



# Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 86 No. 4 **APRIL 2026**



## **THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE:** **JESUS ON THE CROSS**

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

## Blue Mass May 14

All are invited to the annual Blue Mass on Thursday, May 14 at 5:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. Held during National Peace Officers Memorial Week, this special Mass with Bishop Kagan is an opportunity to pray for all active, retired and deceased law enforcement officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel.

## Armed Forces Mass May 16

All are invited for the annual Armed Forces Mass on Saturday, May 16 at 8 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. All current and retired military families, parishioners and civilians are invited to attend to pray for all branches of the armed forces.

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In Western ND Since 1941

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# Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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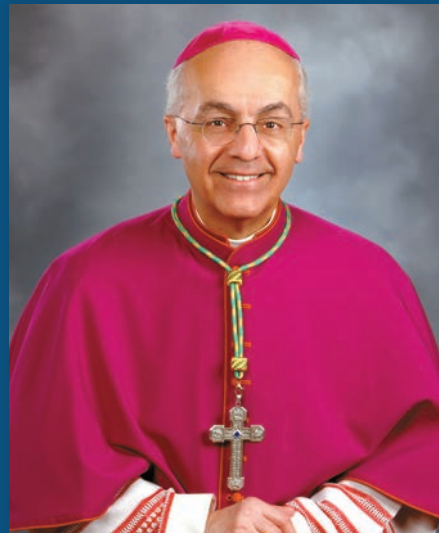
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## FROM THE BISHOP

*Keep the discipline of Lent every day as an act of thanksgiving*

### **Bishop** David D. Kagan

With Easter just a few days away, I wish all of you a Blessed and Happy Easter and Easter season!

It is my fervent prayer for all that the last several weeks have been a time of many graces received for faithfully keeping the discipline of Lent. Recall that the discipline of Lent is threefold: prayer, almsgiving and acts of penance. We do not keep the discipline just for the sake of having something to do. We keep the discipline of Lent in order to increase and strengthen our faith, share with those in need from the many blessings God has bestowed on us, and to rid ourselves of those things which have become obstacles to our love for God and our neighbor.

While I was still a rather young high school seminarian, it was suggested to us during our annual retreat, which was scheduled for Lent, that we should continue the discipline of Lent even after Lent had ended. In fact, I recall that the retreat master said

that the discipline of Lent is really how we should live our Catholic faith every day.

That priest made an excellent point. The whole reason for Lent as our immediate preparation for Easter is so that we can celebrate the fact of our redemption with a firm faith, an ardent hope and an active charity on Easter Sunday, but also each day. To keep the discipline of Lent is to imitate Jesus. The four Gospels recount several times that Jesus prayed both in private and in public; He was always charitable to all in need; He fasted and prayed for 40 days and nights in the desert in anticipation of His public ministry and in the fulfillment of the Father's will.

Again, a Blessed Easter and Easter season to you and may we keep the discipline of Lent every day as an act of thanksgiving to Almighty God for the supreme gift of our redemption. †

*He is risen*

## BISHOP IN ACTION



Staff photo: Bishop Kagan took part in the filming session for the God's Share Appeal video recently at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit. This year's appeal will be conducted on May 2-3.



### **Holy Father's Prayer Intentions for April**

#### **FOR PRIESTS IN CRISIS**

Let us pray for Priests going through moments of crisis in their vocation, that they may find the accompaniment they need and that communities may support them with understanding and prayer.

## BISHOP'S SCHEDULE

**APRIL 2026**

- April 2 Mass of the Lord's Supper, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 6 p.m.
- April 3 Good Friday Service, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
- April 4 Easter Vigil Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 7:30 p.m.
- April 10 Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
- April 11 Confirmation at the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck, 1 p.m.
- April 12 Confirmation at the Church of Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, Stanley, 8:30 a.m.
- April 13-16 Spring Clergy Conference, Bismarck
- April 18 Vocation Day, St. Mary's Academy, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
- April 19 Confirmation at the Church of St. Bernard, Belfield, 8:30 a.m. MT
- April 19 Confirmation at the Church of St. John the Baptist, Beach, 11 a.m. MT
- April 25 University of Mary Graduation, Bismarck Event Center, Bismarck, 2:30 p.m.
- April 26 Confirmation at the Church of St. Vincent, Mott, 10 a.m. MT
- April 29 All-School Penance Service, St. Mary's Academy, Bismarck, 8:45 a.m.

## Following a vocation and strengthening in faith

**Sonia Mullally**  
DCA Editor

For a small diocese like ours, we are tremendously blessed with the number of seminarians who have answered the call to the priesthood. The diocese currently has 15 seminarians, at different levels of study, in formation to one day, God willing, become your priests.

This fall, eight men were accepted into seminary for the Bismarck Diocese. New to the seminary this year are Aiden Schaeftbauer, Nolan Johnson, Ronan Klindworth, Preston Barbie, Tyler Selzler, Taylen Thomas, Paul Vetter and Joseph Schweitzer. In this month's article, we introduce you to two of the eight newest men studying to someday be your priests. The previous two issues of the *Dakota Catholic Action* have featured six of the new men.

*Aiden Schaeftbauer*

Seminarian Aiden Schaeftbauer grew up attending the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary with his family and credits parish life for greatly influencing his path to the seminary.

"My family is on the hospitality team, so



*Aiden Schaeftbauer*

from a young age, I was serving in the parish," Aiden said. "At a young age, this sparked a desire to serve others and fostered a deeper reverence for the Mass. These things only grew once I was able to serve at the parish. In my senior year of high school, I became an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and that had a tremendous influence as I was bringing the Lord to His people. Through that, the Lord grew the desire for the seminary."

Aiden said that joining the seminary came, not from a big realization, but rather many more subtle nudges throughout his life.

"The earliest thought I had of the priesthood and seminary was when I was a sophomore in high school," he explained. "Although, the final push to join the seminary did not come until a couple of years later. There was no single defining moment; rather, it was the accumulation of small graces through which the Lord patiently worked on my stubborn heart. This building up of graces finally struck me during my first year of college during a retreat."

Aiden received guidance from many people on his faith journey. One influential piece was his cousin who had joined the seminary a few years before him. His cousin has recently discerned out of the seminary for our diocese.



*Staff photo: 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 last summer.*

"There have been a lot of influential people in my journey to the seminary," Aiden noted. "My cousin played a significant role in my journey into the seminary, but in the opposite sense, where I felt like I was following him into the seminary. The Lord, through different priests, showed that I was wrong in thinking this way. Along with this, my high school and college chaplain also had a significant role by simply being a witness and guide when I was discerning. They were both great models of what it looks like to live a life centered in Christ."

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

"My seminary experience has been amazing," Aiden said. "One of the greatest blessings of seminary life is being surrounded by men who are walking the same journey of discernment. Living, praying, and studying alongside others who are seeking to respond faithfully to God's call has shown me that vocation is not a solitary pursuit. The fraternity formed in seminary has challenged me to grow in virtue, accountability and humility, while also

encouraging me during moments of difficulty.

"Witnessing the sincerity, generosity and perseverance of my brothers has strengthened my own commitment and reminded me that discernment is not meant to be lived in isolation, but within a community who supports, sharpens and strengthens one another. Along with this, the formation at the seminary is a tremendous blessing. I have learned so much in my short time in seminary."

Aiden shared his gratitude to the people of our diocese for the prayers and support offered to him and all the seminarians.

