



Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 85 No. 3 **MARCH 2026**



AFRICAN MISSION APPEAL
PROVIDING A FUTURE FILLED WITH HOPE

www.bismarckdiocese.com



Vocations Jamboree

March 17-19, 2026

Featuring the Most Reverend Andrew Cozzens, bishop of the Diocese of Crookston and former auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. He led the three-year National Eucharistic Revival and oversaw the 10th National Eucharistic Congress in July 2024. His book, "A Living Image of the Bridegroom: The Priesthood and the Evangelical Counsels," was published in 2020 by the Institute for Priestly Formation (IPF). He currently serves as president on IPF's corporate board.

Join the University of Mary for its tenth annual Vocations Jamboree

Meet members of religious communities from around the country, ask questions, schedule personal meetings with vocations representatives, and learn more about opportunities to serve God and the community.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Bishop Andrew Cozzens

Bishop of the Diocese of Crookston

Wednesday, March 18 at 7:00 PM

Founders Hall, Lumen Vitae University Center, University of Mary



For full schedule and free registration, visit umary.edu/VocJam.

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Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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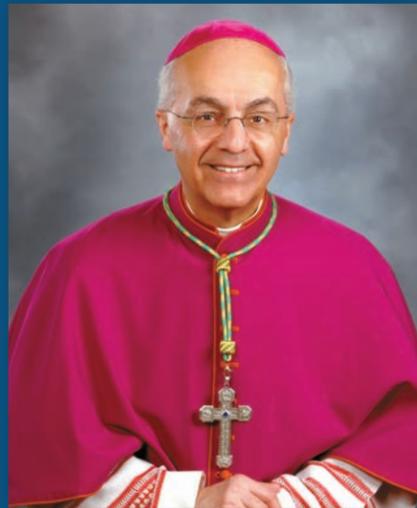
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FROM THE BISHOP

*Prepare ourselves to celebrate
Easter Sunday with true joy
and love*

Bishop David D. Kagan

Now that we are about a week and a half into our great penitential season of Lent, it might be good to take a moment to look at what we are actually doing to observe the discipline of Lent. The Church refers to the practices of prayer, mortification and alms giving (works of charity) as a discipline for a very good reason. To faithfully live the Catholic life first received in baptism, requires that we understand that each of us is engaged in spiritual warfare.

Every time we go to confession, it should be evident that this spiritual warfare between us and Satan is real, that Satan will not give up and so we should not ever give in to his false promises and persistent temptations. Even when we fail and then return to confession, God forgives us unconditionally and He gives us the actual graces to resist temptations and to strengthen our resolve to be faithful to Him.

So, back to my first statement. What are we actually doing to keep the discipline of Lent? Prayer is an absolute necessity for us to save our souls. Ask

yourself, am I setting real time aside every day to pray? Am I making an effort to be at Holy Mass every day in Lent to fortify myself with the Holy Eucharist to live better a life imitating Christ? Ask yourself, am I practicing real self-sacrifice in order to rid myself of the things that are an obstacle to my relationship with the Lord, or am I doing this to lose some weight? Ask yourself, what am I doing to be charitable to those in need? Am I giving from what I have extra or am I giving to others from what I need? Do I give but expect to be thanked, or do I give to others simply because they need me?

Lent followed by the Easter season are the two longest liturgical seasons in our Church's year. They are graced opportunities for all of us to return to the Lord with our whole heart and soul, mind and strength and live faithfully the Christ-like life which always sets a good example and gives glory to Almighty God. Let us pray for each other in these beautiful days and prepare ourselves to celebrate with true joy and love the day of our redemption, Easter Sunday!†

BISHOP IN ACTION



Submitted photo: As Fr. Joshua Hill, chaplain at Minot Bishop Ryan Catholic School, watched in the background, kindergartners, Brady Fegley, Maren Meduna and Isabela Brintnell, presented a celebratory gift basket to Bishop Kagan, filled with tokens and a year's worth of prayer intentions in appreciation and gratitude for his service and support of Catholic Schools. This took place at the conclusion of Mass during Catholic Schools Week in late January.



Holy Father's Prayer Intentions for March

FOR DISARMAMENT AND PEACE

Let us pray that nations move to effective disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament and that world leaders choose the path of dialogue and diplomacy instead of violence.

BISHOP'S SCHEDULE

MARCH 2026

March 1	Confirmation at the Church of St. Leo the Great, Minot, 1:30 p.m.
March 3	Presbyteral Council Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
March 5	Finance Council Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
March 9	Women's Care Center Board Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
March 13	Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
March 14	Rite of Institution of Acolyte, Church of Spirit of Life, Mandan, 8:30 a.m.
March 15	Confirmation at the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle, Tioga, 11 a.m.
March 17	Catholic Charities Board Meeting, Fargo
March 19	Confirmation at the Church of Christ the King, Mandan, 6 p.m.
March 20	Home On The Range Board Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 12 p.m.
March 22	Confirmation at the Church of St. Charles, Bowman, 10 a.m. MT
March 28	Palm Sunday Vigil Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck 5 p.m.
March 30	Chrism Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck 11 a.m.



Providing a Future
Filled With Hope

AFRICAN MISSION APPEAL



▶ March 7-8, 2026 Bismarck Diocese



Come and see the amazing work of the Bismarck African Mission

Tracy Kraft
Director of the African Mission

Editor's note: Tracy Kraft was one of four short-term missionaries from the Church of Corpus Christi who spent time at the African Mission this past summer. On Dec. 1, 2025, she was named the diocesan director of the mission overseeing the administrative and operational aspects.

June of 2025 was a month that I will never forget. After months of planning and preparations, our team traveled to Africa to participate in the short-term missionary program. We were excited to meet the people, see the country and offer our skills and abilities in support of the work of the mission, but the experience was so much more than the four of us could have imagined.

After our long flight and an overnight stay in Nairobi, we began our five-hour ride into the Kisii Highlands of Kenya. The roads were a challenge, but the beautiful, green landscape was amazing. We drove past zebra grazing along the road and saw so many lush views of the countryside dotted by small homes in a wide variety of bright colors. Many small towns serve as hubs for people who must walk to take care of their basic needs for water, supplies, school and religious services.

Everywhere we went, we were greeted by Kenyans of all ages walking along the roads. Most greeted us with wide smiles, lots of waving and excitement about seeing a car full of *wazungu* (white people). We finally arrived at the shamba in the afternoon after almost two full days of travel, and we were so pleased



with what we saw. The new shamba (farm) consists of a two story house, large building that contains a gathering room, storage for the supplies needed for the Water with Blessing Program, space designated for the library and tutoring program, large barn for the cows and chickens, caretaker's cottage and large garden filled with fruit trees, vegetables and napier grass for feeding the cows.

The house contains five bedrooms with sinks, closets and a prayer corner in each that offer a private space during your time in Kenya. There are two bathrooms that contain a toilet, sink and shower, two sitting rooms, laundry room, kitchen and beautiful chapel where we gathered each night for evening prayer. The rooftop balcony allows you to sit in the sun when it arrives midafternoon and dry your clothes on the line while gazing at the *mashamba* (farms, plots of land) all around you where the people live and raise



For more information on the diocesan African Mission, view this year's appeal video or donate, go to bismarckdiocese.com/african-mission.



crops such as maize, beans, bananas, millet, tea and potatoes. You can hear talking and laughter from neighboring families along with music from local churches. It is peaceful and beautiful.

We learned very quickly that thunderstorms play havoc on the electricity at the shamba, and we had one almost every night. We woke up very early and drove to Mass at Gekano Parish in the dark on winding, muddy roads. We prayed the rosary each day while holding on tight to avoid being thrown around in the back of the land cruiser. After the first few days, we got the hang of keeping our balance, and the drives became a very prayerful way to start each day. Upon arrival at the church, we carefully walked through the mud toward the front door where we greeted around 300 girls each morning for Mass. Their voices sang the songs and prayers of the Mass so beautifully, and we learned very quickly that language was not really a barrier to worshipping our Lord. We followed along with the prayers to the best of our ability and slowly learned to pray and sing along in Swahili and English. After Mass, we said goodbye to the girls and the sisters and headed back up the hills to the shamba for breakfast and our assignments for the day.

Our afternoons were spent working on various chores around the mission including some deep

cleaning, work in the garden, meal preparation, working in the business office and cleaning the filters that allowed us to have safe, drinking water. The shamba utilizes the same water filter system as the many women who have received training and supplies through the Water with Blessings Program. This is one of the primary outreach ministries to the community, and we had an opportunity to see it firsthand.

