



Dakota Catholic Action

Vol. 85 No. 1 **JANUARY 2026**



**MARY, HOLY MOTHER OF GOD,
PRAY FOR US!**



Corazon

Have you lost hope in your marriage? You are not alone!

- Is your marriage in crisis?
- Do you feel like you want to give up on your marriage?
- Are you and your spouse struggling to communicate?
- Is your marriage falling apart?
- Have you lost sight of why you fell in love with your spouse in the first place?
- Does your marriage feel cold and distant?
- Do you feel alone, helpless or frustrated with your spouse?
- Are you separated or divorced but want to try again?

Corazon (Spanish for heart) helps couples

- Understand more fully the Sacrament of Marriage
- Grow together in a marriage founded on God
- Communicate more clearly
- Forgive
- Soften hardened hearts
- Pray together
- Explore how family of origin experiences influence your marriage
- Love unconditionally and courageously

Upcoming weekends:

April 24-26, 2026

Sept. 25-27, 2026

The weekend runs from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon.

Testimonials:

"We came into the weekend not knowing whether our marriage would survive and left revitalized with hope that it can be more beautiful than I even imagined."

- Corazon Attendee

"Corazon was a very effective tool as it provided us with much needed time away from the craziness of daily life. It served as a great refresher and reminder that God should be the center of our relationship. If we put Him first, the rest will fall into place. We had to be willing to show up, actively listen and do the work while everything else was taken care of by the team."

- Corazon Attendee

For questions or to get more information, contact Amanda at the Bismarck Diocese, 701-204-7205.
Register at bismarckdiocese.com/corazon

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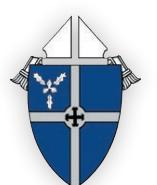
Inspiring journey through adversity to surrender to God's plan



ON THE COVER: This statue of Mary holding a young Jesus is in the Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck.



PAGE 12: Sister Lucia Rose professed simple vows with the Servants of the Children of Light.



Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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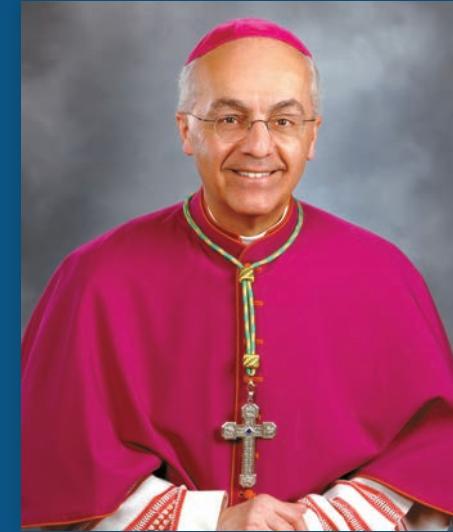
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FROM THE BISHOP

*Focus on a renewed fidelity
and obedience to the Lord*

Bishop David D. Kagan

A most holy and happy new year to all! As we move to the year 2026, we do so in the best possible way. We begin a new calendar year by celebrating the beautiful Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God. There is no other person better to accompany us throughout this coming year than the Most Blessed Mother of God.

The Holy Mass for this solemnity should inspire and invigorate our faith, hope and charity so that we can make this a year of the same fidelity to accepting and doing God's will which Our Blessed Lady lived throughout Her entire life. What the holy season of Advent should have taught us is that unconditional fidelity to the Lord and His Church is what makes us saints, and is what is most pleasing to the Lord. This is, in a word, Our Blessed Mother.

As we publish this first issue for the year you will note a special article which will be printed in three parts through the March edition of the *Dakota Catholic Action*. It is one of several essays compiled in a book entitled "Out of the Shadows into the Truth," published by the University of Mary Press with the express permission of Monsignor James P. Shea, President of the University of Mary. Monsignor had asked that I read the draft text to grant the Church's "nihil obstat" and imprimatur. I found this article, as all the others, excellent reading for any Catholic and I urge you to read the one we

publish here and, if you are interested, you may obtain a copy from the University of Mary bookstore.

The title of this three-part article is "Traditionalist, Progressive: Sorting Out the Catholic Tradition." I found it to be a timely corrective for all Catholics. It is an excellent explanation of that essential element of our Catholic faith and life which is the true Tradition of the Church. It distinguishes the Apostolic Tradition from other traditions which have legitimately grown up within the Church but which are certainly not normative for Catholics of every age as is the Apostolic Tradition established by Jesus Christ on the confession of Peter's faith and that of the other Apostles for whom he and his successors is the head. Finally, it distinguishes between the Apostolic Tradition and the static practices of some groups who claim to be Catholic but are not faithful to the Apostolic Tradition, whether by their liturgical practices or their different and selective interpretations of the Church's Magisterium.

In the end, as we are taught by Our Blessed Lady, the Mother of God, it is unconditional fidelity to God and His Church that keeps us united to Him in this world and prepares us for that eternal communion with Him and all the saints in heaven. May this new year be one of renewed and strengthened fidelity and obedience to the Lord! †

BISHOP IN ACTION



Photo by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Bishop Kagan handed Sr. Lucia Rose the black professed veil during the simple vow ceremony for the Servants of the Children of Light. The Mass was held at St. Joseph's in Mandan on Nov. 21.



Holy Father's Prayer Intentions for January

FOR PRAYER WITH THE WORD OF GOD

Let us pray that praying with the Word of God be nourishment for our lives and source of hope in our communities, help us build a more fraternal and missionary Church.

BISHOP'S SCHEDULE

JANUARY 2026

Jan. 1	Mass for the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 8 a.m.
Jan. 9	Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Jan. 13	Catholic Charities Meeting, 12 p.m.
Jan. 15	Blessing of Bella Health and Wellness, Bismarck, 10:30 a.m.
Jan. 18	Confirmation at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
Jan. 19	Send-off Mass for March for Life Pilgrimage, Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Jan. 21	Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota Annual Member Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, 9:30 a.m.
Jan. 26	Mass for Catholic Schools Week, St. Mary's Academy, Bismarck, 8:30 a.m.
Jan. 27	Mass for Catholic Schools Week, Church of Queen of Peace, Dickinson, 9:30 a.m. MT
Jan. 29	Mass for Catholic Schools Week, Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Jan. 30	Mass for Catholic Schools Week, Bishop Ryan School, Minot, 10:30 a.m.

SERVICE AWARD

Father Phillips recognized for 30 years of service as chaplain for the North Dakota Highway Patrol

Sonia Mullally
DCA Editor

Father Kenneth Phillips was awarded the Colonel's Award for Excellence by the North Dakota Highway Patrol. The award recognized father's 30 years of service to the state agency.

The award was presented to Fr. Phillips at his parish, Church of St. Therese, the Little Flower in Minot by Lieutenant Matt Johnson of the N.D. Highway Patrol on Oct. 7. The award plaque message reads: "On behalf of the North Dakota Highway Patrol, I would like to congratulate you for being nominated and selected to receive the Colonel's Award for Excellence. The engraving symbolizes the American bald eagle surrounded by the North Dakota Badlands, the Little Missouri River and the profile of the Sioux warrior, Red Tomahawk. Each is original and unique to the state of North Dakota. This award is presented to North Dakota state employees and to private citizens as a token of the Colonel's appreciation for efforts and activities that benefit the North Dakota Highway Patrol and the state of North Dakota."

North Dakota Highway Patrol Sergeant Jenna Clawson Huibregtse nominated Fr. Phillips for this award. In her submission letter, she wrote, "I am nominating Father Kenneth Phillips for the Colonel's Award for Excellence for his 30 years of service to the North Dakota Highway Patrol (NDHP) as a department Chaplain. Father Phillips has served as a NDHP Chaplain since the program's inception in 1994.

