



Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 85 No. 5 **MAY 2026**



GIFT OF THE EUCHARIST
CHRIST GIVING HIMSELF COMPLETELY

www.bismarckdiocese.com

Town and Country Celebration

Sunday, July 19 • 11 a.m. CT

Mass, celebrated by
Bishop David D. Kagan,
begins at 11 a.m. CT inside
the Church of St. Vincent de Paul

(Please Note: that although there is a simple
ramp, the church is not handicapped
accessible - especially for seating).

There will be a blessing upon
our rural communities, equipment,
land and animals. Feel free to
bring a container of soil or seed
from your field or garden
to be blessed.

Church of St. Vincent de Paul
3182 36th St
Crown Butte, ND



Hosted by Father Nick Schneider and the parishioners
of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul.

Lunch will follow Mass (*registration required* for accurate meal count).
Bring your lawn chairs, blankets and umbrellas
to enjoy the day outdoors.

All are welcome!



To register, scan the QR code or go to
bismarckdiocese.com/townandcountry
or call Amanda at 701-204-7205.

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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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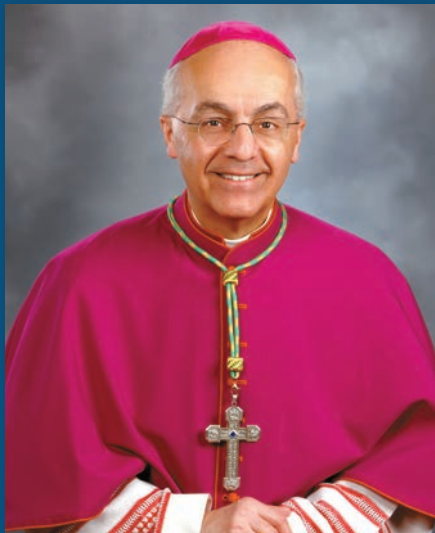
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FROM THE BISHOP

*We have much to be grateful
for this month of May*

Bishop David D. Kagan

We again enter the month of May with much to be grateful for. While we are still celebrating the beautiful Easter season, it will come to a close this month with the Solemnity of Pentecost. The great Easter Octave and Easter season overlap April and May and what we must be grateful for is the gift of our salvation obtained for us by the Lord Jesus, crucified and risen.

It was from His pierced side on Good Friday that the Church was born and His sacraments animate us in our faith, hope and charity. This great grace is celebrated by the Church, by each of us, throughout the Easter season. Whatever we did during Lent to prepare for Easter, we ought to continue in our daily lives of faith. Is it not true that frequent Mass and confession, being truly charitable to those in need, and doing some kind of penance all strengthen us to resist “Satan and all his works and empty promises?”

May, by a long tradition, has been a month dedicated to Our Blessed Mother. Among all her titles, the one we celebrate in May this year is Mother of the Church. Pope Francis designated the Monday after Pentecost Sunday each year as the day for this feast. The first day of May is also the feast of St. Joseph, patron of workers. As the beloved and chaste spouse

of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the divinely chosen Guardian of the Redeemer, he stands before us in holy silence, allowing his actions to speak volumes to us about personal holiness and true obedience to the will of God.

The last day of May is the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her cousin St. Elizabeth. This is not only the second joyful mystery of the holy rosary, but it is the event which celebrates this first meeting between the Messiah and His precursor, St. John the Baptist. Is it any wonder that the Church looks upon this visitation as the model for the new evangelization? Mary, in her love, brings Jesus to her cousin to give her strength and introduces Jesus to St. John the Baptist. This is the heart of evangelization—to bring Christ to others so that they have a personal encounter with Him; this is why Pope Benedict XVI taught that this is faith.

So, you see, we do have much to be grateful for in this month of May. All the graduations, weddings and family reunions take on a whole different meaning if we view them through the clear lens of Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost. May we enjoy this month of May as Our Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph enjoyed their life with Jesus! ✠

BISHOP IN ACTION



Photo by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Bishop Kagan uncovered the cross to be venerated by the faithful at the Good Friday liturgy at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit on April 3.



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

**THAT EVERYONE MIGHT
HAVE FOOD**

Let us pray that everyone, from large producers to small consumers, be committed to avoid wasting food, and to ensure that everyone has access to quality food.