We learned how to prep the buckets and filters for an initial training with women from the surrounding communities, and then attended a training to see how Lilian and Emma teach the ladies about the health benefits of clean water, provide them with a demonstration of how well the filters clean the water and then a chance to taste the filtered water for themselves. We had a chance to do follow up visits to women's homes to see how things were going for them and their filtration systems, and the women were so gracious and excited to welcome our group into their small homes.

We learned very quickly that, just like in America, the homes reflected the personalities of the women who cared for them. Some were very neat and tidy; others were a bit more chaotic and each one gave us a first-hand glimpse into the lives of the women and children of Kenya. Finally, we had the opportunity

to attend a graduation session for a group of women who completed their training, demonstrated their mastery of the system and were awarded large drums to store water for their families which will save them many steps up and down the hills each day. The smiles on the women's faces that day were positively glowing.

We also traveled around with Robert, who oversees the heifer program for the mission. We did home visits to check on the heifers and their calves, provided salt blocks or spray for insects, and ensured that the animals were well cared for. The first calf from each heifer is given back to the mission for another family, and the cow will become theirs permanently.

We were also able to tour the latest home that was awarded to a family through the housing program. The mud house was solid, sealed to protect the family from the elements and sturdy enough to last them for 40 years or more. We were so impressed with the size and quality of the mud homes and with the fact that they are so well built that the family did not have to worry about the mosquitoes or the rain getting in.

Saturdays mean spending time with the orphans when they come to meet with the team for Mission Saturday. Each student brings their report card to discuss their grades and how school is going with Fr. Morman. They visit with Rogers and Robert about any needs or problems they have and then they see Sr. Teresa for their allowance, sanitary supplies and a boiled egg for some extra protein. Finally, they receive their monthly allotment of maize to take home to the families that care for them. Some of those little children carried those heavy bags so far to get them home that our hearts broke a little. But they were so grateful for all they received and thanked Bismarck Mission for all the care and support they receive. Visiting with them and seeing their shy smiles was a highlight of each week.

Sunday provided an opportunity to travel around with Fr. Morman to mission churches and celebrate



Mass with the Kenyan people, and it is truly a celebration! Watching them sing and dance and praise our Lord was one of the most moving experiences of my life. I could have stayed with them all day singing and praising the Lord. They have great reverence for the Word of God, and they offer what little they have, whether that is a coin or a stalk of sugar cane. Five or six hours of Mass on Sunday went much too quickly, and I couldn't wait to go again the following week!

The people of Kenya are warm, welcoming and joyful while living hard lives in abject poverty. I learned a lot from the people of Kenya about being grateful and at peace with what I have, and I will carry this lesson with me for the rest of my life. And now, I am blessed to be able to continue to serve our mission in Kenya, East Africa as the Director of the Mission for the Bismarck Diocese. I will do all I can to support the efforts of Fr. Morman and his team at the mission, as they work to provide for the orphans we serve and the greater community of Kisii and Nyamira counties. I look forward to sharing the short-term missionary program with people of the Bismarck Diocese and I am excited to assist future missionaries who will "come and see" the amazing work that our diocese is doing for the African people. †



AFRICAN MISSION

An update from the Bismarck African Mission

Fr. David Morman
Priest Administrator

*"We are here to serve
the children."*

These words are heard frequently from one member of the staff here at the Bismarck African Mission. They provide encouragement and a challenge to stay focused on the mission.

Education program

The heart and soul of Bismarck Mission is the education program for the orphans and vulnerable children that we assist. It is designed to be a support program for school-aged children so they may complete successfully their educational endeavor through secondary school. To be successful, we believe that students must work hard and have a personal investment in their success and future. To help students, we provide funds for tuition, uniforms and school supplies such as calculators, dictionaries and geometrical sets. Each month, the 399 children and youth come on their assigned Saturday to receive their monthly allowance (approximately seven dollars) and an allotment of maize. The allowance and allotment help them purchase school supplies and assist the guardians in caring for them. These Saturdays give us an opportunity to monitor progress in school and to inquire about their well-being. Children must attend school and bring their report card at the end of each term to remain enrolled in the program.



"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 nearly 400 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.



Wellness program

The wellness program of the mission had humble beginnings. Originally, it consisted of a yearly blood test for HIV and the administration of deworming tablets. Over the past five years, our wellness program has matured to become a seminar that resembles a yearly physical. Routine screenings for height, weight and blood pressure are done. Blood tests for anemia, malaria, diabetes, H-pylori and HIV are conducted. A deworming tablet is given. Educational seminars are led by alumni of our program; topics for discussion include hygiene, nutrition, problem solving and relationships—all guided by what is appropriate for the children’s age and sex. Each child is seen by a doctor, who receives information from the screenings and blood tests and conducts an examination. Common diagnoses include respiratory tract infections, skin conditions like scabies and fungal infections, anemia, gastric problems and ear and eye conditions.

For those in need of a referral to a specialist, arrangements are made for visits. For example, four children were referred to an ear, nose and throat specialist, and 12 children were taken to an eye clinic for further tests from the seminar held in November



2025. As we continue serving the children and youth, it is becoming evident that a clinic would be beneficial to the overall care provided to our population. A clinic could also be an outreach to the local community.

With joy and gratitude, we welcome Dr. Kevin and two nurses, Mellowdee and Wilfrid, who assist with the Wellness Program; they are alumni of the Education Program, and we supported them in their post-secondary studies. They are living testimonies of the hard work of students and the support of Bismarck Mission. After a recent seminar, one student, a boy who is a senior in high school came to me and stated, “I want to be a doctor, a doctor like Kevin.” He has the work ethic and determination to fulfill his dream, and we want to support him.

Tutoring program

In November 2025, Bismarck Mission conducted a pilot project of mentoring children during the extended school break. Two teachers, Daniel and Lydiah, were hired and covered the subjects of math, chemistry, biology, physics, English and Swahili for students in junior high school and senior high school. One day a week was devoted to primary age students. A total of 35 students participated. Timothy and Naom, siblings, attended every day—they walked for two hours, and often, they were joined by other students along the way. At the end of the tutoring sessions, we visited with the students and teachers—their recommendation was to continue these tutoring sessions during school



breaks. In Kenya, these breaks include the month of April, August, November and most of December. We plan to add other subject areas and to hire a teacher specifically for primary grades. We can say that our tutoring program is the seed that has sprouted, the seed that will become our library. Currently, we are reviewing options for our library. It will have books for reading, and it will be a resource center for tutoring.

The first half of 2025, the mission hosted visitors who came for a short while to experience life in the mission. In February and March, Bob Finken, from Douglas, N.D., was present, and in June, a group of four from Corpus Christi Parish in Bismarck came—Fr. John Paul Gardner, Tracy Kraft, Abby Lardy and Sarah Bengston.

Several things come to mind in reflecting on these guests, these short-term missionaries. First, learning a little of the language goes a long way. The basic greeting of “hello” (mambo or jambo), thank you and you’re welcome (asante and keribu) and stating one’s name (jina langu ni _____) can be mastered easily and create a bond of connection with the local people. Often, it is fear of making a mistake or mispronunciation that stands in the way of using a



foreign language. Another thing that often surprises visitors is the condition of the infrastructures with potholes and speed bumps. It elicits groans—these hazards become wearisome as they can be bone-jarring. And, when it rains, the challenges of driving on the roads increase greatly. A consolation while driving the highways and by-ways are the children who eagerly greet the passing vehicle and cry out with enthusiasm, “mzungu,” that is, “white person.” Guests marvel at the celebration of Sunday Mass with its music and dancing and processions. One Sunday, I was accompanied by our guests to three Masses each of which lasted two hours. We left at 6:30 a.m. and returned to the house around 2:30 p.m.; they lost track of time and were amazed it was well past two o’clock in the afternoon.

Vocations program

Finally, a beautiful, but fairly unknown aspect of our mission is the vocations program to support young women in discerning a vocation to religious life. There are five young women enrolled in the program who are affiliated with three different religious congregations. Ebisiba and Lineth are aspirants, that is, they have regular contact with a religious community and attend “vocation days” while they pursue their studies. Both, Ebisiba and Lineth, are



studying nursing. These two women are dedicated students and good role models; they are grateful for the opportunity given to them. Sister Christine was accepted as a novice in a community in December 2025 and is progressing toward her first vows later this year. She expresses gratitude to the Bismarck Mission as she fulfills a lifelong dream of being a religious sister. Sister Ruth made her first vows with her community in December 2025. Her home is near our shamba; she contacts me frequently to assure me of her prayers. Sister Naomi made her first vows in October 2024. She has been active in fostering relationships with other young women and serving as a mentor for those in their discernment. Each month they receive a small stipend to assist with needs, and they may request additional subsidy for items necessary for religious life. Those in school receive funding to pursue their education.