"In those thirty years, Father Phillips has served the agency and citizens of our state with distinction and compassion. He provided emotional, moral, and spiritual support to the NDHP members and

numerous crash victim family members over the years. He has given guidance to officers and ride-alongs and taken the time to get to know troopers personally and be available for a listening ear and compassionate advice whenever needed."

Father Phillips said his primary duties as chaplain was to be readily available to troopers and their families, offering spiritual guidance, counseling and personal support in their work.

"Because of the demanding shift schedules and the often dangerous or traumatic situations they face, law enforcement personnel experience significant stress that can affect both their personal and family lives," Fr. Phillips said. "For most state troopers, the patrol vehicle serves as their office, and it was my responsibility to join them on ride-alongs. As trust developed over time, many troopers sought advice and counsel on personal, professional and family matters. Some Catholic troopers even requested the sacrament of confession during these ride-alongs. When needed, I also assisted at crash scenes by comforting those affected and supported troopers in delivering fatality notifications to families."

In the nomination letter, Sergeant Clawson Huibregtse specifically noted the value of Fr. Phillips' compassion and understanding when delivering life changing information to family members while making these situations easier for troopers and supporting them during these emotional events.

She went on to affirm Fr. Phillips' kindness, empathy, and compassion for the troopers as well as toward members of the public



Photo courtesy of N.D. Highway Patrol: Lieutenant Matt Johnson of the N.D. Highway Patrol presented the Colonel's Award for Excellence to Fr. Ken Phillips at his parish, Church of St. Therese, the Little Flower in Minot, on Oct. 7.

"As a department chaplain, Father Phillips has been readily available for troopers and their families for services such as spiritual guidance, counseling, and being available for them on a personal level to support their emotional needs. Over the years, he has participated in training to enhance the support provided to troopers and their families," Sergeant Clawson Huibregtse wrote.

As one might expect, the jobs of both a priest and a highway patrol officer are emotionally demanding and sometimes take a toll on the spiritual wellbeing of even the most faithful soul.

When asked how he managed his own emotional and spiritual wellbeing while dealing with stressful or emotionally taxing situations, Fr. Phillips explained, "The grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders, together with seeking the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit in difficult moments, has been foundational in sustaining me. A consistent prayer life, the support of close friends and a healthy sense of humor have also been invaluable in stressful situations."

That sense of humor came in handy on more than one occasion over the past 30 years of service to the N.D. Highway Patrol.

"I most enjoyed getting to know the troopers and serving as God's instrument of peace and light for those who sought counsel," Father Phillips noted. "There were also moments of excitement—the adrenaline rush of pursuing a speeding vehicle or responding to an emergency, the roar of the police interceptor engine and the wind whipping past us at speeds exceeding 100 mph. There were humorous occasions as well, such as when parishioners were pulled over for speeding. The trooper would return their license and registration along with my greetings!"

"In summary, I cherished my 30 years as an NDHP chaplain. Had I not been called to the priesthood, I would have pursued a career as a state trooper. I'm pretty certain my parishioners prefer receiving my priestly blessings over speeding citations!"

Essay aims at sorting out the Catholic Tradition

The following is from “Traditionalist, Progressive: Sorting Out the Catholic Tradition,” part 25 of 29, reprinted by permission from the University of Mary’s new book, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Truth: Essays for Formation in an Apostolic Age*. The book is available for sale at www.bookstore.umaryst.edu. This portion below is part one of three from this portion of the book. Parts two and three will be published in subsequent issues of the *Dakota Catholic Action*.

“Jesus said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’” (Mt 13:52)

“Salvation comes, not from the destruction of tradition (progressivism) or the archaeological neutralization of tradition (traditionalism), but only when the Church, the bearer of tradition, penetrates to its true center, to the life at the heart of tradition, to that community with God, the father of Jesus Christ, that is revealed only through faith and prayer. Only when this occurs can there be that true progress that leads to the goal of history; to the God-man who is humanity’s humanization.” (Pope Benedict XVI)

During the last many decades, Catholic life has been dominated by the question of tradition: what it is, whether and how it is important, and how it should take its place in the life of faith. This has not just been an occupation of academic theologians; questions concerning Catholic tradition have increasingly been taken up in popular books and talk shows, on the

internet and in podcasts, and these conversations involve strongly held arguments and opinions that touch our politics, our parishes, our schools, and our own attempts to live a faithful and coherent Christian life. This chapter is meant as a brief aid toward gaining a Catholic mind on this important and vexed question of Catholic tradition.

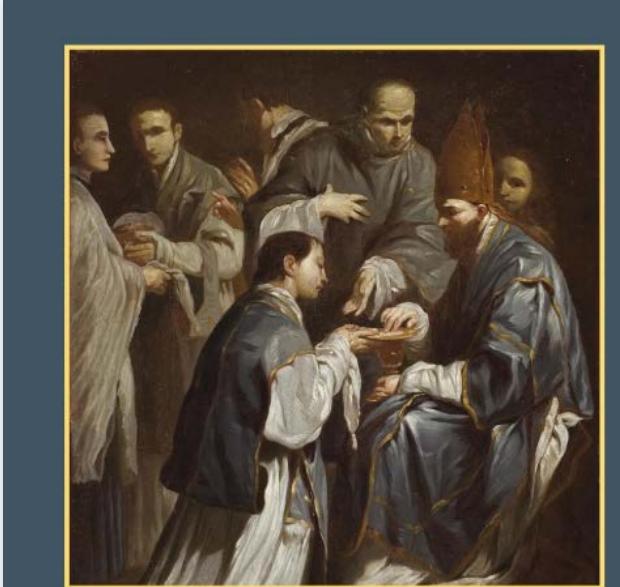
1. Tradition in Christian understanding

A reference to Christian tradition comes up in one of the earliest books of the New Testament. During his second missionary journey, Saint Paul visited the Macedonian city of Thessalonica. His preaching had a significant effect and persuaded many Jews and Gentiles to embrace the new faith. Paul’s time in the city was brief. His success stirred up violent opposition, and after only a few weeks he and Silas had to slip away by night. Paul then wrote two letters to the Thessalonians to encourage them in their newfound faith. The second of those letters included this exhortation: “*So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter*” (2 Thess 2:15).

A few years later Paul wrote something similar to another recently established Church in Corinth: “*I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you*” (1 Cor 11:2). We usually connect the idea of tradition with great age: we call something traditional because it has been around for a long time. Yet here Paul is speaking of traditions that originated in the mission of Christ just a few decades previously and that were handed on to newly converted Christians only a few months before.

The etymology of the word “tradition” gives a clue to Saint Paul’s meaning. Tradition comes from the Latin word *tradere* (in the original Greek the word is *paradosis*) meaning “to hand on, to deliver, or to entrust.” Paul had been entrusted by Christ with the message of the Gospel. His task as a missionary was to “hand on” that message, to entrust it to others. Tradition was thus for Saint Paul a shorthand way of referring to the Gospel and all its demands. Another pair of passages in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians underlines this meaning. He writes: “*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’*” (1 Cor 11:23-24). He writes further on: “*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3-4). In both of these passages dealing with essential Christian beliefs, Paul speaks of first receiving and then delivering the truth in question. The word translated as “delivered” is the verb form of the Greek word *paradosis*, or “tradition.”

This brief foray into scriptural terminology makes clear that the essence of tradition, as the word is used by Saint Paul, is intrinsically tied to the notion of truth. Tradition for Paul meant the truth of the Gospel as first taught by Christ, handed on to the Apostles, and delivered to others as the foundation of the Church and the basis of the Christian faith. In this sense, tradition refers to what has been revealed by God as *perennially true*, what Paul elsewhere called the *deposit of faith*. It has now been two thousand years since the Gospel was first preached and handed on by the Apostles, so the Christian tradition now has the flavor of something long-standing. But Christians value the traditions of the Gospel not mainly because they have been around for a long time, but because they have been revealed by God and are always true



Out of the SHADOWS into the TRUTH

Essays for Formation in an Apostolic Age

UNIVERSITY OF MARY

and ever fresh. They were as “traditional” in the first century as they are in the twenty-first.

