. Since the team plays for Mount Saint Mary’s University, I refer to them as the Blessed Mother’s baseball team. By surrendering this entire ministry to her, she has helped to draw this team closer to her Son.



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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.



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These charitable tax credits and deductions can boost your giving



STEWARDSHIP

STEVE SCHONS

Director of Stewardship and Development
Diocese of Fargo

It's tax time again! Here are some generous options to consider that might save you money as you set your charitable goals. Charitable donations provide an opportunity to receive a tax deduction and, in some cases, an attractive tax credit. Here's the difference:

- **Tax credits** directly reduce the amount of tax you owe, providing a dollar-for-dollar reduction in your tax liability. For example, a tax credit valued at \$1,000 lowers your tax bill by \$1,000.
- **Tax deductions**, on the other hand, reduce how much of your income is subject to taxes. Deductions lower your taxable income, and the value of the deduction depends on your marginal tax bracket.

Since the standard deduction increased substantially in 2018, many taxpayers no longer itemize their charitable deductions because the threshold to itemize is higher. For 2026, the standard deduction is \$16,100 for single filers and \$32,200 for married couples filing jointly.

The State of North Dakota provides several opportunities for taxpayers to receive tax credits related to charitable giving. I would like to highlight three of these credits as they relate to charitable giving, especially within our Catholic community.

1. 40 percent Tax Credit for Donations to North Dakota Qualified Endowments

North Dakota has established a tax credit (N.D. Century Code 57-38-01.21) that allows individuals, businesses, trusts, and estates to receive a 40 percent state tax credit for contributions over \$5,000 to qualified charitable endowment funds.

Additional details:

- Any unused portion of the tax credit may be carried forward for up to three years.
- The credit is limited to:
 - o \$10,000 per year for single filers
 - o \$20,000 per year for married couples filing jointly
- All endowments held at the Catholic Development Foundation (www.cdfnd.org) are qualified.

The State of North Dakota provides several opportunities for taxpayers to receive tax credits related to charitable giving.

2. Tax Credit for Donations to Private, Nonprofit Schools

North Dakota resident taxpayers—including individuals, corporations, and fiduciaries—may claim a nonrefundable tax credit equal to 50 percent of the contribution amount, limited to 25 percent of the taxpayer's total income tax liability or \$2,500, whichever is less (NDCC 57-38-01.7).

Key points:

- These credits cannot be carried forward.
- The credits for nonpublic schools are divided into three categories, which may allow taxpayers to claim multiple credits, as high as \$2,500 in each category.

These categories include

a. Donations to nonprofit private institutions of higher education (NDCC 57-38-01.7.1) – Institutions above Grade 12

Example: University of Mary

b. Donations to nonprofit private institutions of secondary education (NDCC 57-38-01.7.2) – Grades 9–12

Example: Shanley High School

c. Donations to nonprofit private institutions of primary education (NDCC 57-38-01.7.3) – Grades K–8

Examples include Catholic grade schools in Fargo, West Fargo, Grand Forks, Langdon, Valley City, Jamestown, Devils Lake, Wahpeton, Rugby, and Belcourt.

3. Tax Credit for Donations to Maternity Homes, Adoption Agencies, or Pregnancy Support Centers

North Dakota also provides tax credits for donations to maternity homes, adoption agencies, or pregnancy support centers. [NDCC 57-38-01.39]

Examples include:

- St. Gianna's Maternity Home
- Catholic Charities of North Dakota for Adoption Services
- Women's Care Center

This credit is equal to the total amount donated during the tax year, but it may not exceed 50% of the taxpayer's liability or \$2,500, whichever is less.

This article is not professional tax or legal advice; consult a tax advisor about your specific situation.

LIFE'S MILESTONES



Cory and Barb Jones, parishioners of Sts. Anne & Joachim in Fargo and former parishioners of St. Cecilia's, Harvey, married 50 years ago April 24 at St. Mary's in Foxholm. They are blessed with four children (one deceased), seven grandchildren, and one great-grandchild on the way.



Don and Julie Lentz, parishioners of St. Joachim in Rolla, will celebrate their 65th anniversary April 6. They were married in Thorne. They are parents of three children, eight grandchildren, five great-grandsons and another great-grandchild in September.



Merlyn Grabanski, lifetime parishioner of St. Stanislaus in Warsaw, celebrates his 90th birthday April 25. Merlyn and his wife Dolores have been married 66 years. They have been blessed with four children (one son deceased), nine grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren with one on the way.



