



# Dakota **Catholic Action**

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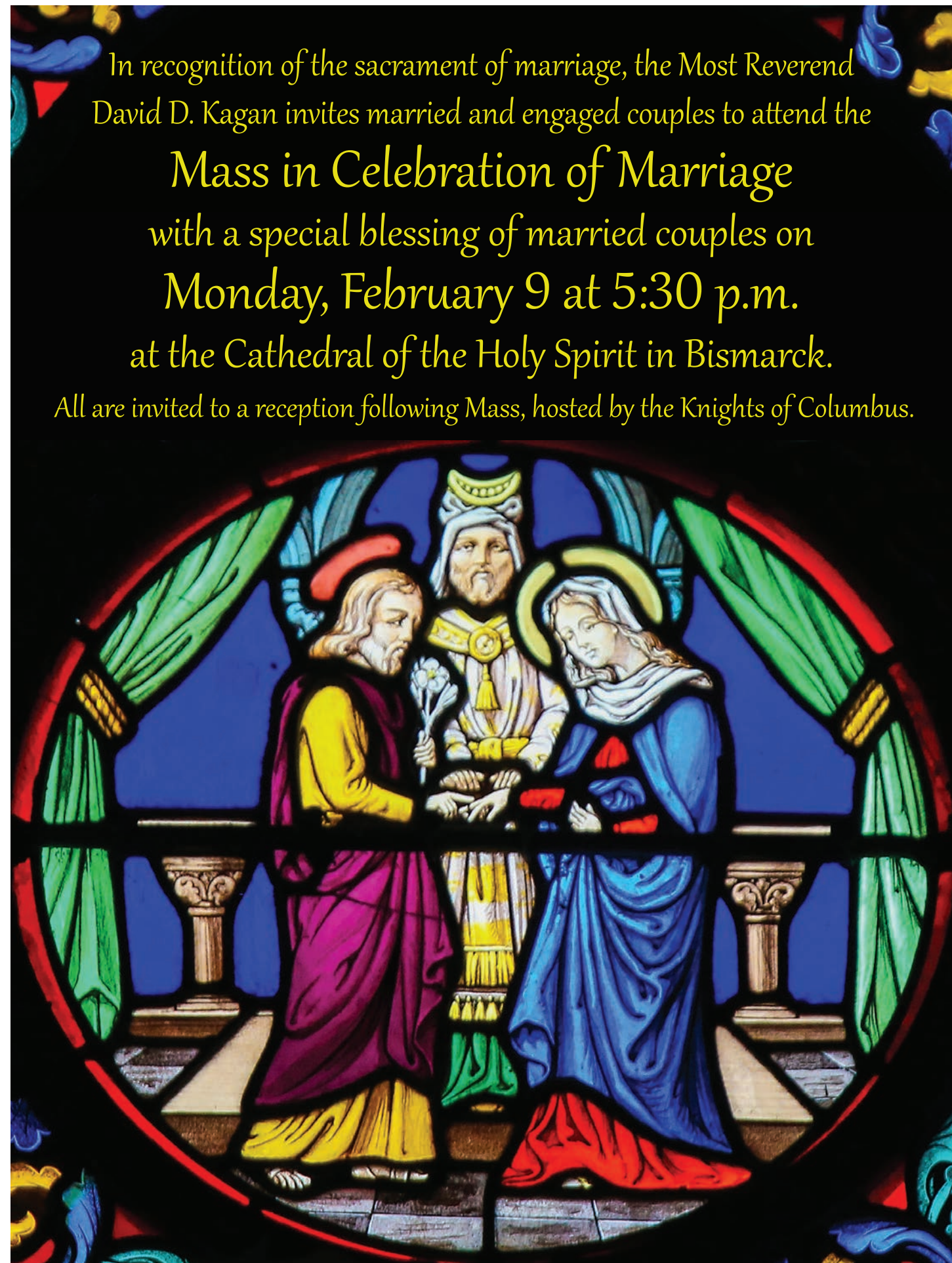
**SEEK HIM:**

**WHEN YOU LOOK FOR ME, YOU WILL FIND ME**

(JER. 29:13)

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





In recognition of the sacrament of marriage, the Most Reverend David D. Kagan invites married and engaged couples to attend the

# Mass in Celebration of Marriage

with a special blessing of married couples on

## Monday, February 9 at 5:30 p.m.

at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck.

All are invited to a reception following Mass, hosted by the Knights of Columbus.

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In Western ND Since 1941

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**ON THE COVER:** The wise men of the nativity out front of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.



**PAGE 22:** God leads a Bismarck teenager to convert to Catholicism, with family members following.



# Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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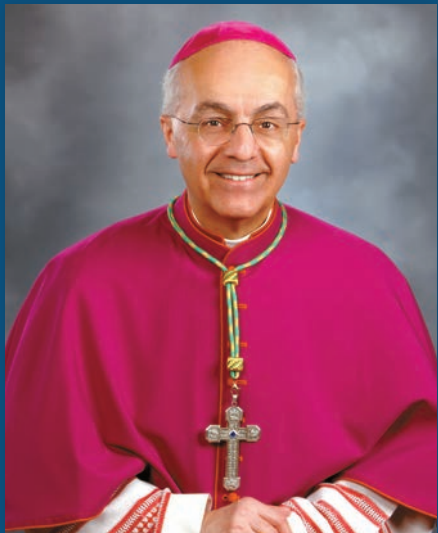
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FROM THE BISHOP

Add forgiveness to your  
Lenten discipline

**Bishop** David D. Kagan

With the month of February which, often enough, is the month when the great penitential season of Lent begins, the Church offers us this time when we can refocus our lives and our faith on the person of Jesus Christ. Of course, every day of our Church year offers us this opportunity, but Lent offers us a special time of grace to remove the obstacles we have created between us and the Lord.

We are certainly familiar with what the Church calls the discipline of Lent. Those traditional and very fruitful practices of intense prayer, acts of self-mortification and sincere works of charity, especially the practice of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, are part of Lent’s discipline. The Church urges us to practice these acts faithfully every day of Lent.

However, I would like to suggest another practice which is certainly related to the ones I just mentioned. It comes from a regular examination of conscience and should be the fruit of our prayer

and certainly it is an act of charity. I am speaking of the need to forgive any other person who may have offended us or whom we have offended by asking for forgiveness. In one way, this is probably the most difficult thing to do. It is not an easy thing nor is it the first thing we usually consider. Often enough, we do just the opposite by responding in kind or maligning another or we simply carry a grudge which becomes the greatest obstacle between us and the other and certainly between us and God. We simply cannot love God if we do not forgive or seek forgiveness from another. Saint Paul addresses this matter in more than one of his epistles when he exhorts the Christians “to forgive as the Lord has forgiven you.”

So, with the celebration of Ash Wednesday when those ashes are placed on our foreheads in the Sign of the Cross, let us realize that the Cross is the sign of how the “Lord has forgiven us.” †



Staff photo: In mid-December, Bishop Kagan took part in the production of his portion of the video to promote the annual African Mission Appeal coming in March.

BISHOP IN ACTION



**Holy Father’s Prayer  
Intentions for February**

**FOR CHILDREN WITH  
INCURABLE DISEASES**

Let us pray that children suffering from incurable diseases and their families receive the necessary medical care and support, never losing strength and hope.

BISHOP’S SCHEDULE

FEBRUARY 2026

Feb. 3	Building Commission Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 9:30 a.m.
Feb. 9	Mass in Celebration of Marriage, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
Feb. 12	Expansion Board Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10:30 a.m.
Feb. 13	Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Feb. 14	Rite of Institution of Lectors for Diaconate Candidates, Spirit of Life, Mandan, 8:30 a.m.
Feb. 18	Ash Wednesday Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 9:30 a.m.
Feb. 20	Staff Lenten Retreat, Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary, Bismarck, 8:30 a.m.
Feb. 22	OCIA Rite of Election, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
Feb. 25	All-School Penance Service, St. Mary’s Academy, Bismarck, 8:45 a.m.



**Lent Begins Ash Wednesday, Feb. 18**

# Seminarians discerning God's call to the priesthood

Sonia Mullally  
DCA Editor

Eight men answered the call to the priesthood this fall by joining the seminary for the Bismarck Diocese. The diocese is blessed to currently have 15 seminarians, at different levels of study, in formation to one day, God willing, become your priests.

New to the seminary this year are Taylen Thomas, Paul Vetter, Joseph Schweitzer, Ronan Klindworth, Preston Barbie, Tyler Selzler, Aiden Schaeftbauer and Nolan Johnson.

In this month’s edition, we introduce you to three of the eight newest men studying to someday be your priest. Subsequent articles will profile the other men. Each of these men have recently finished their first semester of seminary study and have returned to start the second.