Throughout the course of each week, I hear words of gratitude—from students, teachers and administrators in schools, catechists and parish leaders, village chiefs and others—for the work of the Bismarck African Mission. I believe the words I hear reflect the generosity and faith of the people of the Bismarck Diocese and, ultimately, they are meant for God, Who is the source of life and every blessing. †

UPCOMING EVENTS



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.



Corpus Christi Fish Fry through Lent

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.



Lenten fish fry at Ascension

Enjoy a Friday fish fry at Church of the Ascension in Bismarck during Lent. The Knights of Columbus Council 7602 will be providing their Lenten meals with the rotating menu from 5 to 7 p.m. each Friday through March 27. The menu includes breaded fish, along with a variety of sides that rotate each week that include cheese pizza, baked potatoes, fresh salad, garlic bread, cheese soup, quesadillas, macaroni and cheese, coleslaw, tomato soup, cheesy potatoes, pasta bar, potato soup and fruit. Prices are \$15 for adults, \$5 for children age 12 and under and \$40 for a family (includes children age 18 and under and no more than two adults). The meal will be served at the parish community room at 1911 S 3rd St., Bismarck.



Vocations Jamboree March 17-19

Join the University of Mary for its tenth annual Vocations Jamboree on March 17-19. Meet members of religious communities from around the country, ask questions, schedule personal meetings with vocations representatives and learn more about opportunities to serve God and the community. This year’s keynote address will be delivered by the Most Reverend Andrew Cozzens, Bishop of the Diocese of Crookston and former auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. He led the three-year National Eucharistic Revival and oversaw the 10th National Eucharistic Congress in July 2024. He currently serves as president on the Institute for Priestly Formation’s corporate board. For a full schedule and free registration, visit umary.edu/VocJam.



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. 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.



Diocesan chrisms Mass March 30

All are welcome to join Bishop Kagan as he celebrates the chrisms Mass on Monday, March 30 at 11 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. Seating for the public will be limited. The Mass highlights the unity of the priests with their bishop and the sacramental life of the local Church. At this Mass, the bishop consecrates the sacred chrisms and blesses the oil of the sick and the oil of the catechumens. These oils are used during the year, throughout the diocese, for the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, holy orders and anointing of the sick.



Corazon weekends

Are you or someone you know struggling in a marriage? The diocesan program for troubled marriages called Corazon (Spanish for heart) is available the weekends of April 24-26 and Sept. 25-27. Couples who are in a marriage in crisis are encouraged to attend. All confidences are kept and privacy for anyone inquiring about or attending a Corazon weekend is a priority. For questions, contact Amanda at 701-204-7205. For couple registration or additional information, visit bismarckdiocese.com/corazon.

Answering the call to become one of God's priests

Sonia Mullally
DCA Editor

This fall, eight men answered the call to the priesthood and were accepted into seminary for the Bismarck Diocese. The diocese is blessed to 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 Tyler Selzler, Preston Barbie, Ronan Klindworth, Aiden Schaeftbauer, Nolan Johnson, Taylen Thomas, Paul Vetter and Joseph Schweitzer.

In this month's article, we introduce you to three of the eight newest men studying to someday be your priest. A profile in last month's issue featured three men and a subsequent article will profile the other men.

Tyler Selzler

Tyler Selzler grew up attending the small-town parish of Pius V Church in New Salem. There, he developed an admiration for the priesthood and a love for the Mass.

"While in high school, my pastor, Fr. John Guthrie, spent Wednesday evenings teaching our CYO classes," Tyler shared. "He would stay after every week and talk with us. I always admired his intelligence and looked up to him as a mentor. I loved the structure and stability of the Mass, and the idea that I can go to Catholic Mass anywhere in the world, at any time, and it would



Tyler Selzler

make present the same sacrifice that Jesus made for us 2,000 years ago."

Tyler's connection to his parish pastor led to thoughts of the priesthood but he put it aside to pursue college aspirations.

"I had thoughts about being a priest in high school because I admired my pastor, but I felt that it was more of a desire to grow in my faith," he said. "Father John mentioned once to me that I should pray about the call to the priesthood, but I wanted to go to school and study mechanical engineering, so I put off thinking about seminary."

After arriving at the University of Mary in Bismarck, his love of the sacraments was transformed leading him back to those thoughts about exploring a path to the priesthood.

"The beauty of the sacraments was displayed so well at UMary," Tyler shared. "Around this time, Fr. Paul Gardner started mentoring me and encouraged me to start going to daily Mass and praying in adoration more often. During my sophomore year, I went to a SEEK conference and met the FOCUS missionaries at our school. I started going to Bible studies with the missionaries. The FOCUS team leader led me in a discipleship program, and I eventually led a Bible study myself. All these events led me to thinking more seriously and praying with the idea of going to seminary. By my junior year of college, I found that I had a desire to go to seminary that was far stronger than continuing with engineering."

Tyler's formation at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis has been extremely positive and led to major growth in his faith.

"My experience of seminary so far has been great," he said. "I love the formation seminars where we are learning about salvation history, the Gospels, the Church and how it all applies to my personal relationship with Christ and with those around me. I enjoy learning about our faith and spending time with my brother seminarians."

Continued prayers are welcomed by all our seminarians, Tyler said.

"To the people of the Bismarck Diocese, I would like to express my sincere gratitude," he shared. "Your prayers and support are the reason I am here with all the other seminarians of our diocese. Please continue praying for us, our families and the formation teams at our seminaries."

Preston Barbie

Raised as a parishioner with his family at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck, Preston Barbie developed a servant heart at an early age.



Preston Barbie

"I've always loved the parish, and it has been a joy to be able to call it my parish, Preston shared. "St. Mary's has been a big part of my life and has been a large influence on my discernment. My family has been a part of an usher group, and I grew up helping in any way I could. Once I reached third grade, I was trained to altar serve and I was able to serve my parish through it. The desire to serve others and the Church has always been on my heart and a large part of my life."

The affinity for parish life went hand in hand with a deep appreciation for the priesthood. But it wasn't until his first year of college that he moved in the direction toward seminary.

"The priesthood has always been a part of my life growing up," he said. "You can't have the Mass without the priest. I first realized this fact and the importance of the priesthood late in grade school and throughout middle school, but I never really saw it as something for me. I attended St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck,

and it was there that I grew more in my faith. I began to take things more personally and make my faith a real part of my life. Different classes, talks, experiences and thoughts of my future challenged me and led me to begin truly considering my vocation. I felt then that it was my duty as a faithful man to not simply assume marriage as my vocation. Rather, I felt that discerning the vocation to join the seminary and possibly become a priest was not only worth praying about, but something that I ought to pray about and submit my will to the Father's will and let Him guide me where He wants me.

"Toward the end of the year, I didn't have enough confidence in the clarity of my vocation, and I didn't feel a call yet to join the seminary so I figured my best course of action would be to go to college, which would allow me to continue discerning. So, I attended the University of North Dakota studying aerospace engineering. Over the summer, after graduation, I kept feeling increasingly called to seriously consider the priesthood through different experiences, such as serving the impoverished while on a mission trip to Peru. Experiencing a higher level of serving others than I had experienced before and seeing Christ in the people I was with led me to feel a greater desire to join the seminary.

Preston finished out his freshman year of college but had already decided that seminary was the next step.

"Later that summer, I got in contact with Fr. Dosch, the vocation director at the time, and made known to him the call I was feeling," Preston added. "He guided me to continue to attend UND and gave me a few books to aid me as I discerned more seriously. Fr. Dosch supported me throughout my first year of college and, through the help of the Church, I was able to hear the call to the seminary and make the decision to ask for an application to join."

His parents choosing Catholic schools for him and his experience there made a tremendous impact on his faith life and discernment process.

"There are many people that have been influential in my life and that have brought me closer to Christ," Preston said. "First, my parents, who raised me in the faith, brought me Mass, taught me how to pray and ensured that I would receive an excellent education. Their influence in my life and the great many things that they have done for me are immeasurable.

“My high school chaplain at St. Mary’s Central High School and parochial vicar at my parish, Fr. Jake Magnuson, taught me what it means to be a disciple of Christ and how to live the faith more personally in my life. He was the biggest outside influence in my awakening of faith. Also, Dr. Nick Emmel from SMCHS was a large influence on my formation and education. He encouraged me to think in a different way, motivated me to think deeper and to ask more important questions. I am very grateful to Fr. Magnuson and Dr. Emmel for my high school education and formation as a young man striving to live a life of faith.”