"I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the people of the Bismarck Diocese for your continued prayers and support," he said. "Receiving letters from people of the diocese always brings me a strong sense of home and belonging. They serve as a reminder that my discernment and formation are supported by a faith-filled community that continues to encourage me on my journey."

## Nolan Johnson

Seminarian Nolan Johnson grew up in Mandan attending the parish of St. Joseph. Parish life and interacting with the priests there had a significant influence on his decision to join the seminary.



Nolan Johnson

“My parish has been a huge grace to me having served under Fr. Shane Cambell and Fr. Josh Waltz,” Nolan said. “These priests have helped me discern the seminary and helped me with all the religious questions I would ask them.”

His first thoughts of the priesthood began in the role of altar server at Mass while enjoying the advantage of an up-close and personal view of the beautiful sacrifice. Even at that young age, he could picture himself in the role of the priest someday.

“My first thoughts of seminary were when I was a little kid, when I first started serving as a Mass server,” Nolan explained. “Father Shane was celebrating the Mass, and I thought to myself that I could be the person to do that one day.”

The motivation to join the seminary came when Nolan was in college and had the realization that he was meant for greater things.

“The final push to seminary came later when I was in my first year of college,” he said. “I knew I wanted something more and the place I knew I could get more out of my faith life was the seminary. My parents and family have been so supportive and are walking with me on this long journey and I can’t appreciate them enough for having helped grow me into a good man.”

Nolan is in formation for the priesthood at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis. Seminary has proven to be valuable in human formation as well as bonding with men of like minds.

“The seminary is an amazing place with a bunch of men that are striving for the same thing,” he said. “We work toward greater connection to our vocation and relationship with the Lord. I love the seminary and how many activities we do. In addition to formation classes, one of my favorite parts is the number of sports we play.”

He is appreciative of the prayers and support of the people of his home diocese. He knows it sustains him and his fellow seminarians through the daily trials and triumphs.

“Thank you so much to the people of the Bismarck Diocese for your never-ending prayers for me and my fellow brother seminarians,” Nolan said.

## Others in formation

Please continue to pray for all the men following their call to the priesthood in different stages of formation for our diocese. Deacon Colton Steiner will be ordained to the priesthood at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on June 12. Those studying for the diocese at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in St. Louis are Griffin Schaeffer, Alex Wilson, Nolan Johnson, Paul Vetter, Taylen Thomas and Tyler Selzler. Those men at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. are Aaron Ripplinger, Thomas Kraljic, Aiden Schaeftbauer, Preston Barbie, Joseph Schweitzer and Ronan Klindworth. Seminarians Joe Schon and Joseph Richter are in Rome studying at the Pontifical North American College. Joseph Richter will be ordained to the diaconate on Oct. 1 in Rome.

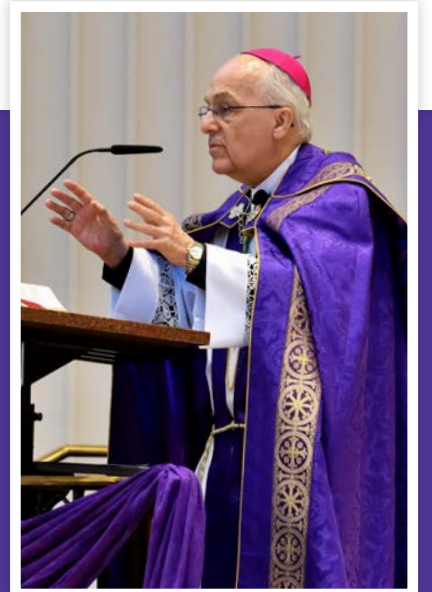
Please also include in your prayers all the young men and women in our diocese who may be considering a call to the priesthood or religious life. †



## RITE OF ELECTION

Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky

The Rite of Election took place at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on the first Sunday of Lent, Feb. 22. Catechumens, candidates and their sponsors gathered at the Cathedral with Bishop Kagan. At the rite, the catechumens (unbaptized individuals preparing for sacraments) inscribed their names in the Book of the Elect, marking their formal call by the bishop to receive baptism, confirmation and the Holy Eucharist. Candidates are already baptized Christians (or baptized Catholics needing completion) seeking full communion with the Church through confirmation and the Eucharist. All will be received into the Catholic Church at their home parishes at the Easter Vigil. †



## Hearing God's call: Step up to the plate at youth vocations day

A special diocese vocations day is being offered to introduce young students to the beauty and diversity of Catholic vocations in a way that is joyful, engaging and age appropriate.

“Step Up to the Plate: Say Yes to God’s Call: A Catholic Vocations Day” is a new experience sponsored by the Office of Catechesis and Youth that welcomes fourth- and fifth-grade students from across the Bismarck Diocese. The day is scheduled for Saturday, April 18 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the St. Mary’s Academy in Bismarck.

Vocations are not merely about what someone will *do* in life; they are about who God is calling them to *be*. Whether that call leads to the priesthood, religious life, the diaconate, marriage or dedicated single life, every vocation is rooted in love and service. Introducing young people to these possibilities during the formative elementary years can make a lasting impact.

While children may seem young to begin thinking about their future, research shows that many vocations first take root during the elementary years. According to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, 35% of ordinands to the priesthood in the Class of 2025 first considered a vocation between the ages of 6 and 13. The study, *The Class of 2025: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood*, prepared for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, reveals that more than one-third of men ordained this year began discerning while still in elementary school. Between 2014 and 2025, that number has averaged 29%, ranging from 19% to 38%.

Those statistics are both encouraging and challenging. They remind us that the seeds of a vocation are often planted early—and that the

Church has a responsibility to nurture those seeds. Vocations Day aims to do exactly that.

### About the day

Throughout the day, students will learn about the many ways one can live out a Catholic vocation. Presentations and personal testimonies will be offered by priests, the bishop, deacons, seminarians, religious brothers and sisters and married couples. Each speaker will share how they first heard God’s call, how they responded and what their daily life looks like now. The goal is not to pressure students into choosing a particular path, but to help them understand that every baptized person has a calling and that following God leads to joy.

By hearing directly from those living these vocations, students will see that priests and religious are not distant or mysterious figures; they are real people who once sat in school desks just like theirs. They will also learn that marriage, too, is a sacred vocation and an important path to holiness. In presenting a wide range of vocations, the day will emphasize that God calls each person uniquely and lovingly.

Because fourth and fifth graders learn best by doing, the day will include hands-on activities alongside the talks. Students will have the opportunity to write letters of encouragement to seminarians, offering prayers and support as they continue their formation. This simple act helps young people recognize that vocations flourish in a community that prays for and supports one another.

In keeping with the baseball theme of the day, participants will also create baseball rosary keychains—a reminder that prayer can be part of

every aspect of life, whether on the field, in the classroom or at home. Each student will also receive a set of baseball cards of their favorite “players” on God’s team to trade with friends or take home. The baseball theme will continue with interactive games such as “baseball jeopardy,” where students can test their knowledge about vocations and the faith, and even a friendly game of whiffle ball with priests, seminarians and other adult participants. These activities reinforce an important message: joy and holiness go hand in hand.

Lunch will be provided and will carry the fun baseball theme as well, featuring classic ballpark favorites like hot dogs and soda. Snacks throughout the day will include pretzels and popcorn, helping to create an atmosphere that feels festive and welcoming. The hope is that students associate talking about vocations not with pressure or seriousness alone, but with joy, community and excitement.