Taylen Thomas

Taylen Thomas grew up in Mandan attending Spirit of Life Catholic Church. Inspired by his parents who were very active in their parish, he naturally became more involved by following their example.



Taylen Thomas

“I began serving Mass, attended CCD and youth group, and later volunteered in the Spirit of Life outreach program,” Taylen said. “The faithful clergy, religious,

seminarians and laity who I have encountered throughout my life have been the foundation of my desire to serve our Lord, wherever He may call me.”

As a youngster, Taylen was impressed by strong leadership from his pastor leading him to an admiration of the priestly vocation.

“As a young boy, I had great awe for the strong men who wore clerics, administered the sacraments and shepherded a parish,” he shared. “While I was in elementary school, our parish was blessed with Monsignor Chad Gion as our pastor. I served many Masses for him and spent additional time with him and his staff through my work in the outreach program. He was a brilliant and compassionate priest who deeply loved Jesus and the Church and lived that love without hesitation. I wanted to be just like him and his brother priests when I grew up.”

When considering who influenced his faith over the years, he’s quick to mention family first as well as clergy and others who helped form his love for the Church.

“When you come from the Bismarck Diocese, nearly everyone you meet leaves an impression on you,” Taylen said. “I am deeply grateful to my parents and to my Grandma Judy, who first taught me who Jesus is. I am thankful for the witness of Monsignor Chad Gion, Fr. Ben Franchuk, Fr. Paul Gardner, Fr. Joshua Ehli, Fr. Grant Dvorak, Monsignor Shea, Sr. Miriam James Heidland and Sr. Idelle Badt, whose lives radiate the love of Christ through the priesthood and religious life. I also recognize the faithful catechists who formed me as a young boy, including Deacon Tony Ternes, Rebecca Liffbrig and Paige Rising.



Staff photo: A gathering of the 2025-26 seminarians for the diocese with the vocations director, Fr. Steven Vetter, as of August of last year.

“One of the most influential experiences in my life was the SEARCH program, especially the adult leadership under Dean Johs and Fr. Ben Franchuk, and the many young people I encountered through that ministry. Since entering seminary, I am grateful for the leadership and guidance of Bishop David Kagan, Fr. Jordan Dosch and Fr. Steven Vetter. While I cannot name everyone who has influenced my life, I hold them close in prayer.”

Taylen is studying at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis. While only experiencing seminary for a short time, he said it has felt like “home” since day one.

“My experience at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary has been nothing short of grace-filled. From the first day, I was welcomed with genuine love and acceptance by the formation team,” he explained. “I have grown in my understanding of love and forgiveness and have developed a deeper desire for the sacraments. I am especially grateful for the time each day to sit with our Lord in silent prayer in the beautiful seminary chapel.”

There’s no question that the new experiences can be daunting, but the people who surround him have made it enjoyable.

“What I enjoy most about seminary is the people,” Taylen said. “I am blessed to walk alongside real men who deeply love the Lord. While I cherish all the men I live with, I am especially grateful for those who have become some of the most important people in my life. Together we share healthy competition in sports, excellent food, academics and most importantly, fruitful prayer.”

Seminary study is a major transition for men who are discerning their vocation. They are sustained through support from fellow seminarians as well as prayerful support from members of their home diocese.

“To the people of our diocese, I want you to know that my vocation has not grown on its own, but has been carried forward by your prayers, sacrifices and fidelity to Christ,” Taylen noted. “Each step I take is strengthened by your witness. In moments of joy and moments of doubt, I am deeply aware that I do not walk this path alone. Thank you for your love for the Church and for allowing me and my brother seminarians to be formed not only through study and prayer, but through the living faith of the people we hope one day to serve. Praised be Jesus Christ, now and forever.”



## Paul Vetter

Paul Vetter grew up in rural Bismarck near the town of Menoken and attended St. Hildegard's Catholic Church with his family. It was in this small parish where his faith grew big.

"St. Hildegard's Parish had a major impact on my journey to the seminary," Paul said. "I was an altar server for many years and helped with many parish events. It was there that I learned to love serving others and where my love for the Mass grew."



Paul Vetter

Paul said that his initial thoughts about the seminary came at a young age mainly because his parents often talked about the priesthood and encouraged him and his siblings to stay open to the idea. Family connections have also had a strong influence on Paul as well as his Catholic school education.

"I also have many cousins who are priests, so I was able to be around a lot of priests growing up," Paul explained. "After attending St. Mary's Central High School and staying in contact with my high school chaplain and the vocation director throughout my two years of college, I was able to discern that the seminary was where God was calling me."

It's through these connections that Paul felt the impact to grow in faith.

"There have been many influential people who have helped me in my formation," Paul said. "My parents, close friends, high school chaplains and vocation directors have all helped me grow closer to God and His plan for me. Each of these people has guided me through the many obstacles that come with discerning a vocation and has been an amazing support throughout my life."

Paul is also in St. Louis at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary and describes the experience with enthusiasm.

"It has been an amazing experience so far," Paul said. "I have been able to form friendships with many different people throughout the nation and have

been able to experience my fellow seminarian's love for God. It always amazes me that so many young people from so many different backgrounds come together under one roof to grow closer to God and to discern the calling to the priesthood."

Daily prayer has been what has sustained him through the ups and downs of this new path.

"My favorite thing about seminary life has been the freedom and peace that come with daily prayer," Paul explained. "In the seminary, we have the gift of going to Mass and praying a holy hour every day. Through this, I have been able to experience God's love in a new way and have been able to receive the gifts that God has desired to bestow on us. I am truly grateful for this experience and for the opportunity to walk with God on my journey of discerning the call to the diocesan priesthood."

Paul expressed his gratitude to the people of his home diocese for continued prayers.

"I would like to thank everyone in the Bismarck Diocese for their constant support of us seminarians," Paul said. "Your prayers have been deeply felt here at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, and I cannot thank you enough. For all the young people in the Bismarck Diocese who are discerning a religious vocation, please continue to reach out to others and stay in contact with your vocation director; it is a beautiful calling. Once again, I would like to thank everyone in the Bismarck Diocese for all you do to support us seminarians. It is because of you that people like me can freely discern God's call."

## Joseph Schweitzer

Growing up, Joseph Schweitzer was blessed to belong to several parishes and became involved in different aspects at each one.

"I attended various parishes namely Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck, Queen of Peace in Dickinson, Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck, St. Anthony's in Linton and Spirit of Life in Mandan,"



Joseph Schweitzer

Joseph shared. "At every parish, my family and I were actively involved whether that was in the coordination of adoration or simply in day-to-day parish activities. I received the bulk of my formation at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and am grateful for the priests and staff who have assisted in it. I've been involved in various men's groups/studies, youth groups, the Knights of Columbus, and the most impactful being adoration."

All the activities in the parish kept him connected, but the real discernment came in the quiet of adoration.

"I can say there have been many people who have influenced my path to seminary but ultimately time in front of the Blessed Sacrament is where I owe the credit," he said. "It was in the still but powerful voice of Christ that I was affirmed in my desire to join seminary."

It was during his senior year of high school when thoughts of the priesthood became more evident.

"Throughout my life, I have been inspired and attracted to the priesthood, but a particular and strong desire began to appear when I had reached the age of 17," Joseph explained. "I began attending St. Mary's Central High School and really began to develop a rigorous routine of prayer. It wouldn't be until four years later that I began to seriously consider entering."

"Throughout those four years, God was forming me into the person and image He was calling me to be, notably through prayer and through the Blessed Sacrament. The final push happened quite triumphantly in daily Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. I remember being so consoled to be in the presence of Jesus when I heard a voice in my head say, 'Haven't I shown you more than enough grace and mercy that I'll be with you wherever you are?' My first initial response was, 'Wow! Jesus, You are absolutely right!'"

Joseph said that he had desired to be much closer to Jesus and the direction He was pointing toward as the priesthood. After Mass, Joseph called the vocations director at that time, Fr. Jordan Dosch, and very soon after that meeting, he applied to become a seminarian for the diocese.

Joseph's road to the seminary has been paved with key people who have led him to where he is today.

"I've had many influential people including priests, fellow parishioners and mentors," he said. "Most notably are my father, Trent Schweitzer, Fr. Joshua Ehli, Fr. Mark Aune and friend, John Berger. It was because of these men that I was formed in the image and likeness of God and learned beautiful practices of charity, kindness and generosity. The Bible verse that comes to mind is Proverbs 27:17: 'Iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another.'"

Joseph is studying at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C.