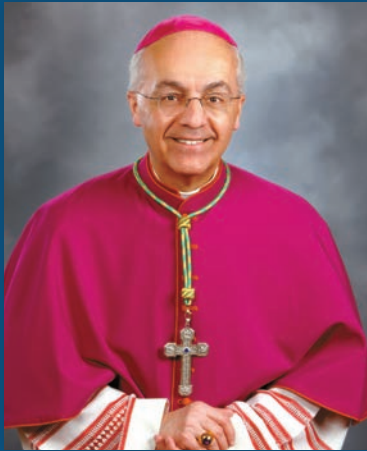
BISHOP’S SCHEDULE

MAY 2026

May 2	Confirmation at the Church of St. Patrick, Crosby, 11 a.m.
May 3	Confirmation at the Church of St. Martin, Hazen, 10 a.m.
May 5	Presbyteral Council Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
May 6	Confirmation at the Church of St. Joseph, Mandan, 6 p.m.
May 7	Confirmation at the Church of Spirit of Life, Mandan, 6 p.m.
May 8	Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
May 9	Confirmation at the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary, Bismarck, 11 a.m.
May 10	Confirmation at the Church of the Epiphany, Watford City, 10:45 a.m.
May 11	Priest Anniversary Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 11 a.m.
May 12	Catholic Charities Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 12 p.m.
May 14	Parish Expansion Board Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10:30 a.m.
May 14	Blue Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
May 15	Home On The Range Board Meeting, Sentinel Butte, 12 p.m. MT
May 16	Armed Forces Day Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 8 a.m.
May 17	Bishop Ryan Catholic School Graduation, Minot, 12:30 p.m.
May 17	St. Mary’s Central High School Graduation, Bismarck, 4 p.m.
May 23	Pentecost Vigil Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5 p.m.
May 24	Trinity High School Graduation, Dickinson, 2:30 p.m. MT
May 30	Dedication Ceremony at the Church of the Ascension, Bismarck, 5 p.m.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Thank you for your faithful support of our diocese and the Church’s many good works supported by our annual God’s Share Appeal. Your response to last year’s appeal resulted in us reaching our goal and is a testament to your excellent stewardship and love of our Catholic faith. I am most grateful for the opportunity to serve such a faithful and vibrant community in western North Dakota.



Our 69th Annual Appeal is upon us. With your donation, we will continue to be able to support the many necessary services provided by our diocese. These include forming our 15 seminarians and 15 diaconate candidates; training our religious education catechists and adult faith formation leaders; helping our young people grow in faith and prepare for the reception of the Sacraments; promoting the dignity of life and marriage; and so much more.

The Annual God’s Share Appeal is a collective effort of our 93 parishes and 61,699 Catholics to support our vibrant Catholic community with the spiritual, pastoral, educational, and temporal works critical in forming families, children, and all individuals yearning for the love and mercy of God.

Please read to learn how your gift makes such a large impact on thousands of individuals and families in our diocese. Our website, www.bismarckdiocese.com has additional information on our offices and programs, as well as materials that will inform, educate, and inspire you.

This year’s theme for the 2026 God’s Share Appeal is “Living Faith, Changing Lives”. Through the Annual God’s Share Appeal, we can live our faith with acts of generosity and positively impact the lives of our parishioners in western North Dakota. I encourage you to prayerfully consider how you can respond to the Lord’s call to serve one another.

Your financial support to the annual God’s Share Appeal ensures that the services provided by the Catholic Church will continue to prosper.

Thank you for your generosity and faithful commitment to the Church’s mission.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

David D. Kagan

Most Reverend David D. Kagan, D.D., P.A., J.C.L.
Bishop of Bismarck
On behalf of the Bismarck Diocese

“Living Faith,
Changing Lives.”



The Bismarck Diocese is not just one person, it is not just one parish,
it is an entire diocese which is the Kingdom of God in western North Dakota.

GOD’S SHARE APPEAL **MAY 2-3, 2026**

We Respond as Disciples...

After reflecting on the importance of the vital works of formation, outreach and education funded through the God’s Share Appeal and how you can help,

Please **reflect** on the many gifts you have received from God, including your family and financial blessings.

Next, **pray** about how God wants you to use the gifts He has entrusted to your care.

Then, **decide** how you will share your blessings with those in need and to support the mission of your Diocesan Church.

Please prayerfully discern how you respond to God’s generosity in your life by making a generous pledge to the God’s Share Appeal that impacts thousands of lives in western North Dakota each year.

Consider Different Possibilities

- 1. Make a pledge rather than a one-time gift.
- 2. Have your gift automatically deducted from your checking or savings account.
- 3. Use your credit card or debit card to make your gift.
- 4. Make your gift on-line at www.bismarckdiocese.com
- 5. Make your gift by “Text-to-Give”: text the \$ amount to (833) 544-1375
- 6. Make your gift on your parish’s APP.
- 7. Increase last year’s gift by a percentage or a specific dollar amount.
- 8. Pledge one percent of your income.
- 9. Make your gift using stocks, bonds, grain, livestock, securities, real estate, or other personal property, which may have greatly increased in value. Should you be considering this type of gift, contact the Office of Mission Advancement at (701) 222-3035 for assistance.



Bismarck Diocese
520 North Washington Street
Bismarck, ND 58501
(701) 222-3035 or
Toll Free 1-877-405-7435
bismarckdiocese.com

Annual Household Income	1% Pledge	Down Payment	11 Monthly Payments
\$12,000	\$120	\$10.00	\$10.00
\$24,000	\$240	\$20.00	\$20.00
\$48,000	\$480	\$40.00	\$40.00
\$60,000	\$600	\$50.00	\$50.00
\$90,000	\$900	\$75.00	\$75.00
\$120,000	\$1,200	\$100.00	\$100.00
\$180,000	\$1,800	\$150.00	\$150.00

Please consider 1% of your income as a gift to the 2026 God’s Share Appeal. Make your pledge today. Thank you for being good stewards of God’s varied graces.

Stewardship and the God’s Share Appeal

The God’s Share Appeal is based on the concept of Christian Stewardship. Stewardship is centered on the daily recognition that we are not the absolute owners of ourselves, our time, our talents, or material goods. Rather, we have received every gift of nature and grace from God. Through Baptism we are called to use our time, talent and treasure in a responsible manner for our families, our parish communities, the pastoral, educational and religious ministries of the diocese, and for the global ministries of the universal Church. Stewardship is not about just giving in order to fill a need. It is about living a life that shows gratitude to the Lord for our lives, our skills and our resources.