Ovide Marcotte, parishioner of St. Michael's in Grand Forks, celebrates his 102nd birthday April 30. He was married to Verna for 75 years until her passing in 2024. They have been blessed with 11 children, 33 grandchildren, 50 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. If you would like your photo returned, please include a self-addressed stamped return envelope (that fits your photo) and phone number. Deadline for the May issue is April 14.

Events

Hankinson / online: Walking in Her Sandals – small women's group. Join Sr. Mary Ruth and other women of faith for a journey through Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost. Explore feminine gifts through the stories of women in the Gospels and contemporary reflections. Mondays 6 to 7:15 a.m. at St. Francis Retreat Center (or online). To register, contact Sr. Mary Ruth: (701) 242-7195 or srmmaryruth@sfcetrements.org.

Fargo: Miryam Dinner for Women Discerning Religious Life April 16 5:30-7:30 p.m. at Bishop Folda's home.

Bishop Folda and vocations director Fr. Kyle Metzger invite women ages 16-30 who are open to religious life to join them for an evening of prayer, dinner, and fellowship. Meet consecrated religious women and hear their own vocation stories of discernment. Typically women are accompanied by a consecrated religious but not required.

Call (701) 356-7956 or email vocations@fargodiocese.org if you are interested in attending. RSVP at least five days prior.

Rachel's Vineyard Retreat: Hope and Healing

Safe, non-judgmental and confidential weekend retreat for anyone— women, men, couples, grandparents or siblings— who struggle with feelings of loss or guilt that can accompany an abortion experience. Weekend begins Friday evening, concludes on Sunday afternoon.

Two retreats scheduled for Fargo diocese: April 17-19, 2026 and Nov 6-8, 2026. For more information, contact Sherry at 701-520-1229 or Tim at 701-799-2051 or email rvregister@yahoo.com. All inquiries strictly confidential.

Valley City: Basic Evangelization Training. April 18, Maryvale Retreat Center. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Want to know what authentic, non-confrontational, joyful evangelization looks and sounds like? Then make sure to attend the Diocese of Fargo's upcoming Basic Evangelization Training with St. Paul Street Evangelization

\$50 registration includes workshop materials, light snacks and lunch. Sign up at www.maryvalend.org/attend-a-retreat

Events (cont.)

Crookston, Minn.: Seven Sisters Day of Reflection at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Crookston, Saturday, April 25 9 a.m.-2 p.m. The theme is "The Power of Praying for Priests." Event includes Mass with Bishop Cozzens, reflections with Fr. Brunn, Bp. Cozzens and Janette Howe, Foundress of the Seven Sisters Apostolate. Event includes Adoration, confession, lunch and Q&A. An array of saint relics will be on display.

Please RSVP to Faith: sevensisterscrookston@gmail.com
Learn more at sevensistersapostolate.org.

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

Apr. 28: St. Benedict's, Horace. Dave Richmond, men's basketball head coach at North Dakota State University.

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

Grand Forks: Msgr. Daniel Pilon celebrates his 50th anniversary as a priest May 31. St. Michael Church to host celebration. Mass at 5 p.m. Dinner follows in school gym. Please RSVP to parishoffice@stmichaelsgf.com by April 20. Physical address of the church is 524 N. 5th Ave.

Hankinson: Franciscan Sisters Mother-Daughter Days. Have some time together. Strengthen your relationship. Learn about your Catholic faith and gain exposure to the religious life. June 11-13 and July 9-11, 2026.

For more information contact Sr. Mary Ruth at srmmaryruth@sfcetrements.org. Register at ndfranciscans.org/vocation-events.html

Hankinson: Franciscan Sisters Come & See Weekend Young women, "Come & See" what life is like as a Hankinson Franciscan. Learn more about the religious life as lived in our community. Explore your vocation.

June 26-28, and August 21-23. 102 6th St SE, Hankinson Sign up at ndfranciscans.org/vocation-events.html
If you wish to arrange another time, please reach out to Sr. Mary Ruth at srmmaryruth@sfcetrements.org

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

Catholic students at North Dakota State College officially opened their new Newman Club chapel and chapter house situated immediately off the Fargo school's campus. Work on the Quonset-style chapel began last summer. With the exception of jobs requiring special skills and licensing, all work was done by the students under the direction of Newman Club chaplain Rev. Edward Arth. The chapel can accommodate about 100 people. The altar is built in a niche at the end of the building so that merely drawing curtains separates it from the main part of the hall. This feature plus the folding chairs with attached kneeling benches permits use of the chapel for social functions when the need arises.