"My seminary experience has been life-changing and awakening," he said. "The priests and formation advisors here have cultivated a very sacred environment where men can become men of God and be close to Him. The fraternity is like none other to the point where my seminarian classmates have become my brothers—men I can grow, transform and laugh with."

Being in a large city gives the seminarians there an opportunity to enjoy the Catholic sites nearby.

"My most favorite aspect of seminary would certainly have to be the accessibility to the sacraments," Joseph shared. "Adoration, Mass and confession are offered everyday not just in the seminary but about every 500 feet in any direction of the seminary. From the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception to the Franciscan Monastery, from St. John Paul II Shrine to the Dominican House of Studies, there is always a place to encounter Jesus through the sacraments."

Joseph is quick to point back toward his roots of his home diocese as the true inspiration for this journey.

"I have the utmost respect and gratitude for the Bismarck Diocese and its people," he said. "It is an easy place to foster a deep devotion to our Lord and encounter others to do it with. It was because of many faithful people that I got to be where I am today. Their examples of prayer and perseverance continue to be a light and motivation to continue this beautiful calling."

To learn more about vocations in our diocese, visit our website at [bismarckdiocese.com/vocations-1](http://bismarckdiocese.com/vocations-1) to watch the vocation stories of all the men studying for the Bismarck Diocese. Later issues of the *Dakota Catholic Action* will feature the newest seminarians in formation. †

### Portion of essay focuses on tradition in relation to Christianity

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.umary.edu](http://www.bookstore.umary.edu). This portion below is part two of three from this portion of the book that explains a link between Christianity and tradition as well as how tradition can be problematic. Part one appeared in last month’s issue of the Dakota Catholic Action and the third and final part will be published in next month’s edition.

#### 3. Christianity and Tradition

Respect for traditions of all kinds has been a universal human practice. Virtually all human cultures have honored the traditions they have received from their forbears and have attempted to live within the contours of what was handed down to them. It has been a general cultural rule that what was new was suspect and needed to prove itself, while what was time-tested was respected and followed. To some degree this has been a matter of simple survival in an often-hostile physical and social environment. If every generation needed to learn for itself the difficult skills required for staying alive and maintaining social order there would be little chance of continuing in existence. Living by inherited traditional wisdom has made good practical sense.

Seen against the backdrop of the world’s cultural history, the coming of Christianity has brought a dynamic element into the static traditions of human societies. While Christians have insisted on faithfulness to the revealed Tradition that was handed on by the Apostles, in other respects they have been less tied to human traditions than most other human cultures. The striking characteristic of societies such

as the Egyptian, the Mesopotamian, or the Chinese has been their continuity through time. Even the Graeco-Roman world greatly venerated what had come down to them from their ancestors and looked askance at whatever was new. For example, the Romans respected the antiquity of the Jewish religion despite the difficulties they sometimes had with their Jewish subjects. Christianity, on the other hand, was not easily respected by them, because it involved a set of doctrines that were perceived as novel. Only when the Church Fathers were able to connect Christianity to the philosophical and educational traditions of Hellenistic culture did it become palatable for the society as a whole.

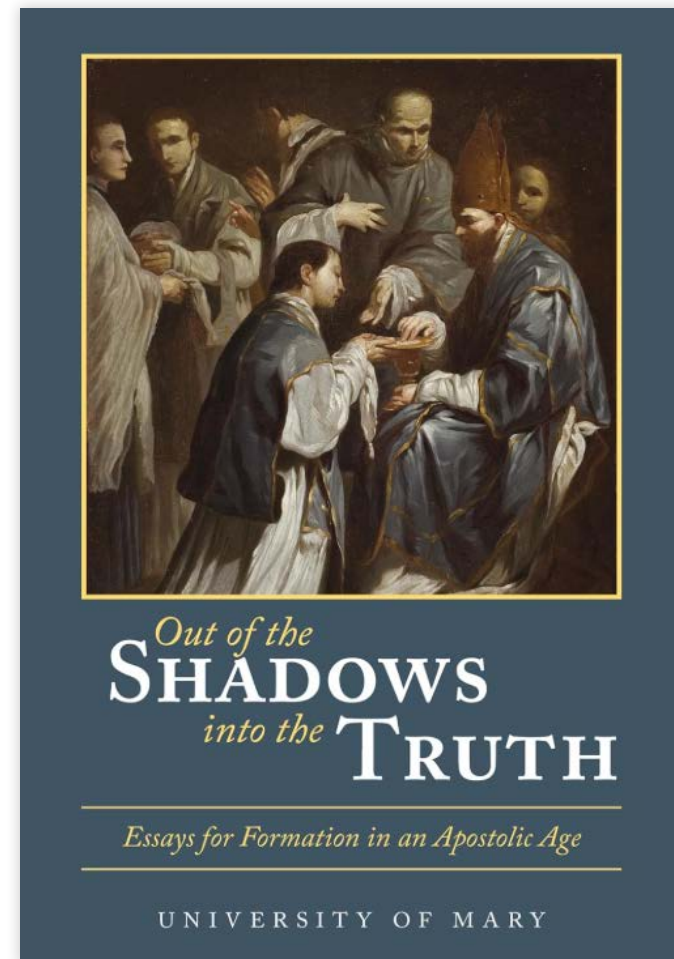
In contrast to many of the great ancient cultures, societies influenced by Christianity have had a dynamic quality that has been more amenable to change and to the reception of new ideas. This dynamism is rooted in the Christian understanding of history as an epic drama written by God whose plot is developing over time and leading somewhere decisive. The ideal of spiritual and societal equilibrium sought by the Romans or the Chinese has found no counterpart in Christian societies, where the longing was not for endless *stasis*, but for the imminent return of Christ and the radical transformation of human life. It is not an accident that the society of the West, deeply influenced by Christianity, has for better and for worse drawn the rest of the world into its dynamic cultural expression and historical development.

Christians have thus had a paradoxical relationship to what is traditional. On the one hand they have understood the Apostolic Tradition to have been revealed by God as perennially true, and have accorded it an authority that goes beyond any merely human set of ancestral customs. On the other hand they have recognized that God in Christ

is in the process of making all things new, and that the Holy Spirit is not a blind force but a divine Person who engages humanity in every age and place according to His own providential designs. To take one example out of many: the development of religious orders over the centuries has been a consistent integration of the old and the new. When the monastic movement first populated the desert, or the mendicants first left the monastery and went begging, or the apostolic societies formulated their plans of action, or Mother Teresa went to the streets with her sisters, new ground was being broken, new modes of living and communicating the faith were being developed, and inevitably a good deal of opposition was incurred from some who were uneasy with this break from long-standing traditions. But each of these developments, and many others with them, can be seen as branches on the trunk of the same tree. In matters of the Apostolic Tradition they have agreed and have maintained unity with each other, even while some of their specific ecclesial traditions have differed. Something similar might be seen in the development of liturgical rites. The same Eucharistic sacrifice was celebrated everywhere according to a shared understanding of its meaning, even as it was differently expressed in the cultural clothing of the Greeks, the Latins, the Syrians, and the Egyptians. When Saint Augustine spoke of Christ and Christianity as a beauty that was “ever ancient and ever new,” he was touching on this paradox. Christianity has been both the oldest and the youngest thing on the face of the earth.

#### 4. Why the question of tradition is currently so problematic

For much of Christian history, no one seriously questioned the need to honor both the Apostolic Tradition and the local ecclesial traditions that had been handed on and developed from the earliest times. There were battles over the precise content of the Apostolic Tradition, and there were constant efforts to maintain the purity of local traditions that could tend over time to take on aspects of worldliness. But it was understood that the point was to live by the truths and the wisdom that had been handed down. A serious break in this pattern came at the time of the Reformation. It is true that the Protestant Reformers were not attempting to do away with the tradition. The whole of their claim was that the Apostolic Tradition, which they tended to confine to what was



found in the Christian Scriptures, had been lost amid a welter of what they considered human traditions and that the Gospel message had become obscured. Yet their movement, especially in its more radical forms, called into question so much that had long been held as part of the Christian patrimony that it tended over time to overthrow the Christian balance of “ancient and new” and fostered an attitude of dislike for all things traditional.

A few hundred years ago a current of thought and life began to set in that has systematically discarded whatever came from the past and has looked forward in a singular way to what is coming in the future. This way of thinking arose from the dynamic soil of Christianity, but while its adherents maintained the Christian idea that human history was an ongoing story of transformation and likewise embraced the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, they abandoned the idea of any revealed, perennial truth. The balance between the old and the new, between love for what was handed on and readiness for what was coming, was lost. Furthermore, our remarkable



progress in the applied natural sciences has meant that in many matters relating to our interaction with the physical world, what is new has generally been better, often spectacularly better, than what was handed on. Under the imaginative potency of that technological development we have made the illogical but understandable *category error* of thinking that the same superiority of what is new over what is traditional applies also to spiritual and moral realities. Horse-drawn carriages are outmoded; the same must be true of sexual morality. Our understanding of particle physics goes way beyond that of our ancestors; the same must be true of our understanding of God.