2. Tradition and traditions

The word “tradition” has other related meanings that go beyond the scriptural use of the term. Many things of different kinds have been “handed on” to us by previous generations. Some are evidently more important than others. How are we to evaluate their relative significance? We might note three broad categories of tradition that have been recognized by Christians over the centuries: (1) the traditions that were handed on from the Apostles, usually called simply “Tradition with a capital T” or the “Apostolic Tradition;” (2) various expressions of Christian faith and life that have arisen and have been handed on by Christians in different times and places and are often called “ecclesial traditions;” and (3) cultural practices of all kinds that are passed on from generation to generation.

The Catholic Catechism explains the difference between the first two types of tradition just noted, supplying a distinction that is itself part of Catholic tradition: The Tradition here in question [sacred Tradition] comes from the apostles and hands on what they received from Jesus' teaching and example and what they learned from the Holy Spirit ... Tradition is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical, or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time. These are the particular forms, adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned under the guidance of the Church's magisterium. (CCC 83)

The two types of Christian tradition referred to in the Catechism are closely related. Particular traditions are not entirely separate from the Apostolic Tradition; they are expressions of it, specific incarnations of the truths of the faith. Christian faith and doctrine are not just abstract ideas; they gather up all the elements of life and thought and clothe themselves in the languages and customs of local cultures. Such particular ecclesial traditions are not only of great value, they are necessary if Christ's truth is to come fully alive. Yet they need to be held up steadily to the light of the Apostolic Tradition such that they maintain their purity and their usefulness. The truth, though unchanging in itself, needs constant re-articulation and re-translation among the different and often rapidly changing human societies within which it takes root. Words and customs often change their meaning over time. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, the Church "retains, modifies, or even abandons" such local traditions such that the Tradition can be presented and handed on anew in all its force and purity to every generation.

A third kind of tradition can be noted: namely the whole pattern of living and thinking that every society hands on to its younger members. Customs

of language, education, governance and social ordering, economic practices, an entire way of life down to detailed matters of food and dress, all fall under this category. Some traditions of this kind are of great value, expressing and incarnating important human truths and reflecting something of God's original intentions in humanity's creation. Many are of a morally neutral character, like a particular language or a local cuisine. Some are unhealthy or morally evil, the result of fallen humanity's habitual corruption.

The Church deals with these three kinds of tradition differently. As to the first, the Apostolic Tradition, the substance of divine revelation itself, the Church carefully protects and proclaims it and lets nothing obscure or replace it. Regarding the second, specific ecclesial traditions, the Church honors them and values them, guiding, nurturing, and adjusting their practice so that they can continue to be effective means of incarnating the truths of the Deposit of Faith. In dealing with the third type, human traditions of all kinds, the Church sifts and sorts them, supporting and encouraging what is valuable and working to mitigate or eliminate what is harmful or evil. The careful handling of these different kinds of traditions has given the Church a remarkable quality of being both changeless and culturally adaptive. Founded on the perennial truths revealed by Christ, the Church is an immovable rock amid a world of constant change. Attentive to the task of clothing the truth in the changing languages and cultures of humanity, the Church puts down roots in human soils of all kinds, affirming and transforming those cultures in the process. As a result, the Church has been a potent agent of both change and continuity in the various cultures it has encountered and inhabited. 

See next month's issue of the Dakota Catholic Action for part two of this section of the book, "Out of the Shadows, Into the Truth: Essays for Formation in an Apostolic Age."

UPCOMING EVENTS



Right to Life march Jan. 18

All are invited to the Bismarck-Mandan Right to Life Chapter's annual March for Life on the capitol building steps in Bismarck on Sunday, Jan. 18 at 2 p.m. This event is held annually on the Sunday closest to the anniversary of the Roe. v. Wade court decision in 1973 that ruled on the constitutional right to abortion in the U.S. Even though that law was overturned in 2022, it's important to remember that abortion remains legal in more than 20 states. A reception will follow the event at Zion Lutheran Church at 413 East Ave. D. Use the south door. For more information, call Virginia at 701-471-0725.



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. Weekends for the 2025-26 season are: Jan. 16-18; Mar. 6-8 and Apr. 17-19. Find more information at bismarckdiocese.com/search1.



Parish dinner in Beach Feb. 1

All are invited to the annual parish dinner at St. John the Baptist in Beach on Sunday, Feb. 1 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The menu includes turkey, dressing and all the trimmings. A freewill offering will be taken.



Men's Lenten retreat Feb. 28

A men's Lenten retreat will be held at the Church of Saint Anne in Bismarck on Saturday, Feb. 28 beginning with Mass at 8 a.m. Featured speakers are Father Kregg Hochhalter, 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 encouraged for meal planning. Please register online at www.wesharegiving.org/app/giving/WeShare-20001540?tab=home or by sending a check payable to Saint Anne's Church to 1321 Braman Ave., Bismarck, ND 58501 and write "A Simple Lenten Retreat for Men" in the memo. Contact the Saint Anne's Parish office at 223-1549 with any questions.



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 March 7-8 in Edina, Minn, March 20-22 in Valley City, N.D. and April 18-19 in Brainerd, Minn. Early registration is highly recommended. For more information visit ndwwme.org or contact Rob and Angie at Applications@ndwwme.org or 701-347-1998.



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 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.



Patriotic rosary at Spirit of Life

Come in prayer to heal our nation. A patriotic rosary dedicates one Hail Mary in a traditional Catholic rosary to each state of the United States and asks God's protection and guidance for our nation. This will be said the first and third Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. at Spirit of Life in Mandan. Please join as we come together and unite to strengthen our nation.

Sister Lucia Rose professed simple vows with the Servants of the Children of Light

On Nov. 21, the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple, Sr. Lucia Rose Franz professed simple vows for three years with the Servants of the Children of Light, a public association of the Christian faithful for women in our diocese. The ceremony was held at the Church of St. Joseph in Mandan.

Sister Lucia Rose recalled the words of Bishop Kagan during the homily of the Mass when he said that a vocation is not only for the individual sister but for the entire Church. Indeed, as witnessed during this profession of simple vows, the sister vows to God the three evangelical councils of poverty, chastity and obedience, thus constituting herself as an eschatological sign, a sign of the life to come in heaven. Unique to the Servants of the Children of Light is the fourth vow to honor Christ in the child. From here, the charism is safeguarded as they serve Christ in the child in Catholic Montessori schools. A testament to the charism were the numerous children present at the Mass of profession.

Sr. Lucia Rose reflected, "In living the vows, one is giving glory to God through her fidelity to that which was professed." The sister's very actions now become a living testament to the love of God made manifest in the world.

During this time, sister will continue to serve the children at Christ the King Catholic Montessori School in Mandan, as well as continue her formation in religious life before final vows.†



Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Bishop Kagan with Mother Chiara Thérèse (left) and Sr. Lucia Rose of the Servants of the Children of Light.

"In living the vows, one is giving glory to God through her fidelity to that which was professed."

— Sr. Lucia Rose



Sister Lucia Rose signed her vow chart on the altar after professing simple vows.



Mother Chiara Thérèse switched Sr. Lucia Rose's white novice veil for the black professed veil.



Sister Lucia Rose greeted people after Mass.

CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

North Dakota's longest married couple honored in Worldwide Marriage Encounter Contest

Diane Huck
Office of Catechesis and Youth

Each year from June through September, Worldwide Marriage Encounter (WWME) hosts its Longest Married Couple State Contest—an annual celebration that highlights enduring love stories across the nation. This year, North Dakota's longest married couple (of those submitted) honorees are Ralph and Irene Kautzman of Center, N.D., devoted members of Christ the King Parish in Mandan. They were nominated by their nephew, Dave Schaff of Dickinson, who proudly shared their remarkable 75-year journey together.