Stewardship is...

- Receiving God’s Gifts Gratefully
- Nurturing God’s Gifts Responsibly
- Sharing God’s Gifts Justly
- Returning God’s Gifts Abundantly

This year’s God’s Share Appeal theme is

“Living Faith, Changing Lives.”

Our faith teaches us that the way we came to know of Jesus’ love for us, was that He laid down his life – as an example for us to follow. By making a gift to this year’s God’s Share Appeal, you are expressing your love as a Christian steward – supporting Christ’s work here in western North Dakota.

Your donation to the 2026 God’s Share Appeal supports all of the programs and services provided by the following offices:

- Archives
- Bishop’s Office
- Canonical Services
- Catechesis and Youth
- Chancery Office
- Communications and Media Services
- Continuing Education for Clergy
- Dakota Catholic Action
- Education
- Episcopal Vicar for Clergy
- Family Ministry/Respect Life
- Finance
- Internal Auditor
- Mission Advancement
- Missionary Activity
- Moderator of the Curia/Vicar General
- Permanent Diaconate
- Vocations
- Worship

“Living Faith, Changing Lives.”

God’s Share Appeal

May 2-3, 2026

We Are...

- 61,699 Catholic people
- 93 Parishes
- 1 Bishop
- 66 Priests
- 12 Retired Priests
- 15 Seminarians
- 86 Permanent Deacons
- 15 Men in Diaconate Formation
- 1 Diocese

Living and Sharing our Faith In 2025, we celebrated:

- 979 Baptisms
- 968 First Communions
- 759 Confirmations
- 252 Marriages
- 763 Deaths

The Bismarck Diocese is not just one person, it is not just one parish, it is an entire diocese which is the Kingdom of God in western North Dakota.



Fr. Steven Vetter, Director of Vocations with Dcn. Colton Steiner.



Priests of the Bismarck Diocese at Mass.



Bishop Kagan poses with Dcn. Colton Steiner during his diaconate ordination.

Office of Vocations

Your donation supports the **Office of Vocations**. This year, Dcn. Colton Steiner will be ordained to the Priesthood. The Bismarck Diocese currently has 15 seminarians pursuing the Priesthood! For a small diocese of our size, we are extremely blessed with the number of seminarians we have.



Bishop Kagan confirms over 700 people each year.



Bishop Kagan gathers with the OCIA candidates.

Office of Catechesis and Youth

Your gift supports the **Office of Catechesis and Youth** which provides valuable training and information to all of the parishes' Religious Education programs. This office also coordinates the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd training for the parishes and Catholic schools using this special Religious Education program; Search weekend; Steubenville Youth Conferences; Young Adult Ministry; and the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA) wanting to enter the Catholic Church.



Bishop Kagan blesses the land, animals and machinery at the Annual Town & Country Celebration.



Youth from western North Dakota attend the March for Life event in Washington, DC.

Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life

Your contribution supports the **Office of Family Ministry and Respect Life** which provides informational resources for marriage preparation, respect life, natural family planning, marriage enrichment and several other opportunities. There are numerous programs and services offered by this office that include the Town and Country Celebration; Courage; Hannah's Hope Ministry; Corazon; Second Marriage Seminars; N.D. March for Life; and others.



Office of Communications

The **Office of Communications** assists Bishop Kagan in communicating with people of all ages in a variety of ways – through the *Dakota Catholic Action* news magazine, weekly video messages on the diocesan website and through social media including Bishop's Twitter account.



Bishop Kagan with newly ordained Deacon Bob Nickola and his wife, Joan from Queen of Peace, Dickinson.

Office of Permanent Diaconate

Your gift supports the **Office of Permanent Diaconate** which assists men who are studying to become deacons in the five-year formation program. This office also coordinates the on-going formation weekends for our Ordained Deacons throughout the year. Currently, we have 15 men in formation and 86 deacons.



Diocesan Educational and Training Workshops

Educational workshops are offered by several diocesan offices to a variety of parish groups throughout the year. Our priests, deacons, parish employees, parish and finance council members are among the many who benefit from the education provided.



Fr. Eckroth with Bishop Kagan.

Retired Priests and Bishop

Your contribution supports all of our 12 retired priests who are a tremendous gift to our diocese. Through the ministry of the Office of the Episcopal Vicar for Clergy, we desire to reaffirm them and offer encouragement to them as they experience their sunset years. Bishop Kagan visits with Fr. Leonard Eckroth, one of our retired priests.



Continuing Education for Clergy

The **Office of Continuing Education for Clergy** provides for the continued spiritual, intellectual and pastoral growth of our clergy by planning the Annual Fall and Spring Clergy Conferences, Annual Retreats for Priests and the New Priest Workshops.



Bishop Kagan at Mass.



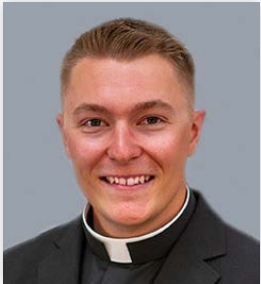
Bishop Kagan at Liturgy.