Not surprisingly, this attitude toward the “bad old things” and the “good new things” has also affected the Church. The nineteenth century saw the rise of “liberal Christianity,” a kind of halfway-house between Christianity and progressive unbelief, in which certain Christian moral ideals were maintained along with a sentimental attachment to Christianity’s founder, while the perennial truths of the faith were set aside as being old and therefore outmoded. This phenomenon of liberal Christianity arose first in the Protestant world. Among Catholics it became a point of sharp contention during the Modernist controversy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and has continued to be a cause of serious disagreement concerning the authentic interpretation of the Second Vatican Council.

At the heart of modern progressive religion – for it is a religion – lies the claim that we are now living in an age different from what came before it, not just accidentally in the way that every age has its uniqueness, but essentially. What has pertained in the past no longer applies to this new age. In the progressive gospel, the Christian belief in a coming heavenly age of perfection has been secularized and brought into historical time: we have left behind us the age of oppression and are now emerging into the age of freedom, and the ongoing revolution in its many forms is bringing about the fulness of that new age of humanity. This way of thinking has imbued our atmosphere and has tended to provide unexamined first principles even for many people who do not sign on to the details of a specific revolutionary program. It is a hard thing to avoid being affected by the pervasiveness of the progressive paradigm; one sees these hidden first principles

at work on all sides of our current political, social, and religious controversies. Catholics taken by the progressive mindset have applied this dogma to the Church. They have conceived an instinctive and profound dislike for the two-thousand-year heritage of Catholic doctrine and history, seeking to bring about what they have sometimes called a Copernican revolution in the Church’s self-understanding. They have coupled an un-Catholic contempt for historical expressions of Christian truth with an un-Catholic eagerness to imitate a secularizing culture in moral and spiritual matters.

In the face of this apostasy, and confronted by a culture that has increasingly despised everything traditional, some in the Church have reacted not only by insisting on maintaining the perennial Apostolic Tradition as revealed by God and honoring the traditions that have expressed it, but by elevating certain particular and local ecclesial traditions to the same level of authority that Catholics have always accorded the great Tradition. When they heard the cry: “The new is good, the old is bad!” they responded with its sweeping photographic negative: “The new is bad, the old is good!” The response is understandable, but it is seriously out of step with genuine Catholic tradition. Ironically enough, as Bishop Daniel Flores has observed, “a Catholic form of traditionalism can morph into just another (boring) version of Modernism when it becomes consumed with deconstructing the living magisterium of the Church through subjective criteria.” The Catholic traditionalist can tend to consider the Church through the optic of contemporary political categories while unknowingly adopting the modern progressive assumption that our age is essentially different from all others. The danger here is to take up the modern ideological terrain and then simply turn the progressive dogma upside down. Broadly speaking, instead of idolizing the modern age and denigrating the past, one can denigrate all that is modern and idealize the past. For the progressive believer, the golden age lies in the future and we need to hurry to meet it. For the traditionalist, the golden age lies in the past and we need to get back to it. †

See next month’s issue of the *Dakota Catholic Action* for the third and final portion of this section of the book, “*Out of the Shadows, Into the Truth: Essays for Formation in an Apostolic Age.*”

# 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](http://bismarckdiocese.com/corazon)

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February 2026

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

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Bismarck Dream Center partners with the community to serve the needs of the poor

Sonia Mullally  
DCA Editor

The words, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me...,” from the Gospel of Matthew are the guiding principle at Dream Center Bismarck.

Catholics know this aligns with the Corporal Works of Mercy and words by which we are called to live. Dream Center offers a special opportunity to join with our brothers and sisters in Christ to live out this Scripture passage. This faith-based non-profit resource center provides free meals, groceries and various resources for those in need.

The Catholic community responds to the needs of the poor in many ways through our parishes in partnership with Dream Center. Last fall, Ascension parish in Bismarck was given the first-ever “Mission of Hope” award that recognizes organizations and businesses that have done extraordinary things to help in the mission of Dream Center. Since the center does not receive federal or state funding, it relies on the kindness of volunteers and support of churches and businesses, with many church groups volunteering on a regular basis.

For one Bismarck couple, Jessica Wachter and her husband, Nick Barranger, answering the call to serve at Dream Center came from an inspiring homily of their parish priest at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary. Jessica recalled a homily from Father Jared Johnson that focused on the message of the 14th chapter of Luke’s Gospel. Luke 14 highlights the central message of humility, radical discipleship and counting the cost of following Jesus, contrasting worldly honor with heavenly reward, demanding



Submitted photos: Bismarck couple, Jessica Wachter and Nick Barranger, serve as the champion campaign co-chairs raising awareness of the center’s mission.

total commitment (even over family) and showing that true followers are those who embrace God’s invitation wholeheartedly, even if it means sacrificing earthly comfort or status.

For Jessica, Father Johnson’s homily was a call to action to focus less on self and more on giving back to the community, a virtue she hopes to pass along to her family and friends through example. Visiting Dream Center for the first time, edified this calling to serve.



Several church groups regularly volunteer at the center to help serve meals including this crew from the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary.

“That homily just reminded me that everybody deserves a seat at the table. The first time we visited Dream Center, I recognized right away that this was a place where everyone is given a seat at the table no matter their circumstances,” Jessica shared.

Dream Center staff member, Denise Fettig-Loftesnes, who serves as the development director is also a parishioner at St. Mary’s. She sought out the couple hoping they could help raise awareness of the center’s mission.

“When we were approached to help, Nick and I discussed, ‘what can we do?’ And then we went to Church and heard this homily from Fr. Johnson on Luke 14; we felt it was a sign from God,” Jessica said.

She said they are honored to be the first champion campaign co-chairs. “Our role is to ‘champion’ the work that is already being done here. The staff and volunteers here are doing the real work but we are here to connect with people across different sectors

and get them involved. We have been blessed and we need to turn that outward and bless others. We are connecting with friends, family and business leaders asking ourselves and others how we build awareness.”

About Dream Center

Dream Center is like no other place in Bismarck. Volunteers arrive starting each morning at 5:30 a.m. They utilize the help of 35-40 people a day among the more than 400 active volunteers. Breakfast starts at 7 a.m. A sack lunch is available throughout the day for anyone who wants it. A box of groceries is available for every household from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and on Saturdays from noon to 1 p.m. A hot supper meal is served Monday through Friday from 5:30 to 7 p.m. On Saturdays and Sundays, from noon to 1 p.m., a hot lunch is served, and sack lunches are available. It’s the only facility in town that serves 365 days a year. They are also the only facility with a refrigerator truck that goes out six days a week to



collect food from businesses. Area grocery stores give from their surplus or food that is close to expiration. A partnership with the Great Plains Food Bank also provides a large monthly shipment.

“I always say it’s so important to break bread with the community,” Denise shared. “We are trying to keep them from becoming homeless, we’re helping them out of unfortunate events in life that might have occurred through good meals and other resources they need.

“I’ve had pastors tell me, ‘You’ve given us an opportunity to do what God is calling us all to do.’ They say, ‘We can’t all, as an individual church, serve meals to the poor and provide for all the needs,’” Denise said. “Each church couldn’t possibly do this, so they support us with volunteers and financial support to do the work to provide for the poor. The pastors have told me that we’ve allowed people to live out the Gospel of Matthew that tells us to feed the poor, give drink to the thirsty and clothe people.”

The concept began quite literally as a dream of Bismarck resident Jim Barnhardt’s. Back in 2016, he awoke after a vision for a ministry that would provide meals and services to those in need. He later identified this as direction from God to start Dream Center. He met with key people from the community to share his plan. In 2019, people involved in community assistance joined Jim on a trip to Dream Center in Los Angeles confirming the model for the idea to be implemented in Bismarck.

In April of 2022, Dream Center officially opened in south Bismarck for free meals and an on-site food pantry. While food is the focus, the staff strives to partner with entities to assist with job searches, healthcare and other essential services. Dream Center Bismarck is a non-profit organization with the main goal of providing help now and hope for the future. Internationally, there are about 85 Dream Centers working independently in communities to find and fulfill the needs of the poor.

Denise admits that most people involved with the center had no idea of the need until Dream Center



Last fall, Dream Center Bismarck founder, Jim Barnhardt, presented the first-ever Mission of Hope Award to Bismarck’s Ascension Church accepted by Beth Kathol, parish business manager.

was built. More than 1,000 households receive groceries each week. Meals are served every day of every week of the year—750 breakfasts, 1,100 sack lunches and 1,800 hot suppers each week on average.