A love story that began young

Ralph and Irene first met when she was just 15 and he was 18. After two years of courting, they married at ages 17 and 20. Because Irene was underage, her parents had to come to the courthouse to sign permission for the young couple to wed. Their wedding took place on Oct. 26, 1949, at Saint Vincent's Country Church near Crown Butte.

Their wedding day was full of memorable moments—some joyful, some chaotic and some downright unexpected. After their morning ceremony, the couple enjoyed a soup lunch before heading to Bismarck for wedding photos. An evening meal in New Salem followed, along with hopes of attending their wedding dance. But getting there proved difficult: Irene's brother borrowed Ralph's car to get cows and got stuck in a straw pile, leaving the newlyweds anxiously waiting for the vehicle to return.

Perhaps the most shocking moment of the day was when Irene's cousin—after having too much to drink—took their wedding cake outside and threw it, jealous of Ralph.



Submitted photos: Ralph and Irene Kautzman on their wedding day, Oct. 26, 1949.

Despite these mishaps, the young couple began their life together with resilience and humor—traits that would define their decades of marriage.

Building a life side by side

Ralph and Irene have lived on the same farm since the beginning of their marriage. Their first home was a one-

room house without electricity or running water. After one year, Ralph's father built them a new home, and 50 years ago the family added on a kitchen. The current home, now 76 years old, remains a cherished part of their story.

Much of their married life was spent milking cows and selling cream to Schultz's Creamery. Whether working in the fields or managing day-to-day chores, the Kautzmans found companionship in doing everything together.

Their greatest challenge came when they took in three nieces after the death of Irene's brother. They were already raising two daughters of their own. The Center school teachers struggled to teach the girls and sent them home instead. "I'm not a teacher," Irene remembers saying, but they persevered—just as they always had.

Even in recent years, they have weathered hardships. Two years ago, Irene suffered a serious fall in which she broke her back. Yet today, at almost 94 years old (she is the 12th of 13 children), she continues to heal and thrive. Ralph, now 96, still stands faithfully by her side.

Advice for a long marriage

When asked their secret, the Kautzmans' answer is simple, "Do everything together—even if it's picking rocks in the field for a whole month and you hate it, do it together."

They also recommend three keys to their success: going to dances together, getting up for church together and milking cows together.

Their long, shared journey is a testament to the power of unity, faith and perseverance.

Worldwide Celebration of Marriage

Worldwide Marriage Encounter—the original faith-based marriage enrichment program in the U.S.—has been offering enriching experiences for over 55 years. Programs are available in multiple languages, and even priests and religious can participate to deepen their sacramental relationships. In recent years, WWME has expanded to include online virtual experiences to meet couples where they are.



Ralph and Irene Kautzman (seated) of Center, N.D. were honored with a certificate from the Worldwide Marriage Encounter Longest Married Couple State Contest. The award was presented by Kennen and Diane Huck of Bismarck representing Worldwide Marriage Encounter.

The Longest Married Couple Project began in 2011 to celebrate the beauty of lifelong commitment. This year, WWME received 75 nominations from 28 states, with three from North Dakota. Nationally, the longest married couple for 2025 is Matthew and Jeanette Thomason of Marietta, Georgia—ages 103 and 102—celebrating 80 years of marriage.

WWME operates in nearly 100 countries, making it the world's largest pro-marriage movement. Its mission is to help couples—and priests—not just improve their relationships but thrive together.

Learn more or nominate a couple

Nominations for the Longest Married Couple Project are accepted year-round at wwme.org. To learn more about WWME or to apply for an upcoming marriage enrichment experience, visit wwme.org. For questions about the Longest Married Couple Project, contact Paul & Robin Ring, Coordinators at 321-633-1531. †

St. Mary Sisters building the heart of a teaching mission in Bismarck

Patti Armstrong
DCA Writer

Dinner is extra when Mother Mary Joseph, superior, and two religious sisters of the St. Mary Sisters in Bismarck, eat at the University of Mary's dining center once a week.

The meal is secondary, according to mother, who explained that eating at the cafeteria allows them to be present to young women who might be interested in a vocation. On Thursdays, after attending vespers and going for supper, many young women have questions and stories to share, drawn in by these women in habits dedicated to teaching and spreading the Catholic faith in schools.

Currently, Mother Mary Joseph shares a two-bedroom convent near the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit with Sisters Maria Bernadette and Mary Elizabeth. She plans to build a house of formation for up to 36 new sisters who will ultimately go into the world to serve the Church. Ground has been broken but the actual building awaits donations, beginning with a chapel that will welcome the public for prayer.

Attracting new vocations before the building is constructed might seem premature, but Mother Mary Joseph's boundless enthusiasm and faith is unstoppable. After all, none of this was her idea to begin with but God's through Bishop David Kagan's invitation to come to the Bismarck Diocese.

Couldn't say no

"There was a fire in me, and I couldn't say no anymore," Mother recalled. It was from the same



Submitted photos: Sister Maria Bernadette takes part in the weekly meals at the university cafeteria to talk with students and make connections.

spark that originally drew her to become one of the first sisters formed with the Ann Arbor, Michigan Dominicans. But after teaching in 14 schools in seven states, she wanted to form other women as teaching sisters to help set the Church on fire. "I was given 12 months of leave to start a community or come back," she explained.

When word spread among those acquainted with Mother Mary Joseph, she began receiving



Mother Mary Joseph (center) and Sister Mary Elizabeth enjoyed a meal and conversation at the dining center at the University of Mary.

invitations from bishops within weeks. The first was from a bishop in Armadale, Australia on the east coast.

"I did meet with him," mother said. "His diocese is out in the bush where there is an anti-Catholic feeling."

None of that dissuaded her, but under those circumstances, there is a need for four sisters to go together and for money to build a convent. She hopes that in the future, Australia will get those sisters and perhaps they can be formed in Bismarck. She also visited Ireland where sisters in habits are so rare that many asked why she was dressed that way.

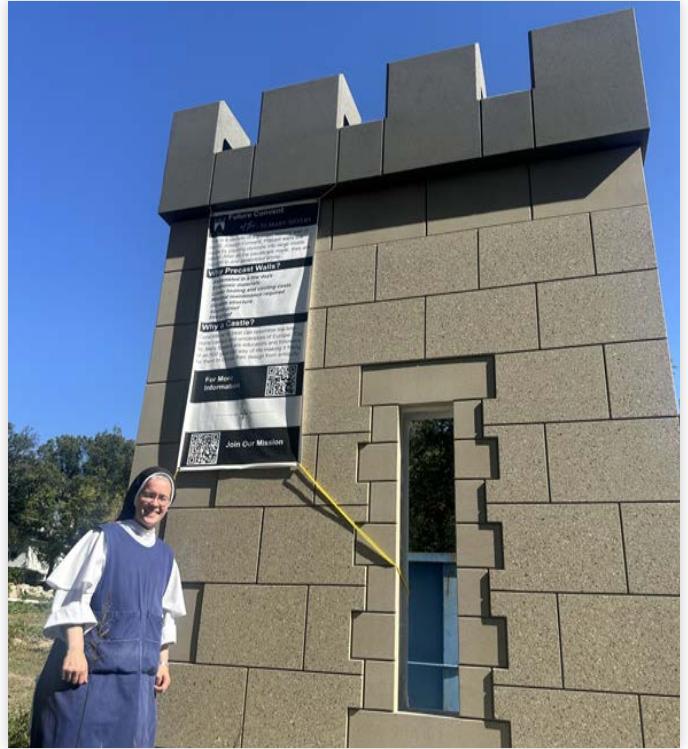
Home to Bismarck

The invitation from Bishop Kagan was accepted in 2019, erecting the St. Mary Sisters of Bismarck for

women dedicated to serving God through vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and St. Dominic's four pillars: prayer, study, community and preaching. Once formed, these sisters will be missionaries who go where God calls. Formation begins with one year of postulancy, two years as a novice and five more years with temporary vows before making permanent ones.