Seminary life for Preston at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. has been a place of growth and exploration.

“My seminary experience so far has been very formative and enjoyable!” he shared. “The seminary is a place where one can grow in virtue and faith and in different aspects that are important for someone who is studying for the priesthood. I’ve had different classes at the Catholic University of America; I’ve traveled to places I’ve never been and done things I never imagined I would be able to do. We’ve gone on pilgrimage to different shrines along the East Coast and have been able to have silent retreats. My seminary experience has been one of growth in prayer and in who I am.”

Like many men in their first years of seminary, Preston is forging strong bonds with his brother seminarians.

“I enjoy seminary life a lot, but one of the biggest aspects is fraternity with the other guys here,” he said. “The seminary schedule is structured to allow for a balance of prayer, liturgies, classes, formation, work, leisure and fraternity. All these things are important and necessary for all aspects of the formation process and daily life. I enjoy all of them but have come to appreciate the fraternity a lot. Being in a house with almost 60 brothers allows me to create a lot of friendships and encounter many opportunities to spend time with them. It’s customary to spend time together after supper and we have a common room where we can relax. We play pool, foosball, cards, musical instruments, make coffee, play board games and watch sports games and movies. We encounter each other in different ways outside of schoolwork and create friendships through these different mediums.

Preston conveyed his immense gratitude to the people of our diocese for the prayers and continued support.

“To the people of the Bismarck Diocese, thank you very much for your support and prayers for all of us seminarians,” he expressed. “We are very grateful for all your generosity. We are very proud to be able to say that we are from Bismarck and it is because of all the faithful who we know are supporting us. Thank you all very much and God bless.”

Ronan Klindworth

Ronan Klindworth grew up attending the small-town parish of St. Joseph’s in Beulah with his family. It was there, during high school, that thoughts of the priesthood entered his heart and mind.



Ronan Klindworth

“I received the foundation of my catechesis in my parish through CCD classes, Bible studies and, most impactfully, through opportunities to attend Steubenville conferences, SEARCH retreats and the March for Life,” Ronan said. “These experiences brought to life the formation I received from a young age within the parish from my parents, catechists and pastors. In fact, it was through the Steubenville conferences and SEARCH retreats that the seeds of discernment were sown in my life.”

Those early thoughts of the priesthood came from the greater exposure to the Church as he became more involved with youth events in the diocese.

“These events introduced me to many of the holy priests of our diocese,” Ronan explained. “I especially was touched by the revelation of the true fraternity that is shared among the priests and seminarians of our diocese. These realizations combined with an increased devotion to our Lord in the Eucharist—present in the Mass and in adoration—was what, for the first time, made the prospect of seminary and the priesthood something that was attractive.

“The final push to join seminary came through the formation I received at the University of Mary. While there, I was invited into the mission of living my life



Staff photo: In August of last year, the 2025-26 seminarians for the diocese, with the vocations director, Fr. Steven Vetter, gathered on the front steps of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

for others and this gave me a context to live out the catechetical formation I had received to that point. Then, I knew that my desire to know about God was serving my greater desire to share Him with others and to ultimately imitate His love for me as I served others.”

The pastors at his home parish played a key role in his formation and journey toward the priesthood.

“I have had the blessing of two heroic pastors at St. Joseph’s,” shared Ronan. “My first pastor, Father Ken Phillips, really showed me what it looked like to be a man in love—a man in love with God and in love with the Church. This is most inspiring in hindsight because, as a child, I was not as excited about Church or CCD. My current pastor, Father Thomas Grafsgaard, accompanied me as a spiritual father throughout my adolescence. Father Grafsgaard presented the faith as something that was reasonable, which was what ultimately motivated me to take my faith seriously and my relationship with God as something that demanded my entire life.”

Ronan is studying at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. and said that seminary life has already exceeded his expectations.

“My experience thus far in seminary has been a great blessing,” he said. “The formation we receive has truly surpassed what I ever could have expected. The formators and spiritual directors are firmly committed

to the development of us principally as Christian men who can then respond generously to the call of fatherhood.”

The friendships formed and developed with his fellow seminarians is a highlight for Ronan.

“I most enjoy the vibrant fraternity of the seminary,” he shared. “There is real camaraderie among the 60 men who live in the house. The fraternity among the seminarians I am particularly close with, especially my diocesan brothers, is a bond that runs deep. We do many things together in our common life ranging from playing sports and games to going on excursions and road trips. The common pursuit of holiness through our life of prayer in the context of the brotherhood and culture of the seminary has been especially edifying.”

The prayers and generosity of the people of his home diocese are what fuel him on.

“A hallmark of my seminary experience has been the bombardment of immense prayer and support from the people of the Bismarck Diocese,” Ronan said. “I learned very early that the culture of the Bismarck seminarians is a clear reflection of the generosity of the people of the diocese. I would like to thank all the people from the diocese who make it possible to be formed in the seminary. I am greatly inspired by the generosity of the people of our diocese.” †

CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

The following appointments have been made with the permission of Bishop David D. Kagan:



The Reverend Nicholas J. Vetter to be Rector for the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, effective February 11, 2026.



The Very Reverend Douglas S. Krebs, J.C.L., to be Parochial Administrator for the Church of St. John the Baptist, Beach, and the Church of St. Mary, Golva, effective February 11, 2026.



The Reverend Jarad P. Wolf, to be Pastor of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Beach, and the Church of St. Mary, Golva, effective May 13, 2026.



The Reverend Roger A. Synek, to be Pastor of the Church of St. Patrick, Crosby, the Church of St. Luke, Noonan, and the Church of St. John the Baptist, Portal, effective June 1, 2026.



The Reverend Dustin L. Johns, to be Pastor of the Church of St. Anthony, Mandaree, and the Church of St. Anthony, New Town, effective June 1, 2026.



The Reverend Shane A. Campbell, to be Pastor of the Church of St. John the Apostle, Minot, effective July 1, 2026.



The Reverend David A. Richter, to be Pastor of the Church of St. Bernard, Belfield, the Church of St. Mary, South Heart, and the Church of St. Mary, Medora, effective July 1, 2026.



The Reverend Gregory R. Crane, S.T.L., to be Chairman of the Theology program at the University of Mary, Bismarck, effective June 1, 2026.



The Reverend Dominic F. Bouck, to be the Director of the Bishop Paul A. Zipfel Catholic Studies Program at the University of Mary, effective July 1, 2026.



The Reverend Paul A. Gardner, to be the Chaplain for the University of Mary and Director of the Pope St. John Paul II Center for University Ministry, effective July 1, 2026.



The Very Reverend Jared M. Johnson, to be the Director of Continuing Education for Clergy, effective Feb. 1, 2026.

Prayer for Priests

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.

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

March 1	Fr. Nicholas Vetter	March 16	Br. Nicholas Erickson, OSB
March 2	Sr. Grace Dahmus, OSB	March 17	Fr. Benjamin Wanner
March 3	Br. Elias Thienpont, OSB	March 18	Deacon Richard Fettig
March 4	Deacon Keith Due	March 19	Fr. Terry Wipf
March 5	Deacon Steve Brannan	March 20	Deacon Leonard Fischer
March 6	Seminarians and Religious in Formation	March 21	Benedictine Monks in Bogota
March 7	Sr. Ivo Schoch, SSND	March 22	Mother Chiara Thérèse, AFL
March 8	Fr. Steven Vetter	March 23	Fr. Brandon Wolf
March 9	Catholic Educators	March 24	Deacon Michael Fix
March 10	Seminarian Nolan Johnson	March 25	Seminarian Thomas Kraljic
March 11	Sr. Rosemary DeGracia, OSB	March 26	Sr. Jill West, OSB
March 12	Sr. Lucille Heidt, OSB	March 27	Fr. Jarad Wolf
March 13	Fr. Josh Waltz	March 28	Deacon David Fleck
March 14	Deacon Victor Dvorak	March 29	Bishop David Kagan
March 15	Fr. Justin Waltz	March 30	Sr. Mary Angela, ACJ
		March 31	Deacon Randy Frohlich

New biography about Servant of God Michelle Duppong tells the story of hope amidst suffering

It was a surreal moment for Ken and Mary Ann Duppong and their family on All Saints' Day, Nov. 1, 2022, at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, where Bishop Kagan made the formal announcement that he was opening a cause for canonization for their daughter, Michelle, giving her the title, Servant of God. This ordinary prairie girl from Haymarsh, North Dakota may, one day, be recognized by the Catholic Church as a saint.