Parents are warmly invited to take part in the day. They may join their children for the presentations and activities or choose to remain in the chapel for quiet time in prayer. A designated space will be available for parents who wish to spend the day praying specifically for their children and for an openness to God’s will in their lives. After all, parents play the most significant role in fostering vocations. When children see their parents praying and trusting God, they learn to do the same.

### A simple invitation

The statistics from CARA confirm what many in youth ministry have long believed: children begin wondering about their future much earlier than we might think. If 35% of newly ordained priests first considered their vocation between ages 6 and 13, then fourth and fifth grade is not too early—it may be exactly the right time. A simple invitation, a meaningful encounter or a joyful witness can plant a seed that grows quietly for years before coming to fruition.

Vocations Day on April 18 is ultimately about planting those seeds. It is about creating space for God’s voice to be heard amid the busyness of school, sports and activities. It is about helping young people recognize that God has a plan for their lives—and that His plan is always good.

As students leave St. Mary’s Academy at the end of the day, the hope is that they will carry home more than a handmade rosary keychain or memories of a whiffle ball game. The hope is that they will carry a deeper awareness that they are loved, chosen and called.

And perhaps, years from now, some of them will look back and remember that it was in fourth or fifth grade—at a simple day focused on vocations—that they first began to wonder how God was calling them to serve His Church. †

—Staff report

## Local filmmaker is part of the film industry's new wave

Patti Armstrong  
DCA Writer

From silent, black and white movies to technicolor and sound, the film industry took root in Hollywood in the early 1900s. Initially, strict standards for content reflected Christian values until 1968 when censorship became relaxed and Christian morality was often disregarded or demeaned. Decades later, there followed Christian movies with forced messages often lacking in good stories or good acting.

Today, there is a new wave of Christian filmmakers who understand that good stories don't have to be preachy or second rate because the story of Jesus is played out in humanity repeatedly. As a result, Christian and wholesome films are now doing well at the box office driven by audiences seeking uplifting and faith-based content. For instance, Angel Studios has become a major player in this space, creating high-quality family movies. At the same time, Hollywood is no longer the end all and be all for filmmaking.

Enter Daniel Bielinski who has become a player in this new generation of movie making. He serves as chair of the Dramatic Arts Program at the University of Mary in Bismarck and founded Canticle Productions, a film company that celebrates the history, land and culture of the Great Plains.

He has produced an impressive lineup of movies and has just landed a big win with his latest, *Hazel's Heart*, released in 2025. It depicts the true events of

16-year-old Hazel Miner from Center, N.D. during a fierce blizzard in March 1920. The legendary courage of this humble farm girl's Christ-like sacrifice inspired Bielinski to bring her story to the screen.

He wrote the screenplay during a three-day North Dakota blizzard, an experience that stirred emotion in him to the point of tears, imagining what Hazel went through. He explained that the story is profoundly spiritual.

"There is a Christian message that does not hit anyone over the head but comes out through the story itself in a humble and faithful way like the person that Hazel was," he said.

Bielinski's films are finding an ever-growing audience, particularly with *Hazel's Heart* which packed theaters at the world premiere in Bismarck and across the state last fall. The film's executive producer helped Bielinski secure a national distribution deal with Samuel Goldwyn Films, a highly regarded independent production and distribution company. After the December run in theaters, it is now platformed on demand on Amazon, Apple TV, Google Play/YouTube Movies, Fandango-At-Home, Versant, Vubiquity and DirecTV/AT&T and was exclusively streamed on Angel Studios in December. Not bad for a North Dakota resident with no interest in acting as a kid.



Canticle Productions



Canticle Productions

### *In the beginning*

It was a production of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* during his junior year in high school in Wisconsin that first bit Bielinski with the acting bug.

"I was strong armed into filling a part," he recalled. "I didn't grow up in a theater family; we were musicians and played the piano." He had a small but comedic part. "People laughed and I discovered the joy of performance through that," he shared.

Bielinski majored in literature at Ave Maria University in Naples, Florida and by sophomore year began directing his own productions just for fun. He was soon hired as an adjunct professor and would cast himself in the plays.

"I was learning as I directed the plays myself," he recounted. "I was also involved in a professional opera company and played some secondary roles and was exposed to real talented professionals. I learned a lot from being around them, seeing the polish and precision and beauty of opera."

Bielinski went on for a master's in fine arts from Columbia University School of Arts in New York before accepting the position at the University of Mary. He now lives in Bismarck with his wife and six children. Alongside movie making, Bielinski has been establishing a premier performing arts center at the University of Mary. His movie company also affords students opportunities to gain hands-on experience in the film industry.

Canticle's success has come despite Bielinski starting out as an outsider, but employing initiative, learning and faith—feeling that God has called him to this work. But how can someone be successful making movies in North Dakota? According to Belienki, so much is outsourced these days, it's no longer a disadvantage not to be in Hollywood.

"I actually consider it an advantage to be in North Dakota with all the stories and staying grounded as a person by living here," he shared.

It's also not a problem getting talented actors and crew members to North Dakota. Bielinski hires a casting director who finds talented people, even bringing in actors from England for his upcoming movie, *Medora: Empress of the Badlands*. A red-carpet premiere is scheduled for this film on April 17-18 at the Grand Theatres in Bismarck.

Canticle's movies reflect North Dakota values and do not demand astronomical budgets according to Bielinski.

"The goal is not to be working directly for Warner Brothers or a big brand but to produce well-told beautiful stories," he explained. "They don't have to have an A-lister that immediately grabs attention, but producing quality films over time will make an impact and open the door for the next film. In terms of the production, it is that we retain creative control so the story telling doesn't get lost. Although, it would be a blessing to work with large distribution companies on some projects if it is the right fit."

By continuing to tell beautiful stories that have deep meaning, Bielinski trusts that his movies will continue to reach a growing audience. What is a beautiful story? "A story that moves us toward virtue," he explained. "It doesn't mean we can't handle stories that have no religious themes. I think of *Mary Poppins* and *The Beauty and the Beast*—beautiful stories where good is presented as good and evil as evil. The challenge is to present that mystery at the heart of who we are without becoming preachy, but the audience will see and sense it and want to understand it." †

## MONASTIC COMMUNITY

### Sister Nicole Kunze re-elected prioress of Annunciation Monastery

On March 14, 2026, following a time of prayerful discernment, the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck have joyfully re-elected Sister Nicole Kunze, OSB, to continue serving as prioress. First called to this role in 2016, when she succeeded Sister Nancy Miller, Sister Nicole faithfully led the community through consecutive four- and six-year terms. Now, guided by the Holy Spirit and with the support of her sisters, she has graciously accepted the call to serve another six-year term.

Her re-election was marked with a formal re-installation on March 14 in the presence of the monastic community and election facilitators Sister Kimberly Porter of St. Walburg Monastery in Covington, Ky., and Sister Nancy Bauer of Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minn., who also serves as president of the Monastic Congregation of Saint Benedict.

"I am deeply humbled by the trust my monastic community has placed in me to serve another six years," Sister Nicole shared. "I am grateful for the relationships I share with each sister and for the support they offer so generously. Their wisdom, holiness, and lived experience continues to shape and deepen my own faith. I have grown in my understanding of our monastic life, the richness of the Benedictine charism both here and around the world, and the impact of our ministries. I cherish the love and prayer that surround me each day."

