



# Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 83 No. 1 **JANUARY 2024**



AND **THE WORD** BECAME **FLESH**


[www.bismarckdiocese.com](http://www.bismarckdiocese.com)




Come experience

# DEVIIVA I REVIVAL REVIVAL

with us



Bismarck Diocese



UNIVERSITY of MARY

Together with the Bismarck Diocese, we at the University of Mary warmly invite you to join us on a pilgrimage to the 10th National Eucharistic Congress.

The Diocese and the University have secured 300 tickets (valued at \$375/ticket) and busses from Bismarck, ND, to Indianapolis, IN.

**Register today! [umary.edu/NEC](http://umary.edu/NEC)**

Please reach out to University Ministry at [umin@umary.edu](mailto:umin@umary.edu) with any questions.

**July 16-22, 2024  
Indianapolis, IN**

*with overnights in Minneapolis and Chicago*

**COST PER PERSON**

\$945 (double-occupancy room)  
\$755 (triple- or quad-occupancy room)  
\$1580 (single-occupancy room)

*Free for children ages 4 and under*

*Cost includes event registration, transportation, and lodging. Payments will be handled in installments.*

## IN THIS ISSUE

Reporting on Catholic Action  
In Western ND Since 1941

**6 FOLLOWING THE CALL TO THE PRIESTHOOD**  
Two more men enter seminary study for the Bismarck Diocese  
By Sonia Mullally

**10 40 HOURS DEVOTION**

**12 MODELS FOR SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE**  
Mass to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spouses on January 23

**15 CARRYING THE LIGHT OF FAITH ACROSS GENERATIONS**  
Shine of the Mother of God in Flasher built in 1954  
By Amanda Evinger

**18 OBITUARY**  
Fr. Al Bitz

**20 STILL BRINGING SOULS TO OUR LORD**  
Michelle Duppong's 40th birthday and Christmases past  
By Patti Armstrong

**23 FOLLOW THE STAR**



**ON THE COVER:** Eucharistic adoration was the focus of the 40 Hours Devotion event at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. See more on the event on pages 10-11.



**PAGE 15:** Shrine of the Mother of God in Flasher carries the light of faith across generations.



# Dakota Catholic Action



*Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941*

**Publisher:** Most Reverend David D. Kagan, D.D., P.A., J.C.L., Bishop of Bismarck

**Editor:** Sonia Mullally, [smullally@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:smullally@bismarckdiocese.com)

Center for Pastoral Ministry - Bismarck Diocese USPS0011-5770

520 N. Washington Street, PO Box 1137, Bismarck, ND 58501-1137

Phone: 701-222-3035 Fax: 701-222-0269

**[www.bismarckdiocese.com](http://www.bismarckdiocese.com)**

The Dakota Catholic Action (0011-5770) is published monthly except July by the Bismarck Diocese, PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575.

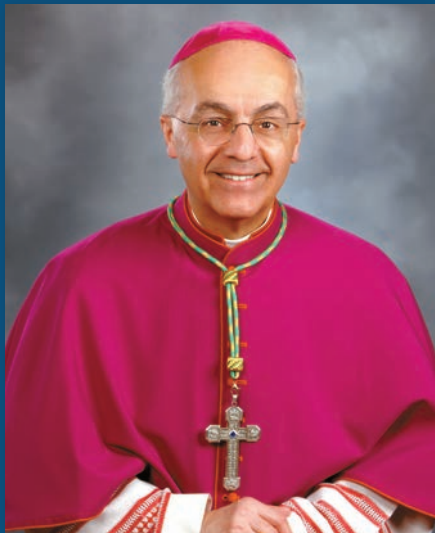
Periodical postage paid at Bismarck, ND, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to address below.

Dakota Catholic Action, PO Box 1137, Bismarck, ND 58501-1137

The Dakota Catholic Action is funded in part by the annual God's Share Appeal.





FROM THE BISHOP

*Make a new resolution  
and keep it*

**Bishop David D. Kagan**

Having just celebrated the beautiful Solemnity of the Birth of Our Lord, and then during the Octave of Christmas celebrated the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, we come to a new calendar year. Of course, for us our new year began on the first Sunday of Advent and will continue through the Solemnity of Christ the King toward the end of this year of 2024.

The reason I mention these important days is that Holy Mother Church wants the secular calendar year to be begun, lived and concluded under the inspiration of Almighty God and His angels and saints. In a visible way, to evangelize the world which needs God so desperately and needs the example of holiness and virtue of all the saints throughout history, most especially the examples of Our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph.

If you were in Church during Advent and Christmas, you no doubt picked up a new parish calendar for 2024. I urge you to look at each month and see the many days every month when the Church celebrates the feast of saints, either individually or two or more together on a specific day. The majority of days every month and throughout the year have a feast or solemnity.

Now, take your *Lives of the Saints* and read about these saints and do it as a daily practice. There's the custom of making some New Year's resolutions on January 1 and that's nice but we usually make resolutions which we do not keep. This year, make just one resolution and keep it. Be resolved to read the life of a saint every day and ask yourself this question: what in this saint's life is most like my life? If you keep this resolution every day during 2024, I assure you that you will grow in your personal holiness. When we associate ourselves with the saints, their holiness rubs off on us.

I know we all reflect on the year just ended and we do thank God for the many blessings we received. However, let's not let those blessings lie dormant. Let us use them for our own sanctification and let us help others appreciate the blessings they have received and use them. The examples of the saints help us understand what true holiness is and why it is so necessary for us to be holy every day.

Have a happy and holy new year! †



*Photo by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Bishop Kagan celebrated the confirmation Mass at Ascension parish in Bismarck on Nov. 17. In the 2023 calendar year, Bishop Kagan confirmed 703 young people from 47 parishes in the diocese.*

BISHOP IN ACTION



**Holy Father's Prayer  
Intentions for January**

**FOR THE GIFT OF DIVERSITY  
IN THE CHURCH**

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit helps us recognize the gift of different charisms within the Christian community, and to discover the richness of different ritual traditions in the heart of the Catholic Church.

BISHOP'S SCHEDULE

JANUARY 2024

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Jan. 3  | Blessing of Abbot Valerian Odermann, OSB, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, 10:30 a.m. MT  |
| Jan. 6  | Mass for Profession of Final Vows of Sr. Chiara Thérèse Jacobson, Our Lady of Victory Chapel in St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, 4 p.m. |
| Jan. 8  | Women's Care Center Board Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 5 p.m.  |
| Jan. 12 | Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.   |
| Jan. 15 | Sendoff Mass for March for Life Pilgrimage, Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary, Bismarck, 10 a.m.   |
| Jan. 22 | Mass at Benedictine Living Center, Bismarck, 9:30 a.m.   |
| Jan. 23 | Mass for the Feast of the Holy Spouses, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 6 p.m.   |
| Jan. 26 | Mass for Catholic Schools Week, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 9 a.m.   |
| Jan. 29 | Mass for Catholic Schools Week, St. Mary's Academy, Bismarck, 8:30 a.m.  |
| Jan. 30 | Mass for Catholic Schools Week, Queen of Peace, Dickinson, 9:30 a.m. MT  |
| Jan. 31 | Know Your Faith Competition, St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, 2 p.m.  |

# Two more men enter seminary study for the Bismarck Diocese

Sonia Mullally  
DCA Editor

The Bismarck Diocese is blessed with 10 seminarians currently studying for the priesthood.

