



Faithful Footsteps

Walking Together in Faith on a Lifelong Journey

Just Say Yes: A Journey of Faith in the Brash Family

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?

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 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 recalls.

Attending Catholic 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. 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 reflects, “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 explains. “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. 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.”

Anna made her first Reconciliation on February 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 attends 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 admits. But being in a Catholic environment and receiving formation as a member of the university community, attending Wednesday morning Masses with coworkers, and watching Anna’s joy slowly opened her heart.

Though some questioned her support of Anna’s conversion—“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 at Broom Tree in May 2023 was the final push. She returned and spoke with Fr. Bouck, 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 this past spring. And Martin? He has been nothing but supportive. “He was apprehensive to send Anna to Catholic school,” Rachel remembers. “But he was very supportive and appreciative—and he still is.”

Some people have said that Anna “converted her family.” But she sees it differently. “All I did was say yes and step back,” she says. “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 says. “That will lead me to tomorrow.”



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

Walking Together in Faith to these

UPCOMING EVENTS

Emmaus Youth Retreat

Dickinson: Sunday, February 22, 2026, Trinity High School
 Bismarck/Mandan: Sunday, March 22, 2026, St. Mary's Central

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

2025-26 SEARCH WEEKENDS

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

MAR 6-8, 2026
 APR 17-19, 2026

WEEKEND COST: \$75⁰⁰
 PARTIAL SCHOLARSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE. NO ONE WILL BE TURNED AWAY BASED ON FINANCIAL NEED.

REGISTER ONLINE
SearchinMedora.com



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

Prairie Sheepfold

Catechist Gathering 2025-2026
 Freedom, Responsibility and Art

Thursday, February 12 7-9:00 PM
 Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, 519 Raymond St., Bismarck

We welcome CGS catechists/aides of all levels to gather for continuing education followed by time for sharing the insights of children in our atria and uplifting fellowship.
 Register at bismarckdiocese.com/goodshepherd



Carolyn Kohlhaas is a nationally recognized Formation Leader for CGS at all three levels of formation. She received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theology and in Religious Education from Franciscan University of Steubenville and her AMI Primary (3-6) and Elementary (6-12) Level Certifications from the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota. Carolyn has a Master of Education degree (Loyola College, Maryland) as well as a Master of Arts in Theology (St. Paul Seminary School of Divinity). She has worked with children in atriums in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis since 2006 and with adults in formation courses across the U.S. since 2009.

The United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd




New CGS Trainings Already in Motion for 2026

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

STEP UP TO THE PLATE: SAY YES TO GOD'S CALL!

A Catholic Vocations Day for 4th & 5th Grade All-Stars

TICKETS ONLY \$20 SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2026

SPONSORED by THE BISMARCK DIOCESE OFFICE OF CATECHESIS AND YOUTH

ST. MARYS ACADEMY
 1025 N 2nd St. Bismarck, ND

GATE OPEN AT 9:30 A.M.
 EVENT STARTS AT 10 A.M. - ENDS AT 3:00 P.M.

FREE DRINKS • FREE FOOD • DOORPRIZES



WWW.BISMARCKDIOCESE.COM/VOCATIONSDAY

You are invited to celebrate with all those who will be entering the Catholic Church this Easter season through Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist

RITE OF ELECTION AND CALL TO CONTINUED CONVERSION

FEBRUARY 22, 2026
 CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
 BISMARCK, ND

"Sought and Summoned" Retreat 12:00 - 2:45 PM for catechumens, candidates and their sponsors

Rites with the Bishop 3:00 PM
 Open to the Public Reception to follow




WHY YOUR RURAL PARISH NEEDS A YOUTH GROUP

Kevin Losleben November 12, 2025

[Rural Catholic Youth Ministry](#)

I've heard parish leaders give so many reasons as to why they don't have a youth group.

So, here is a list, in no particular order (except for the last one, which is the most important), of all the reasons why your small, rural parish **should** have a youth group:



- Because the kids in your parish are members of the parish just like everyone else and they need to be evangelized, formed, and built up...just like everyone else.
- Because at least 21% of fallen-away Catholics say they are now evangelical (and some of the kids in your parish are going to the youth group at the Protestant church down the street).
- Because the world we live in is aggressively secular and materialistic and seems hellbent on ruining kids' lives and God wants someone to be His hands and feet in order to tell kids about the gospel.
- Because if your parish were a Fortune 500 company, it would invest in a younger demographic to ensure it doesn't go belly-up in 10 years (and a youth group is that investment).
- Because the median age that kids leave the Church is 13.
- Because your diocese needs vocations and youth groups are often a key part of priests' journey.
- Because God is calling you to lead a youth group.
- Because running a youth group is fun and often boosts the faith of those running them.
- Because only 13% of Catholics say they pray daily, go to Mass weekly, and Confession at least annually.
- Because a youth group can breathe new life into a parish.
- Because most of the kids in your parish attend religious education classes, but not Mass, and a youth group can bridge that gap.
- Because kids want Jesus.
- Because many young adults cite problems with Church teaching as reasons they don't consider themselves Catholic, and that is often remedied by a loving member of the Church explaining her teachings to them.
- Because your priest is overwhelmed with baked goods from old ladies and a youth group is a great way to dispose of said baked goods.
- Because young people want to feel like they belong, and what better place to belong than the Catholic Church?
- Because if we don't tell kids who they are, the Internet will.
- Because most recently ordained priests say they first considered a vocation to the priesthood at the age of 16.
- Because Confirmation isn't graduation and youth groups give kids a reason to come back.
- Because Saints come from small towns (Assisi, Ars, Lisieux, Okarache...) and they could come from yours, too.
- Because the Church is always talking about losing young people, but not doing much to keep them around.
- But most of all, because...**Jesus was a small-town kid.**

If we look at Jesus' public ministry, we see that he went out to all of the "cities and villages" (Mt. 9:35). Villages are small. If Jesus felt it was worth His time to preach the gospel in small towns, then it's worth yours, too.

But it's also a big deal that Jesus grew up in a small town, because it makes the reality that we should see Christ in our young parishioners even more tangible. Think about it: God chose to live in a small town! Of all the places the Word could have chosen to "increase in wisdom and stature," He chose a tiny village in Galilee!

So stop coming up with excuses for not starting a youth group! We serve the Sower who scatters seeds willy-nilly, the shepherd who goes after the one lost sheep, and the Savior who would have died on the Cross even if you were the only one in the world needing saving.

Don't count the cost of starting a youth group, count the reward.

The Bismarck Diocese Office of Catechesis and Youth is working in partnership with RCYM. FMI please contact Diane

LOOK WHO'S WALKIN'

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



A Season of Service Complete: Honoring a Young Couple's Years with SEARCH

Kyle and Brenna Hoff were recently gifted with a beautiful blanket and mugs as a sign of appreciation for all the years they dedicated to the SEARCH program. After serving as adult leader for many years, they have "retired" to focus on their marriage and young family. Kyle shared his journey through the SEARCH program.

"My journey with SEARCH began in the fall of 2015. I had never heard of it before, but a past SEARCH'er came to our church and talked about it. It sounded interesting to me but I was 24 at the

time and thought I was too old. After a visit with Dean (Johns—program coordinator), we decided I would give it a try. I signed up for October SEARCH and enjoyed every minute of it. Upon returning home I told my then girlfriend about it and how she had to experience the weekend. She attended in January 2016. Given our age and commitment led us on an accelerated path with growing responsibilities of leadership roles and giving numerous talks. I directed a weekend in December 2016 and Brenna in October 2017. Although we don't have an exact number of weekends we attended, rough math puts it somewhere in the 30's. After getting married in 2019, we transitioned into adult roles and spent two years on adult leadership. It was a blessing and privilege to be on the leadership team and a great opportunity to help the SEARCHers grow in their own faith journey while working with a top notch, faith-filled team of adults. As our family responsibilities grew, we made the tough decision to step down from our leadership roles. Since then, our two boys (Logan 4 yrs & Laiken 5 mo.) have kept us running at all times. We serve at our local parish as lectors, Eucharistic ministers and being a part of the parish prayer chain. Last fall, we had the opportunity to attend WWME and really enjoyed and grew from that experience. We have also made Cursillo/Cum Christo weekends when time allows. In closing, we want to say how grateful we are for the numerous ways we have grown and the wonderful relationships we have formed along our SEARCH journey. The impact this program has had on the Bismarck Diocese, and others, is immeasurable and invaluable."

Family Night Fun at St. Joseph's in Beulah

Those that braved the cold and attended our family night enjoyed a delicious meal then played Catholic Jeopardy Trivia.

First and second place prizes were awarded to the Watson Family and Weiss Family.

Gift baskets included Catholic family games and items. Next family night will be Feb. 18th - Ash Wednesday



ST. JOSEPH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PRESENTS:

TRIVIA NIGHT

January 21st at 6:00 PM

ST. JOSEPH PARISH HALL

Supper Served at 6:00pm
Jeopardy style Trivia at 6:45

OPEN TO ALL FAMILIES WITH STUDENTS IN GRADES K-12 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

PRIZES AWAIT OUR WINNERS!