The Chancery Office

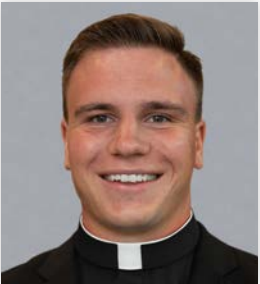
The **Chancery Office** provides administrative and clerical assistance for Bishop Kagan and maintains official diocesan records and reports in the Archives.

For more information on each office, please visit our diocesan website: bismarckdiocese.com

PRAY FOR OUR 2025-2026 SEMINARIANS



Dcn. Colton Steiner
Configuration IV
St. Joseph
Dickinson



Joseph Richter
Configuration III
Saint Anne
Bismarck



Joseph Schon
Configuration II
Ascension
Bismarck



Aaron Ripplinger
Discipleship IV
St. Joseph
Beulah



Griffin Schaeffer
Discipleship III
Our Lady of Grace
Minot



Alex Wilson
Discipleship III
Cathedral
Bismarck



Thomas Kraljic
Discipleship II
Cathedral
Bismarck



Preston Barbie
Propaedeutic Year
Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary
Bismarck



Nolan Johnson
Propaedeutic Year
St. Joseph
Mandan



Ronan Klindworth
Propaedeutic Year
St. Joseph
Beulah



Aidan Schaeffbauer
Propaedeutic Year
Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary
Bismarck



Joseph Schweitzer
Propaedeutic Year
Cathedral
Bismarck



Tyler Selzler
Propaedeutic Year
St. Pius V
New Salem



Taylen Thomas
Propaedeutic Year
Spirit of Life
Mandan



Paul Vetter
Propaedeutic Year
St. Hildegard
Menoken

Office of Vocations

The **Office of Vocations**, on average, has the largest office budget. Through your donations to the annual God's Share Appeal, Bishop Kagan is able to pay for the education and formation expenses of our 15 seminarians. The average cost for one seminarian in the major seminary is \$45,000 each year. Please continue to pray for our 15 seminarians and for everyone else that is considering a call to the Religious Life.

Adoration is the best time you will spend on earth

Amanda Evinger
DCA Writer

When Bismarck resident, Johanna Nagel, met Pope John Paul II in 1987, she had no idea what an amazing mission God had in store for her.

“He made me the coordinator of adoration for North Dakota. Each December, I was supposed to write a letter to Pope John Paul II and tell him the progress I was making, and he would write me letters of encouragement back.”

Although it was quite inspiring to receive a calling directly from the Holy Father himself, Johanna definitely had a tough job ahead of her. She said it was very difficult to get adoration started here because many people were not open to it.

“However, I met with Bishop Zipfel about it, and he said he would educate the priests to all be in favor of it, and he did! Now it is much easier to promote because all the priests in our diocese are supportive of it,” Johanna shared.

One by one, holy hour by holy hour, Johanna and her fellow prayer warriors went to work for the Kingdom of God—not so much by putting their hands to the plow so to speak, but by joining them together in prayer.

“In the beginning, when it was especially hard to get people to come, sometimes I would go to adoration from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. to fill the empty hours,” Johanna recalled. “I put the most time in when we started perpetual adoration at Christ the King parish in Mandan. Some weeks, I went for up to 27 hours!”

When asked how she can go to adoration for so long, Johanna said, “Just being with Jesus is well worth it!



Submitted photo: Bismarck resident Johanna Nagel has been the state coordinator of adoration since 1987.

He is there, and you are there. You don’t have to say anything; you can just be quiet and listen to what He has to say.”

In the words of St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta, founder of the Missionaries of Charity, there is no better way to spend your time than in adoration.

“Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament is the best time you will spend on earth. It will make your soul everlastingly more glorious and beautiful in heaven. A holy hour of adoration helps bring everlasting peace to your soul and to your family. It brings you personal peace and strength. Every holy hour deepens your union with Him and bears much fruit.”

Lives touched by adoration

Over the years, Johanna has seen many lives profoundly touched by the blessing of adoration.

“Once, we were working on getting adoration started at a parish, so we planned a Marian conference,” she recalled. “A few people called and said even though they were not Catholic, they would still love to see the statue of Mary and hear the whole conference. We told them they were welcome to come because Mary is everyone’s mother. After coming to it, they started making a holy hour every Friday, and they never missed it for years! They eventually became Catholic.”

When it comes to the founding of adoration chapels in our diocese, God’s providential designs have been at work in amazing ways.

“One lady offered to pay for the chapel to be built at Christ the King Parish, and afterwards, she got two oil drills on her property,” Johanna said. “That is how pleased God was with it.”

For Catholics like Johanna, adoration can be a lifelong devotion that brings a sense of serenity to one’s soul like nothing else can.