Two men joined these ranks last fall as seminarians for the diocese—Justin Croonenberghs and Aaron Ripplinger.

We introduce you to the two newest men studying to someday be your priest.

Justin Croonenberghs

Seminarian Justin Croonenberghs took a less than “traditional” route to the seminary.

He’s an Air Force veteran and had most recently been working as a network engineer before he felt compelled to change his life path.

He grew up all over North Dakota, moving a lot. He spent a few years of elementary school, here and there, in Catholic schools but didn’t have a strong faith foundation. Those around him were Christians and his grandmother was the lone Catholic. His faith took a few different directions and even admitted to a time in his life when he was an atheist. It took a



Justin Croonenberghs

long while for him to experience a reconversion in his late 30s.

Justin tends to approach life in a rational and scientific way but, at some point, he began to look closer at things for which there was no explanation except for God. Over time, his faith grew slowly sparked by meeting Msgr. Patrick Schumacher, pastor at Bismarck’s Church of Corpus Christi in 2021.

“I felt nudged to ‘go back’ to the faith. So, on Ash Wednesday of 2021, I went back and made my ‘30-year confession’ as I call it,” Justin said.

From there, Justin’s rapid deep dive into his faith felt natural. Weekly Mass turned into daily Mass, then followed with Eucharistic adoration and Stations of the Cross during Lent. While listening to the music at the Easter Vigil, it affected him greatly and on Easter Sunday he felt a strong calling to the vocation of the priesthood.

“My vocation came fast and furious. God hit me over the head with it,” he joked. After a few days he called Msgr. Schumacher to talk it over. “God is not subtle with me and I’m thankful for that.”

After that abrupt calling, he spent a year and a half convincing himself and everyone he knew that he was going to take the giant leap of faith and join the seminary. His employer, at the time, even offered him a safety net of letting Justin know that if



2023-24 seminarians for the diocese with the vocations director.

“My vocation came fast and furious. God hit me over the head with it,” he joked. After a few days he called Msgr. Schumacher to talk it over. “God is not subtle with me and I’m thankful for that.”

— Seminarian Justin Croonenberghs

exploring this vocation didn’t work out, that his job would be there waiting for him.

That gave Justin the final push he needed to start the process of selling his house and most of his belongings.

“It turned my life completely upside down and I couldn’t be happier about it.”

This fall, he moved to St. Louis to attend Kenrick Glennon Seminary for his first year of formation.

“I didn’t come into this with much expectation because I didn’t really know what seminary was,” Justin explained. “Today, I still struggle to explain it, but the biggest thing is the brotherhood and relationships. I’ve never been at a place like this that

is intrinsically good, where no one is malicious, and I have good brothers who are tolerant of my foibles.”

He’s grateful to be in a place where he can be vulnerable and reveal the interior of the heart. The first year of formation is referred to as the propaedeutic year which serves as preliminary instruction or “before the learning.” It’s a time to sort of detox from society to tend to the heart of the man, learn how to pray before diving into the academics of the next years of formation.

“You begin to realize how broken we all are,” Justin said. “Most of this year is interior work to work on yourself and do all the things that are foundational to being a priest but can get lost in the academics of it. This way, we can approach the next years of formation with a proper foundation.”



Having an Air Force background, Justin said there are surprisingly a lot of similarities between seminary and how military training works.

“When people think of military training, they think about the push-ups and the drills, but it’s really about your heart as a soldier. The whole point of military training is to show you what you are truly capable of...when the time comes to put yourself to the test. Obviously, it’s more spiritual than military training, but it’s very similar, the comradery, the growing together as men.”

To the people of the diocese, Justin said, “Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for making this possible. And please pray for me because I’m really going to need it. Please pray for all of us seminarians.”

*Aaron Ripplinger*

Seminarian Aaron Ripplinger grew up Catholic attending Mass with his family at St. Joseph’s in Beulah. He received the sacraments there and gained a solid foundation to practice his faith, but admits his faith wasn’t a huge priority mixed in with school and sports.



Aaron Ripplinger

“My first thoughts of the priesthood came at a Steubenville Conference in high school, but it wasn’t until college at North Dakota State University, where I grew in my faith and personal relationship with Jesus that I began to feel a call to the priesthood,” Aaron shared.

At that conference he heard a priest say, “If I lived 99 more lifetimes, I’d be a priest every single time.” This statement stuck with Aaron. But he was resistant to the idea of the priesthood for several

reasons including the fact that he was dating a girl in a serious relationship.

At first, Aaron was initially enjoying the college lifestyle of partying and forming friendships. Not long into his freshman year, he started to realize this wasn’t the best path and things became slightly clearer.

“I have been blessed with many holy priests and friends who have guided me during my formation and in discerning my vocation,” he said. “One man is Aaron Filzen, who is a FOCUS missionary at NDSU’s campus. His joy and conviction were inspiring to me and gave me the courage to begin pursuing my faith more seriously during my freshman year at NDSU. Aaron has a zeal for others, and he believed in me and encouraged me. As my life began to change, Aaron would take time to meet with me to answer my questions, help me through decisions, and guide me as a role model of a good Catholic man. Over the next two years, Aaron and I formed a friendship, and through his presence at St. Paul’s Newman Center on campus, he was there to help me through the discernment process.”

During the Bible studies and conversations with other faithful Catholics, two things stuck out to Aaron—his growing desire to lead others to Christ and the inspirational writings of the Venerable Fulton Sheen that inspired him to share Christ with others. He felt the Holy Spirit was moving him in the direction to deepen his faith. To further cement the vocational path, Aaron then had the opportunity to visit a seminary.

“A final push to join came from visiting a seminary and my desire to join a community of men on fire for the Lord and pursuing holiness,” Aaron said.

He’s currently studying at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C.

“So far, seminary has been a lot of new experiences: adjusting to seminary life, going on pilgrimages and visiting places in the surrounding areas, new classes,

*“Through these new experiences and time at the seminary so far, I have experienced overall a sense of peace and gratitude. It has been a fruitful and joyful experience.”*  
— Seminarian Aaron Ripplinger


etc. Through these new experiences and time at the seminary so far, I have experienced overall a sense of peace and gratitude. It has been a fruitful and joyful experience,” Aaron shared. “The two things that I enjoy most at the seminary is the fraternity among the seminarians and a lifestyle centered around my relationship with Christ.”

He added, “I am very thankful for all the prayer and support of the diocese that makes it possible for me to be a seminarian. We, as Bismarck seminarians, know what a great diocese we have, and we make sure to share that with the other seminarians!”