The story of Servant of God Michelle Duppong is told in the newly released biography, *Michelle Duppong: Hope in the Depths of Suffering*, by Bismarck author, Patti Maguire Armstrong, with Stephanie Parks. Through the story of Michelle's life, we come to know this ordinary farm girl who loved travel, visiting with friends, four-wheeling, pizza and Irish bands. But in the midst of her ordinariness was an extraordinary love of Jesus that she would not—could not—contain. She did not just want to be a saint, but “a great saint.” She craved heaven not just for herself, but for everyone.

After graduating from Fargo's North Dakota State University in horticulture, it was a perfect fit that Michelle became a FOCUS missionary for six years promoting the faith on college campuses with the last year being at the University of Mary in her beloved North Dakota. From there, Bishop Kagan hired Michelle to be the Director of Faith Formation for the Bismarck Diocese. Besides sharing her deep faith with the staff, she reached out to the small-town priests and churches to put on missions, and she headed up the first Thirst Conference in Bismarck in which over seven thousand attended to listen to top Catholic speakers.

Cancer diagnosis

Michelle brought people to Jesus and celebrated the beauty of the Catholic faith even during her last year of life while fighting cancer. When she was diagnosed with benign ovarian cysts in late 2014, surgery was scheduled to remove them since the pain had become intense. To everyone's shock, the expected routine surgery revealed there were tumors throughout her abdomen. Michelle was diagnosed with stage four cancer and given two months to live.

Michelle and her family were not alone in the fight against cancer. The story spread and an international network of prayer warriors united, and ultimately over 230,000 people prayed and followed her story on the Caring Bridge website. People continued to be drawn to Michelle during her last year, though dying and so often in pain, she comforted others and led them to Jesus. Michelle prayed for healing but trusted in whatever God's plan was for her.

Michelle died at the age of 31 on Christmas Day in 2015, a year after the initial discovery of cancer. Almost immediately, her parents, as well as Bishop Kagan, began receiving sympathy cards and letters daily from around the country. People testified to the impact Michelle had on them, with many describing the graces obtained through her intercession. Most reported a deep peace and trust in God's will after praying to Michelle. Her growing reputation for holiness led Bishop Kagan to open her cause for canonization. After the diocesan investigation is complete, it will be sent to Rome. If

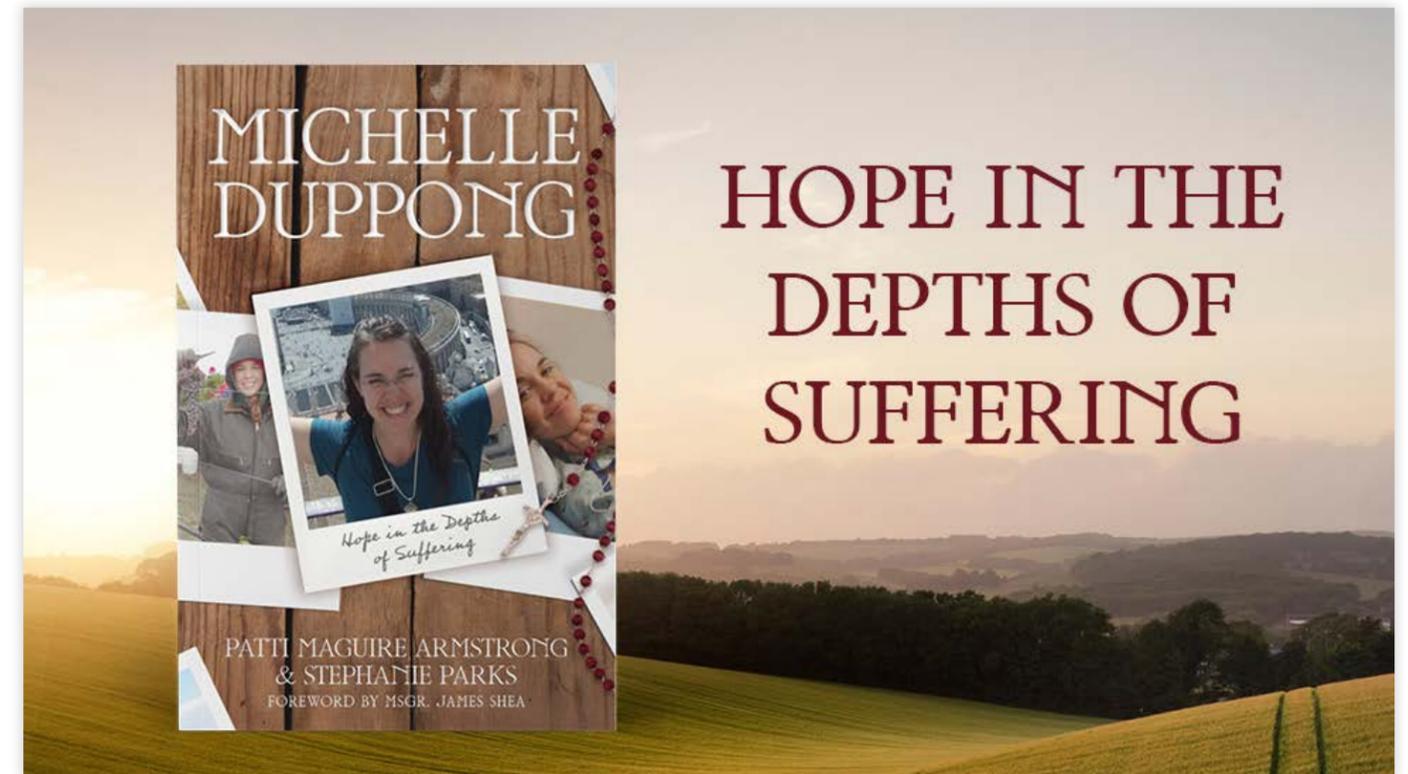


Image courtesy of Sophia Communications.

HOPE IN THE DEPTHS OF SUFFERING

it is agreed that Michelle lived a life of heroic virtue, she will be given the title “venerable.” From there, a miracle is required for her beatification to be called “blessed” and another to be canonized as a saint.

Still stirring hearts

Msgr. James Shea, President of University of Mary, explained in the book's foreword, that Michelle's evangelization did not end with her death, but now continues on through the story of her life.

In the words of her spiritual director, Msgr. Thomas Richter, Michelle's last year on Earth was a “twelve-month Holy Week”—a year in which illness and suffering did not interrupt her evangelization but instead fulfilled it.

Each chapter includes “In Michelle's Words”—brief excerpts from her talks, podcasts and writings from a book assembled by Servant of God Michelle Duppong Guild—to help readers pray with her heart and live what she lived. Readers will witness

a woman whose joy and faith is still spreading, whose sanctity continues to lead others to Jesus and whose hope-filled insights into redemptive suffering will help steady souls in their trials. For more information on the guild that works to promote awareness of Michelle's life and ministry, go to michelleduppongcause.org.

Michelle's example leads us all on a path to sanctity. Her life reveals how to practice present-moment trust in one's relationships with God and others, and how to accompany others into deeper discipleship with Him.

Get the new book

The new book, *Michelle Duppong: Hope in the Depths of Suffering*, is available for purchase at Amazon.com and other online retailers such as sophiainstitute.com and catholiccompany.com. †

—Staff report

University of Mary earned national honors for pro-life culture and Catholic identity

Recently, the University of Mary was recognized for excellence in two areas—pro-life culture and Catholic identity.

The university has been named a Top 10 Christian college in the nation for strongly integrating pro-life values into campus life and, once again, named a Cardinal Newman Society Recommended College in *The Newman Guide 2025–2026*, earning the organization’s widely respected “seal of approval” for faithful Catholic higher education.

Culture of Life

The University of Mary earned a rare A+ grade with zero infractions in the 2025 Christian Schools Project conducted by Students for Life of America’s Demetree Institute for Pro-Life Advancement. Out of 725 Christian colleges and universities investigated nationwide, only 66 received an A+ rating. The University of Mary not only achieved that distinction, but rose to the top tier for its comprehensive, mission-driven commitment to a culture of life.

That culture is visible in concrete action. Nearly 200 University of Mary students, faculty and staff travel annually to Washington, D.C., for the National March for Life, undertaking a 60-hour round-trip bus journey that the university intentionally frames as a pilgrimage. The institution underwrites a portion of the cost to ensure that financial barriers do not prevent students from participating.

At the heart of campus life is Collegians for Life, the largest student organization at the University of

Mary. The student-led group partners with Students for Life of America to bring national speakers and professional training to campus, while also engaging in service and outreach in the local community.