Their day begins at 4:45 a.m. and includes prayer, readings, meditation and study. Mother likens the Dominican vocation to being like the Navy SEALs by explaining, "We work hard, have a rigorous schedule and we don't compromise. It is very fulfilling."

The sisters will earn credentials to teach Catholic catechesis and a state certification in education. Sister Maria Bernadette is observing at Legacy High School, a large public school in Bismarck, right now before student teaching there in the spring and



Mother Mary Joseph, this summer, stood by the temporary wall of the formation house at the construction site near the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

Sister Mary Elizabeth is taking a few more courses in education at the University of Mary. Once they have credentials, they will teach exclusively at Catholic schools; teaching many subjects but especially focused on religion.

Sister Maria Bernadette has been observing business classes for several hours a week, "I'm about to start teaching lessons in accounting and marketing," she said. "The students have received me with open arms. I'm meeting people who have seen me around town or at Mass. One girl going to 6:45 a.m. Mass, but not in my class, asked after Mass, 'Are you the sister I've seen around school?'"

The goal for Bismarck, according to mother, is to always have sisters here but Dominicans are for the world. She hopes that by having a house of formation—also known as a "motherhouse" for its association birthing new life—the Bismarck Diocese will be a part of this mission. For instance, the Nashville Dominicans (Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia) have sisters in over 40 schools across the United States and internationally.

The two-part goal now in Bismarck is finding support to build the motherhouse and to fill it. Having supper weekly at the University of Mary became an impromptu idea to help attract vocations.

Sister Mary Elizabeth noted that these meals have been an opportunity to get to know some of the students in a deeper way. "There is a wide range of conversation, and they seem to be willing to share their hearts with us. They've been very open and vulnerable in a beautiful way."

For young women open to a religious vocation, they can come for a weekend or longer to help them discern before applying. Mother admits the visits will be much easier once the house of formation is built.

Join the mission

"Priests can't do everything," mother said. "We are the catechists to keep the faith strong and help everyone realize why we exist. Look at the many schools and hospitals that exist because of the sisters. Everyone wants heroes. The religious give their lives for others and are an example of discipline and faith because that is what drives them."

For people wanting to support this mission, they can donate or buy a brick at StMarySisters.org.

"Fundraising is challenging," mother said. "I am doing it between everything else. My top priority is forming the sisters. So, even just spreading the word—something everyone can do and costs nothing—would be so helpful."

Investing in the sisters helps to change the world, according to her.

"Look at all the things the sisters have done throughout the world, and they came with nothing," she said. "It's because we are driven; we have a mission. We are teachers and we will teach." [†]

VOW PROFESSION

Brother Martin pronounced simple monastic vows as a Benedictine monk

Brother Martin has joined the Benedictine monastery in Richardton.

On Nov. 11, Alexander Krauth of Wheatland, Wyo., pronounced simple monastic vows, at Assumption Abbey in Richardton, for a period of three years and was given the name Brother Martin with St. Martin of Tours as his patron.

Alex was born in Springfield, Mo., in 1999, but was raised and attended school in Georgia. He spent a few semesters at Georgia Gwinnett College in Lawrenceville. Alex was at first interested in the Jesuits. After that, he considered the Carmelites and the Fraternity of Saint Peter. The Carmelites introduced him to Christian monasticism; the prospect of growing deeper in intimacy with God attracted him very much.

Brother Martin is forever cheerful in a spontaneous and disarming way. He loves people and reassures with a hearty smile.

During the Eucharistic ceremony of the feast of St. Martin of Tours, Brother Martin was given the

black scapular and hood, a sign of his monastic commitment.

When asked what might be distinctive about Assumption Abbey, Brother Martin said, "The relative remoteness of this place allows our monastic community to slow down and remain more apart from the world than some other communities. I have grown fond of the beauty of the Dakota prairies."



In this day and age, when fewer young people are attracted to monastic life, Brother Martin said, "God calls. In community life, there's always someone around to point out the good and the not-so-good in you. This is good. It aids in growth. There's always someone around if you need them. The love of brothers I have found here is unlike any other I have experienced elsewhere." [†]

—Submitted information



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

OBITUARY

Deacon John Michael Woiwode

Deacon John Michael "Mike" Woiwode, 73, formerly of Minot, North Dakota was called home on November 11, 2025, in Surprise, Arizona.

Mike was born on May 29, 1952, in Minot, a son of Jerome and Criselda (Finken) Woiwode. He grew up in the Minot area and graduated from Minot High School in 1970. He was previously married, and had three daughters: Anne Marie, Rae and Laura.

He entered the United States Air Force as a law enforcement specialist in 1973 and proudly served until 1977. During his time in the Air Force, he was stationed at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, Colorado, and Laken Heath Air Force Base in Mildenhall, England.

After his time in the Air Force, Mike worked as a county deputy for Ward County, and then at Monarch Products for over 10 years. He was then employed by civil service in the meat department at the Minot Air Force Base Commissary where he retired after 29 years.

In 1998 he joined the Beginning Experience Support Group (B.E.) where he met many wonderful friends and his future wife, Marion. He then facilitated levels 3 and 4 of B.E. for 10 years.

Mike was united in marriage to Marion (Martwick) Strandlien in 1999. Together they had a daughter, Michaela.

Mike was ordained a deacon of the Catholic Church in the Bismarck Diocese on October 23, 2011. He served at St. Leo the Great Parish in Minot where he assisted with baptisms, funerals, and many Masses. He and Marion also led pre-marriage classes for engaged couples.

Mike, Marion and Michaela moved to Lake Havasu City, Arizona in 2015 where they learned how much they loved the dry heat. There, he served the Diocese of Phoenix at Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, St. Clare of Assisi Parish in Surprise, Arizona, and St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Sun City, Arizona. He enjoyed leading Bible study groups, OCIA classes and spiritual counselling. He was also a chaplain at the Kingman Men's Prison. Mike and Marion moved to Sun City, Arizona in 2021 for medical reasons.

Mike was known for his witty sense of humor and his magic invisible ball trick that mystified every child he met. He was also known for his belief in the power of love: love for our Father in heaven, love for our neighbors and the love our Father in heaven undeservingly gives us. He loved to fish, watch movies and spend time with friends.

Mike's surviving family includes: wife, Marion Woiwode of Sun City, Ariz.; daughters, Anne Marie (Nick) Petty, of Rohnert Park, Calif., Rae (Corey) Davies of Kokomo, Ind., and Michaela Woiwode (Kelly Eggen) of Bismarck; step-children Jessica Strandlien and Jason Strandlien, both of Minot; siblings, Verona Ferderer, Val Lavik, David Woiwode, all of Minot and Al (Karen) Woiwode of Fargo; 14 grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

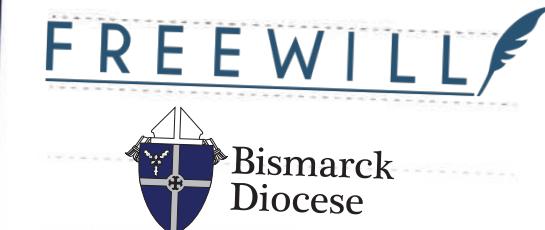
Mike was preceded in death by his parents, Jerome and Criselda Woiwode; daughter, Laura (Woiwode) Bruce; brothers, Jerome (Jerry) Woiwode Jr., Donald Woiwode and brother-in-law, Carl Ferderer. †



January 2026

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NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS



Why creating a will should be your new year's resolution

Creating (or updating) your will is one of the most important goals to add to your list of New Year's resolutions. Without this document, there's no guarantee that your wishes will be fulfilled after death. You've spent your life working hard to support yourself and your family. Here are several reasons why making a will should be a priority on your list of resolutions for the upcoming year.