*Others in formation*

Please continue to pray for Justin and Aaron, as well as our two deacons entering the final stages of formation, and all the men following their call to the priesthood. Additional seminarians currently studying for the Bismarck Diocese include Deacon Eric Artz, Deacon Ryan Martire and Colton Steiner at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis; Joe Schon, Ben Weigum and Dominic Schaeftbauer at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. Seminarian Joseph Richter is in Rome studying at the Pontifical North American College. Seminarian Isiah Jilek is spending a pastoral year at the Church of Saint Anne in Bismarck.

Please also include in your prayers all the young men and women in our diocese who may be considering a call to the priesthood or religious life. †



### PRAY FOR OUR 2023-2024 SEMINARIANS

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|  <p><b>DCN. ERIC ARTZ</b><br/>CONFIGURATION 4<br/>LITTLE FLOWER, MINOT</p>               |  <p><b>DCN. RYAN MARTIRE</b><br/>CONFIGURATION 4<br/>CATHEDRAL, BISMARCK</p>    |  <p><b>COLTON STEINER</b><br/>CONFIGURATION 2<br/>ST. JOSEPH, DICKINSON</p> |
|  <p><b>JOSEPH RICHTER</b><br/>CONFIGURATION 1<br/>ST. ANNE, BISMARCK</p>               |  <p><b>ISAIAH JILEK</b><br/>PASTORAL YEAR<br/>ST. WENCESLAUS, DICKINSON</p>   |  <p><b>JOSEPH SCHON</b><br/>DISCIPLESHIP 4<br/>ASCENSION, BISMARCK</p>    |
|  <p><b>BEN WEIGUM</b><br/>DISCIPLESHIP 3<br/>ST. ANNE, BISMARCK</p>                    |  <p><b>DOMINIC SCHAEFTBAUER</b><br/>DISCIPLESHIP 2<br/>ST. JOSEPH, MANDAN</p> |  |
|  <p><b>JUSTIN CROONENBERGHS</b><br/>PROPAEDEUTIC YEAR<br/>CORPUS CHRISTI, BISMARCK</p> |  <p><b>AARON RIPPLINGER</b><br/>PROPAEDEUTIC YEAR<br/>ST. ANNE, BISMARCK</p>  |  |

BISMARCKVOCATIONS.COM



**40 HOURS DEVOTION**  
NOVEMBER 17-19



A 40 Hours Devotion was held Nov. 17-19 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. Featured events included an opening Mass on Friday, a healing service on Saturday, and evening prayer on Sunday. There was adoration around the clock, Masses, confessions, the rosary, special times of adoration for high schoolers and for families with young children. Monsignor Tom Richter, pastor at Queen of Peace in Dickinson, preached a series of homilies during the three-day event. Father Brian Gross, pastor at parishes in Watford City and Alexander, facilitated the healing service.

The event was held in conjunction with the National Eucharistic Revival which was developed by the United States bishops. The vision of National Eucharistic Revival is “to inspire a movement of Catholics across the United States who are healed, converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist—and who are then sent out on mission ‘for the life of the world.’”

Recordings of Msgr. Richter’s homilies from the event can be found at [www.cathedralparish.com/homilies](http://www.cathedralparish.com/homilies).✝



*“...to inspire a movement of Catholics across the United States who are healed, converted, formed, and unified by an encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist—and who are then sent out on mission ‘for the life of the world.’”*





## Mass to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spouses on January 23

January 23 marks a little-known feast—the Feast of the Holy Spouses—also referred to as the Feast of the Espousal of Mary and Joseph.

The feast honoring the marriage of Mary and Joseph was first celebrated in the fifteenth century. The feast gained some popularity and was celebrated across much of Europe in the 1700s and its liturgical use was allowed in the United States in the 1840s. Although many are unfamiliar with this feast as it is not on the universal liturgical calendar of the Church, it is celebrated at various shrines and holy sites dedicated to St Joseph and by certain religious communities.

While there are many feasts of Mary and Joseph as individuals, and more recently also a feast of the Holy Family, no feast honoring their marriage is part of the universal liturgical Church calendar. In 1961, a movement to simplify the universal liturgical calendar suppressed this and other particular feasts. This requires special permission requested by groups or communities wishing to commemorate it.

The Cathedral Knights of Columbus have recently received permission from Bishop Kagan to celebrate the feast day on Jan. 23. All are invited to attend at 6 p.m. with Bishop Kagan as the main celebrant at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the feast is to recognize the holy marriage of Joseph and Mary and uphold married

life as a path to holiness. It's no secret that marriage is under attack in our culture with fewer people seeing the necessity for marriage and the continuing rise of divorces. This special Mass offers us a contemplation on the union of Joseph and Mary helping us to understand the dignity of the sacrament of marriage and emulate the holy spouses in their total surrender to God's will and their trust in His love, mercy and provision.

### *Devotion to St. Joseph*

The year 2020 brought special attention to St. Joseph. It was the 50th anniversary of St. Joseph being declared the universal patron and protector of the Church by Pope Pius IX and the 100th anniversary of Pope St. John Paul II, seen as the “pope of the family.” In his apostolic exhortation, “Redemptoris Custos,” promulgated on Aug. 15, 1989, St. John Paul II discusses the importance of St. Joseph's role in the Holy Family as the first guardian and protector of Jesus and how that serves as a model for marriage and family.

That winter of 2020, a group of men from the Bismarck-Mandan area completed consecration on March 19, the Feast of St. Joseph, in person with Fr. Josh Waltz at the Church of St. Joseph in Mandan. This prompted an even greater devotion among the men including John Berger, Grand Knight of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit Council #6540. John recently wrote a letter to Bishop Kagan, on behalf



*A painting of the holy family at St. Joseph parish in Mandan.*

of the Knights Council, to request permission to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spouses.

“I’d like to personally encourage folks to consider consecrating themselves to Saint Joseph,” John said. “And yes, you can do this even if you have completed the consecration to Holy Mother Mary. Saint Joseph is our spiritual father, and the union of Saint Joseph and Mary is the model of marriage in a suffering and confused world.”


Up next was the year 2021 proclaimed, by the Holy See, as the Year of St. Joseph for the Universal Church. In the same year as that proclamation, Father Donald Calloway released the book “Consecration to St. Joseph: The Wonders of Our Spiritual Father.” The book's 33-day consecration


to St. Joseph emulates the preparation method employed by St. Louis de Montfort in his Marian consecration, and it is estimated that well over two million individuals throughout the world have now completed the consecration to St. Joseph.