A native of the Valley City area and the eldest child of Allen and Marilyn Kunze, Sister Nicole first encountered the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery while studying at the University of Mary, where she earned her undergraduate degree in biology. She later earned a Ph.D. in chemical education from the University of Northern Colorado, where she was honored with the Graduate Dean's Citation for Outstanding Dissertation. After 10 years of dedicated service as an associate professor of chemistry at the University of Mary, she received the Regents' Award for Teaching Faculty in 2011. She was also recognized with an honorary doctoral degree from Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., in 2025.

Since entering the monastery in 1996, Sister Nicole has devoted herself to both education and community life,

including five years teaching chemistry and biology at St. Mary's Central High School. Within the monastery, she serves on several councils and continues to offer leadership to the sisters' sponsored ministries, including CHI St. Alexius Health, the University of Mary and Ministry on the Margins. Her service extends beyond the local community as well, including leadership roles within the Monastic Congregation of St. Benedict and the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses.



As prioress, Sister Nicole serves as both spiritual and administrative leader, guiding the monastic community move forward with its mission and vision for the future. "I am excited about the directions our community has chosen for the future," she said.

In her leisure time, Sister Nicole said, "My personal prayer is an anchor in my life. Taking time for exercise each day is critical. I get up at 5 a.m. each day to exercise. When the weather is nice, I try to spend time outdoors in the evening on the deck to read, work and journal." A sports enthusiast, Sister Nicole is a long-time fan of the Minnesota Twins, the Minnesota Vikings and the University of Mary Mauraunders.

Reflecting on the mission of the community, Sister Nicole shared, "The spirit of our founding sisters continues to guide us today. Those courageous sisters came to Dakota Territory in 1878 with faith and hope to serve the needs of the people. With that same faith and hope, we strive to enrich the lives of others through prayer and service. It is my hope that our monastery will continue to be a place that offers radical hospitality to all who come here. We invite women who may be discerning religious life, to come and get to know our sisters and our charism." †

—Submitted information

# EMBARK ON A LIFE OF GRACE

**Certificate in Prayer and Spiritual Direction**

This summer, deepen your connection with Jesus Christ. With courses taught by **Monsignor Thomas J. Richter, Monsignor James P. Shea, and Father Wayne Sattler**, the University of Mary's certificate program in Prayer and Spiritual Direction will equip you to receive fruitfully from the life of grace and build a foundation for leading yourself into a deeper relationship with the Triune God.

Participants will earn a graduate certificate upon successful completion of all three courses, which can be completed over one to three summers. Certificate recipients can easily stack their earned credits into a master's degree plan. **Classes begin May 4.**

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Program participants may qualify for **up to \$3,000** in scholarships. Learn more at [umary.edu/Prayer](http://umary.edu/Prayer)

## Guided by a pope: Local chaplain had Pope Leo XIV as her spiritual director

**Patti Armstrong**  
DCA Writer

White smoke signaling the election of a new pope emerged from the roof of the Sistine Chapel on May 8, 2025. It was 11:07 a.m. Central Daylight Time and Heather Deneen, Staff Chaplain at CHI St. Alexius Health, was at the Annunciation Monastery on the campus of the University of Mary in Bismarck attending the Ministry of Sponsorship Day.

Deneen shared that when word came out that a pope had been chosen, all the TVs were turned on throughout the university campus. “Let’s take a lunch break,” the presenter announced. “There’s no way I can keep your attention now.”

Deneen and others recessed to the campus cafeteria, a short walk away. Keeping an eye on a TV screen while chatting with a fellow attendee of the conference, she spotted Cardinal Protodeacon step onto the central balcony of St. Peter’s. “*Habemus papam!*” he announced. (“We have a pope!”)

The cafeteria grew still. Who could it be? There had been some talk of an American but the widely held belief among Church experts was that an American would never be elected pope—too political, too much of an economic power...

Then the name came—“Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost!”

Murmurs rippled through the room, “Who is he?”

“He’s American!” Deneen announced. “I know exactly who he is.”



*Submitted photo: Staff Chaplain at CHI St. Alexius Health in Bismarck, Heather Deneen, was blessed to have Pope Leo XIV as her former spiritual director.*

It was Fr. Bob to her! He had been Deneen’s spiritual director for three months in Chicago before he left to become a bishop in Peru. Pope Leo XIV, a 69-year-old Chicago native, elected on the second day of the conclave surprised the world, but for Deneen, it was breathtaking.

When the conference resumed, she could not contain her excitement.

“Everyone was in disbelief that an American would be pope,” she recounted. “I started telling everyone that he was my spiritual director for three months. He was someone with my same background, he grew up in the south side of Chicago, we both had degrees from CTU [Catholic Theological Union in Chicago],

and I once sat across from him as my spiritual director.”

### *From Chicago to Rome*

The future pontiff received his theological education at CTU. At the age of 27, he studied canon law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome and was ordained there on June 19, 1982, at the Augustinian College. He was sent to the Augustinian mission in Peru in 1985. In October 2013, he returned to his Augustinian Province in Chicago, serving as director of formation and provincial vicar until Pope Francis appointed him as a bishop in Peru in November 2014. He became an archbishop in January 2023 and a cardinal in September of that same year.

Deneen also grew up on the south side of Chicago, graduated in with degrees in Japanese and political science, and then taught English in Japan for three years. After returning to the U.S and working at several jobs, she was drawn to a religious vocation. She entered a Felician convent in Pennsylvania and spent time in Connecticut and South Carolina before getting sent to Chicago to attend the Catholic Theological Union where she received a master’s in divinity.

“When I started school in 2014, I needed a spiritual director,” Deneen explained. “I loved the Augustinian seminary students in my classes, so I asked them for a suggestion. Their house of studies was right across the street from CTU. They recommended Fr. Bob who had moved into their house, just back to the states from Peru.”

Deneen contacted Father Bob (Prevost) and made an appointment.

“He was very quiet and listened attentively,” she recalled. “He said I needed to pray more and that made sense. At our third meeting, he gave me the news that he was being named a bishop in Peru, and we’d have to discontinue spiritual direction. The Augustinians in the Chicago area have a mission in Peru.”

Ultimately, Deneen did not stay with the religious order and instead became a hospital chaplain which led her to CHI St. Alexius Health in Bismarck where she has worked for five years. One of the Felician sisters that Deneen kept in touch with had written once that she heard Deneen’s former spiritual director had become a cardinal.

“After Pope Francis died,” Deneen recalled, “I heard some talk about Cardinal Prevost being considered for the papacy. I didn’t know if it was a joy or a concern that he was being considered.”

Deneen mentioned it to friends to pray for him either way. The next thing that she heard along with the rest of the world was that he had become the first American pope.

“He’s a person from my neighborhood and then he became pope,” Deneen said. “I think for a lot of people in Chicago—and my mom said this—he seems ‘human.’ Yeah, he has a favorite pizza place in Chicago; he was very normal.

“I think his act of selflessness to become pope, reflects the selflessness of Christ on the Cross,” Deneen reflected. “Now, when he comes back to Chicago, it’s not like he can go to his favorite pizza place without causing a scene. If he ever comes back, the reaction would probably be greater than when the Cubs won the World Series. I think the city would shut down.