Ensure Your Wishes Are Honored

Crafting a will allows you to dictate how your assets and belongings will be distributed after your passing. Without a will, the distribution of your estate may be subject to the default laws of your state or country, potentially leading to outcomes that don't align with your wishes. A will ensures that your intentions regarding your estate are clearly documented and followed.

Protect Your Minor Children

If you have underage children, creating a will allows you to appoint a guardian of your choice to care for them in the event of your passing. Without a will specifying your wishes, the court may decide on guardianship based on its assessment, which may not align with your preferences.

In less than 20 minutes, write or update your will for free!

The Bismarck Diocese has a partnership with FreeWill, an online service that makes it simple, cost-free and accessible to create your own will. Nearly 67% of American adults do not have an estate plan, missing a crucial element of Catholic stewardship.

Here's how it works:

1. From the convenience of your home, log in at FreeWill.com/bismarckdiocese.
2. Select a username and password.
3. Begin typing your information.
4. Once completed, your free will is ready to print.
5. You sign and notarize with a local notary public. *
6. DONE!

Takes about 20 minutes to complete. **It's easy and 100% FREE!**

If your circumstances should ever change, it's easy and FREE to log back into FreeWill and change your will, then print the updated copy and have it notarized again.

*In the state of N.D., for a will to be legal, you MUST sign your will in front of a notary public. Most banks, insurance offices, investment offices and public libraries have notary publics who can witness your signature.

For more information, contact Ron Schatz at (701) 204-7202 or rschatz@bismarckdiocese.com or Bryan Winterberg at (701) 415-0399 or bwinterberg@bismarckdiocese.com.

Inspiring journey through adversity to surrender to God's plan

The following is an excerpt from a book titled "Surrender to Lead," written by long-time television journalist and Bismarck resident, Monica Hannan. It shares the stories of 11 people who learned, through adversity, to surrender to God's plan. This segment is from a chapter that highlights Bismarck resident, Jake Kubik, and his faith journey through a rough childhood. Text was edited for brevity.

The pain of betrayal can be hard to give up, and forgiveness doesn't always come easily, especially when the hurt begins early. It can require a great deal of surrender and help from the divine. But for Jake Kubik, it made all the difference.

There are probably only a few places in the world that seemed safer than the streets of Wilton, N.D., in the late 1990s. The population at that time was fewer than 700 souls. Built on a grid of perhaps 12 blocks, with no traffic lights and only the occasional stop sign, it didn't take long to get from the house on the north end to the all-night Cenex gas station on the south side. To strangers, it has the appearance of a movie set. It could be any town in the American heartland—fallen on challenging times, perhaps, with some boarded-up businesses along Main Street but friendly, the kind of place where a kid could feel safe, a good place to call home. But behind closed doors, the story was far from a storybook.

For Jake Kubik and his siblings growing up in Wilton, home was often a nightmare of uncertainty where the person who was supposed to love them the most might come flying at them from out of the darkness.

"There were beatings with the spoon, and a lot of verbal abuse, and just a lot of emotional trauma



"There were too many nights when my mom would come him from work late, and she'd be drunk and angry," he recalled, "and she had this plastic spoon."

His mom worked nights at a supper club 30 miles away, and he and his little brother were left in the care of their older sister. She did her best to shield them, but she was also just a kid. Jake said he and his brother would lock their bedroom door before going to bed at night so that their mother couldn't get at them when she came through the door in the wee hours, because she would often arrive angry. They never knew what might set her off. Perhaps it was a toy left out, or dishes left undone. Or perhaps they'd done nothing at all, but things simply hadn't gone well at work.

"There were beatings with the spoon, and a lot of verbal abuse, and just a lot of emotional trauma

from Mom coming home drunk after work and yelling, or we'd find her in the kitchen, almost passed out, sitting at the table just blasted. It was traumatic to see," he said.

One night in particular stands out. He was ten, and his little brother was eight.

"She had that spoon, and she was pounding on the door, super mad. I remember talking to my brother, kind of game-planning on how we needed to open the door and kind of push our mom out of the way to get out of the house. We kind of rushed her. She was drunk, and she stumbled into the other room, and we ran out. It was the middle of the night," he said.

He said they ran into the darkness, scared, but more frightened of her than of what they might encounter on the street. There they were, two little kids in their pajamas, walking alone, from one end of their small town to the other until they reached the lights of the Cenex. Jake said he remembers being frightened, but not in the way most children would be.

"It was more of an adult nervousness. A child should probably be thinking of the dangers that would be lurking in the darkness but because of the traumatic experiences we'd had up to that point, we were desensitized and more aware of the dangers that other adults could pose to us. So, nervous while we were walking, yes, particularly because it was me and my younger brother, me being the older one, and wanting to get him to where we were going. Yeah, a scary situation," he explained.

When they got to the Cenex, the cashier called their father, who lived several hours away in another town.

"He was on the road right away to get to us. But we sat in that gas station for three hours, waiting for him to show up, which he did. By then, the sheriff had also come. My dad must have called him and told him what the situation was," he said.

Jake said the sheriff wasn't surprised. He's pretty sure his dad had the sheriff's cellphone number, because trauma was a regular thing in Jake's household. His

parents had been divorced since Jake was two. They had three children between them, and while there were court battles over custody and fights over her fitness to raise them, he said his mother always managed to retain custody.

"She was a fantastic manipulator; still is. She could lie through her teeth and always managed to pull out a story that would convince the judge that things were fine, and she'd take us home," he said.

In the end, Jake said their dad rented a house for them in Wilton, had a phone installed in it, and gave them the keys. It was empty, and they were too young to live in it by themselves, but their father reasoned that at least it would give them a place to go instead of the gas station if they felt unsafe at home.

"We were ten and eight. We grew up fast," he said.

His dad had remarried and had another family to provide for, but after that night, Jake said he got a job nearby and moved his new wife and son closer to Wilton to keep a better eye on things. But other than child support, he felt that was the best he could do.

But there was a saving grace. Jake and his siblings were able to spend weekends with extended family on his grandfather's homestead ranch—happy times with aunts and uncles and cousins, learning to do chores and feel what it was like to be folded into his dad's big, close-knit family. Jake remembers those days as wholesome and wonderful, times he credits with helping to shape him and his siblings into successful adults despite their rough start in life.

"They were people to emulate. All my aunts and uncles and my dad really stressed that you work hard, and you earn things in life. And it was that side of the family's influence, I think, having regular exposure to it that saved us," he said.

Once he entered his teen years, a change in the law allowed him to decide for himself where he wanted to live, and he and his brother moved in permanently with their father. It was at that point that he finally had some peace in his life, and a whole new world opened up for him, one that finally had room for a loving God.

“Only Jesus allowed those conversations to happen and to give me courage to do that. Which, really, one could argue is a form of surrender in itself, because you have to surrender bitterness and anger in order to forgive, right?”

“My mom wasn’t a regular churchgoer,” he explained. “She was a Protestant. She always made sure we went to Vacation Bible Schools and church on Christmas and Easter, but my relationship with Jesus was a lot of fear-based praying. I knew there was a God, that there was someone we needed to take care of us beyond our situation, and there was a lot of fear-based surrender to just giving it to God because there really were no other options. I’d pray in tears, asking for God’s help.”

But after his move, he enrolled in a Catholic high school and received regular religious education. He was especially influenced by classes in Church history. He said he was convinced of the truth of Catholicism through his intellect, and his understanding steadily grew from there. But in the end, he said reason wasn’t enough.

“I also needed faith. I had to surrender in order to draw closer to Him. Not to try to understand enough information to be convinced that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, but surrendering to His will in order to believe, and through that, to grow deeper in my understanding of who He is. And that surrender has repeated itself in my life, in my marriage, in my service to others—to be good to my wife as a husband, for each of my three children, surrendering to God,” he said.