In September 2022, it was announced that the Vatican had turned down a request from some U.S. bishops to add the Feast of the Holy Spouses celebrating the marriage of Joseph and Mary to the Church's universal liturgical calendar. The feast, however, can be celebrated in places or institutes which have a special devotion to St. Joseph, or where the feast has gotten support from the diocesan bishop.†


—Staff report





 **Search weekend dates**  
Search for Christian Maturity is a weekend retreat experience which provides youth an opportunity to think, talk, question and dive deeper into their faith. The weekends are for any high school or college age person at least 15 years old. The program is both rooted in the Catholic faith and open to young people of any denomination or creed. Search weekends are held five times throughout the year at the Badlands Ministries Camp just south of Medora. Cost for the weekend is \$75. Partial scholarships are available. Remaining weekends for the 2023-24 season are: Jan. 12-14; Mar. 1-3; and Apr. 12-14. Find more information at [bismarckdiocese.com/search1](https://bismarckdiocese.com/search1).


 **Monthly Eucharistic series in Mandan**  
In response to the National Eucharistic Revival, Spirit of Life Parish in Mandan is hosting a monthly series on the Eucharist. Each session offers its own Eucharistic-related topic. No need to register, just join in at the church at 7 p.m. on the third Tuesday of the month through May 2024. The planned topics are: Jan. 16 - The Eucharist and the Dignity of the Human Person; Feb. 20 - Lenten Parish Mission; March 19 - Preparing to Receive; April 16 - Eucharistic Miracles/The Miracle of the Eucharist; and May 21 - The Eucharist and the Holy Spirit. All are welcome to attend.

 **Pro-life events Jan. 21-22**  
Bismarck-Mandan Right to Life Chapter invites you to their annual March for Life on the state capitol building steps on Sunday, Jan. 21 at 2 p.m. For information, call Virginia at 701-258-5379. There is also a pro-life conference all day on Monday, Jan. 22 at the N.D. Heritage Center starting at 9 a.m. Cost is \$20 per person for the conference. Call 701-355-6425 for information.

 **Marriage Encounter Weekends**  
The mission of Worldwide Marriage Encounter is to proclaim the value of Marriage and Holy Orders in the Church and in the world. Experience a Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekend and discover the beauty of your relationship. The next Worldwide Marriage Encounter Weekends in the region are Feb. 9-11 in Mandan and March 22-24 in Valley City. Early registration is highly recommended. For more information visit our website at [ndwwme.org](https://ndwwme.org) or contact Rob and Angie at [Applications@ndwwme.org](mailto:Applications@ndwwme.org) or 701-347-1998.

 **Women’s Lenten retreat Feb. 17**  
The women’s simple Lenten retreat is back in 2024. All area women are welcome to attend on Saturday, Feb. 17 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Corpus Christi Church in Bismarck. There will be two talks. One reflection will be “Holiness Reflected Through Saints and Heroes” by Mother Mary Joseph of St. Mary Sisters based in Bismarck. The other presentation is “Inspirations for Lent” by Msgr. Patrick Schumacher. The day includes Mass at 8 a.m., two speakers, Eucharistic adoration, confession, breakfast, lunch and vendors. Registration is \$40. Registration ends on Feb. 9 to obtain an accurate count for meals. Register online at [bismarckdiocese.com/lenten-retreat-for-women](https://bismarckdiocese.com/lenten-retreat-for-women).

 **Men’s Lenten retreat Feb. 24**  
A men’s Lenten retreat will be held at the Church of Saint Anne in Bismarck on Saturday, Feb. 24 beginning with Mass at 8 a.m. Featured speakers are Fr. Jake Magnuson, Fr. Russ Kovash, among others. A light breakfast will be provided following Mass and lunch will also be served. There will be some time for Eucharistic adoration and confession with the retreat ending by 2 p.m. Registration fee is \$25 and pre-registration is required. Please send checks to Mike Bichler at 140 Telstar Dr., Bismarck, ND 58503. Contact Ben Vetter at [bvetter307@gmail.com](mailto:bvetter307@gmail.com) or 307-575-1593 with questions.

 **Pilgrimage to National Eucharistic Congress**  
Embark on a transformative spiritual journey! The Bismarck Diocese and the University of Mary warmly invite you to join us on a seven-day pilgrimage (July 16-22, 2024) to the 10th National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. Take part in a historic gathering of missionary disciples and experience what promises to be a “new Pentecost” for the American Catholic Church. Register today at [www.umary.edu/NEC](https://www.umary.edu/NEC).

# Shrine of the Mother of God in Flasher built in 1954

Amanda Evinger  
DCA Writer

The shrines and grottoes we are blessed to have in our diocese bring much more to us than their pretty stones, sturdy statues and impressive mason work. They bring the light of faith to us, and to our children and grandchildren. They carry the beauty of Catholicism and the courage of its devotees have brought down through the generations in a uniquely meaningful way.

According to Noel Wax, former parish administrative assistant for three parishes of St. Lawrence in Flasher, St. Gertrude in Raleigh and St. Theresa in Carson, “Places like these give family members opportunities to share special memories and aspects of their faith with one another,” she says. “They give grandmas and grandpas a chance to tell stories to their grandchildren. I had two lovely grandmas growing up, and they were both really good at getting out old photo albums and telling important stories of family and faith.”

By carrying the torch of faith from generation to generation, we bring the Light of Christ to all nations, beginning with those we know and love the most.

“We need to take time to be with our older people,” Noel said. “We need to get them to start talking because they sure have a lot of great things to share! Being with them can build up our faith as well as our family ties. We need to go to Mass and pray the rosary together as families as well. We should teach our little ones what the Catholic faith is all about, and



show them simple, special things like how to light a votive candle to intercede for others. We also really need to revive the tradition of bringing children over to shrines and grottoes to pray.”

Such a sacred place is the Shrine of the Mother of God in Flasher, which was built in 1954 by Fr. Poettdens from the Netherlands.



*“Jesus honored her before all ages and will honor her for all ages.  
No one comes to Him, nor even near Him, no one is saved or sanctified,  
if he too will not honor her. This is the lot of angels and of men.”*  
– St. Maximilian Kolbe

“The shrine is very well done,” said Fr. Biju Antony, Parochial Administrator of the parishes of St. Lawrence, St. Theresa and St. Gertrude. “The statue of Mary is similar to that of Our Lady of Fatima. The steps to the shrine are actually the cement steps to the old church which had burned down in the 1940’s—those were the only things that were left standing. The rest of the shrine was crafted from petrified wood taken from the Badlands as well as rose quartz, clear quartz and mica stones hauled here from the Black Hills.”

And like many sacred places, it tells a lovely, inspiring story—a story of the courage and perseverance of our faithful ancestors.

“When the immigrants came here to settle during WWII, they suffered from a lot of drought and sickness,” Fr. Biju Antony said. “They practiced many Catholic devotions, which they relied on for protection from natural calamities and disasters. These prayers were very important to them. They had a great love for Mary as well, and truly desired to be devoted to her in their hearts. In fact, at that time, Marian devotion was spreading all over the world; there were lots of miracles happening in Lourdes, Fatima and in Mexico.”

Formerly, the Shrine of the Mother of God was located near a parish school, which is no longer there.

“All of the school children were encouraged to be devoted to Mother Mary,” Fr. Biju Antony noted. “Before Mass, they offered a rosary, and at times they would walk over to the grotto and pray it together



there as well. This helped to keep them rooted in their Catholic faith.”