### *Come and see*

Jessica says here’s so much more need in the community that people don’t realize and invites people to simply come and see.

“I think, if anything, the awareness involves a challenge for people to realize there is so much of a need in the community. Come and see the need firsthand at Dream Center. It’s an opportunity to live out your faith. Our faith has really grown through serving here. This community is so beautiful and, coming here, you see faith being lived out. They’ve created an environment where people feel safe to come with their children and families for help and it’s a place where they can see people of faith working with them and for them.”



The staff and the pastor, Fr. Russ Kovash, of Ascension parish in Bismarck are among the more than 400 active volunteers at Dream Center.

The champion campaign needed a voice and Nick and Jessica are working to give it. It’s a one-year commitment from different “circles” in the community asking people to think deeper about the needs of those less fortunate.

“That homily of Father Johnson’s was about the timing for us...Nick and I were searching for something more and to instill that charitable work in our young family and that homily hit at just the right time. We came and were so excited about the wonderful work being done here. We really are just the biggest cheerleaders for them and their work through this as campaign chairs this year,” Jessica shared.

Denise added that Dream Center is truly a grassroots, community-driven effort. “We all know someone who needs food. It might be someone in your school or your church. Starting those conversations with friends and family members, making them aware of the opportunity to explore the joy of giving, whether it’s financial or volunteering time.”

Jessica added, “We all stumble on hard times; we are all the same. We all sit at the same table and when we get to heaven, we bring nothing with us.

It’s important to see that here and be around people who also believe this through their faith.”

Denise stressed how seriously all the staff and volunteers take their job of serving people in body, mind and spirit. Dream Center is a place where everyone can find and fulfill their purpose in life by using their gifts and talents. “People who are served here are the most important people in the room. Volunteers say they have purpose again,” she said.

Since Dream Center relies heavily on community support, there are two important days coming up. One is Giving Hearts Day on Thursday, Feb. 12. This nation-wide online giving event features non-profits from across the Midwest. Early giving is open and more information can be found on the center’s website. Another is a new event called “Starry Night” on Saturday, April 25. This is a formal dinner along with live and silent auctions to help raise funds for the center’s continued mission.

To learn more about Dream Center and their mission, go to their website at [dreamcenterbismarck.org](http://dreamcenterbismarck.org). This is also where volunteer needs are posted and sign up is available. †



# God's Grace at work through the University of Mary College of Nursing

Amanda Evinger  
DCA Writer

We have all been there, or at least we know someone who has—in a medical facility, helplessly relying on the mercy of God and the quality of health care professionals to see us through. Whether it is during the vulnerable time of childbearing, while battling a sickness or supporting a loved one going through surgery, we all appreciate knowing that Our Heavenly Father “has our back”—and that is what Catholic nurses are for.

Knowing what a noble calling the nursing profession is, the University of Mary has developed an authentically Catholic nursing program to prepare students to be at the service of their patients in a holistic way.

“Grounded in the Rule of Benedict’s call to ‘listen with the ear of the heart’ and to place care of the sick above all else, our students learn to practice reverent attentiveness to the needs of both body and soul,” said Dr. Billie Madler, Dean of University of Mary’s College of Nursing. “This formation prepares our nurses to serve as a spiritual presence and to offer prayer as they accompany patients, while also providing a well from which they can draw to sustain themselves through the profound human challenges they will encounter across their careers.”

The university’s outstanding program features numerous undergraduate and graduate options and facets, offered in on-campus and online formats. Through these various means, the program provides a testimony to faith, hope and love amid the culture of death.

As Dr. Madler described, “In today’s healthcare environment, where efficiency, technology and

productivity pressures can easily overshadow the human experience, a specifically Catholic nursing program offers a vital and necessary witness. Catholic nursing education insists that every patient is more than a diagnosis or list of tasks in a management plan; each person bears inherent dignity as a child of God. This conviction shapes how nurses are formed to think, act and care, particularly in moments of vulnerability, suffering and ethical complexity.”

## Embracing the Catholic nursing experience

One of the main goals of the University of Mary’s Nursing Program is to foster a profound respect for the dignity of human life. “The Catholic nursing experience begins with a foundation rooted in respect for persons,” remarked Dr. Mary Dockter, Dean of Saint Gianna School of Health Sciences. “At the University of Mary, we hire faculty who embrace this mission and support their ongoing formation in Catholic social teaching.”

Through inspirational conferences, ethics education and engagement with Catholic leaders, faculty members in nursing and healthcare education programs, students discover the value of integrating faith and practice.

“This creates an environment where students flourish—where care is centered on the patient, and nurses develop the moral courage to lead and transform healthcare,” Dr. Dockter shared.

As the program continues to bloom, so does its mission to respect God’s greatest gift—the gift of life.



Submitted photos

“Looking ahead, my hope is to deepen partnerships with healthcare systems that share our values, prioritizing patient over profit,” Dr. Dockter said. “In doing so, we will continue to grow programs that make a meaningful impact on patient outcomes and uphold the sacredness of life.”

## Significant contributions

In recent years, the University of Mary’s healthcare programs, especially in nursing, have grown not only in numbers, but also in the contributions it makes to society.

“Our recent growth in enrollment has been a blessing, allowing us to strengthen the healthcare workforce in our region and beyond,” Dr. Dockter said. “In the spirit of stewardship, we’ve worked creatively with healthcare partners to address financial barriers, launching initiatives like the tuition-free nursing academy. This program reflects our commitment to hospitality—welcoming students who might otherwise be unable to pursue their calling.”

Furthermore, all students in the St. Gianna School of Health Sciences live out the Benedictine value of service by providing thousands of hours of *pro bono* care and community-based learning.

“These experiences not only transform lives but prepare students to lead with compassion and competence,” Dr. Dockter remarked. “Our faculty, lifelong learners and scholars, contribute to their professions through research that is both clinically relevant and ethically grounded.”

When asked what her favorite aspect of being Dean of St. Gianna School of Health Sciences, Dr. Dockter said, “What I enjoy most is the privilege of working alongside faculty who embody the Benedictine value of servant leadership. Every day, I witness their unwavering commitment to guiding students not only toward excellence in healthcare but toward becoming professionals who respect the dignity of every person.

She also appreciates the fellowship that students and faculty have with one another.



“Our interdisciplinary approach reflects the Benedictine emphasis on community, as students and faculty learn from and with one another, preparing to care for patients holistically—body, mind and spirit. I also treasure the deep conversations we share about the ethical challenges of our time. These discussions ensure our graduates leave with the moral courage to lead in healthcare decisions that honor life and human dignity.”

### Diocesan chapter of National Association of Catholic Nurses

In an effort to thoroughly integrate faith and healthcare, University of Mary’s College of Nursing has developed a hybrid diocesan-university chapter of the National Association of Catholic Nurses (NACN)—a national organization with roots dating back to the 1940’s. This inaugural hybrid model is chartered in collaboration with the Bismarck Diocese and led through Saint Gianna School of Health Sciences.

The Bismarck Diocesan-University of Mary Chapter is a first for NACN, which previously recognized only parish-based or diocesan-based chapters. The chapter’s foundation was spearheaded by University of Mary nursing faculty and supported by Bishop Kagan. In years to come, it may serve as a national blueprint for other Catholic universities and dioceses seeking to form spiritually and ethically-grounded nurses. Membership is open to Catholic nurses across the diocese who desire support in honoring the values and teachings of the Catholic Church in their work.



There is no question that today’s nurses face challenges which test their professional judgment, moral clarity and emotional resilience. The NACN provides a nourishing milieu where Catholic nurses can integrate their vocation with their faith, grow spiritually and find peace in knowing they are profoundly appreciated and uniquely called to serve in Christ’s healing ministry.

### Recent additions

In recent years, University of Mary’s College of Nursing has achieved two landmark developments: an innovative nursing academy as well as a state-of-the-art facility. Thanks to donor contributions totaling nearly \$3 million, the College of Nursing constructed a facility which features cutting-edge technology and a top-notch workspace, which prepares students for real-life nursing experiences. Furthermore, to help our nation combat its critical shortage of nurses, the College of Nursing has developed a year-round-campus (YRC) nursing academy which fast-tracks qualified students to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. This truly unique program allows them to earn their BSN in merely 2.6 years —free of tuition—through generous scholarships funded by healthcare partners, Sanford Health and CHI St. Alexius Health. Along with the advantages of a debt-free education and guaranteed employment upon graduation, the academy also provides a unique approach to nursing education by integrating rigorous academics with spiritual and ethical formation.