50 years ago — 1976

The permanent diaconate, family prayer, and vocations were among topics discussed by the Fargo diocese's priests at their spring meeting held April 1 at Maryvale in Valley City. Leading discussion on the permanent diaconate were Msgr. Ernest Fiedler and Rev. Mr. Clarence Enzler from Washington, D.C. Monsignor Fiedler is executive director of the Bishop's Committee on the Permanent Diaconate and Dr. Enzler, ordained a Permanent Deacon in 1971, is director of the Family Life Bureau for the Archdiocese of Washington. The meeting closed with prayer and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament led by Bishop Justin A. Driscoll.

20 years ago — 2006

The Devils Lake Knights of Columbus Council received the K of C Father Egan Award at the North Dakota State Convention in Minot April 21. This award recognizes both the Devils Lake Seminarian Scholarship Program as well as the many local knights and families who have supported it.

For all diocesan events,
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Two priests save two altar boys from drowning, but die in the effort

By Walter Sánchez Silva | EWTN News

Two priests died on Friday, March 13, after saving two altar servers who were in danger of drowning off a beach in Ecuador.

The priests — Father Alfonso Avilés Pérez, a member of the Society of Jesus Christ the Priest and parish priest of St. Albert the Great Parish in the Diocese of Daule, and Father Pedro Anzoátegui, who served in the Diocese of San Jacinto — did not hesitate to rush to the rescue of the youths, who were participating in a Lenten retreat for altar servers being held in the coastal town of Playas, where the minors had gone out into the water.

Martha de Murillo, who served as Avilés' secretary for over 20 years, told ACI Prensa, the Spanish-language sister service of EWTN News, that during the Mass celebrated March 14 at 11 a.m. at St. Albert the Great, the superior of the late priest's community — Father Lope Pascual — recounted the events.

"In his homily, Lope explained how it all unfolded: Two altar servers were in danger of drowning, and the priests went to rescue them; the altar servers made it out — thank God — but, tragically, the priests did not," she explained.

All the young people who participated in the retreat are physically well, out of danger, and have been taken home, according to the Ecuadorian newspaper *El Mercurio*.

During the Mass he celebrated on March 14, Cardinal Luis Cabrera, Archbishop of Guayaquil, entrusted the priests to God and, visibly moved, asked the congregation to pray for "our brothers Alfonso and Pedro whom the Lord, in these circumstances, today fills with his grace and blessing."

A statement from St. Albert the Great Parish said that Avilés "departed for the Father's House, generously giving himself for those entrusted to his care."

Avilés was born in 1966 in Murcia, Spain. After studying philosophy and theology, he was ordained a priest in 1990. "With more than 30 years of priesthood and nine years of service in our parish, he leaves behind a legacy of faith, closeness, and love for the community," the parish highlighted.

Prior to his arrival at the St. Albert the Great Parish, he also served as parish priest at St. Therese of the Child Jesus in Entre Ríos in the Guayaquil metro area, where he served the community and strengthened the life of faith of many families,



Father Alfonso Avilés Pérez (left) and Father Pedro Anzoátegui, died after saving two altar servers from drowning in Ecuador on March 13. (Diocese of Daule; Diocese of San Jacinto)

noted a press release from the former parish.

He promoted initiatives for family catechesis, Eucharistic adoration, and altar server formation — fundamental pillars of his evangelizing mission. In 2021, he received an award from the town of Samborondón for his spiritual and community contributions.

A phrase he constantly repeated was: "Charge! For the goal is heaven!"

A large number of the faithful congregated at St. Albert the Great Parish — including the first lady and wife of Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa, Lavinia Valbonesi, along with the president's mother, Annabella Azín. They spent a few minutes in prayer at the church, where the funeral Mass was celebrated March 14, before proceeding to the burial at the Panteón Metropolitano.

"The holiest priest I have ever known has passed away: Alfonso Avilés. His homilies were spectacular. He was my friend. We met only a few times, but the spiritual bond that united us was very strong," Carlos Polo, director of the Ibero-America Office of the pro-life Population Research Institute, told ACI Prensa.

"Even as years went by, every time I saw him he would tell me that he was still praying for my son, just as I had asked him the first time we spoke. He died living his law: the law of love," added Polo, recalling the passage from the Gospel of John

"...without love for God and neighbor, life has no meaning."