“Jesus is always calling us to give up our own wants and needs for the good of others and the good of the Church, but by becoming pope, now, the moment he sets foot anywhere, he’s not able to be himself. He’s the vicar of Christ and everything he does is for the good of the Church.”

Last fall, Deneen looked up, on the internet, how to send a card to the pope.

“I don’t know if it will even get read by him, but I wanted to write to him,” she shared. “I talked about what I did after religious life and thanked him for being the pope and how awed I was at his gift of self.” †

## Sister Grace Dahmus, OSB

Sister Grace (baptized Mary) Dahmus, 86, a member of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, entered eternal life on Feb. 25, 2026.



Born May 29, 1939, in Knobel, Arkansas, the fourth of the eight children of Rudolph and Catherine (Engel) Dahmus, the family moved to a Regent, N.D., farm when Sister Grace was a year old.

Following graduation from St. Mary's High School, New England, N.D., Sister Grace aspired to be a member of the Benedictine Sisters of the Annunciation in Bismarck and made monastic profession in 1959. She celebrated her 60th anniversary of monastic profession in 2019.

With a Mary College elementary education degree, Sister Grace taught the gamut of grades from one to six in parochial schools in Dickinson, Mandan and Bismarck for more than 22 years. Of her teaching years, Sister Grace stated that "being with children has helped me see God's designs for my life more clearly and has helped me grow." Tall in stature, Sister Grace often recalled children's delightful perspectives as she told the story of one child, observing all the teachers on the first day of school, whispering to her, "I think you're the longest sister of all of the teachers."

After teaching, Sister Grace pursued clinical pastoral education and served in pastoral care at St. Alexius, as a CNA, and classroom and library volunteer.

As varied health challenges came, including macular degeneration, Sister Grace gratefully availed herself of such resources as "talking books" and delighted in sharing topics of interest she had learned. When able, she

readily participated in outings offered. In the capacity allowed by impaired eyesight, Sister Grace enjoyed making cards and scrapbooks for students of all ages and had numerous pen pals over the years.

Sister Grace is survived by her sisters Agnes Haas and Rita Christina, and brother, Henry, nieces and nephews and the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. She was preceded in death by her parents, her sister, Margaret, and brothers, Paul, Joseph and Alfred.

## Sister Dorothy Niemann

Sister Dorothy Niemann, a sister of Mercy of the Holy Cross, age 82, died Feb. 23, 2026, at Bell Tower Residence in Merrill, Wisconsin. A funeral Mass was held on March 4, 2026, at Holy Cross Chapel in Bell Tower Residence. Father Charles Hoffmann officiated. Burial followed in the St Francis Catholic Cemetery, Merrill, Wisc.



Dorothy M. Niemann was born Nov. 8, 1943, in Breese, Illinois, to John and Annie (Wolters) Niemann. She entered Holy Cross Convent in Merrill, Wisc., on Aug. 12, 1962, and professed her vows on Aug. 22, 1964. Sister Dorothy was in her 62nd year of ministry at the time of her death.

She attended Mater Dei High School, Breese, Ill., graduating in 1961. She received a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in 1968 from Alverno College, Milwaukee. She earned her Master of Science in Nursing degree in 1977 from Catholic University in Washington, D.C. In 2001, she completed one year of clinical pastoral education residency at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Sister Dorothy served as a nurse at Holy Cross Hospital in Merrill, Wisc. for seven years and at St. Joseph's Hospital and Health Center in Dickinson, N.D. for eight years. She was a charter member of Heartland Hospice. She served as a nurse educator at Dickinson State University in Dickinson from 1985 to 1999. While teaching, she also served as a parish nurse at St. Wenceslaus parish in Dickinson.

Following her clinical pastoral education, she served as Director of Pastoral Care at St. Joseph Hospital in Breese, Ill. for 12 years. In 2013, she moved to Merrill, Wisc. and served as a chaplain at Bell Tower Residence until 2017.

Sister Dorothy has also served the Holy Cross Sisters as a Provincial Councilor several times and as a trustee of the Sisters of Mercy of the Holy Cross Community Support Charitable Trust. She played guitar and enjoyed

singing in choirs. She was an avid reader. Other pastime activities included walking outdoors and line dancing.

After her diagnosis of lung cancer, she had surgery in 2020, and, in 2023, started one and a half years of various treatments, then chose to discontinue treatment for a better quality of life and entered hospice.

Preceding her in death are her parents John and Annie, her sister, Betty, and spouse, Paul Bruns. She is survived by her family of Holy Cross Sisters and associates, as well as her sisters, Dolores (Ted) Richter of St. Rose, Ill., Marge (Henry) Schaefer of Atlanta, Mo. and brother, John (Karen) Niemann of Breese, Ill. and many nieces, nephews, great nieces and great nephews. †

**Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May they rest in peace. 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

April 1	Deacon Lance Gartner	April 16	Sr. Nancy Gunderson, OSB
April 2	Lay Ministers	April 17	Fr. Eric Artz
April 3	Br. Placid Gross, OSB	April 18	Deacon Terry Glatt
April 4	Sr. Mariah Dietz, OSB	April 19	Deacon Lonnie Grabowska
April 5	Pope Leo XIV	April 20	Deacon James Haga
April 6	Fr. David Zimmer	April 21	Br. Stephen Johnson, OSB
April 7	Deacon Hans Gayzur	April 22	Bishop David Kagan
April 8	Fr. Charles Zins	April 23	Sr. Marena Hoogland, OSB
April 9	Sr. Marie Hunkler, OSB	April 24	Seminarian Preston Barbie
April 10	Seminarians and Religious in Formation	April 25	Fr. Mark Aune
April 11	Fr. Jeff Zwack	April 26	Deacon Harvey Hanel
April 12	Deacon Don Gion	April 27	Sr. Patti Koehler, OSB
April 13	Lay Ministers	April 28	Sr. JoAnn Krebsbach, OSB
April 14	Br. James Hanson, OSB	April 29	Sr. Annette Dobitz, SSND
April 15	Seminarian Aaron Ripplinger	April 30	Br. Herman Kim, OSB



## The gift of Carmel: a personal invitation

**TheaMarie Mahrer**

It is providential that I can share my own experience with you here as the nudge for my discernment to become a Lay Discalced Carmelite began with a 2024 article that I read in this publication, the *Dakota Catholic Action* magazine. I will be praying for seeds to be planted in those He asks to discern a call and for courage to pursue that call. In His goodness, He always provides and has a life of abundance for you!

When I came into the Church my senior year of high school, I was struck and filled with the joy of the reality that He is never done performing miracles and renewing our hearts. Raised in a Protestant community, I found my experience at St. Mary's High School drawing me closer to Christ in the sacraments which eventually led to my coming into the Church on All Saints Day as a senior in high school.

Now, as a wife and mother in formation process with the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites (OCDS), I have had people ask if I was becoming a nun and how that would work with my family life. This is an honest question and always makes me giggle! The short answer is that I am not joining a convent and my vocation as wife and mother remains my primary path of my sanctification and the Lord has been inviting me to deeper union with Him through OCDS.