A highlight of the program is a pilgrimage through Europe that deepens students’ understanding of the dignity of human life and the moral foundations of healthcare. Through these efforts and many more, the nursing academy is quickly gaining a reputation of bringing forth morally courageous, profoundly dedicated nurses who seek to mirror the gratuitous love and mercy of Our Lord, the Divine Healer.

Recently, University of Mary Chaplain Father Dominic Bouck dedicated time to teaching the nursing academy students ethical and moral concepts. Looking back, he cannot help but rave about his experience. “Teaching ethics to the students in the nursing academy was one of the



most powerful moments in my priestly life,” he shared. “The students were very driven. They spent a great deal of time together which bonded them in a common purpose, guided by their goal but bound together in friendship.”

When asked what he feels is the role of the University of Mary’s Catholic nursing program in today’s world, he responded, “A contemporary Catholic university emphasizes ethical guidelines, but even more importantly, care for the entire person and the moral courage to carry it out. The modern Enlightenment-based medical industry seeks progress and forgets the soul. Unbridled materialist optimism created a medical monster, and until more educational programs instill an integrated and spiritual vision of man—made in divine dignity—it will only grow colder and crueler.”

### Program rankings

Multiple times, the University of Mary’s Nursing Program has been ranked No. 1 in America by Mountain Measurement bench-marking service. The service’s annual report is based on Bachelor

of Science in Nursing (BSN) graduates who took the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) exam. The program has a consistent pass rate of 98-100%, while the national average is around 73%. In spring 2025, it placed number one among 1,425 schools across the nation.

There are several factors that account for the high scores. University of Mary nursing students are thoroughly skill-tested before they even take the NCLEX exam. The personal academic attention that faculty offer to their students enables them to prepare confidently for the exam. Furthermore, the program faithfully follows industry quality and safety standards, which is critical to its success. University of Mary’s graduate nursing programs carry outstanding rankings as well. In 2024, program graduates achieved a 100% pass rate on the rigorous American Academy of Nurse Practitioners (AANP) Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) certification exam.

For more information about the University of Mary College of Nursing, visit [nursing.umary.edu](https://nursing.umary.edu) or call 701-355-8030.†



Saying yes — A journey of faith for the Brash family

Diane Huck  
Office of Catechesis and Youth

In the quiet “yes” of a child, in the unplanned detour of a preschool opening, in a chapel after school— God was writing a story. And the Brash family is still living it, one “yes” at a time.

When Anna Brash, a junior at St. Mary’s Central High School in Bismarck, talks about her faith, she doesn’t speak of one lightning-bolt moment. Instead, she speaks of a quiet pull, a gradual unfolding and a series of “yeses” that led not only her, but her family, deeper into a relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church.

Anna was born into a devoted Lutheran family. Her parents, Rachael and Martin, both came from strong Protestant roots. Martin’s mother was Catholic, but after marrying a Lutheran, the couple raised their children in the Lutheran faith. Rachael’s side was deeply active in their Lutheran community. Church wasn’t a constant in Anna’s early life—mostly limited to Christmas and Easter—but faith was present.

So how did Anna, raised Lutheran, find herself confirmed in the Catholic Church?

Preschool opening and a prompted heart

Anna’s journey began somewhat unexpectedly—with a preschool opening. Rachael and Martin were looking for a place to start their daughter’s education, and St. Mary’s Grade School happened to have room. They toured the school, loved the



Submitted photos: Anna Brash was confirmed by Bishop Kagan in 2023 at the Church of Corpus Christi in Bismarck.

atmosphere and enrolled her. By kindergarten, the family had chosen to try public school instead. But something didn’t sit right. After attending orientation, Rachael reached out to the principal at St. Mary’s on a whim. On a Friday night, she received a heartfelt email: “We’d love to welcome Anna back.”

Martin was out fishing when he felt an unshakable peace about letting Anna return to St. Mary’s. “Something just told him to let me go,” Anna recalled.

Attending Catholic grade school meant Mass every Friday. Anna didn’t feel out of place, just different. Her faith life at home hadn’t changed much, but her heart was being quietly stirred.



The Brash family, (l-r) Martin, Elsa, Rachael and Anna at the church for Elsa’s first communion.

Then came second grade and a field trip to the Annunciation Monastery. That day would change everything. Anna became pen pals with Sister Thomas Welder and fell in love with the sense of community, joy and peace she experienced among the sisters.

“I didn’t realize it at the time,” Rachael reflected, “but that visit was pivotal.”

By the time Anna reached St. Mary’s Academy, things deepened. Her teacher, Mother Mary Joseph, brought the faith to life with daily reflections on saints, symbols and the liturgical seasons. Anna began visiting the school chapel each morning. “It was the first time I really prayed—really talked to God,” she said. She started stopping in after school, too. “Something just drew me there.”

Her belief in the Eucharist wasn’t born in a single moment. “It was more of a process,” she explained. “The more time I spent with Him, the more I realized He was really there.”

Despite the growing fire in her heart, Anna was afraid to tell her mom. With her mother’s deep Lutheran background, Anna feared disappointing her. So she made a quiet decision: when she turned 18, she would become Catholic on her own.

A heavenly nudge on All Saints Day

But God had other plans.

On All Saints Day in seventh grade, Rachael turned to her daughter and asked, “Do you want to be Catholic?”

Anna said yes. Just like that.

Rachael was surprised. She asked why. At first, Anna simply said, “It’s what I know, and I love it.” A year later, her answer was deeper: “I love the Eucharist.”

And Rachael understood. “I could support that.”



Sacraments and family transformations

Anna made her first reconciliation on Feb. 10, 2022, and received the Eucharist for the first time at the Easter Vigil that year. She was confirmed with her classmates in the fall of 2023. She now takes part in the sacraments regularly—confession and Mass weekly.

But Anna’s faith didn’t just transform her life—it touched other family members as well. Rachael had worked at the University of Mary for 17 years before her daughter’s conversion. “My only experience with Catholics was weddings and funerals,” she admitted. But being in a Catholic environment and receiving formation as a member of the university community, attending Wednesday morning Masses with co-workers and watching Anna’s joy slowly opened her heart.

Though some questioned her support of Anna’s conversion asking, “Don’t you love your own faith enough?” Rachael believed strongly that forming her child in truth meant staying open herself. “If she is open to formation, then I need to be too,” she said.

A silent retreat in May 2023 was the final push for Rachel. She returned and spoke with Fr. Bouck, chaplain at the University of Mary, who welcomed her journey. She didn’t go through OCIA; her formation had already begun—first as a mother, then as a seeker. In July 2023, she became Catholic at the University of Mary.

Anna wept when she found out. Her younger sister, Elsa, curious and interested, soon followed. She received her first communion at the Easter Vigil last spring. And Martin? He has been nothing but supportive. “He was apprehensive to send Anna to Catholic school,” Rachel remembered. “But he was very supportive and appreciative—and he still is.”

Letting God lead

Some people have said that Anna “converted her family.” But she sees it differently.

“All I did was say yes and step back,” she said. “Obviously, it’s what God did, not me.”

As for the future? Anna is considering religious life. But for now, she’s focused on staying close to the One who has led her this far. “I’m staying open to what He has for me today,” she said. “That will lead me to tomorrow.” †

“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, contact mission director Tracy Kraft at 657-268-9000 or tkraft@bismarckdiocese.com or go to bismarckdiocese.com/african-mission for more information.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Dinner at St. Ann’s in Hebron Feb. 1

All are invited to the Church of Ann in Hebron for their parish dinner on Sunday, Feb. 1 from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. The menu includes homemade knoephla soup, German sausage and Assumption Abbey breads. Cost is \$10 for adults and youth; children 6 years and younger eat for free. There will be a raffle and Chinese auction as well.



Mass in Celebration of Marriage Feb. 9

In recognition of the sacrament of marriage, Bishop Kagan invites married and engaged couples to attend the Mass in Celebration of Marriage on Monday, Feb. 9 at 5:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. There will be a special blessing of married couples within the Mass. All are invited to a reception following Mass, hosted by the Knight of Columbus.



Mardi Gras Dinner at Corpus Christi Feb. 13

Everyone’s invited to the Mardi Gras Dinner Fundraiser hosted by Bismarck’s Corpus Christi Youth Ministry on Friday, Feb. 13. It is a four-course meal with wine, hosted at the Corpus Christi rectory. There are two dinner seating times available at 4:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. The cost is \$50 per person, and all proceeds go toward supporting the youth attending the Life Teen Restore Mission Trip and the Steubenville Conference this summer. New this year is a king’s cake giveaway. Seating is limited. Please RSVP by Feb. 10 at this link: <https://bit.ly/mardigrasdinner>.