-Bishop Cristóbal Kudławiec, in his homily for Father Avilés' Requiem Mass

(15:13): “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

A young professional who served at the altar for Avilés told ACI Prensa that the priest loved the sea. “He raised us with temperance; he instilled in us the aspiration to be gentlemen, heroes, warriors: upright individuals and good sons of God. He always said that the very best among us should be at God’s service, and that we could not be wimps. His flame was always burning: at any hour, in any conversation, no matter how brief. I am so deeply saddened,” he shared.

Anzoátegui was born in 1982. He was ordained on Nov. 20, 2010, at the Guayaquil cathedral. He served at Holy Cross Parish in the town of Durán in the Diocese of San Jacinto. He also served in Guayaquil.

‘Jesus, I trust in you’

“Dear brothers, I trust you will understand that I will not speak many words, for we are all reeling from this shock — this blow — and it is difficult to say something at such a moment. But when our human words fall short, we must heed God,” Bishop Cristóbal Kudławiec of Daule said during the Mass he celebrated at St. Albert the Great Parish for the eternal

repose of Avilés.

“And for these occasions — so difficult, so hard — the Lord sends us some important words; not to console us — for at times it is very difficult to find consolation after such a powerful shock — but rather to help us understand, in some small measure, what he wishes to show us through these events, illuminated by his word,” he continued.

Addressing the questions the faithful might ask themselves regarding the late priest’s projects or the reasons behind his death, the prelate reminded them that God “makes no mistakes, and his will is holy. And we, as mere human beings, must always affirm this—even in those moments when our very souls are shattered.”

The bishop emphasized that “without love for God and neighbor, life has no meaning.”

“In the face of this news, so sorrowful, so shocking, we can only say: ‘I believe in you, Lord Jesus. I trust in you, Jesus. And I trust that what you offer me as a teaching—even through certain shocking events—is for my good,’” he reflected.



Quotable

St. Catherine
of Siena

Feast Day April 29

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Pope Leo XIV responds to an atheist ‘who loves God’

By Walter Sánchez Silva | EWTN News

Pope Leo XIV responded to an atheist who paradoxically described himself as someone who “loves God,” explaining to him that “the real problem of faith” isn’t believing or not believing in him but seeking him.

In the February issue of the magazine Piazza San Pietro, the pope answered a man named Rocco from Reggio Calabria, Italy, who asked for help with some questions he had: “How is it possible to consider oneself an atheist and love God? I feel the need to love God, but I consider myself an atheist, or perhaps I think I am, and deep down, am I seeking God?”

To better express what he was going through, Rocco sent the pope the following poem: “I observe nature, spying on every development: the sunrise or its setting on the horizon; the starry sky and the mystery of harmony. I believe that I don’t believe, absolutely certain of nothingness, yet I still yearn for God. My drama is God! My restlessness is God! An atheist who loves God!”

The Holy Father thanked Rocco for his “beautiful poetry” and shared that it reminded him of a line from St. Augustine’s “Confessions,” his most famous book: “You were within me, and I was outside. And there I sought you.”

In this regard, Pope Leo emphasized that this is enough “to tell you that one cannot be an atheist who loves God, who seeks him with a sincere heart.”

“Recently, several theologians have helped us reflect on how what is important in life is seeking God. Yes, because the real problem of faith isn’t believing or not believing in God but



Pope Leo XIV waves to pilgrims in St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican. (Daniel Ibáñez | EWTN News)

seeking or not seeking him!” the pope continued.

God, Leo continued, “allows himself to be found by the heart that seeks him, and perhaps the correct distinction to make is not so much between believers and nonbelievers but between those who seek God and those who do not.”

In conclusion, Leo XIV said that “one can believe that one believes and not seek the face of God, not love him; one can believe that one does not believe and be ardent seekers of his face, loving him as you do. So, Rocco, we are all longing for Love, we are all seekers of God. And therein lies the dignity and beauty of our lives.”

God “allows himself to be found by the heart that seeks him.”

-Pope Leo XIV

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SIDEWALK STORIES

ROXANE B. SALONÉN

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

Recently, our area pro-life efforts made history, but to truly appreciate it all, let's go back a ways.

Ever since the first murmurings of plans for a pregnancy-resource center just south of the Moorhead abortion facility, on a weed-covered plot of land with a sagging building, we began to envision how drastically this addition could aid our outreach.

