



# Faithful Footsteps

**Walking Together in Faith on a Lifelong Journey**

## Generational Grace: Young Converts Inspiring Whole Families

### Lighting the Way: Savanna Garver's Courageous Journey into the Catholic Church

When Savanna Garver walked through the doors of St. Mary's Academy (SMA) in the fall of 2022 as an 8th grader, she was guarded, uncertain, and—by her own words—deeply skeptical. She didn't know a single person, and she had no intention of letting SMA “change her.” But today, barely three years later, Savanna is a Confirmed Catholic, a youth ministry leader, and a bold witness for her faith.

Savanna's spiritual roots began in the Lutheran tradition, baptized and raised in a home with Christian values. Her family includes her parents, Kellie and Chris, and two younger brothers, Gabe and Vincent. But despite these roots, middle school years were marked by emotional and spiritual struggle.

“I was miserable,” she recalls. “I went to youth group at Charity Lutheran—I saw little moments of God but wasn't living it out.” Her experiences with friends were painful and confusing, including peer pressure to question her identity. Seeking healing, Savanna entered therapy and eventually transferred to SMA in 8th grade.

It was at SMA where her heart began to soften—especially after taking a religion class with Fr. Paul Gardner. “It changed my life,” she says. “It was a class I looked forward to... it was more than a book. We went to Adoration during class. That was the turning point.” That moment eventually led her to ask Fr. Gardner to be her Confirmation sponsor.

Savanna was received into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil on April 8, 2023—a night she remembers vividly. “I remember the first time I realized I wanted to be Catholic. Fr. Gardner gave me a rosary. I asked my mom to pray with me when I got home. I associated Mary with my own mom.” Her mom was supportive, even though not Catholic herself. Her extended family background is diverse—some Protestant, some Catholic, some disconnected from church. Still, many showed up for her Easter Vigil, including her grandmother, who had previously expressed anti-Catholic views. “She stayed the whole time—didn't even go out to have a cigarette,” Savanna says with a smile.

Her faith has continued to blossom. She's now actively involved in Corpus Christi Youth Group, has attended SEARCH retreats twice, helps lead “Summit” events for middle schoolers, and will be heading to the Steubenville Youth Conference in Denver this summer.

She speaks fondly of friends who have helped her grow closer to God, especially Anna, a fellow student. “She is an inspiration to me... I see God in her.”

Even her own family is being touched by her transformation. Her dad, Chris, recently discovered he had never been baptized and is now taking classes. “He listens to the audio recordings from the OCIA class,” Savanna laughs. “I make sure he does!” Savanna doesn't shy away from challenges to her faith. Once pro-choice, she now speaks passionately in defense of life. “Heck no!” she says when asked if she still holds her former views. In fact, she admits to reading anti-Catholic posts online just to “destroy their comments with Catholic stuff.”

Her little brother Vincent is also an inspiration. “If I'm having a bad day, he'll say, ‘You just need to pray’ or share Bible verses with me. He even dressed as Jesus for hero day!”

Looking back, it's clear that what began as a reluctant transfer to a new school turned into a life-altering encounter with Christ.

As for her message to others? Savanna says it best: “I told my mom, ‘How can you not have time for God, when He created time?’”

Savanna's story is a beautiful reminder that God meets us where we are—but He doesn't leave us there. He leads us home.



# Walking Together in Faith to these

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Emmaus Youth Retreat

Minot: Sunday, November 16, 2025, Bishop Ryan High School

Dickinson: Sunday, February 22, 2026, Trinity High School

Bismarck/Mandan: Sunday, March 22, 2026, St. Mary's Central

All retreats run from 12:30 - 6:00 pm local time  
with 5:00 pm Mass included

#### 2025-26 SEARCH WEEKENDS

Don't wait until the last minute, the deadline to register is 2 weeks before.

- ☐ NOV 14-16, 2025
- ☐ JAN 16-18, 2026
- ☐ MAR 6-8, 2026
- ☐ APR 17-19, 2026

**WEEKEND COST: \$75<sup>00</sup>**

PARTIAL SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE. NO ONE WILL BE TURNED AWAY BASED ON FINANCIAL NEED.

**REGISTER ONLINE**  
SearchinMedora.com



A PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN MUST BE PRESENT WHEN REGISTERING ONLINE IF UNDER 18.

## ALL-CITY youth event

sponsored by  
Bismarck/Mandan Catholic Youth Ministry

**SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2025**  
5:00-8:00 PM  
**ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL GYM**  
**MANDAN, ND**

Join us for a Christian concert, Praise and Worship, Adoration of Jesus, Reconciliation, games and pizza!