The university’s pro-life commitment is perhaps most powerfully embodied in the Saint Teresa of Calcutta Community for Mothers, a nationally acclaimed initiative that provides on-campus housing, support, and community for single mothers pursuing their undergraduate degrees.

These investments reflect the University of Mary’s ongoing commitment to supporting families and honoring the sanctity of life through practical, mission-driven support for student mothers.

Since 2023, three mothers have graduated from the program, with three more currently enrolled.

Building on that success, the University of Mary recently announced plans to construct Saint Joseph’s Residence Hall, a new 58,000-square-foot, \$20 million facility that will include a dedicated wing for the Saint Teresa of Calcutta Community for Mothers. The project will provide private living spaces for mothers and children, along with a state-of-the-art, year-round daycare.

The university also marks the National March for Life each year with Life & Dignity Week on campus, a series of educational and formative events celebrating the inherent dignity of every human person.

“The sanctity of human life is core to who we are,” said Father Dominic Bouck, chaplain and director



Submitted photo: Students enjoy the Marian grotto on campus.

of University Ministry. “As a Christian, Catholic, and Benedictine institution, we form students to live well, to serve generously, and to carry a culture of life into their communities after graduation.”

Faithfully Catholic

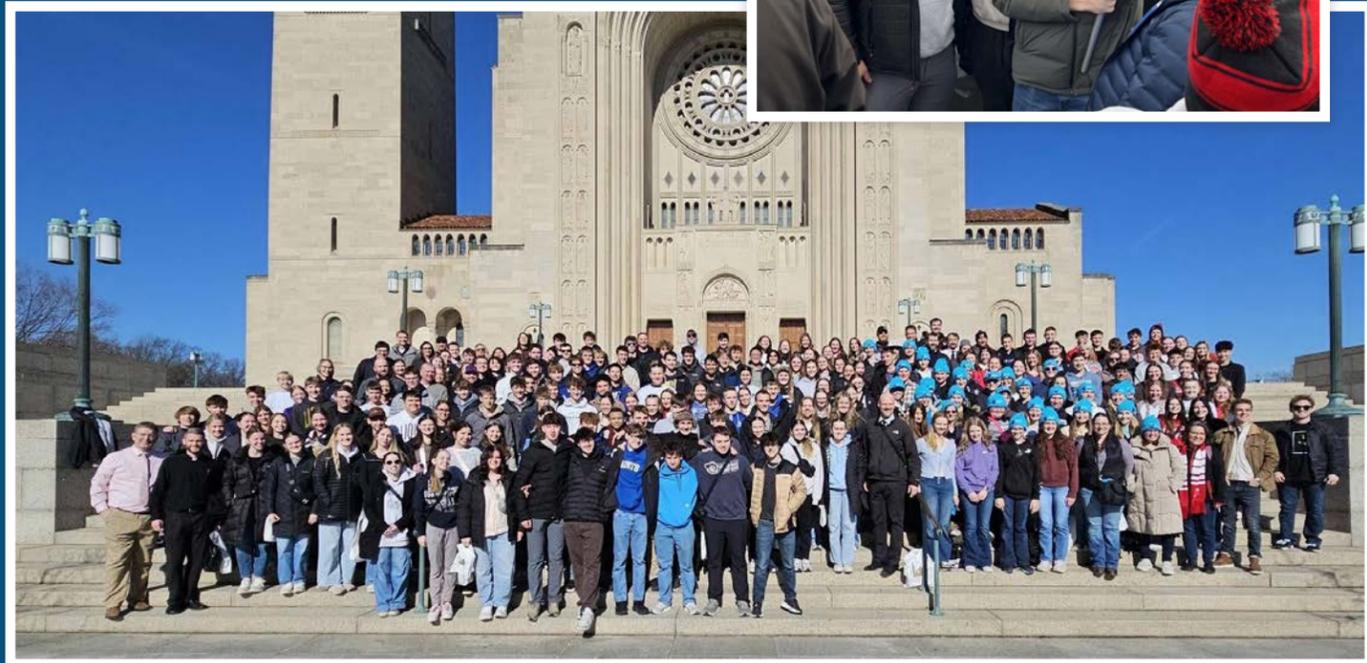
The Top 10 national ranking further distinguishes the University of Mary as a Catholic institution recommended by the Cardinal Newman Society, underscoring its fidelity to mission and offering a strong example of how faith and values can be fully integrated into the life of a university.

Published by the Cardinal Newman Society, *The Newman Guide* is a nationally and internationally trusted resource for students and parents seeking colleges and universities that are academically strong and authentically Catholic. The 2025–2026

edition highlights select undergraduate institutions worldwide and identifies just seven Catholic colleges and universities recommended for graduate education.

Monsignor James Shea, president of the University of Mary, said the recognition is both an honor and a responsibility.

“We are deeply grateful and genuinely humbled to be recognized once again by the Cardinal Newman Society,” Shea said. “When I travel around the country—and around the world—I am often asked how a private Catholic university in Bismarck, North Dakota, continues to grow and thrive, expand its campus, and welcome record enrollment year after year. The answer is simple: the University of Mary remains true to its mission. We are faithfully Catholic, joyfully Christian, and gratefully Benedictine.” †



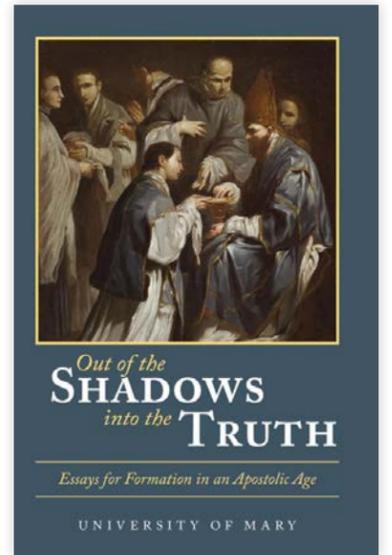
Final portion of essay considers testing tradition through a Catholic lens

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. The portion below is the final of three parts from this portion of the book that explains a link between Christianity and tradition as well as how tradition can be problematic. The first two parts of this essay appeared in the previous two issues of the *Dakota Catholic Action*.

5. Two Tests

Some practical litmus tests can be applied that can help to see whether such hidden progressive tendencies are present in our own thought and behavior. One has to do with the overall atmosphere we engender. It is part of progressive dogma that the evil of the world comes not from personal sin, not from the wound of our nature, but from external sources, structures of evil that need to be destroyed so that the inherent goodness of humanity can emerge. For this reason every progressive cause is necessarily revolutionary: its moral demand is to tear down whatever out there has been identified as the source of evil. Spreading the progressive gospel is by necessity a call to violent or disruptive action, and progressive believers make converts by inciting people to anger and anxiety. Given the progressive mindset, this evangelistic tactic makes sense. Only if people become worried and enraged will they be motivated to embrace revolutionary action. Christianity, on the other hand, makes its way in the world and announces its Gospel in very different terms. The Christian call is to do battle, but mainly with self. It is a call to repentance and humility, to love and reconciliation, to union with God. If as a group of Christians we find ourselves enveloped in an air of anger about what is going on in the Church and the world and

we regularly try to get others angry, if our thoughts and energies are mainly directed at seeking out and eradicating external enemies, if a sense of moral superiority because of our correct practices has gained the upper hand among us, we can be sure that the deep structures of modern progressivism are unwittingly present.



A second litmus test can be found in the progressive tendency to settle upon a simplistic solution to the complex problem of human evil. Every progressive cause produces a “silver bullet,” the one thing that will do the job in overcoming evil. It is the philosophy of the “if only.” If only we do away with the aristocracy; with the bourgeoisie; with the Church; with patriarchy; with heteronormativity; with Jews; with white privilege; with our flawed human “wetware,” everything will fall into place. This way of thinking is one of the sources of our society’s current proliferation of conspiracy theories that hope to identify and thus overcome that one source of our evil. Christians who have been influenced by the progressive mindset can be swayed by similar simplistic views in a variety of directions. As an example, some among both liberal and traditionalist Catholics have identified such a silver bullet in the practices of the liturgy. If only we can change the liturgy, the Church will be launched into its new progressive form. If only we can retain a specific ecclesial tradition of the liturgy, all the ills of the Church will evaporate. Liturgy

is indisputably of central importance in our Catholic life and worship, but when seen through the reductionist lens of our prevailing cultural mindset it can come to be viewed as the single issue upon which everything else hangs.

6. Gaining a Catholic mind concerning tradition

“Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name” (Jaroslav Pelikan).