I have found it helpful to share more about the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites. The OCDS is comprised of "practicing members of the Catholic Church who, under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and inspired by St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, make the commitment to the Discalced Carmelite Order to seek the face of God for the sake of the Church and the world." (<https://www.thereocds.org/>)

*TheaMarie Mahrere, special contributor to the DCA, resides in Bismarck with her husband.*

This may seem like a lot of words, and I am eager to break down my understanding and share some fruits of my visiting and formation process thus far. One of my favorite, and the most important, aspects of the Discalced Carmelites is their desire and continuous call to "seek the face of God." To seek the face of God may sound daunting since no one has seen the face of God (the Father) and yet, we are all invited to seek His face in each moment. This looks different for each of us as we continue to say "yes" to our vocation. Our most important and primary vocation is to live in our identity as daughter or son of God, which when we receive this reality, changes *everything* that we know about anything. Living in this spirit, our lives turn completely to Him through Christ, our model of sanctified humanity, in order that we cling to His will above our own. In this, we seek Him through our identity as daughter or son of God.

What has this discernment and call looked like practically? Honestly, it has required balance, conversations and discernment with my husband, and logistically some sacrifices which have, in turn, provided further order and an abundance of grace in our family life. To discern a vocation within OCDS does not mean you are joining a club or becoming a part of something that you can leave and come back to when you feel like it. It is a community of lay people who, through professions, become an actual extension of the Discalced Carmelite Order throughout the world.

As Lay Carmelites, there is a specific charism that is nourished by living in obedience to the Carmelite tradition distilled to five specific commitments that



Fr. Aloysius Deeney O.C.D. shares in his book, "Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites." While many things flow from these five things, the simplicity of each of them have provided an important outline in formation.

First, the invitation and hope to attend daily Mass to remain in union with Christ and to "seek His face" before we seek anything else.

Secondly, being people of meditation. When we steep our lives in His word, a stretch of silent prayer, and choose simplicity, He provides in ways we couldn't receive had we kept ourselves busy mentally and physically.

Third, we love and honor Our Lady, Mary the Mother of God, as our guide to her Son. She is the Morning Star that can bring us closer to Christ and will never leave her children alone.

Fourth, we are expected to pray Liturgy of the Hours, specifically Morning and Evening Prayer, and invited to pray Night Prayer. One may ask (me included, initially) how I would fit this in my schedule as a wife and mother who stays home and is called to steward our home well. I have found that by responding to the call to discern a vocation with the Lay Carmelites and choosing to commit to praying the Liturgy of the Hours, my time has multiplied and my heart has been rooted in scripture and peace instead of hurry and unrest. This is vital for maintaining a heartbeat of peace in our home. One of my prayers since joining the Church has been directly from the Mass when the priest celebrating Mass says, "Order our days in Your peace." In the Church's wisdom, the prayers she provides throughout the day anchor and order our days in peace only He can offer. Fr. Aloysius Deeney O.C.D. shared, "The second reason is you are not picking texts that are pleasing to you; that's not prayer, that's self-consolation. How can you hope to convert to the will of God if you are making the word of God convert to how you feel?" That very statement created conviction in my heart to commit to the Liturgy of Hours every day, which often includes our two-year-old singing the hymn and learning prayers with me!

Lastly, we are expected to attend monthly meetings. We are in an exciting phase for the Bismarck community specifically, as we have grown and are learning from

After Comes HOPE

An Easter Invitation to Grow Together

After a long winter, the first signs of spring remind us that light returns, life stirs, and hope is renewed. This Easter, we invite you to be part of that renewal, helping new life take root for individuals and families across our community.

Scan to Support Our Mission

Your Easter gift helps bring hope, healing, and new life to those we serve. Please give today and help us grow together this season of renewal.

another well-formed and rooted community in Sioux City, Iowa as we work toward becoming our own community in Bismarck. In His goodness and timing, He has provided faithful and holy people who are willing to spearhead this for the Bismarck community which, in turn, will allow for growth to take root in solid ground.

I've been grateful that the invitation to be in formation for the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites has come when it has. Many may think this is not the season with it being so "busy" as a young family and yet, I think that is the exact reason to come visit and discern! God doesn't call us to be busy; He calls us to be faithful. This invitation has borne great fruit in my prayer life, marriage, motherhood, and seeds are being planted and watered for our daughter to know and love God in unique ways. I hope to see you there!

Those interested in more information about the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites can contact Bryon Herbel at [bryon.herbel@icloud.com](mailto:bryon.herbel@icloud.com) or Cheryl Hansen at [cheryl@midconetwork.com](mailto:cheryl@midconetwork.com) or 701-527-4022. †



## Vocations Day April 18

The Diocese Office of Catechesis and Youth is hosting a Vocations Day for all 4th and 5th graders from across the diocese on Saturday, April 18 at St. Mary's Academy in Bismarck. The theme is "Step Up to the Plate: Say Yes to God's Call." The day opens at 9:30 a.m. with events beginning at 10 a.m. and concludes at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$20 and includes free food and drinks. Door prizes will also be given away. Go to [bismarckdiocese.com/vocationsday](http://bismarckdiocese.com/vocationsday) to register.



## Search weekend dates

Search for Christian Maturity is a weekend retreat experience which provides youth an opportunity to think, talk, question and dive deeper into their faith. The weekends are for any high school or college age person at least 15 years old. The program is both rooted in the Catholic faith and open to young people of any denomination or creed. Search weekends are held five times throughout the year at the Badlands Ministries Camp just south of Medora. Cost for the weekend is \$75. Partial scholarships are available. One weekend, April 17-19, remains for the 2025-26 season. Find more information at [bismarckdiocese.com/search1](http://bismarckdiocese.com/search1).



## Trivia Night at St. Joseph's in Mandan April 24

Join the fun at Trivia Night at the Church of St. Joseph in Mandan on Friday, April 24 at 7 p.m. Reserve your table now for this event open to adults age 21+. Cost is \$150 per table (6-8 adults). The night will feature two trivia categories—general knowledge and faith. There will also be raffles, refreshments, prizes and more. Bring cash for the trivia lifelines and 50/50 raffle. Doors to the school cafeteria open at 6:30 p.m. For questions, call the parish office at 701-663-9562 or register at [stjosephmandan.com/trivia](http://stjosephmandan.com/trivia).



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



## Priesthood anniversary Mass May 11

The public is invited to gather with the diocese and Bishop Kagan on Monday, May 11 for the anniversary Mass of the ordination of the holy priesthood. Priests celebrating anniversaries this year are: 5 years – Fr. Jacob Degele, Fr. Ben Franchuk, Fr. Greg Hilzendeger, Fr. Nicholas Vetter; 10 years – Fr. Doug Krebs; 15 years – Fr. Jason Signalness; 25 years – Fr. Shannon Lucht; 30 years – Msgr. Tom Richter; 35 years – Fr. Ken Phillips; 60 years – Fr. Marv Klemmer and 65 years – Fr. Paul Cervinski. The Mass will be held at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck beginning at 11 a.m.



## Blue Mass May 14

The annual Blue Mass will be held on Thursday, May 14 at 5:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. Held during National Peace Officers Memorial Week, this special Mass with Bishop Kagan is an opportunity to pray for all active, retired and deceased law enforcement officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel.



## Armed Forces Mass May 16

All are invited for Bismarck Diocese Armed Forces Mass celebrated by Bishop Kagan on Saturday, May 16 at 8 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. All current and retired military families, parishioners and civilians are invited to attend to pray for all branches of the armed forces.