He was a senior in high school when he was confirmed into the Catholic Church. But his toughest surrender was still to come.

“That surrender to Jesus gave me the courage to forgive my parents,” he said.

Through prayer and reflection, he’s developed a certain empathy toward his mother, and he said he now views her with mercy and sympathy for the trials she faced in her own growing-up years, and the things that made her turn to alcohol.

Because he was able to forgive his mother, he’s able to have a relationship with her now, although he admits it hasn’t necessarily been easy. He recalls sitting down with her while he was still in college to talk about the trauma he’d faced. He doesn’t lie to himself about what happened, and he hasn’t recast his memory into something less traumatic, but he is able to love his mother despite all that’s happened.

“I said, ‘I forgive you, Mom.’ And her response was, ‘I have no idea what you’re talking about. Did you ever starve? Did you ever not have clothes? You never wanted. I don’t know what you’re talking about,’” He shook his head and continued. “And that’s where it lies to this day. But that conversation helped me. I have forgiven her, because I needed that.”

He talked with his father, too. That conversation went differently.

“I forgave him for not fighting harder for us. He could have done more. He did a lot, but he probably could have pursued legal avenues, pushed a little harder. He broke down in tears, and he was apologetic. My dad’s a great man, and my mom cast it off to the side, which is right on par with how I would expect her to behave. But I needed Jesus in order to forgive her, to surrender my pride and the anger that I had been harboring for years. It freed me.”

Jake said he’s faced many surrender moments in his life, and he can list them, but they tend to boil down to the same thing.

It comes down to surrendering to be a good man. Asking Jesus to help me in my brokenness. It happens on a daily basis. I’m a broken individual who cannot be made whole without Jesus,” he said. And though he admits to his brokenness, he feels

the trauma in his early life served an important purpose, one he said he didn’t understand until he joined the Catholic faith.

“We view our suffering as having a purpose, and we can actually use it for the benefit of others. And I think about the resilience that it imbued me with. It has created a pragmatic nature in me that allows me not to necessarily react to other people’s emotions, to have a thicker skin when it comes to business, to go my own way. It’s fueled my ability to take risks,” he explained.

“Those forgiveness conversations were breakthroughs for me in my relationship with my parents,” Jake said. “Only Jesus allowed those conversations to happen and to give me courage to do that. Which, really, one could argue is a form of surrender in itself, because you have to surrender bitterness and anger in order to forgive, right?”

Get the book

“Surrender to Lead” is available on Amazon and BarnesandNoble.com from TLI Publishing, a division of Tepeyac Leadership, Inc. [†]

NEW PRIEST WORKSHOP



Newly ordained priests, or those new to the diocese, meet for five years for the new priest workshop, most recently held Nov. 23-25. After daily Mass with Bishop Kagan at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, this group, under the direction of Msgr. Patrick Schumacher, listened to presentations from the fiscal office staff led by John Fraase, Laurie Hagerott and Sarah Torpen; the parish services team led by Tony Chap; Bishop David Kagan; Msgr. Gene Lindemann; and participated in discussions led by Msgr. Schumacher. After Msgr. Schumacher’s 13 years and 44 “new priests,” Fr. Jared Johnson, pastor at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary, will assume the responsibility of leading the new priest workshop in April 2026.



MAKING SENSE OUT OF BIOETHICS

Embryo adoption: an open question?

Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

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

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

The 2008 document entitled *Dignitas Personae* states: “The proposal that these embryos could be put at the disposal of infertile couples as a treatment for infertility is not ethically acceptable” (19). It identifies a specific situation, namely, attempting to treat a couple’s infertility by embryo transfer, as being always immoral.

The document then goes on to point out that these moral objections extend beyond this single case, so that the same set of concerns will apply in other instances where embryo transfer might be proposed or considered:

“It has also been proposed, solely in order to allow human beings to be born who are otherwise condemned to destruction, that there could be a form

of ‘prenatal adoption.’ This proposal, praiseworthy with regard to the intention of respecting and defending human life, presents however various problems not dissimilar to those mentioned above.”

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

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

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

A second, older Church document released in 1987 and entitled *Donum Vitae* references the “absurd fate” to which human embryos have been exposed by freezing them, and then notes that there is “no possibility of their being offered safe means of survival which can be licitly pursued” (5). Hence, it would seem even as far back as the late 80s, a negative judgment had already been made by the

teaching authority of the Church regarding the question of embryo adoption.

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

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

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

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

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

Taken together, these documents point to the fact that transferring a stranger’s embryo into one’s wife violates the inner structure of marital fruitfulness.

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

Couples who have done IVF and ended up with frozen children face an excruciatingly difficult situation as they try to figure out what to do with their “leftover” embryonic offspring. I offered some possible approaches to this situation in a previous article (see <https://tinyurl.com/4euau5j5p>).

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



“Come and See”

the African Mission in action as a short-term missionary

The Bismarck Mission welcomes people who have a desire to “come and see” the mission and share in its life on a short-term basis (three weeks up to six months). It’s a rare opportunity to be the hands, feet and voice of Christ in Kenya by serving our brothers and sisters through the various programs administered by the mission. It is also an opportunity to allow oneself to be shaped and formed by people of deep faith who live in poverty. The heart of the mission is the education program that serves over 450 orphaned and vulnerable children.

If you are interested in learning more about the Bismarck Diocese African Mission, go to bismarckdiocese.com/african-mission for more information.



Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Senior Ethicist at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org and www.fathertad.com.



A major pro-life victory in North Dakota

David Tamisiea

On a late Friday afternoon this past November, the North Dakota Supreme Court quietly released a final ruling reversing a Bismarck court's judgment that declared North Dakota's near-total ban on abortion unconstitutional. While local news outlets reported on the decision, the coverage was so muted that many North Dakotans may not have noticed it. Despite the minimal news attention, there is no doubt the decision marks a major pro-life victory in North Dakota.

By way of background, North Dakota's abortion ban was passed into law in the 2023 legislative session, shortly after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and returned the issue to the states. The law was almost immediately challenged in court by four physicians and the Red River Women's Clinic, the state's sole abortion clinic at that time before relocating to Minnesota.

North Dakota's abortion ban makes it a felony for a physician to perform an abortion in our state except when, in his or her "reasonable medical judgment," it is necessary (1) to prevent the death of the mother, (2) to prevent a "serious health risk," defined as a substantial physical impairment of a major bodily function, or (3) to end a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest if the unborn child's gestational age is at six weeks or less. Notably, mental health conditions like anxiety or depression are excluded from the health risk exception. Any physician who

violates the statute by performing an illegal abortion in North Dakota faces up to five years in prison and a \$10,000 fine. While the law is imperfect, it does prohibit most abortions in our state.

The lawsuit began in a Bismarck trial court and has been going on for more than two and a half years. Throughout the litigation, the plaintiffs argued that the statute violates the North Dakota Constitution on two main grounds: first, that the law is unconstitutionally vague and fails to give physicians fair notice of when they may legally perform an abortion under the exceptions; and second, that it infringes on a woman's supposed fundamental right to obtain an abortion before fetal viability outside the womb. The state defended the statute, asserting that it provides adequate and fair warning to physicians who comply with its requirements, and emphasizing that abortion has never been recognized as a fundamental right under the North Dakota Constitution except when necessary to protect the mother's life or health.

The case proceeded until September of 2024 when the Bismarck trial judge issued a radical decision expanding abortion rights in North Dakota beyond what they had been even under *Roe v. Wade*. Ruling in favor of the plaintiffs, the trial court held that the law is unconstitutionally vague and therefore violates an abortionist physician's due process right

to be given fair notice of prohibited conduct, and that under the North Dakota Constitution there is a fundamental right to abortion for any reason whatsoever before fetal viability, including for mental health reasons.