Corpus Christi Fish Fry beginning Feb. 20

Corpus Christi Fish Fry Season is back! Starting Friday, Feb. 20, enjoy a fantastic fish fry each Friday in Lent at the Church of Corpus Christi in Bismarck. The fish fry runs from 5 to 7 p.m. and features tasty baked and fried fish, French fries, fried shrimp, noodles, fried green beans, applesauce, coleslaw, coffee, tea, milk and homemade desserts. All proceeds from the fish fry supports youth participating in retreats and conferences. Prices are \$14 for adults, \$8 for children, \$50 for a family. The church is located at 1919 N. 2nd Street. Contact Melanie with questions at 701-975-9809.



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 Gregg 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](http://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.



Cursillo weekends in March

The Cursillo of the Bismarck Diocese will be holding their 2026 weekend retreats—a weekend of faith, renewal and Christian community. Cursillo is a short course in Christianity for adults that takes place over a four-day weekend retreat. The men’s weekend is March 5-8 with this year’s theme of “Remain in Him (1 Jn 3:21-24).” The women’s weekend is March 19-22 with theme of “For I know the plans I have for you (Jeremiah 29:11).” For information, contact Paul Kenney at 701-471-9560 or Melody Haider at 701-400-9941.



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: Mar. 6-8 and Apr. 17-19. Find more information at [bismarckdiocese.com/search1](http://bismarckdiocese.com/search1).



Women’s Lenten retreat March 28

A Women’s Lenten Retreat will be held at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck on Saturday, March 28. Women of all ages are invited to join for a day of prayer, Mass, Eucharistic adoration, confession, inspiring talks and fellowship. We will also have vendors available throughout the retreat. The retreat begins with check-in at 8 a.m. and will conclude around 2 p.m. Cost to attend is \$25, and registration is required. You can register at the parish website, [www.stmarysbismarck.org/womens-retreat](http://www.stmarysbismarck.org/womens-retreat). Registration is due by Monday, March 23. Any questions about the retreat can be directed to the St. Mary’s parish office at 701-223-5562.





## BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

### The history of the North Dakota Catholic Conference

#### David Tamisiea

In the summer of 1969, Bishop Hilary Hacker of Bismarck and Bishop Leo Dworschak of Fargo began discussions with several priests and laymen about the possibility of forming a state Catholic conference in North Dakota. After some preliminary discussions, a committee was formed to explore this further, and at their first meeting the committee members unanimously agreed there was a real need to create a North Dakota Catholic Conference.

The committee invited John Merkert, the executive director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference, to attend their next meeting later that summer to share his knowledge and expertise. A few months later, on Sept. 25, 1969, the North Dakota Catholic Conference incorporated as a non-profit organization in North Dakota and became the 22nd state Catholic conference in the United States.

After its legal formation, the North Dakota Catholic Conference's board of directors, composed of the two bishops and three laymen, moved to appoint Edwin Becker as the conference's first executive director. The North Dakota Catholic Conference officially opened its doors on Jan. 5, 1970. The North Dakota Catholic Conference set as its two highest priorities opposing the liberalization of the state's abortion law and advocating for public funds to support non-public schools. Alas, some things never change.

Although they are found in most states, state Catholic conferences are often referred to as one the best-kept secrets of the Church in the United States. A state Catholic conference is an organization established by the bishops of a state to communicate public policy positions important to the Church in that state and to educate Catholics and the broader public on Catholic moral and social teaching and its bearing on these policy issues. State Catholic conferences provide a mechanism for the bishops in a state to act together in a unified and coordinated manner to advocate before government officials for the Church's position on issues like abortion,

school choice, homelessness, human trafficking, social welfare programs, immigration and other important issues.

State Catholic conferences emerged in the United States shortly after the Second Vatican Council as a new form of collaboration among bishops within the same state. While a handful of state Catholic conferences existed before the Council, they began proliferating after its conclusion, so that today 44 states have state Catholic conferences. The inspiration for this new phenomenon is the theology of Vatican II which emphasizes inter-ecclesial collaboration among bishops, lay participation in the Church's mission and the Church's engagement with the modern world.

Since the North Dakota Catholic Conference began operating in 1970, it has had only five executive directors. The first executive director, Edwin Becker (1970-1975), was a farmer, businessman and state senator from Willow City. Becker worked to establish the structure and operations of the conference and to educate the Catholic faithful and legislators about this new work of the Catholic Church in North Dakota. Most notably, in 1972, Becker as head of the Conference, led the campaign to defeat a ballot measure that would have legalized abortion up to 20 weeks gestation in a landslide victory garnering 77% of the vote. Sadly, two months later, the U.S. Supreme Court issued *Roe v Wade*, wiping out the hard-fought victory.

The second executive director, Kitty Englestad (1970-1987), was the first woman state Catholic conference director in the nation. Englestad played an important role helping state legislators and the general public respond to the *Roe* decision and established standing committees to assist her political advocacy work. Englestad also initiated the Legislative Action Network, an organized network of North Dakotans whom the conference calls upon to lobby state and federal legislators when important bills are under consideration.

The third executive director was Sr. Paula Ringuette (1987-1995). Sister Paula was a member of the Presentation Sisters in Fargo. She expanded the work of the North Dakota Catholic Conference to include more advocacy for policies to help the poor and once said, "If it was not for the Church, sometimes there would be no one to speak for the poor." Sister Paula also increased the number of committees assisting her advocacy work and put into practice the Church's love for the unborn child and the poor and marginalized.

The fourth executive director was Christopher Dodson (1995-2023). Dodson moved to Jamestown from his native California with his wife, Rosi, a North Dakotan, and began as the healthcare liaison at the conference in 1994 under Sr. Paula when healthcare reform was being debated across the country. After Sr. Paula retired, Dodson became executive director and the first attorney to lead the North Dakota Catholic Conference. During Dodson's long tenure, the North Dakota Catholic Conference helped enact conscience protections for adoption agencies, one of the nation's first Alternatives to Abortion programs, an advance directives law that respects the dignity of human life and individual decision-making, criminalization of assisted suicide and human cloning and protections for religious freedom. Dodson also became a respected leader and strategist on the issue of abortion and worked with others to craft a law criminalizing most abortions in the

event *Roe* was overturned and, after it was, advocated for laws to help pregnant women in need. Dodson's time also coincided with the creation of the internet, and, under his leadership, the North Dakota Catholic Conference became the first state Catholic conference with a website, a news feed and an e-newsletter. In recognition of his work, in 2023 Pope Francis awarded Dodson with the *Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* ("Cross for the Church and the Pope"), the highest honor a pope can give to a layperson, for his distinguished service to the Church. Under Dodson's direction, in 2011, the conference hired Stacey Pflieger as an associate for the conference. Pflieger, who had previously served as director of North Dakota Right to Life, continues to serve an invaluable administrative role for the conference throughout the year and, during the legislative session, assists with pro-life advocacy work.

I currently serve as executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference. I am also an attorney, have a doctorate in theology and previously served as a professor and dean at the University of Mary. Christopher Dodson assisted me in my first year as co-director and continues to serve as general counsel and a part-time policy consultant.

Please pray for the North Dakota Catholic Conference to continue to serve faithfully in advocating for policy positions important to the Church in North Dakota now and for many years to come. †

*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.*

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Striving to be on God's team

James Odermann

“Grandpa, it seems like chores get done so much faster when we do them together,” my grandson said as we walked through the yard. “It just seems easier and a lot less work.”

I smiled and said, “Yes, things do go faster when we work together. And, when we work together to make sure the animals are fed, watered and cared for is a real sense of satisfaction.”

The real joy, however, for me, is observing how youngsters view the world while outside enjoying the fresh air and learning how to work as a team. There is also great satisfaction in knowing the chores were done together—and done right.

The discussion took place as we scurried through the pens, opening gates, feeding buckets of grain and chipping ice. The cacophony greeting from the animals was music to our ears—and we responded with our own imitations of non-musical tones.

Nevertheless, the animals greeted us with enthusiasm, kicking up their heels as they rushed to greet us in anticipation. The enthusiasm was unnerving. “I’m scared,” my grandson screeched as he ran behind me. “They might charge me.”

I assured him the animals were just curious to see a little man in the pen. The animals were happy to see him, especially the feed we were bringing. We stopped moving and the animals crowded around us in a semi-circle, steam billowing from their nostrils this cold, frosty morning.

He tried to pet one, but it pulled away. “Why doesn’t he like me?” my grandson queried. “I don’t want to hurt him.”

“I know. You just want to give him a little love but he doesn’t know you,” I said as I hugged my grandson, who grinned, adding, “OK.”