How wonderful it would be to redirect abortion-minded individuals right instead of left off Highway 75—toward life over death! In the old location in Fargo, the extra blocks between the life-giving facility and its counterpart at times proved an obstacle. In these situations, every minute matters.

So we waited eagerly for the new Women's Care Center to be raised and readied for lives that hang in the balance every Wednesday, when abortions are scheduled.

Despite the more attractive presence and proposal of the bright pink building over the 1960s brick facility to its north, our hopes of many cars rerouting to life did not pan out as dramatically as we'd dreamed. Unfortunately, the majority still enter the parking lot that likely will lead to their child's death.

The Women's Care Center is prepared to receive abortion-vulnerable clients, both with triage-type measures on Wednesdays, as well as practical, everyday education and guidance that can change lives. I've sometimes wondered, though, if they, too, wish for more dramatic turns and last-minute miracles.

Recently, however, it happened, on Ash Wednesday, at the start of our area's first-ever 40 Days for Life spring campaign. I'd just arrived and was walking across the street from my parking spot just east of the Women's Care Center when I noticed one of our sidewalk advocates talking to a couple in the parking lot there. "Is something happening?" I asked our coordinator, wondering if the sidewalk advocate was redirecting an abortion client. "We're not sure yet," she responded. "We'll have to wait and see."

We soon learned that the couple was in fact a "redirect," having come with the intention to abort their child—an

intention that was "aborted" instead by the swift actions of the advocate offering new possibilities. They agreed to visit with the Women's Care personnel, who welcomed them with practical and compassionate help.

We were relieved when, later, we saw the car exiting the facility and away from the abortion business. The advocate told us they'd decided to cancel their appointment—for now—but were still weighing their options.

It was time to pray in earnest for this conflicted couple, who was, apparently, worried about the mother's age and any associated health risks.

Fear can so often pull us off course. I've been guilty of this myself. But recently, I was reminded of how fear shackles us, as this couple ultimately realized. A few weeks after that day, we learned their ultimate determination: yes to life. Praise God!

Reflecting now, I think about all the resources and time that went into that beautiful new pink building. Some might wonder if we have come out ahead.

Certainly, we haven't been seeing the horde of redirects like we'd envisioned, but the building is there—a miracle in itself—and within it, people dedicated to ushering in new life, ready with their skills, resources and love.

We might not have the privilege of seeing this little one come into the world. We might not learn whether he or she became a famous scientist who cured cancer or something much humbler. But we do know that the world of this couple just opened up into a million possibilities that would have died with their dead baby, had they chosen that route.

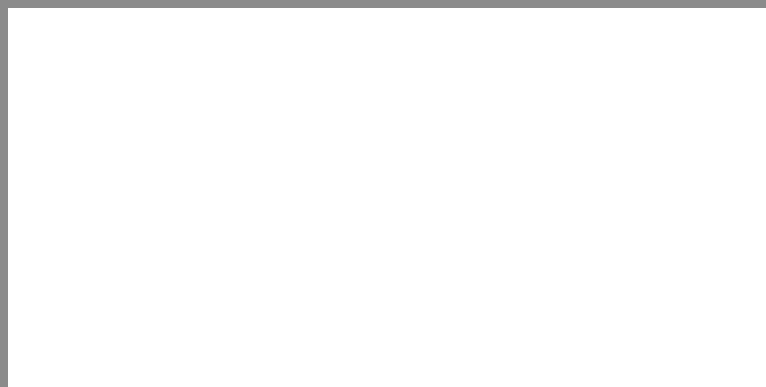
A new child will be in our world, God willing, by the year's end because of a sidewalk advocate's loving persistence; because of a trained counselor encouraging a decision toward life; because of the grace of a loving Father who knew this child before they were formed in their mother's womb.

We don't have to wonder too long as a community whether we've come out ahead. The price of this one soul now growing next to its mother's heart is worth its weight in gold, and God knows its value, even if we can't yet fully grasp it.

This triumph, which happened on the first day of our area's first spring 40 Days for Life effort, will now go down in history: as the first save of our spring campaigns, and, as we recently learned, the 3,800th save in the 45-year history of Pro-Life Action Ministries (PLAM), our St. Paul-based training organization. And finally, in heaven's record book of earthly victories.

NEW EARTH

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Do you know
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Where in the diocese are we?

Last month's photo is from the
temporary sanctuary at
St. Benedict's in Horace