Importantly, shrines such as this one nurture a profound Marian spirituality in a memorable way in the souls of all who are blessed to encounter them.

“This shrine has helped to keep the faith alive throughout the years,” Fr. Biju Antony said. “It has really handed down a love and reverence for the Blessed Mother. It reveals the mystery of Mary to people in a way they can understand. The person closest to Jesus was Mary, so we need to grow closer to her if we want to grow closer to Jesus. Mary was God’s own mother; that is why she has been honored with the title of Mother of God. Those who love Mother Mary will receive special blessings from the Lord.”


Over time, the Shrine of the Mother of God has been worn down, but the wonderful news is that it likely won’t stay that way for long.

“It is such a beautiful grotto, and we wanted to fix it up,” Fr. Biju Antony said. “The renovation is scheduled to begin towards the end of this year and be finished in 2024. We are hoping to repaint the Blessed Mother statue. We want to keep it maintained to help bring Marian devotion back into people’s lives. Anyone who comes to Flasher is welcome to come and see the grotto, not just those who are Catholics or parishioners.”

The Shrine of the Mother of God is a sort of “gem in the rough” among the prairie lands of our great state.

“It is falling into disrepair, and we want to change that,” Noel said. “It’s benches have grown too old. It is a hidden treasure—even to some of our parishioners. We really need to cherish it. Once or twice, I made a little pilgrimage out there just to be there and to appreciate it. It is great to know that we have something beautiful where we live in North Dakota, too. We don’t necessarily have to leave our neighborhood to visit a pilgrimage site, because we have one right here where we are at.”

Although many of these precious, sanctified places across our beloved nation go largely unnoticed, unappreciated or untended, we have the opportunity to treat them differently. They are a very significant part of our Catholic heritage and if we use our time, talent and treasure to take care of them, we will help the Kingdom of God flourish in our midst. †



**PRAY FOR THE PRIESTS, RELIGIOUS, DEACONS SERVING OUR DIOCESE  
AND THOSE IN FORMATION AND LAY MINISTERS**

**An invitation from the St. Serra Vocations  
Apostolate of Bismarck Mandan**

|         |   |         |                                 |
|---------|---|---------|---------------------------------|
| Jan. 1  | Fr. Wayne Sattler                         | Jan. 16 | Seminarian Ben Weigum           |
| Jan. 2  | Deacon Randy Schmidt                      | Jan. 17 | Sr. Hildegarde Urlacher, OSB    |
| Jan. 3  | Abbot Valerian Odermann, OSB              | Jan. 18 | Sr. Lucille Heidt, OSB          |
| Jan. 4  | Music Ministers                           | Jan. 19 | Fr. Frank Schuster              |
| Jan. 5  | Br. Bertrand Vogelweide, OSB              | Jan. 20 | Deacon Doyle Schulz             |
| Jan. 6  | Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus           | Jan. 21 | Fr. Al Bitz +11-21-23           |
| Jan. 7  | Fr. Dennis Schafer                        | Jan. 22 | Deacon Al Schwindt              |
| Jan. 8  | Deacon Kenneth Schmit                     | Jan. 23 | Fr. Biju Antony                 |
| Jan. 9  | Fr. Thomas Wordekemper, OSB               | Jan. 24 | Sr. Gerard Wald, OSB            |
| Jan. 10 | Sr. Eleanor Stockert, OSB                 | Jan. 25 | Msgr. James Shea                |
| Jan. 11 | Fr. Nick Schneider                        | Jan. 26 | Deacon Bob Stockert             |
| Jan. 12 | Seminarians and Religious in<br>Formation | Jan. 27 | Benedictine Monks in Bogota     |
| Jan. 13 | Msgr. Patrick Schumacher                  | Jan. 28 | Mother Mary Joseph Campbell     |
| Jan. 14 | Deacon Erv Schneider                      | Jan. 29 | Fr. Robert Shea                 |
| Jan. 15 | Lay Ministers                             | Jan. 30 | Deacon Steve Streitz            |
|         |   | Jan. 31 | Seminarian Dominic Schaeftbauer |



OBITUARY FR. AL BITZ

Fr. Longinus “Al” Bitz died Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2023. Mass of Christian burial was held Nov. 27 at St. Philip Neri Church, Napoleon, N.D., with Bishop John Folda, Bishop of Fargo, presiding, Fr. Tim Schroeder as main celebrant, Fr. Phil Ackerman and Fr. Gerard Braun as principal concelebrants, and Fr. Dale Lagodinski as homilist. Burial took place at the St. Philip Neri Cemetery, Napoleon.



Father Al was born Aug. 2, 1943, to Mathias and Rose (Schwartzemberger) Bitz on a farm near Napoleon, and baptized on Aug. 8 at St. Anthony’s Church, rural Napoleon. He was a life-long member of St. Philip Neri Church in Napoleon.

He attended grade school at rural Starkey School District #1 and Assumption Abbey High School and Assumption College in Richardton, N.D. from 1957-1963. After receiving his BA in philosophy and classical languages from St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. (1963-1969), he enrolled there for theological studies. At the same time, he also enrolled at St. Thomas University, St. Paul, and received his MA in teaching in 1968. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Fargo on June 13, 1969, at Napoleon.

He liked to note that he was baptized at St. Anthony’s Church (Napoleon), ordained on the feast of St. Anthony (June 13), served as pastor of St. Anthony (Fargo), and celebrated a Mass at St. Anthony’s in Fargo for the first time on the feast of St Anthony.

His first assignment was to New Rockford (1969-1971) where he served the parish of St. John and St. William in Maddock and taught at St. James High School. He then served in Langdon-Osnabrock-Milton-Nekoma as an associate from 1971-1976, in St. Michael of Grand Forks from 1976-1978. He then served as pastor of St. Anthony in Fargo from 1978-1983, Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo from 1983-1993, St. Boniface in Wimbledon, St. Mary in Courtenay, St. John in Kensal from 1994-1996, St. Leo in Casselton and St. Thomas in Buffalo from 1996-2003. His last assignment was pastor of St. James Basilica in Jamestown and St. Michael in Pingree, St. Margaret in Buchanan, Sacred Heart in Fried and St. Mathias in Windsor (2003-2014). In his retirement, he worked for the University of Mary in Bismarck (2014 -2017).

He has nine brothers and six sisters: Hilary (Carol) Bitz, Ferdinand-deceased (Mathilda) Bitz, Margaret Bitz, Cecilia (Tom) Brown, Leonard-deceased (Marcy) Bitz, Vincent (Marjie) Bitz, Sebastian (Deb-deceased) Bitz, Alex (Joan-deceased) Bitz, Richard (Zelda) Bitz, Bernie Johnson (Calvin-deceased), Willie-deceased (Donna) Bitz, Monica (Ken-deceased) Watkins, Mathias Jr.-deceased (Janice) Bitz, Marian (David) Gates, Sharon-deceased (George) Lawrence. †

**May almighty God bless us with his peace and strength, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. May the Angels lead thee into Paradise. May the Martyrs receive thee at thy coming and take thee to the Holy City. May the Choirs of the Angels receive thee and mayest thou have rest everlasting. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.**

Embark on a rewarding career

Find freedom, flexibility and fulfillment as a Knights of Columbus insurance agent.