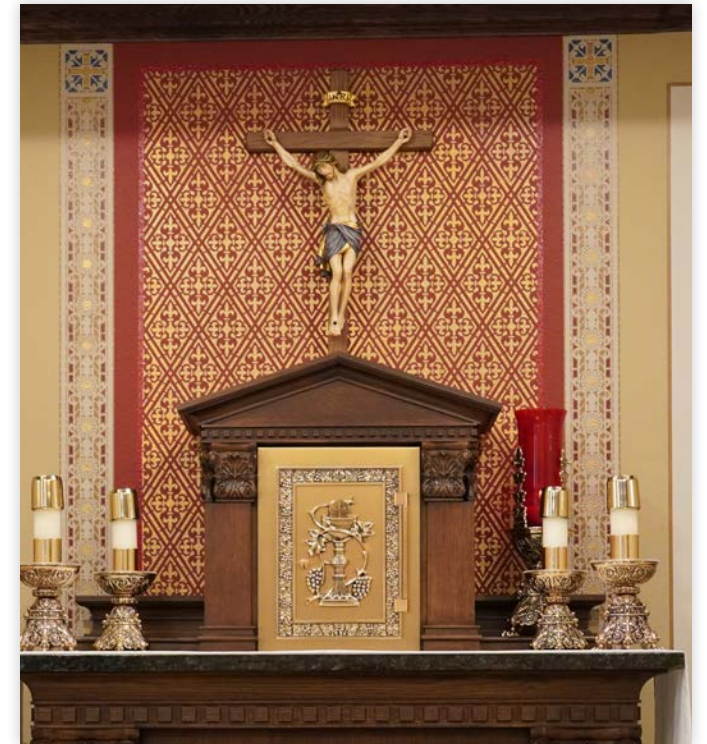
“I have been going to adoration since I was a child, way back in the 1930’s,” Johanna shared. “Since I have been working and left the farm, I started going every single Sunday. Now, I go to adoration everywhere! I am almost never home.”

Even though Eucharistic adoration is well established in most of the parishes in our diocese in some way or another, Johanna isn’t exactly “retired” from her post, even though she is 94 years old.

“I am doing very well, and God takes good care of me!” she said. “I still distribute prayer cards and fliers about adoration.”

Adoration in the life of the priesthood

Adoration can transform anyone’s faith life. Not surprisingly, it also has an integral part in the spiritual life of the priest.



Staff photo: The adoration chapel for the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck offers a quiet, serene setting to adore Our Lord.

“Eucharistic adoration was instrumental in my discernment to become a priest, and it has been instrumental in my life as a priest as well,” said Fr. Jared Johnson, Pastor of the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck. “When I first began to sense a call to the priesthood in high school, I would frequently attend Eucharistic adoration at my home parish, St. Joseph’s in Williston. It was often in the context of both Mass and Eucharistic adoration where my desire to be a priest was strongest.”

Over time, the good “Lord of the harvest” watered these seeds of Eucharistic faith in Fr. Johnson’s heart until they blossomed.

“Because of this, I was especially grateful that the seminary I attended (St. John Vianney College Seminary in St. Paul) had a required Eucharistic holy hour for all the seminarians each morning. This practice allowed Eucharistic adoration to become an essential part of my daily life as a seminarian, and now as a priest. I’m grateful that the other priests I have lived with since being ordained also make a daily Eucharistic holy hour in our rectory chapel. For me, it is essential to begin each day in the chapel for an hour of adoration.”

When asked what he most appreciates about adoration, Fr. Johnson responded, “My favorite aspect of Eucharistic adoration is simply being in the presence of the Eucharist. While there are many worthwhile ways to spend a holy hour, whether it be reading Scripture, praying the rosary or preparing a homily, I find myself ‘doing less’ and simply allowing my heart and mind to be with our Lord during this time.”

Adoration is God's gift to everyone

Although going to adoration can feel intimidating to many, the truth is, it does not have to be.

“There are amazing resources that can help people begin attending adoration,” Fr. Johnson said. “I think the simplest initial step would be for them to bring their Bible with them and pray through the Sunday Gospel. In doing so, they can read with their heart and pay special attention to different verses or scenes that speak to them. This is how the Lord speaks, and once that happens, an individual can further sit and reflect on the verse or scene that they find especially relatable.”

Adoration may seem complicated, but it is actually very simple—it is nothing more than a testimony of Christ’s love.

As St. Mother Teresa said that nowhere on earth are we more welcomed or loved than by Jesus in

the Eucharist. “When you look at the crucifix, you understand how much Jesus loved you. When you look at the Sacred Host you understand how much Jesus loves you now. This is why we need perpetual Eucharistic adoration in every parish throughout the entire world.”

Just as we receive our Lord during Holy Mass, we can receive His love in adoration in a quiet, intimate way that brings an ethereal peace to our souls.

Eucharistic adoration can be described as an extension of the Mass. For example, right before we receive Holy Communion, the priest holds up the Eucharist and says, “Behold the Lamb of God...” Now imagine if at that moment, we just paused and adored, for however long we would like, as we behold the Lamb of God.

The beautiful thing is that when we give ourselves to adoration with love, we give ourselves to Christ and ultimately, to all of God’s children. Eucharistic adoration really can become the “heartbeat” of all the services and activities a parish provides by anchoring everything in the Real Presence of Christ. For us to bring Christ to others, we must first receive Him in our own life of faith through prayer.

Today—not tomorrow—is the best day to find out what time adoration is offered in our local community, so we may spend the best time on earth in His divine presence.✝

Prayer for the Spread of Perpetual Adoration

Heavenly Father, increase our faith in the Real Presence of Your Son, Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. We are obliged to adore Him, to give Him thanks and to make reparation for sins. We need Your peace in our hearts and among nations. We need conversion from our sins and the mercy of Your forgiveness. May we obtain this through prayer and our union with the Eucharistic Lord. Please send down the Holy Spirit upon all peoples to give them the love, courage, strength and willingness to respond to the invitation to Eucharistic Adoration. We beseech You to spread perpetual adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament in parishes around the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord. Amen. Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament help us to spread the glory of your Son through perpetual adoration.