**OPEN TO ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**  
please RSVP to [abitz@sjsmandan.org](mailto:abitz@sjsmandan.org) by 11/25



Concert by Hip Hop Artist Austin Bitz



Keynotes by Fr. Justin Waltz and Fr. Greg Luger



Worship music by Jordan Griffin

The ROCK is for  
**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ONLY.**

If you are bringing a large group, please

RSVP to Fr. Magnuson at 223-4113

## THE ROCK

**OCT 8 | NOV 19 | APR 8**

**St. Mary's Central High School**  
Doors Open at 6:30 pm  
Event Starts at 7:00 pm

"A great flame of faith and love must once again spread across the world, lighting the way for all people of good will." -Pope Leo XIV

"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on ROCK. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on ROCK." -Matthew 7:24-25

Sponsored by the Office of the Chaplain of St. Mary's Central High School.

Do you have a past event you would like to highlight or an upcoming event you would like to share? Email Diane at [dhuck@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:dhuck@bismarckdiocese.com) with all the information, photos, quotations and more to be including in the upcoming issues of Faithful Footsteps.

# STOP SHAMING PARENTS: WHY THE CHURCH NEEDS TO SHOW UP IN THEIR WORLD

Christopher Wesley    Sept 15, 2025    <https://blog.marathonyouthministry.com/>

One of the most common frustrations I hear from priests and parish leaders is this: *“Kids show up for sacramental prep and don’t even know the Our Father or the Hail Mary!”* The exasperation is real, but too often what comes next is shaming parents. We make general statements about their failures, we complain about their lack of effort, and we act shocked that the “basics” aren’t covered at home. **Here’s the thing—when we shame parents, we don’t bring them closer. We drive them away.** And that’s a problem because we believe, as Catholics, that the home is the primary place where faith is passed on. **If parents feel judged or unwelcome, then the very mission of the Church suffers.** The stakes aren’t small: it’s not just about kids knowing their prayers, it’s about families staying connected to Christ and the community.

If parents aren’t succeeding in passing on the faith, what’s really going on? Is it laziness? Or is it that we as the Church haven’t done a good job of walking with them and showing them what it actually looks like?

A few years ago, my son had a middle school math teacher who found out that my son played travel baseball. He asked me when his next game was. I figured it was just polite conversation, but then he actually showed up. On a Saturday. To watch a middle school kid play baseball. During the game, I thanked him for coming, and he said something that floored me: *“I get it. I’m a parent. I know what it means when others show up to support my kids. It tells me I’m not alone because someone else cares.”*

That teacher got it. He wasn’t responsible for my son’s faith, but he understood the power of presence. He knew that showing up to something that mattered to us created trust. That’s the kind of incarnational presence the Church needs to model with parents. If we want to know how to help parents, **we have to enter into their world and walk with them.**

So how do we start shifting from shame to presence?

- **Watch your language.** Instead of, “Parents don’t even teach their kids to pray,” try asking, “What can we do to help parents feel confident praying with their kids?”
- **Be present outside parish walls.** Show up at community events, sports games, block parties, or even the school pickup line. Parents don’t just need us in the pews—they need us in their world
- **Offer small wins.** Equip parents with one or two practical tools—like a bedtime prayer or a mealtime blessing—instead of overwhelming them with lofty theology.

Parents aren’t perfect. None of us are. But before we point fingers or pile on shame, let’s remember that Christ didn’t sit in the temple waiting for people to show up—He went to the well, He went to the sick, He went to the margins.

This week, think about a parent who has given you a hard time and ask yourself:

“What’s one way I can walk with them today?”

## New CGS Trainings Already in Motion for 2026

Plans are underway for a Level 1 training to start July 13-18, 2026 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit! Registration will be open soon on the diocesan website. Also working on the details for a Level 2 and Level 3 training for July 2027-2028! CGS is growing and I am so excited to support it from the diocesan level!

[Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Bismarck Diocese](#) | [Bismarck, ND](#) | [Bismarck Diocese](#) | [Bismarck, ND](#)



# LOOK WHO'S WALKIN'

Celebrating fun and educational events in our Diocese that are spreading the Love of Jesus!



Corpus Christi Parish in Bismarck hosted Friday evening Emmaus Young Adult bonfire and Sunday SNAC (Sunday Night After Church) Youth Group "Grill the Priest" event. Both events were held at the Rectory with Msgr. Schumacher, Fr. Dinoy Rebera and Fr. John Paul Gardner.



**Happy Fall y'all**



Holy Rosary Stanley  
17h · 🌐

🐾🙏 Yesterday after CCD classes, Father Jason shared a special blessing with some of our parish family's furry (and feathered!) friends. The Pet Blessing was a beautiful reminder of God's love for all creation and the joy our pets bring into our lives. ❤️🐶🐱🐦🐙

Thank you to everyone who brought their pets to be blessed — what a fun and faith-filled way to celebrate the gift of God's creatures! 🌿🌟



St. Joseph's Parish - Williston, ND  
1h · 🌐

The UMary Center at WSC enjoyed our 24th successful Proverbs Pub! We had young adults who were WSC students, UMary Students, as well as non-students eating our Pub Pizza! Dcn. Aaron Schmit gave his Wisdom Testimony as a Financial Advisor!