I recalled a tender moment several days earlier when I witnessed familial love while doing chores. We had just finished parking equipment. “Dad,” my grandson yelled, and took off across the ice-covered yard like an Olympic skater. I watched his dad, older brother and him share a hug.

My eyes misted as I saw the love and respect going in both directions. It truly was a “God-moment” for me. We were done and it was time to see grandma—and eat a delicious, hot meal.

I thought about how lucky I was, how God has blessed me with such love. And, that got me pondering further. God is always there. Do I take as much time doing my spiritual chores as I should? Am I feeding my soul with the same dedication, attention to detail and energy to make sure livestock and crops are fed and cared for?

The Christmas season ended with the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. This is ordinary time yet there is nothing ordinary about this time. It is a new calendar year and there is no better time to recognize—and appreciate—God’s presence. My life is God’s and my time is God’s time.

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).

The script for my life is authored by me. I fill the pages of my autobiography with the choices I make, with the love I receive and freely give.

God is everywhere—in my spouse, my children, grandchildren, in-laws, in my friends and those whom I have failed. I just need to slow down and open my eyes to let God’s love into my life.

I reflected on my life and I blushed, mostly because I wondered whether my priorities were properly aligned with what I believe as a Catholic. I thought about the attention I devote to my profession. Do I exude that same intensity in feeding and developing my soul? Do I really make sure God is front and center in my life? Do I resist the secular world’s temptation to measure success by position and wealth? Will my memoirs be a series of rouses in which I succumbed to the peer pressure of accumulating material possessions?

In the end, God will call me back. I ask myself, “Am I ready to be returned home, to be welcomed into eternity by God?” This question gives new meaning to how I use my time, how I respond to God’s message.

Am I joyful about being a creation of God? Or, am I caught up in worldly wants that result in rash, impetuous actions which do not value the love of God?

I need to be grateful for the gift of life, the gift of being on a team where my sisters and brothers will help me to be the best version God created. I need to be thankful for teammates—and I need to work hard to be on God’s team.

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

Feb. 1	Fr. Frank Schuster	Feb. 16	Deacon Lynn Clancy
Feb. 2	Deacon Dan Brooke	Feb. 17	Br. Louie Bachand, OSB
Feb. 3	Fr. John Patrick Arnett, OSB	Feb. 18	Br. Leo Meuchel, OSB
Feb. 4	Sr. Idelle Badt, OSB	Jan. 19	Fr. Johnson Simethy
Feb. 5	Sr. Laura Hecker, OSB	Feb. 20	Deacon David Crane
Feb. 6	Lay Ministers	Feb. 21	Bishop David Kagan
Feb. 7	Msgr. James Shea	Feb. 22	Fr. Christian Smith
Feb. 8	Deacon John Burke	Feb. 23	Deacon Robert Dangel
Feb. 9	Br. Jacob Deiss, OSB	Feb. 24	Fr. Keith Streifel
Feb. 10	Sr. Melissa Cote, OSB	Feb. 25	Seminarian Joseph Schon
Feb. 11	Sr. Renee Branigan, OSB	Feb. 26	Fr. Roger Synek
Feb. 12	Lay Ministers	Feb. 27	Deacon Dennis Dean
Feb. 13	Fr. Robert Shea	Feb. 28	Seminarians and Religious in
Feb. 14	Deacon Dallas Carlson		Formation
Feb. 15	Fr. Jason Signalness		





## MAKING SENSE OUT OF BIOETHICS

### Is it ethical to clone animals?

#### Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

The global market for cloning cats, dogs, and other pets reached \$300 million in 2024, and has been projected to reach \$1.5 billion by 2035.

When it comes to the ethics of cloning animals, whether cattle, racehorses, dogs or cats, it is important to inquire if a “proportionately serious reason” exists for doing the procedure, since the process can cause physical and genetic defects of varying severity in cloned animals.

Cloned mice, for example, have aberrant patterns of gene expression in multiple genes, and cloned animals have elevated rates of unexplained gestational or postnatal deaths, as well as anomalies like enlarged hearts or abnormal lungs.

Because cloning involves the bringing together of two remnants of heavily damaged cells — an extracted nucleus from a body cell, plus an egg that has been deprived of its nucleus — it should come as no surprise that these two conjoined elements may have difficulty cooperating and communicating with each other to produce a presentable member of the species.

It is also conceivable that a cloned animal could give rise to a dangerous genetic variation, by making the individual animal, for example, more violent. Even in the absence of such outcomes, regularly described in science fiction, it is still noteworthy that genetic

variability and the long-term viability of animal populations, particularly small populations of endangered species, could be affected by extensive animal cloning. Decreasing diversity through cloning could make populations more susceptible to disease and environmental changes, impacting sensitive ecosystems and conservation efforts.

Even with the risks of cloning, we can envision situations where a “proportionately serious reason” would exist for attempting to clone animals. A German shepherd, for example, that is exceptionally skilled at sniffing out illegal drugs or other contraband, might be cloned to expand the availability of “super-olfactory canines” for police departments around the country.

If a famous Hollywood celebrity loses his or her beloved Fido to cancer, however, we can validly debate whether a strong attachment to the departed canine constitutes a sufficiently serious reason for embarking on a cloning project with a price tag of fifty or sixty thousand dollars. A generated dog clone will always be an imperfect copy of Fido and will often have a very different personality from the original animal.

When actress Barbra Streisand lost her beloved 14-year-old dog, Samantha, she cloned two replicas. She commented that they had “different personalities... I’m waiting for them to get older

so I can see if they have her brown eyes and her seriousness.” Later, a somewhat disappointed Streisand remarked, “You can clone the look of a dog, but you can’t clone the soul.”

Given that canines hold a primary position in the animal world as “man’s best friend,” it should not be difficult to find another furry friend, perhaps one waiting to be rescued from a local shelter, who can serve as a new member of the family and once again pull at their owner’s heartstrings.

While animal cloning can sometimes be a reasonable choice, and ethically justifiable, the Catholic Church teaches definitively that the cloning of human beings is morally unacceptable. This conclusion arises from the recognition that human persons, unlike non-human animals, are created in God’s image and likeness, which implies an essential obligation that human procreation and the transmission of human life happen exclusively within marriage through the marital act of spouses.

As we consider animal cloning and other novel biomedical developments of recent years, we face important ethical questions about how best to exercise our limited dominion over the earth, including the animal kingdom. Our dominion is not an absolute right of domination over God’s creation. Instead, we are called to use reasonably, and avoid abusing, the powers we have received.

Exercising proper stewardship over animals ought to be a balanced part of a broader concern of avoiding exploitation of the vulnerable, as we try to be respectful of the given order of creation.

Cloning technology can have useful applications in animal husbandry, helping to generate stock animals that are more resistant to disease or that have a higher productivity rate. Researchers can engineer and clone dairy cows, for example, to produce an improved quantity of milk or better quality meat.



#### Fasting and abstinence during Lent

During the season of Lent, Catholics are called to take part in certain days of fasting and abstinence. **Ash Wednesday** and **Good Friday** are the **two days of both fasting and abstinence**. In addition, **all Fridays during Lent are days of abstinence**.\*

• **Fasting:** The norms on fasting are obligatory from age 18 until age 59. When fasting, a person is permitted to eat one full meal. Two smaller meals may also be taken, but not to equal a full meal.

• **Abstinence:** The norms concerning abstinence from meat are binding upon members of the Catholic Church from age 14 onwards.

*\*Exceptions to these guidelines include those who are physically and mentally ill (including chronic illnesses like diabetes) as well as pregnant and nursing mothers. The Church teaches that common sense should prevail so that a person does not further jeopardize his or her health because of the fasting requirements.*

But if animal cloning becomes widespread, as seems likely, it may have the subtle effect of shifting our attitudes and perceptions towards the animal kingdom.

By routinely cloning animals, they may come to be seen as little more than “manipulable quantities” or “raw material” for our domination — less as animals, and more as artifacts or objects. We need to be attentive to the prospect of reducing animals, including cloned animals, to market-driven technological commodities, cobbled together under the impetus of unrestrained profit-seeking.

So, while the cloning of non-human animals is generally permissible when proportionately serious reasons exist, we must also remain attentive to the broader social and environmental implications. The responsible use of the technology requires us to weigh carefully its scientific potential against the duty to avoid causing unnecessary suffering to animals or risks to their populations. †

*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](http://www.ncbcenter.org) and [www.fathertad.com](http://www.fathertad.com).*





# Dakota Catholic Action

Bismarck Diocese  
PO Box 1575  
Bismarck, ND 58502-1575

PERIODICAL

## 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 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).



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