CHRISM MASS 2026

Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky

The Church makes use of three sacred oils for sacraments: oil of the sick, oil of catechumens and chrism oil. The first two are blessed by the bishop and he consecrates the third during the annual Chrism Mass held during Holy Week, traditionally on the Monday of Holy Week in the Bismarck Diocese. Each year, the bishop blesses new oils for the 93 parishes in the diocese during the Chrism Mass. After Mass, the oils are bottled into smaller vessels and distributed to parishes to be used in administering the sacraments that call for oil during that year—baptism, confirmation, holy orders and anointing of the sick. This Mass is also known for the renewal of priestly promises made on the day of ordination.✝



The ritual for consecrating the sacred chrism is slightly different from the other oils. At the end of Mass, the bishop says a prayer to consecrate the sacred chrism oil during which he breathes on the oil at the opening of the urn signifying the presence of the Holy Spirit.



Diocesan Seminarian Deacon Colton Steiner placed the chrism oil before the consecration.



Father Nicholas Vetter at the altar during the Mass.



Deacon Bob Nickola presented the oil of catechumens to Bishop Kagan.

Catholic school is a mustard tree in Williston

Emily Monson
St. Joseph's Catholic School, Williston

My father once said that he and my mother considered moving our young, growing family out of Williston many years ago because they wanted us to have more access to Catholic education. At that time, St. Joseph's in Williston only served kindergarten through sixth grade, which meant we would need to go to public school for middle and high school. After much prayer and discussion, he said the decision to stay became final when he read these words credited to St. Francis de Sales: "Bloom where you are planted." Recognizing the voice of the Holy Spirit, my parents put our family's roots down in Williston and trusted God to take care of the rest.

The words of St. Francis and my parents' story keep coming back to me as I contemplate the role of education in light of the 75th anniversary of St. Joseph's Catholic School. The two, evidently, are connected by the common thread of evangelization. Establishing and raising a family is much like building a Catholic school in that they both serve to spread the Gospel but only do so slowly and with the greatest care and patience. This fits well with the plant analogy St. Francis evokes with his quotation and parallels the growth of the mustard tree found in the Gospels.

Typically, when we read about the parable of the mustard seed, we focus on the analogous growth of the Church as it transforms from the smallest seed into the biggest tree. But there's more to the story. Mustard trees, like all plants, grow slowly and quietly without much notice. That is unimpressive, but the circumstances of their growth are truly inspiring. Mustard trees don't simply survive but thrive in hot, dry climates. They are resilient to harsh conditions like extreme temperatures and low water availability. Despite these challenges, the trees grow relatively quickly and foster their own private ecosystems as they attract a variety of wildlife thanks to their abundant foliage and fruit. These unassuming plants

produce dense, durable wood ideal for making tools due to its strength and resistance to decay. The remarkable success in such a challenging environment often parallels the world of education.

Education is unbelievably difficult for dozens of reasons. Educators must balance the art of teaching with the endless demands of grading, training, safety, classroom management, discipline, communication, standards, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, chaos coordination and testing. Amid all this, we are expected to form children to be mature in the arena of manners, responsibility and ethics while we ourselves maintain patience, joy and charity—while, for some of us, it might seem that we are slowly losing our minds. We pour every ounce of ourselves into hundreds of students over the course of days, weeks, months and years without really knowing what kind of humans we are sending into the world. In a word, we plant hundreds of little seeds over time and rarely see the fruits of our labors. How do we persevere with a task that has the tendency to push us to the breaking point while showing little to no perceptible progress?

Go, make disciples

While this daunting question ruminates in the mind of any given educator, it is especially evident in a Catholic school, for here we add another challenge to outweigh all the rest: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19). This is the honorable yet audacious mission here at St. Joseph's School in Williston. We don't simply pass along knowledge to our students in the vain hope they use it for the common good. We have an additional call to train soldiers for Christ in the spiritual drama of rescuing souls—in short, we evangelize. Since evangelization begins in the home, Catholic schools are designed to build upon the family. We help Catholic



Submitted photos: Historical photo of St. Joseph's 1st Communion in 1954.

families pass on the faith while the lessons are in turn reinforced at home. But a Catholic school's mission to form Catholic students is often coupled with the additional need to evangelize its non-Catholic students.

Reaching both Catholic and non-Catholic students is particularly challenging for our school. Saint Joseph's is in a very precarious situation to evangelize because a large portion of its students—about 40 percent— is not Catholic. Some of our kids have never even prayed or set foot in a church before arriving at our door. Furthermore, St. Joseph's is the only Catholic church in a town that is predominantly Protestant. Add to this the highly unpredictable and transient nature of an oilfield town and it's a wonder anyone can find a Catholic school in this corner of the state at all, let alone one that has survived for several decades. In other words, we are evangelizing in a place where we are quite obviously the minority and at a serious disadvantage. And yet, after many years and through multiple oil booms, our school is still alive and growing—quietly, humbly and unexpectedly, all thanks to the Divine Gardener who planted a mustard seed in Williston.