## Steubenville Conference St. Paul July 23-26

The Steubenville Conference trip provides an exciting opportunity for youth to become better equipped and empowered to live life to the fullest as joyful disciples of Christ. The conference features speakers, workshops, music, Eucharistic adoration and fellowship with other Catholic teens. The Bismarck Diocese group's trip to St. Paul will take place July 23-26. Registration is now open at <https://bismarckdiocese.com/steubenville-st-paul>.



James Odermann

## Retirement is step in preparation for eternity

"What are you doing with your spare time now that you are retiring?" was a question one of my grandsons asked as we drove through the calving pen. I was surprised by the question.

The bitter east wind was pounding the cold right to the bone so I decided the pickup heater would be welcome. I asked the boys if they wanted to ride along, an offer they quickly accepted.

There is always something to talk about—and extra horseplay that might need to be toned down when those youngsters hop in the pickup. Young voices, however, always add to the joy.

"Well," I began, "stories of my retirement have been exaggerated. I am just getting started."

"Grandpa, you are supposed be taking it easier, let Dad and us do the work!" the younger of the two exclaimed. (I really don't do that much now, just filling in to cover busy schedules.)

I chuckled, enjoying the exuberance of the young hands. They are more than helpers; they save me lots of steps, fill and carry buckets of grain, open and close gates, drive the pickup (their favorite), etc. In fact, I usually tell their dad that I want to do chores with those youngsters.

"It is true," I continued. "I am just getting started, I am hoping my testing ground, my life on this Earth is just the beginning of a glorious future."

"What do you mean Grandpa?" the older of the two boys spoke up. I had them hooked and we started talking

about faith, prayer and family. They were captivated (and captured) as we drove along.

"Boys, you learn in religion class about God, Who always was, always is and always will be," I said, recalling the over six decades ago when I memorized the Baltimore Catechism. "You know God created all of us, lives in us and wants us back."

The bewilderment was obvious as they thought Grandpa has just gone off the deep end. It was a concept beyond their current level of understanding. In fact, truth be told, most adults do not accept this basic precept about human existence.

As we continued our drive, I tried to keep the focus on the subject of life as a proving ground for eternity. The topic did not hold their interest for long.

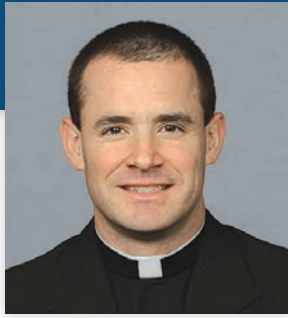
Everything seemed in order—cows, calves, feed, water and fences were okay. I delivered them home, but I was unsatisfied.

I thought about the one axiom from my youth: "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." Keep moving, keep planning, concentrate on goals to make a better world and to make me a better person was the mantra.

It is easy to stay busy. The real paradox in the equation is this state of busyness has turned the world upside down, emphasizing secular power, personal recognition and peer accolades. This trance has led to a convergence of a lifestyle without God.

*AG ATTITUDES continues on page 25*

*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).*



## QUESTIONS I WAS AFRAID TO ASK

### Q: Will my body be resurrected?

Fr. John Paul Gardner

Father, do we Catholics really believe that our physical human bodies will be resurrected after death and burial?

Yes, Catholics profess in the Apostles Creed, “I believe in...the resurrection of the body...” which means that in the end, not only our souls, but also *our bodies*, by God’s power, will be raised to heaven or hell for all eternity.

As you may well know, being a priest provides ample opportunity to be in the presence of the dead. The sight of a dead body can challenge anyone’s faith to its very core. Many of us priests are so familiar with it all that we become friends with those who work at the local funeral homes. In jest, I try to tell them that they are running a dying business, but they quip back that they just keep on finding new customers! As serious and difficult as death is, mixed in with our grief, we find there is some humor. With firm faith in Christ and His Body, the Church, we find many phenomenal reasons to hope for what is to come—yes, even for what is to become of our dead bodies.

A lack of belief in the resurrection of our bodies has a significant toll on humanity. Just think of how many ways blindness to this reality darkens our sense of human dignity and life itself. Such a mindset lends itself to an overt attention to indulge the vices of our flesh here and now—“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!” We are blind to what our bodies will become; we indulge our passions

with greed, gluttony, lust, anger vanity and pride. Losing our awareness of the ultimate destination of the body leads to the justification of major offenses against the human body such as the horrible atrocities of war or aborting unborn children. As our bodies succumb to weakness, sickness and the frailty of old age, this blindness viciously beckons us to choose suicide, to get rid of the elderly, and to discard our bodies, burn them and dump them in the wind. It leads some philosophers and even false Christians to conclude that only the soul or spirit is good; but bodies must definitely be evil. This blindness needs the truth of Christ’s body.

In Genesis, we see that God formed a body for man and woman and He called them “good” (cf. Gen. 2:7-25). Even though they sinned against Him and thus brought death to the body, the goodness of the human body was only weakened but not completely lost. The body needed redemption and so God sent His only Son, who had been only Spirit, to become a bodily man in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In his Gospel, St. John describes it this way, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” Christ’s body itself is a proof of the value of our own bodies. For if the body was completely evil, Christ could not have taken on a human body.

Taking on a poor weak human body was not sufficient for Christ; He wanted to redeem it completely by enduring physical death on the cross and, on the third day, by raising it to new life.

Christ’s Resurrection is at the very center of our Catholic faith. Saint Paul tells us that if Christ is not risen then our faith is all in vain (cf. 1 Cor 15:17). Jesus proved that His body was risen from the dead. Saint Mary Magdalene embraced Him and St. Thomas, the doubter, pressed his finger and hand into the wounds of the risen Christ. If, therefore, Christ’s body was risen from the dead, how can we fail to believe that, we, His followers will not also have our bodies raised from the dead?

Saint Paul writes to the Romans in Chapter 8 that the same Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise our mortal bodies from the dead. The belief that our dead bodies will rise from the dead like Christ’s body, completely transforms our lives. We see our weak, sinful, dying bodies capable of life beyond this world. At Holy Mass, we receive the Resurrected Body of Christ and begin to taste the new life to come even now. The body of Christ and the body of Mary have already entered the glory of heaven. They long for us, body and soul, to be with them forever in heaven. Let’s live life in our human bodies in a way that leads us to eternal life in heaven. †

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## RETIREMENT IS STEP IN PREPARATION FOR ETERNITY *(continued)*

So, I asked myself, “Am I too busy? Am I engaging in things to avoid facing God’s calling to me?”

Whoa Nellie! That last question brought me up short. I thought about my own insecurities, my personality deficiencies bringing me face-to-face with my reticence to create space for conversation—with God.

I reflected on the original question about retirement. I may be retiring from the active lifestyle I enjoyed (life has been a joy) during the various phases of my life.

So, no I am not retiring. I remembered a story calling busyness the temptation and work of the devil. It is so easy to become so self-absorbed one can forget about the goal and purpose of life: a trial period when I can show God’s love and goodness to my sisters and brothers.

With God as a companion, my purpose in life is to answer the call, to please God. As I transition from this

world, I hope I have earned a key to unlock the door to an eternity with God, the saints and angels.

As I prepare for the eternal transition, I, like all, know “neither the day nor the hour” (Matthew 25:13). I need to be prepared by seeking forgiveness for my sins. I need to remove the busyness from my life and spend prayer time with God.

There are tribulations but sorting through what matters is the needed preparation. I need to focus on the things that truly matter, celebrating the joys and obstacles that will help me prepare for “post-retirement” life in heaven—with the Holy Trinity, my spouse, children, grandchildren, friends, those with whom I have not had a Christ-like relationship and others I have not met on Earth.