The authentic Catholic view rejects both of the options – progressivist and traditionalist – mentioned above. Catholics know that every age from the first coming of Christ to His return shares the same fundamental conditions. In every age both God and the devil are on the move, human hearts are being sifted, and the Gospel is continuing to make its way among the languages and cultures of the world. The Catholic mind recognizes that the “counter-revolution” is not a revolution in reverse, which would be a capitulation to secular thinking; it is the re-articulation of perennial truth and a recovery of Christ’s balance of the old and the new. The Catholic mind refuses to be co-opted by a false view of history, and it reasserts the important distinctions that apply in every age between Apostolic Tradition, particular ecclesial traditions, and human traditions.

To be a Catholic means to be traditional in the full understanding of that word. It means loving the Apostolic Tradition: the deposit of faith handed on by the Apostles, eminently preserved in the Scriptures, remembered by the Church, and interpreted authoritatively by the Church’s magisterial gift. When Saint Paul wrote to his disciple Timothy concerning his duties as a bishop, he summed up his letter by saying: *“O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you!”* (1 Tim 6:20). That task of guarding the Good News of Jesus has been the joy and duty of every disciple. In addition, to be Catholic means to honor the many Christian traditions that have arisen through the centuries and that the Church has taken to its heart, even those of times or places that have no connection to us. It means avoiding the perilous temptation of thinking ourselves wiser and holier than our ancestors. This is what G. K. Chesterton meant when he wrote, “Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition

refuses to submit to that arrogant oligarchy who merely happen to be walking around.”

At the same time to be a traditional Catholic means to recognize the difference between Tradition and traditions, and to willingly honor the authority given by Christ to the Church’s magisterium for ordering its ecclesial traditions according to the Apostolic Tradition. Those who have embraced a Catholic mind are reticent to change the forms by which the Apostolic Tradition has come down to us, knowing that rapid change, even concerning that which is not essential, can call into question revealed truths. Yet they will equally avoid the temptation to absolutize cultural expressions of the faith. They will remember Christ’s admonition to the Pharisees: *“You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!”* (Mk 7:8-9). Serious-minded traditional Catholics will feel drawn to and rejoice in particular ecclesial customs, but they will remember that difference does not mean disunity wherever the Apostolic Tradition is honored and the authoritative voice of the Church is present and giving guidance. Above all, they will strive to maintain unity and the bond of peace with all genuine fellow-believers, loving the Church, preserving their hearts from anger or pride (for God opposes the proud even when they are right), and fostering in their own communities a visible unity in worship without affectation.

In this time of increasing extremism in the wider society, with so much anger and vitriol captivating both our political order and the public discourse of Catholics, it has become critically important for those who have been given the grace of Christian discipleship and the task of guarding what has been entrusted to us to embrace the whole of the Catholic mind regarding tradition. We can do so in a spirit of joyful repentance, faithful obedience, and hope-filled trust. In response to God’s grace for our times we will want to become like that scribe spoken of by Jesus and trained for the Kingdom of Heaven, and who therefore knows how to bring forth both the old and the new from the treasure of our faith.

This article concludes the three-part series of the section of the book, “Out of the Shadows, Into the Truth: Essays for Formation in an Apostolic Age.” †

OBITUARY

Father James Kilzer, OSB

Father James Kilzer, OSB, 63, passed away on Saturday, Feb. 7, 2026, in the Benedictine Living Community in Dickinson. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at Assumption Abbey on Feb. 16. He will be buried in the Abbey Cemetery.

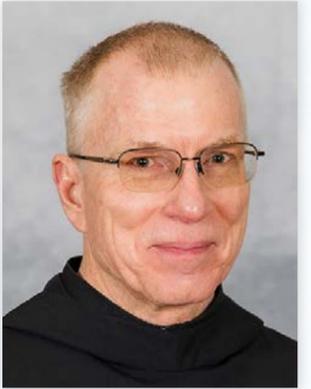
Born in Jacobson Memorial Hospital in Elgin, N.D. on Nov. 26, 1962, the tenth of 14 children, he was named Ernest after his Benedictine uncle, a monk of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, Minn. Ernest grew up on the farm settled by his paternal grandparents seven miles from Bently, N.D., and attended Eagle Scout School #2 in Hettinger County, where the students were almost all his siblings or cousins. High School took him to St. Mary’s in New England, N.D. for one year; the remaining years he spent in Mott Lincoln High School, graduating in 1981.

After two years at Eastern Montana College in Billings, Mont. studying chemistry and computer programming, he took time off to see the world with “Up with People” before a stint at selling everything from vacuum cleaners to cotton candy. Then, in 1986, he returned to college earning a bachelor’s degree in theology from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio in 1989. That same year, he came to Assumption Abbey and, after candidacy and novitiate, received the name James when he pronounced simple vows in 1991.

After solemn vows in 1994, he attended St. John’s School of Theology in Collegeville, Minn. and was ordained a priest in 1998. He frequently did weekend pastoral work. His penchant for wordsmithing was appreciated both in the parishes in which he helped, as well as by his brother monks.

A self-starter, James got involved in many areas of work. If he did not know how to do something, he read everything he could get his hands on and learned how. Tough jobs of refurbishing and altering rooms went to James because he had, it seemed, limitless skill and energy. His assigned duties over

the years showcased his multiple interests. He was in the abbey business office for 16 years. He made candles for sale. He was an excellent carpenter. For one of his last major projects, he installed a new stock tank in the east pasture of the abbey farm, to prevent the banks being muddied by cattle, something unhealthy for them and for wildlife.



When James took charge of the abbey gift shop, he built new and better shelving, set down new vinyl flooring and turned the place into a boutique with ample inventory. All of this he did while serving as the abbey’s oblate director for 22 years; he gave that lean program a solid base and the enrollment mushroomed.

Diagnosed with cancer in June of 2024, he did not sit on his hands but began journaling. He sent these reflections to various newspapers, then collected them into a self-published book titled “Thoughts on Living with Cancer,” which was a comfort to many.

Father James was preceded in death by: his parents, Werner and Edith (Remington) Kilzer; brother, Mike; sister-in-law, Vicki; nephew, Colby Kilzer; and niece, Lindsay Binstock. Besides his brother monks at Assumption Abbey, he is survived by 12 of his 13 siblings: Sherryl (Muessig) Kilzer of Billings, Mont.; Madonna (Walter) Braun of Rosholt, S.D.; Richard (Linda) of Redding, Calif.; Paul (Karen) of Richfield, Minn.; Roger (Sue) of Bently, N.D.; Veronica (Dan) Sparling of River Falls, Wis.; Lauretta (Terry) Marigny of O’Fallon, Ill.; Jude of Minneapolis, Minn.; Margaret (Allan) Binstock of Dickinson, N.D.; Raymond (Brenda) of Mott, N.D.; Sharon of El Paso, Texas; Marian (Kent) Quamme of Fergus Falls, Minn.; and Kristine (Stewart) Mehrer of Dickinson, N.D. †



Priorities: answering God's call in life

James Odermann

Previously I talked about the fact that God was going to call me back, back to a life where only joy and love prevail. Then, I asked myself, “Am I ready to be returned home?” This question gives new meaning to how I use my time, how I respond to God’s message.

This point was accentuated the other Sunday morning when I received a message on my cell phone, “Your daily average phone time last week was 1 hour, 52 minutes, down 10% from the previous week.” Really? Did I spend that much time talking on the phone?

I was relieved to hear I did not talk that much. Further investigation revealed talking, texting, reading and replying to emails or just checking prices on supplies needed on the ranch. (The phone will keep track of everything from heart rate to respirations to steps in a day to calories used. There are many things I don’t want know about—and even more I do not want the data collectors to know.)

Yet, welcome to today’s world. The phone (which really is a computer) is an addiction. I seem unable to leave my office to do chores, go to town or just relax on the couch without that pesky machine in my hands, pocket or at my side.

I am obsessed—more like controlled—by the mischievous hand-held device. Is it an entertainment piece? A tool for work? Both? What is my fixation with that phone? If I cannot sell it or turn it off, it owns me.

So, I thought what can I do to take control of my life. “Don’t talk so much,” was the first answer when I asked the question around a table of family members. “Just shut it off,” was another quick reply, as family members hammered away on their own phone. My grandson said, “Grandpa, give it (phone use) up for Lent.” Other suggestions cropped up as the conversation moved to other topics.

In the quiet of my office, however, I did examine my phone use. I really got to second guessing my priorities because the data analysis revealed 7.73% of my day was spent on that doggone machine that follows (or should I say leads) me around like cards at a pinochle tournament. (And I do not even have a Facebook page!)