Knights of Columbus helps families enjoy economic security when they need it most, while turning some of the profits from our insurance business into charitable impact.

LIFE INSURANCE | DISABILITY INCOME INSURANCE | LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE | RETIREMENT ANNUITIES



**Wayne Cherney**  
Field Agent  
701-739-8143  
wayne.cherney@kofc.org



**Jamison Fettig**  
Field Agent  
701-325-0712  
jamison.fettig@kofc.org



**Joel Herman**  
Field Agent  
701-219-5847  
joel.herman@kofc.org



**Sam Owan**  
Field Agent  
701-609-1918  
sam.owan@kofc.org



**Nathan Sather**  
Field Agent  
701-840-0965  
nathan.sather@kofc.org



**Don Willey**  
Field Agent  
701-202-9089  
don.willey@kofc.org



**Pete Speicher**  
Field Agent  
701-864-2679  
peter.speicher@kofc.org



**Jon Beebe**  
General Agent  
605-882-8689  
jon.beebe@kofc.org

Apply today.  
kofc.org/careers



**Knights of Columbus®**

© Knights of Columbus, 1 Columbus Plaza, New Haven, CT 06510



# Michelle Duppong’s 40th birthday and Christmases past

Patti Armstrong  
DCA Writer

This new year, on January 25, Ken and Mary Ann Duppong and family, will mark what would have been their daughter Michelle Christine’s 40th birthday. Her death on Christmas Day eight years ago at age 31 has brought many changes to the family and even to the Church with the opening of her cause for canonization on November 1, All Saints’ Day, in 2022.

Michelle is now known to the world with the title “Servant of God” as the diocese conducts its investigation into her life. If all is in order, the cause will advance to the Vatican to declare her “Venerable” then await a miracle for her beatification and another for canonization.

Each year, her family has tried to continue to honor and celebrate Michelle’s birthday by inviting her personal friends for a winter party, according to Mary Ann. It’s a chance to share memories of their Christmases with Michelle.

The seasons have changed at their farm in Haymarsh near Glen Ullin, North Dakota, where they raised their six children, she explained. There were many past years of their family’s lively “Haymarsh Holiday Hoedown” celebration to gather with relatives and friends. Then, the night of Christmas Day 2015 was spent with family gathered at Michelle’s bedside, singing, praying and expressing their love as she quietly slipped into eternity at 11:23 p.m., ending her yearlong battle with cancer.

Not long after Bishop Kagan celebrated Michelle’s funeral Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit,

he began hearing accounts from people about Michelle’s impact in their lives. The Duppongs also received over 500 cards and letters that first month after her death, and around 200 included special notes about how Michelle influenced their lives in a profound way.



Michelle Duppong

“What inspired me about Michelle and prompted me to take this first step were her two most obvious virtues: her joyful faith and her unconditional acceptance of God’s will for her,” Bishop Kagan stated in an earlier interview. Her main desire, he said, was to share the joy of knowing Jesus.

## Christmas gatherings

The season that celebrates the birth of Jesus, was Michelle’s favorite according to Mary Ann, and her joy was always infectious at their family Christmas gatherings.

“We practiced the custom of lighting the candles on an Advent wreath along with listening to a meditative reading at our supper meal, and would attend both Christmas Eve evening or midnight Mass, and the next morning Christmas Mass, unless the roads were blocked,” she said.



Ken, Mary Ann, Michelle, Renae at the beginning of Michelle’s cancer journey at Minnesota’s Mayo Clinic on Jan. 5, 2015. Renae is holding a photo of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, one of the saints to whom Michelle had a special devotion.

As the children became older, they participated in the special Christmas choir/music for those liturgies.

“My side of the family had a tradition of a live Santa home visit, so we did some of that when our children were young. Usually, one of the uncles put on a costume and brought gifts to our home, or we went to one of the other relatives’ houses.”

On Christmas Day, they had a special holiday meal, often with other guests.

When Christmas started to mean kids coming home from college, their Haymarsh Holiday Hoedown was scheduled sometime between Christmas and New Year’s. By then, the gathering expanded to include neighbors, as well as elderly who were alone, adding up to as many as 60 guests. The afternoon entertainment grew to include any talent, even yo-yo

tricks. Sometimes Ken, Michelle’s father, and their neighbor, Russell Gietzen, would play *Amazing Grace* together on their harmonicas. If weather permitted, there was sledding or tubing in the snow; and sometimes Russell brought a team of horses over for hayrides.

“I thought once they went off to college, they would not be interested in doing the hoedown anymore,” Mary Ann said, “but, instead, they really valued it and looked forward to the gathering.”

## A peaceful death

There was no Christmas party the year that Michelle was sick. After many hospital stays, she was home on hospice care.



“By mid-December, Michelle was very weak and not talking much,” Mary Ann recalled. “On a Tuesday night, three days before her death, our parish priest and a few parish friends and relatives came to our house. They stood in the hall outside of her room and sang some Christmas songs. ‘We love you, Michelle,’ one said upon leaving. Michelle could barely muster enough strength to respond, ‘thank you,’ and smiled—some of the last words she spoke.”

Mary Ann recalled, “Their caroling meant so much to all of us.” Jean Wanner, Mary Ann’s dearest friend and sister-in-law, her husband Ken’s sister and beloved aunt to Michelle, had died of cancer just two weeks earlier. “Our hearts were aching,” she said.

The family was all together for that last Christmas with Michelle.

“Throughout Christmas Day, we prayed our daily rosary, a Chaplet of Mercy, a litany of other prayers together around her bedside, and sang traditional Christmas songs to her,” Mary Ann recounted. “Michelle no longer spoke or opened her eyes.”

Surrounded by family, Michelle breathed heavily and then drew her last breath. “It was a peaceful death,” Mary Ann said. “Some of us cried. It was a relief that her suffering here was over, but you are never ready to say goodbye. Lisa [Gray, her married sister] had gone in that day and told Michelle, ‘If you are going to go, I want a sign that you are in heaven.’”

Lisa had shared in an earlier interview, “When I saw her taking her last breath, I was so happy for her. I was so proud of her. I had the feeling of her running to Jesus. It was not just the tragedy-of-the-cancer story; people knew that Michelle was ‘marked.’ It was just part of her journey. I had a heart of knowledge that she was going to heaven on Christmas night.”

Early the next morning, Lisa received a great consolation. “As I woke up, I heard her voice, ‘Leese, it’s beautiful.’ Her voice was radiant.”

Only later did the Duppong family learn that Michelle said she would die on Christmas. She had told one

of the religious sisters from the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites who had helped her during hospice care that she would die on Christmas Day. The sister doubted that Michelle would know that so did not mention it until after her passing.