Care to join me? †

*Fr. John Paul Gardner is parochial vicar at the Church of Corpus Christi in Bismarck. 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](mailto:info@bismarckdiocese.com) with “Question Afraid to Ask” in the subject line.*



# The emperor's new clothes and the transgender movement

David Tamisiea

When I was a young boy, I was fascinated by the folktale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by Hans Christian Andersen. Like every good folktale, it contains important lessons, and in this case warns about the power of peer pressure and social contagion to convince people to deny even reality itself.

As the story goes, a vain emperor is approached by two con artists who promise to create for him magical clothes that only intelligent and competent people can see. The swindlers set up looms and pretend to weave clothes for the emperor. Although the emperor sends his ministers to check upon their progress, each one, not wanting to appear foolish or ignorant, reports back how beautiful the clothes are. When the rogues finally complete the outfit, the emperor and his entire retinue, despite seeing nothing at all, compete with one another in praising the invisible clothing.

Before they depart, the two scoundrels convince the emperor to wear his new outfit in a public procession through the town. Convinced he is dressed in beautiful new clothes, the emperor parades through the streets to the acclaim of the townspeople, each not wanting to be thought a fool for not seeing anything. But finally, a young boy who is too innocent to accept what is obviously false, points at the emperor and cries out, “The emperor has no clothes!” Soon all the townspeople begin to cry out in laughter that the emperor is wearing nothing at all. Though the emperor suspects they are right, he proudly and foolishly continues the charade, walking naked through the streets with a train of sycophants following closely behind.

“The Emperor’s New Clothes” offers a useful lens for understanding the rapid societal shift toward

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accepting transgender ideology over the past few decades. Gender dysphoria refers to the persistent distress that some individuals experience due to the perception that their male or female body does not correspond to their inner sense of gender identity. People suffering from gender dysphoria deserve our respect, compassion and concern. Many seek mental health counseling to resolve their distress and grow to accept their born sexual identity. Others, however, influenced by transgender ideology, “transition” to the opposite sex corresponding to their internal gender identity by choosing a new name, dressing as the opposite sex, receiving puberty blockers, taking cross-sex hormones and undergoing sex-change surgeries.

Transgender ideology asserts that a person’s gender identity has no connection to their sexual anatomy. Activists claim that sex is not a given of nature but rather a social construct that can be changed. Despite lacking sound scientific evidence, transgender ideology carries enormous social pressure to accept its claims. Powerful supporters in government, entertainment, media, medicine, law and education demand that everyone assent to its doctrines as orthodox truth.

Contrary to transgender ideology, the Catholic Church teaches that the human person is a body-soul unity. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains, “Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. ... Spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature (CCC 364-365). The Church rejects dualistic accounts of human nature like that proposed by transgender ideology: the human person is not a soul in a body, and does not merely have a body, but rather is composed

of both body *and* soul, inseparably united. It therefore makes no sense to speak of a female soul, spirit or identity trapped in a male body, or a male soul, spirit or identity trapped in a female body.

The Church also teaches that God creates the human person as either male or female (CCC 369-373; 2331-2336). As opposed to the claims of transgender activists, God did not create non-binary, third sex or gender-fluid human beings, but rather a binary complement of male and female (Gen 1:26-27). The Church also teaches that the human person’s femaleness or maleness permeates their entire being through and through: “Sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of his body and soul” (CCC 2332). Rather than engaging in futile attempts to change one’s gender—something that in reality cannot be done—the Church encourages every person to accept their intrinsic sexual identity revealed in their bodily nature as male or female, “Everyone, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity” (CCC 2333). No matter how loudly activists claim to the contrary, it is simply a fact that harmful medical and surgical mutilations of the body cannot alter one’s innate sexual nature as male or female.

Consider the following facts surrounding the transgender controversy. The human body contains approximately 37 trillion cells, and every person with a normal genetic makeup has either XY (male) sex chromosomes or XX (female) sex chromosomes in every cell of their body. These cellular chromosomes determine the person’s biological sex. Does it make any sense to say that someone with XY male sex chromosomes is really female, or that someone with XX female sex chromosomes is actually male?

Transgender interventions entail the surgical mutilation and removal of perfectly healthy body parts and the construction of artificial sexual organs to mimic those of the opposite sex. Females transitioning to male typically require lifelong injections of testosterone to masculinize the body, and males transitioning to female typically receive lifelong injections of estrogen to feminize the body. The person becomes a permanent medical patient to maintain the appearance of the opposite sex and to monitor the many health risks. Over the course of a lifetime, the costs of these medical treatments can

reach up to \$100,000. Does all this seem normal?

Children as young as toddlers are now being identified as transgender. Puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and irreversible gender-reassignment surgeries are being performed on minor children long before they have the maturity to make such life-altering decisions, and sometimes without parental knowledge or consent. Transgender interventions are being presented to troubled teenagers as a cure-all solution for a wide range of personal and social problems. The diagnosis of being transgender is also often hastily made, with reports of health care providers determining a child is transgender after just one appointment. Instead of treating gender dysphoria as a mental disorder, which many so-called experts now discourage, the illness is being affirmed, normalized and indulged in. Does any of this seem responsible, wise or compassionate?

Biological males who transition are now allowed to compete against female athletes in sports at every level like swimming, track and field, weightlifting, cycling, soccer and volleyball. Unsurprisingly, trans athletes dominate these sports, winning championships, breaking records and taking awards and opportunities from female athletes. Some female athletes have even been seriously injured in competitions against biological males who are trans. Girls and women have also been forced to share locker rooms with biological males claiming to be female and told to prioritize the trans athlete’s feelings over their own. How is any of this fair?

The transgender debate is playing out in real time in North Dakota. Currently, in North Dakota, it is a crime for a health care provider to give drugs or perform surgeries for the purpose of changing a minor’s biological sex to match the child’s internal gender identity. Three families and a pediatric endocrinologist in Fargo filed a lawsuit in a Bismarck court against the State of North Dakota challenging the law but lost at trial. Undeterred, the physician recently filed an appeal of the decision with the North Dakota Supreme Court. Let’s all pray the North Dakota Supreme Court makes the right decision consistent with reality.

Transgender ideology is false and dangerous and stands completely opposed to reality. It is time for people to exercise common sense, resist social pressure and call a spade a spade: The emperor has no clothes. †

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### PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

The Bismarck Diocese is firmly committed to the health and protection of our children, young people and vulnerable adults. With the hope of healing the pain and suffering from sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, we encourage anyone who has suffered from this abuse to please come forward and let us know. To report allegations of sexual abuse, please contact: Deacon Brent Naslund, Chancellor, Bismarck Diocese, PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575. Phone: 701-223-1347 or 1-877-405-7435. Email the victim assistance coordinator, Joyce McDowall, at [victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com](mailto:victimassistance@bismarckdiocese.com).

### CODE OF CONDUCT

The Catholic Church must be exemplary: Clergy, staff, whether diocesan or parish, and volunteers are held accountable for their behavior. To enable the highest level of accountability, there must be a clear and unambiguous definition of appropriate behavior. To this end, this Code of Conduct is defined for the Bismarck Diocese and it provides a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards for all personnel. View the Code of Conduct at [www.bismarckdiocese.com](http://www.bismarckdiocese.com).



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