The state appealed the case to the North Dakota Supreme Court, and both sides submitted briefs presenting their arguments. The North Dakota Catholic Conference joined the state's appeal and filed its own brief, contending that there is no evidence whatsoever of a fundamental right to abortion for mental-health reasons. The Court heard oral arguments in March 2025 but did not issue its final decision until eight months later.

On Nov. 21, 2025, the North Dakota Supreme Court finally issued a 2-3 decision that effectively upheld the state's abortion ban: two justices (Tufte and Jensen) found the law constitutional, while three justices (Crothers, McEvers and Narum) concluded it was not. In an unusual twist to the case, Judge Narum, a district court judge, sat on the case in place of Justice Bahr, who recused himself because he had previously served as North Dakota's Solicitor General defending the abortion statute before joining the high court.

Under the North Dakota Constitution, a law passed by the state legislature is presumed to be constitutional and can only be invalidated by the state Supreme Court as unconstitutional by a supermajority (at least four of the five justices). This requirement is designed to prevent courts from too readily overturning laws enacted by the people's representatives in the North Dakota Legislature. Consequently, although the majority wanted to strike down the law, the absence of a supermajority meant that the trial court's ruling was reversed, and the state's abortion ban upheld.

Justice Crothers wrote the majority opinion and focused solely on the claim that the statute's exceptions allowing for an abortion to preserve the

life or health of the mother were unconstitutionally vague. According to Crothers, a doctor acting with an honest but mistaken belief that an abortion was necessary to protect a mother's life or health could be criminally prosecuted, which he claimed unfairly penalizes medical professionals acting in difficult circumstances.

Justice Tufte authored the minority opinion that ultimately prevailed in the case. Tufte flatly rejected the vagueness challenge, concluding that the statute gives physicians adequate and fair warning about when an abortion is permitted or prohibited. Tufte stressed that no statute can be drafted with absolute precision to cover every medical situation, but that this statute offers sufficient guidelines to prevent arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement and provides fair notice to a reasonable person of what conduct is allowed or forbidden. Tufte likewise dismissed the claim that the North Dakota Constitution contains a fundamental right to abortion, pointing out that when the constitution was adopted in 1889, it could not possibly have included a right to abortion since abortion was illegal in North Dakota at that time, except when necessary to prevent the mother's death. According to Tufte, evolving public opinion cannot create a right to abortion in the state constitution; only a constitutional amendment—not a judicial reinterpretation—can do so.

While we should celebrate this court decision as a major pro-life victory, we must also acknowledge that this win was by a razor-thin margin of just one vote on a deeply divided Supreme Court. The Christian pro-life community should be clear-eyed in recognizing that pro-abortion advocates will view this outcome as just a temporary setback. We must therefore remain fervent in prayer, vigilant in our efforts and proactive in resisting any attempts to enshrine abortion as a fundamental right in our state. [†]

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



AG ATTITUDES

The holy family is a version for the world

James Odermann

It is wintertime. I am reminded of that as I trudge through snow 10-12 inches deep, forcing me to “high step” it through the fluffy moisture with which God has blessed most of the Bismarck Diocese.

The frustration, brought about by the occasional tripping and falling into pillow-like piles of moisture, is humbling. The “snow angels” I could make do not have nearly the attraction when made without family, especially grandkids.

Here in the northern part of the Northern Hemisphere, snow is a naturally occurring phenomena. Snow provides cover for the land—and will provide moisture for growth this coming spring and summer.

And, while I have come to expect snow at this time of the year and into even June, it was the aspect of family—and all the joy families can have. Living in a rural setting is not all work and no play.

It just means being creative with the winter opportunities which are presented to my family and me. There are hayrides, sledding parties, snowball rolling competitions, snow people (both genders) to make and decorate, shoveling competitions, etc.

The amount of safe, clean fun is limited only by one’s imagination. And, to top things off, this fun can be shared with everyone—young and old alike.

As I contemplated new “winter Olympics” events on the ranch, I mused about my families. There is my

nuclear family, my community family, my business family, my pinochle family, my work family, my spiritual family.

There is much intersection within these (and more) families. The reality is each is a family in its own right and offers authentic support, encouragement, relief, sustenance and much more. I thought about this as I dusted my “snow coat” and shook the snow out of my boots (because the snow was deeper than I thought).

These various familial junctions are crossroads of love and respect. This is what Christmas is about: family, gathering to share stories and memories, recalling the miracle and gift of Jesus.

The secular world jump started Christmas with sales and decorations as early as October. The focus has been on sharing gifts, highlighting worldly attachments. The existential spirituality of the gift of Jesus is tossed by the wayside.

Christmas tells us God is absolute, the original celebration of God making good on the commitment to save my family and me by sending His Son Jesus to be part of my life—and the very fabric for the world. Jesus is real.

I weaved my way through the fluffy snow to the house. I got to the warm confines of my office and pondered the promises of Jesus, born in a stable. Christmas Eve marks the beginning of the Christmas celebration, which this year (remember the

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).

liturgical calendar began anew at the start of Advent) continues through Jan. 11, 2026.

I wondered how I could make Christmas more meaningful, more a celebration of the many gifts I receive from Jesus by His birth. These thoughts brought me to remember a favorite feast day of mine, the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family, the first family of the Catholic Church and the world for that matter.

The Feast of the Holy Family is the template for all families, celebrated on the Sunday between Christmas and the Solemnity of Mary (New Year’s Day) or on Friday, Dec. 30 if the aforementioned feasts are on a Sunday. The feast commemorates the sanctity of the family and the important role families play in society.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus and highlights the various ways I can make a difference: as a Christian, as a spouse, as a father, as a grandfather, as a friend, as a disciple of Christ. In the same way, the Feast of the Holy Family establishes the climate for being Christ-like within my family. The Feast of the Holy Family involves Jesus, the son of God, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Joseph, the loving, understanding man who acceded to God’s plan.

The examples of the Holy Family are incredible. I just need to spend time learning more about those three pillars of family life and emulate such in my thoughts, words and actions.

This is my personal task. Care to join me? [†](#)

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. Dinoy Rebera	Jan. 17	Deacon Jeff Baranick
Jan. 2	Abbot Valerian Odermann, OSB	Jan. 18	Msgr. Thomas Richter
Jan. 3	Fr. Thomas Wordekemper, OSB	Jan. 19	Deacon Daniel Barone
Jan. 4	Sr. Litty, CLC	Jan. 20	Fr. Wayne Sattler
Jan. 5	Fr. David Richter	Jan. 21	Sr. Norma and the Sisters Ministering in Williston
Jan. 6	Deacon John Bachmeier	Jan. 22	Fr. Dennis Schafer
Jan. 7	Sr. Nicole Kunze, OSB	Jan. 23	Sr. Lucia Rose Franz, AFL
Jan. 8	Sr. Paula Larson, OSB	Jan. 24	Deacon Jim Belohlavek
Jan. 9	Seminarians and Religious in Formation	Jan. 25	Fr. Nick Schneider
Jan. 10	Deacon James Baker	Jan. 26	Benedictine Monks in Bogota
Jan. 11	Pope Leo XIV	Jan. 27	Mother Mary Joseph Campbell
Jan. 12	Bishop David Kagan	Jan. 28	Msgr. Patrick Schumacher
Jan. 13	Br. Michael Taffe, OSB	Jan. 29	Deacon Robert Bohn
Jan. 14	Lay Ministers	Jan. 30	Seminarian Joseph Richter
Jan. 15	Seminarian Deacon Colton Steiner	Jan. 31	Deacons in Formation
Jan. 16	Sr. Kathleen Atkinson, OSB		



Dakota Catholic Action

Bismarck Diocese
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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: Deacon Brent Naslund, 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 McDowell, at victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com.

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