That figure embarrassed me. My mortification was amplified when I placed that statistic within the context of spiritual development. I reflected on the time I spent nurturing my soul, time spent in prayer, solitude communicating with God. I blushed—and I should feel shame.

My mind was racing with dozens of questions as I tried to make sense of my choices, my priorities. My time management, in relationship to spiritual development, was like an aircraft carrier in a desert. I was going no place. The most alarming—and most scary—concept was my self-examination of my allegiance to God, who created heaven and earth and all within that sphere, a timeless world that always was, is and will be.

On earth, my life is finitely measured with time and is very short, but my life is eternal, as God wanted. My earthly dwelling is less than a speck within the frame of eternity; scarier than scary.

The key to this issue seems to be choices I make with my time. “Do I prioritize a relationship with God?” (I already confessed spending more time on my phone than in spiritual development. I need to change that behavior.)

As a youngster—and still today—I could work myself into a frenzy about not meeting the expectations of God, failing God by failing others, by not living the 10 Commandments, receiving the sacraments, performing the corporal or spiritual works of mercy, sharing the beatitudes, etc. In fact, as a human, it is not possible to reach that level of perfection. I know I will fail.

Despite the failings, there is hope because I know God is forever loving and forever forgiving. God’s love and kindness is on display daily. I need to see the opportunities of life, the blessings and tests God presents to me as I ride the trail of life, navigating forks in the road, fording streams of challenges and relishing the gifts of joy with which I am blessed.

Despair is not an option because God is right there alongside me, holding my hand—if I genuinely want and ask for forgiveness. God’s guidance might be visible in a scene of nature or from a grandchild, a co-worker, a spouse, a friend who loves unconditionally, with the true spirit of God’s love.

I must be patient, hopeful and humble as I live—and be always ready when God calls. Care to join me? †

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



Q: Why isn't the term "last rites" used anymore?

Fr. Joseph Evinger

Many people think the phrase “last rites” means anointing of the sick. Later in this article, I’ll explain what the phrase actually means and that we still use the term. But first let me talk about anointing of the sick to clarify some things about this sacrament.

Every now and then I hear that a Catholic is sick in the hospital. The person could be sick for a variety of serious reasons: heart attack, stroke, cancer, bad infection, hip or knee replacement, etc. I usually ask the person who told me if he or she has been anointed. Meaning, has the person received the sacrament of the anointing of the sick?

Sometimes the person has been anointed, other times it didn’t cross the person or family’s mind, or sometimes the person does not want to be anointed. Sometimes the person is afraid of being anointed because, in their mind, they think that if they are anointed, it will cause them to die.

Before the revision of the rubrics or guidelines surrounding the sacraments after Vatican II, the books stated that someone should only receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (then called extreme unction) when the person was close to death. This caused priests and laity alike to assume that you have to make sure someone is almost dead before calling the priest.

However, this was not the intention when Jesus gave the Church this sacrament. We hear about this sacrament specifically in two places in the New Testament.

In Mark 6, right after Jesus sends out the 12 Apostles on mission we read: “So they went off and preached

repentance. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.” So, we see that anointing here is more about curing the sick than causing them to die. Also, in James 5 we read: “Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.” As you can see there is no mention again that the sacrament will cause the person to die. Rather the sacrament gives grace and God’s healing whether that is physical, spiritual or both.

So, what does “last rites” mean?

When a Catholic is determined to be dying and the priest is called and arrives, the priest gives the person the sacraments of confession, anointing of the sick and Holy Communion (assuming the person is still capable of receiving confession and Holy Communion). There are also prayers, psalms and other rituals that correspond to a dying person that the priest does as well.

Once the person has died, and it was the last time they received these rites, only then do we call these rites the “last rites.” Just as after a person has died, we talk about their last goodbye, their last meal, a last vacation, so too after the person died, we can say he or she received the last rites. The sacraments of the Church right before the person died gave him or her the strength necessary to say “yes” to God upon death. †

Fr. Evinger is pastor of St. Joseph in Killdeer, St. Paul in Halliday and St. Joseph in Twin Buttes. If you have a question you were afraid to ask, now is the time to ask it! Simply email your question to info@bismarckdiocese.com with “Question Afraid to Ask” in the subject line.



BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

Educational choice comes to North Dakota

David Tamisiea

Just this past January, Governor Kelly Armstrong announced that North Dakota will participate in a new federal program that offers tax credits for certain donations made to organizations that provide educational scholarships to K-12 students in our state. North Dakota is numbered among 23 states planning to participate in what is called the Education Freedom Tax Credit program. Over the past several months, the North Dakota Catholic Conference and the State Association of Nonpublic Schools have been advocating with the Governor's office to opt in to this exciting new program so that all North Dakota students might have real options to access educational opportunities that suit their needs.

The Education Freedom Tax Credit program marks the first time the federal government has specifically incentivized charitable giving through federal tax credits to support educational choice. Educational choice is the idea that families should have the freedom to choose the educational setting and tools best suited to their children. It also entails the notion that, for families to be truly free in making these choices, they should be given adequate financial resources. This new federal tax credit program is a big step towards increasing educational freedom in North Dakota.

The Education Freedom Tax Credit program was part of the Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill that was signed into law on the 4th of July last year and will take effect beginning on Jan. 1, 2027. The program has no sunset provision and is now a permanent part of the federal tax code. It aims at making a broad array of educational choices more affordable for families and will be administered by the U.S. Treasury Department.

Under the Education Freedom Tax Credit program, individual taxpayers can receive a dollar-for-dollar

tax credit up to \$1,700 for cash contributions made to approved Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGO), which in turn grant educational scholarships to eligible K-12 students. Although donors cannot earmark funds for any particular student, donors can designate the funds be used to support students at a specific school or school system. If for some reason the taxpayer cannot use the full tax credit that year, it can be carried over to future tax years for up to five years. While donors could give more than \$1,700, the credit is only available for \$1,700 per year. Even so, any amount donated over that amount might still be treated as an itemized charitable deduction to reduce taxable income. One area that the Treasury Department will need to clarify is married couples filing jointly. The law states "any taxpayer" can use the tax credit but it does not address married joint filers, so it is unclear right now whether each spouse on a joint return could separately claim up to a \$1,700 credit (for a potential \$3,400 combined credit) or if a joint return is limited to a single \$1,700 credit.

What this means is that, instead of North Dakota taxpayers sending all their federal tax dollars to the federal government in Washington, D.C., they can instead direct the funds to stay in North Dakota to support educational choice for families in our state.

Under the program, a participating SGO must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is approved by the governor and cannot be a private foundation. The SGO is required to provide scholarships to at least 10 or more students who do not all attend the same school. The SGO must also run lean and spend no less than 90% of all donations on funding student scholarships. The SGO must provide scholarships to children to attend the school of their choice or to access other qualified education-related services and products.

To be eligible for a scholarship, a student must be eligible for enrollment in a public K-12 school and have an annual household income at or below 300% of the "area gross median income." This is a high threshold that would cover the majority of North Dakotan families. SGOs are also allowed to narrow eligibility requirements within this general framework to prioritize assisting those in greatest need. Thus, for example, an SGO could establish means-testing levels where needier students from poorer families would qualify for more funds or would be first in line for the scholarships. Although the amount of a donor's tax credit is limited to \$1,700, scholarship amounts given to students are not capped and will be determined by the SGO awarding those scholarships based on its mission.

Education freedom scholarships in this program can be used for any qualified education expense of an eligible student, which includes a broad set of expenses incurred in connection with K-12 education for students in public, private, charter or home schools, located in urban, suburban or rural areas. These qualified educational expenses include things like tuition, fees, tutoring, special needs services, books, supplies, uniforms, transportation, computer technology, internet access and the like, as long as it is used for educational purposes. The SGO, however, could narrow this list to focus more specifically on funding scholarships that align with its mission. Thus,

for example, an SGO with a mission to support students wishing to attend nonpublic schools could offer tuition-only scholarships.

For a state to participate in the program, two things must happen. First, the governor or other state official or agency designated by state law must opt in to the program, which our governor has already done. Second, the governor or other state official or agency designated by state law must submit a list of approved SGOs to the Treasury Department. At this time, the North Dakota Catholic Conference and the State Association of Nonpublic Schools are working together with other experts in the field to form an approved SGO that will fund scholarships to support families who wish to send their children to nonpublic schools in our state. Setting up this SGO will not happen immediately but will take significant time, effort and resources. Once the SGO is in place, we will disseminate information to those wanting to participate.

While the state of North Dakota does not yet offer financial support for K-12 students attending nonpublic schools, the federal Education Freedom Tax Credit program is a good start. Educational choice has come to North Dakota. †

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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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.

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