### Perfect Christmas gift

The year following Michelle’s death, the family was grieving her loss. Mary Ann shared a dramatic and unexpected moment that brought great comfort.

“During the night on Dec. 23, 2016, I was sound asleep. At 5 a.m., I woke up upon hearing Michelle speaking to me joyfully out loud like she was standing by my bedside. ‘Merry Christmas, Mom!’ I sat up in the bed. Was I dreaming? It was dark in the room except for the window’s moonlight. I looked about the room, at the clock and looked at Ken asleep in the shadows.

“Puzzled, I went to lay back down. Then, I heard her voice again, saying in exactly the same jovial manner, ‘Merry Christmas, Mom!’ I knew it was Michelle. The tone of her voice reassured me that she was so happy, and I peacefully went back to sleep. That was the perfect Christmas gift.”

Mary Ann shared, “Christmas will never be the same for us. Losing Michelle at such a young age and the trauma during her last year are unforgettable. Yet, we realize how blessed we were to have her in our lives those 31 years and feel assured that she is rejoicing with all the saints and being with the Holy Family eternally.

“With the announcement of Michelle’s title of Servant of God, our family humbly rejoices that Michelle’s life and work are not forgotten,” Mary Ann said. “We feel confident that she is still bringing souls to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”✝



## FOLLOW THE STAR

“Follow the Star” is an interactive nativity, where families can experience the Christmas story in live action. The event features local “actors” and was directed this year by Christine O’Riley. This is part of the two-day Festival of Trees holiday fundraiser presented by the Dakota Hope Clinic in Minot held each year the weekend before Thanksgiving. The purpose of the Festival of Trees is to raise awareness about the mission of the faith-based, life-affirming women’s care clinic and raise money to help their clients. Because all the services at Dakota Hope Clinic are free and they don’t receive government funding, they depend on God’s grace and donations from the community to keep their doors open. The clinic is based in Minot with satellite locations in Tioga and Bottineau.✝







# AG ATTITUDES

## Spiritual sustainability is a call to commitment

James Odermann

Winter is here—or spring is less than 90 days away. This realization gives me two thoughts: time continues to march on (and the older I get the faster it seems to move) and planning is underway for the next growing season.

One of the key components of planning in agriculture is sustainability. Will the management decisions made today be sustainable practices that create positive outcomes producing food and preserving the air, water and soil for use today and for generations that follow?

Across the geography of the Bismarck Diocese, agricultural producers always have an eye on the future, whether it be crop rotations, genetic variety selection for crops and livestock, labor needs or equipment. The bottom line is this review and planning is a necessity for sustainability, which is the development of management that affirms an activity over time. Responsible sustainability implies an inherent respect for and application of principles that protect the precious God-given resources in the environment.

Too often, society places an overwhelming emphasis on the economic benefits of sustainability. Yet, as I walked across the pens and delivered grain (the old-fashioned way out of a bucket) to the calves in the pens, I asked myself, “What about my spiritual sustainability?” The question was more than rhetorical. The answer needed an action plan.

I asked myself, “What is the focus of my spiritual growth and development? Do I have a spiritual sustainability plan?”

“Yes,” popped into my mind without even thinking. I have a lot more to lose if my spiritual life is not sustainable, if I stray from God. Thoughts about my earthly existence reflected on my mortality.

Spiritual sustainability is a serious matter because it has infinite consequences. Spiritual sustainability needs to be practiced 24/7, every second of every day. God wants to be front and center in my life—but I need to make the conscious choice to answer God’s call.

“What does God expect from me? What does God want me to do with the gifts and responsibilities given to me?” I reflected.

It is easy to get overcome with emotion, with fear, yet I need to remember God is love.

God doesn’t demand anything, rather creating situations when I can react in the spirit of God’s love. This means reacting to challenges with God’s love as the basis for understanding, for patience, for empathy.

The Advent season was start of the new liturgical year—a time of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus in the Christmas season, which is celebrated from December 25 until January 8 (2024) this year.

Christmas is a time to remember and relish the gift of Jesus given by God, an endowment of spiritual sustainability constantly beckoning me. God sent Jesus to save me. God, through the Holy Trinity, knew the plan.

God, nevertheless, is persistent in efforts to provide grace to a sinner like me. From the joy of the birth of Jesus to the dark days of Good Friday, God remained true to His word and offered the gift of spiritual sustainability. There is a future; there is spiritual sustainability.

Are my actions in life creating a spiritual sustainability, affirming a commitment to God over time? Do I accept and appreciate the situations that arise in life? Do I expect everything to be easy, to fuel my ego, my desires, my wants, my wishes?

I thought about how Jesus, born a baby in a stable, grew to adulthood and faced the scorn of many. Yet, Jesus was unwavering in His commitment to God, giving me a template in spiritual sustainability.

There is so much to be done to be spiritually sustainable and it involves Jesus’ help and the help of my sisters and brothers. I need the sacraments. I need to pray.

I pray, “Open my mind, heart and soul to you, Jesus, so my life is spiritually sustainable.”

Care to join me? †

Odermann lives with his wife, Leona, on the family farm in Billings County. They are members of the Church of St. Patrick in Dickinson and assist with Eucharistic celebrations there as well as at the Churches of St. Bernard (Belfield) and St. Mary (Medora).



# QUESTIONS I WAS AFRAID TO ASK

## Q: Do I have to obey my father and my mother like the 10 Commandments say even when I’m an adult?

Fr. Greg Luger

Some might wonder if this commandment applies throughout all of life. This is something that I am sure crosses all our adult minds at one point or another. After all, were we all taught as children that we must always obey our parents and that it is a sin to disobey them (assuming that they haven’t commanded us to sin)?

Certainly, we can all agree that when our mothers told us to do our chores as children that we had a moral obligation to get our chores done, right? But what about when I’m an adult? If a mother or father commands their 10-year-old son to do something, he must do it. But what if that same child is now 40 years old?

Actually, the question as framed in the title of this article is a bit misleading. The fourth commandment doesn’t say “Obey your father and your mother,” it says, “Honor your father and your mother.” The obligations of this commandment are different for adolescent children and adult children.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church is informative on this point: “As long as a child lives at home with his parents, the child should obey his parents in all that they ask of him when it is for his good or that of the family. ‘Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord’” (CCC 2217). It goes on to say, “obedience toward parents ceases with the emancipation of the children; not so respect, which is always owed to them.”

Put in simple terms: as long as a child lives in his parents’ home, he must obey them. When he leaves the home, he no longer owes them obedience. Whether he lives at home or not, he always owes them respect. The Catechism then goes on to say that the fourth commandment reminds adult children of their responsibilities towards their parents namely “material and moral support in old age and in times of illness, loneliness, and distress,” as much as they can (CCC 2218).