Strong start

In 1950, the Sisters of Mercy broke ground and began building St. Joseph's Catholic School. It was dedicated by Bishop Ryan in 1951 and officially opened that same year with 128 students in grades one through six. Seventh and eighth grade were added the following two school years with the first 8th grade graduation in May 1956. Within six years of opening, the school added a gymnasium and several classrooms to the grounds. Despite the pressures of a Protestant community, St. Joseph's experienced tremendous growth in the first 10 years. Enrollment gradually increased from 175 students in 1954 to more than 500 in 1961.

Our students, through the years, have enjoyed a history of excellence with readers clubs, poetry contests, science fairs, art shows, junior olympics, spelling bees, poster contests and sports competitions. The St. Joe's Jets basketball team was particularly successful as they won championships in 1960-61 and were undefeated when they won again in 1963-64. They've performed in talent shows, plays, musicals and operettas. From the beginning,



St. Joseph's second grade class in 1951-52 with their teacher, one of the Sisters of Mercy who started the school.



St. Joseph's eighth grade graduating class in 1970-71.

St. Joseph's has consistently provided for the spiritual needs of its students with weekly Mass, confession, catechesis and daily prayer. Life at St. Joseph's was blooming.

Decision to close

And yet, after 20 years, the school almost collapsed. Enrollment dropped drastically and the pastor, Fr. Raymond Aydt, decided to remove grades seventh and eighth in 1971. The following year, the parish voted to close St. Joseph's Catholic School completely. When the request was sent to Bismarck, Bishop Hilary Hacker responded not with an order, but a plea to the parish urging it to keep the school open. These words of the bishop prompted a spark of hope and a renewed desire to continue evangelizing through the school despite its many challenges. The first major hurdle, however, was staffing the classrooms. By the time the decision was made to keep the school open, the Sisters of Mercy had already arranged other commitments and were unable to stay and teach. St. Joseph's, for the first time, was staffed without sisters for the 1972-73 school year. The following year, kindergarten was added and St. Joseph's was the only fully lay-staffed parochial Catholic school in North Dakota.

A newspaper article from the 1970s quoted a skeptic regarding the continuation of the school: "Without nuns, there would be no parochial school." Ironically and despite the absence of religious sisters, St. Joseph's has continued forming the minds and hearts of its students 50 years after it nearly closed. We currently have 200 students enrolled in 13 classes. We've reinstated seventh and eighth grade and will have our first eighth grade

graduation since 1971 this May. Two preschool classes were moved out of the main school into a new early childhood development center to allow more classroom space; we've doubled classes for four grades and added two mobile modulars to our parking lot to accommodate the increase in enrollment. Despite the threat to it in 1971, St. Joseph's has managed to continue evangelizing against all odds. But how?

Still bearing fruit

Well, St. Joseph's Catholic School is a mustard tree. Its hot, dry climate is the vast, mostly-Protestant population; its extreme temperatures are the continual shifts in student attendance as families come and go unpredictably with each oil boom. The low water availability can be likened to the fact that it lost its founding sisters, the closest Catholic school is two hours away, and the next Catholic church can only be found in another town. And yet, this school bears fruit. It attracts a variety of families looking to escape the heat of secular pressures in the public schools.

Our non-Catholic students and staff have found a home here unlike anywhere else; some have even become part of the Catholic Church. Over the years, teachers in the public middle and high schools have often said they can recognize students from our school due to their respectful behavior and academic excellence. Lastly, the durable wood for tools is our staff who have coordinated so much chaos over time that they could be expert jugglers in a circus. The growing number of students, shifting of classrooms and constant changes in duties have made them solid, dependable and experienced professionals.



St. Joseph's Catholic School student body with the staff and priests during the 2026 Catholic Schools Week celebrated annually in January.

But a mustard tree is only as good as its gardener. The existence and growth of St. Joseph's is largely dependent on the people over the years who have made tremendous sacrifices to nurture it well and to whom we owe deep and sincere gratitude: the Sisters of Mercy, who were the first administrators and teachers; the pastors over the years who worked diligently to keep the mission of the school on course and the associate pastors who formed key relationships with its students; the principals, teachers and staff who have put in countless hours and extreme effort in the care and formation of God's children; the families and parishioners without whom a school wouldn't even be possible; the Blessed Mother for her gentle guidance and fierce protection; and our patron, St. Joseph, who quietly models how to serve with obedience, patience, humility, perseverance, fidelity and sacrifice. Finally, the highest honor and acclaim go to the Master Gardener, who promised at the close of the Paschal Mystery, "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Mt. 28:20). The fact that our school is still alive and working despite decades of challenges is proof that God's presence alone keeps it intact.

So how do we persevere with a task that almost breaks us without showing progress? How do we continue to plant seeds without seeing the fruit? It's simple: we don't. God plants the seeds and nurtures their growth without any concern for the unfavorable circumstances in which He places them. Our school continues to wrestle with new obstacles, but we can rejoice in the confidence of St. Teresa of Calcutta who said, "God has not called [us] to success, but to faithfulness."