On this point, I can’t help but think of the examples of my own parents towards my grandmothers (one was widowed for over 30 years before her death, and the other has been widowed now for over 13 years). My mother was always sure that my grandma was taken care of and visited her often, especially when she moved into assisted living, and was by her bedside when she died (at the very end of her life, she wanted at least one of her children by her side). On the other hand, my dad visits my other grandma frequently as well, makes sure she makes it to doctor’s appointments, and has her stuff in order. She once told me, “I don’t know what I would do without Michael” (my dad). Dad, if you’re reading this, yes, she actually said that.

I bring up the examples of my parents because I think they serve as good models of how we are to honor our father and our mother when we are adults. After all, our parents brought us into this world, and for that we owe them our respect. †

Fr. Greg Luger is pastor at the Churches of St. Jerome in Mohall, St. James in Sherwood and St. John in Lansford. If you have a question you were afraid to ask, now is the time to ask it! Simply email your question to [info@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:info@bismarckdiocese.com) with “Question Afraid to Ask” in the subject line.





## BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

### Introducing the new executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference

#### David Tamisiea

I am honored and grateful to Bishop Kagan and Bishop Folda for choosing me to serve as the next executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference. I am also indebted to my predecessor, Christopher Dodson, who continues to serve as co-director and general counsel for the conference during this transition period, and to my associate, Stacey Pflieger, both of whom have been a tremendous help to me.

My wife, Seana, and I live in Bismarck with our six children. Years ago, a priest friend bluntly told me that I was not called to be a priest, but rather “you should marry that girl (Seana).” It was the best advice I ever received, and Seana and I have now been married for over 20 years. Our family has struck roots in North Dakota, and we love the rock-solid Catholic community here.

I grew up in a Catholic family in Omaha, Nebraska. My father was a professor and dean at Creighton University Dental School for over 50 years, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom until the children were out of the house. My mother later became a successful fundraiser and headed up the Office of Stewardship and Development of the Archdiocese of Omaha for many years. My parents taught us that faith and family are the two most important things in life.

I attended the University of Notre Dame where I double-majored in pre-medicine and psychology

and, for a short time, was a walk-on running back on the varsity football team. After college, I did two years of full-time volunteer work, helping underprivileged youth in a poor area in Arizona, serving the homeless at a Catholic Worker House in Phoenix, and teaching and coaching football at my old high school back in Nebraska. During this period, I also got involved in prolife activity in Omaha by starting a high school prolife club and praying weekly outside an area abortion clinic. Eventually, I went to the University of Texas Law School and then went on to practice law for 10 years in Dallas, Texas.

While in Dallas, I was appointed as a trustee of the St. Thomas More Society, the Catholic lawyers’ guild in Dallas, and became involved in a group called the Young Serrans of Dallas. As a Young Serran, my faith grew tremendously as I got involved in Bible studies, catechism studies, retreats, Eucharistic adoration, street evangelization, apologetics and ecumenical dialogue with non-Catholic Christians.

Ever since I attended World Youth Day in Denver in 1993, Pope John Paul II has been my hero and inspiration. When John Paul invited Catholics to prepare for the Great Jubilee of 2000 by revisiting the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, I responded by reading and studying all the documents of Vatican II and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Not long after, my wife and I made the prayerful decision for me to leave law and pursue graduate studies in Catholic theology at Ave Maria University.

*Tamisiea serves as co-executive director of the N.D. Catholic Conference, the official liaison for the dioceses of Fargo and Bismarck in matters of public policy.*

I obtained a PhD in theology from Ave Maria, with a major in systematic theology, a minor in moral theology and a focus in ecclesiology. After completing my graduate studies, I taught theology at Ave Maria and then later at the University of Mary, where I eventually became dean of the School of Arts & Sciences.

I would describe myself as a faithful, orthodox Catholic, who is committed both to the life issues and to caring for the poor and marginalized. I love the

Church and want others to love the Church too. I am passionate about the Church’s teachings and have a deep desire to share these teachings with others. Serving as executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference is in many ways a dream job for me because it calls upon me to utilize my skills, training, experience and interests, all in service to Christ and His Church. I eagerly look forward to advocating for the Church in North Dakota for years to come. †



Servant of God  
*Michelle Christine*  
**DUPPONG**

Jan 25, 1984 – Dec 25, 2015

A laywoman who dedicated her life to evangelization and showed Jesus to others while suffering with cancer

Jesus, I praise and thank You for the life of Your servant Michelle Duppong. In her life and suffering, she joined You in Your thirst for souls and embraced the cross offered to her. Following her example, I ask for the special grace of... and, if it brings You greater glory, that she be honored by Your Church. Jesus, I ask this in Your Holy Name. Amen.

With ecclesiastical approval of Bishop David D. Kagan  
Diocese of Bismarck, North Dakota

Please report any special favors granted to  
duppongcause@bismarckdiocese.com

## NEWS BRIEFS

### SAFE ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM IN FULL COMPLIANCE

The Bismarck Diocese is required to undergo audits to ensure compliance with the articles of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. Based on the results of the recently performed on-site audit, Bishop David Kagan is pleased to announce that, for the audit period of July 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023, the diocese was found to be in full compliance with the requirements in the Charter.

### POST-ABORTION SUPPORT

If you or someone you know has experienced an abortion either recently or in the past and are dealing with the aftereffects, contact the staff at Dakota Hope Clinic. This life-affirming clinic based in Minot offers a post-abortion support program called “Discover Peace.” This support program is offered in a small group setting, giving individuals the chance to share and heal, surrounded by those who have been in similar situations. A new Discover Peace support group is being offered soon. The course will run Monday nights from 6 to 7:30 p.m. For more information, including location, go to [dakotahope.org](http://dakotahope.org) and click the post-abortion support tab under the free services tab to fill out a confidential form and the program facilitator will contact you.



**PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN**

The Bismarck Diocese is firmly committed to the health and protection of our children, young people and vulnerable adults. With the hope of healing the pain and suffering from sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, we encourage anyone who has suffered from this abuse to please come forward and let us know. To report allegations of sexual abuse, please contact: Dale Eberle, Chancellor, Bismarck Diocese, PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575. Phone: 701-223-1347 or 1-877-405-7435. Email the victim assistance coordinator, Joyce McDowall, at [victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com).

**CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Catholic Church must be exemplary: Clergy, staff, whether diocesan or parish, and volunteers are held accountable for their behavior. To enable the highest level of accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous definition of appropriate behavior. To this end, this Code of Conduct is defined for the Bismarck Diocese and it provides a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards for all personnel. View the Code of Conduct at [www.bismarckdiocese.com](http://www.bismarckdiocese.com).



*Staff photo*

## *New priests' workshop*

The new priests' workshop (NPW) met Nov. 19-22 under the direction of Msgr. Patrick Schumacher, Director of Continuing Education for Clergy. Following daily Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit with Bishop Kagan, presenters at the Bismarck Radisson included Fr. Chris Kadrmas, Fr. Doug Krebs, Msgr. Gene Lindemann, Msgr. Stephen Rossetti, as well as Bishop Kagan and Msgr. Schumacher. The NPW meets twice annually, for the first five years of a new priest's service in the Bismarck Diocese.