St. Joseph's Catholic School, the mustard tree, and Catholic families remind us that great things emerge from humble beginnings if we are obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. All we can do is surrender and bloom wherever the Good Lord plants us. You never know—He just might be planting another mustard tree. †

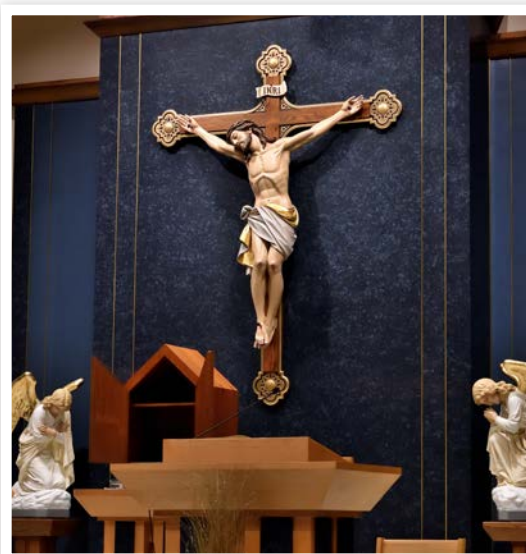
Monson serves as the Director of Religious Education at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Williston.



HOLY THURSDAY AT THE CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky

Holy Thursday radiates a quiet and profound beauty at the heart of the Church's liturgical year. It commemorates the Last Supper, where Christ offered the gift of the Eucharist and modeled humble service through the washing of feet. The evening Mass carries a deep sense of reverence, as the altar is stripped and the faithful are invited into solemn reflection. In its stillness and symbolism, Holy Thursday gently draws believers into the mystery of love, sacrifice and the beginning of the Passion of Our Lord. †



GOOD FRIDAY AT THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky

Good Friday in the Church carries a calm, solemn beauty that invites reflection on sacrifice and love. The stripped altar, the silent bells and the veneration of the cross create a space where simplicity speaks more powerfully than words. It is the only day within the Church year when Mass is not celebrated. In the stillness, the faithful contemplate the depth of Christ's suffering and the profound hope it brings to humanity. It is a day where sorrow and grace intertwine, revealing a beauty that is both humbling and deeply moving. †





EASTER VIGIL AT THE CHURCH OF SAINT ANNE

Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky

The Easter Vigil Mass begins in darkness, symbolizing the world before Christ's resurrection, and includes the blessing of the new fire and the lighting of the Paschal candle. The liturgy features multiple Scripture readings that recount salvation history, leading up to the proclamation of the Resurrection. It is also the time when many new members are baptized and welcomed into the Church, making it a powerful celebration of renewal and faith. The Mass concludes with the celebration of the Eucharist, representing the victory of Jesus over sin and death.†



UPCOMING EVENTS



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.



Foundation golf tournament June 15

The 12th Annual Seminarian Scholarship Golf Tournament hosted by the Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota is Monday, June 15 at the Prairie West Golf Course in Mandan. Check in and lunch begins at noon with a shotgun start at 1 p.m. Lunch and dinner are provided. Cost is \$520 per team or \$130 per person. Register online at cfwnd.org/golf by June 12. The tournament fills up fast, so you are encouraged to register early. For more information contact Ron Schatz at 701-204-7202 or Mike Bichler at 701-471-0985.



Big Smoke BBQ Competition June 21

The 2026 Big Smoke event at the Flickertail Garden on the ND State Fair Grounds in Minot is Sunday, June 21. Doors open at 3 p.m. Come and spend the day with priests and diocesan seminarians at this event held by the Serra Club of North Central North Dakota. Tickets can be purchased at the door. Take part in taste testing at competitor stations and stay for a BBQ dinner with all the fixings served by the seminarians. Proceeds of this event work to ensure the future of our Catholic Faith by supporting new priests, the priesthood and the consecrated life.



KC pancake breakfast July 3-4

All are welcome to the Knights of Columbus Art in the Park 4th of July pancake breakfast on Friday, July 3 and Saturday, July 4. Each day the breakfast is served from 7-11 a.m. on the Morton Mandan Library patio behind the band shell on Main Street in Mandan. Cost is \$7 for adults and \$4 for children aged 10 and under. Proceeds to benefit various charities.



Town and Country Celebration July 19

You are invited to the annual Town and Country Celebration on Sunday, July 19. The event will be held at the Church of St. Vincent de Paul in Crown Butte. The day will begin with Mass celebrated by Bishop Kagan inside the church at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow Mass. There will be a blessing upon rural communities, equipment, land and animals. Attendees are invited to bring a container of soil or seed from their field or garden to be blessed. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets and umbrellas to enjoy the day outdoors. The event is hosted by Fr. Nick Schneider and the parishioners of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul. Register at bismarckdiocese.com/townandcountry or call Amanda at 701-204-7205. Registration is required for an accurate meal count. Note that although there is a simple ramp, the church is not handicapped accessible, especially for seating.



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 bismarckdiocese.com/steubenville-st-paul.

Fr. Paul Becker

The Reverend Paul D. Becker, 78, passed away at the Benedictine Living Center in Bismarck on March 21, 2026. A Mass of Christian burial was held March 25 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, with the Most Reverend David D. Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck, as celebrant. The priests of the Bismarck Diocese concelebrated. Burial followed at St. Mary's Cemetery, Bismarck.



Father Becker was born on Nov. 7, 1947, in Bismarck to Paul and Hildegard (Reyerson) Becker. He was raised in Bismarck and attended St. Mary's Grade School, Bismarck, Assumption Abbey, Richardton, and graduated from St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, in 1965. He continued his education at Crosier Seminary, Onamia, Minn. from 1965-1967. He then continued his studies at St. Thomas Seminary, Denver, Colo. He was ordained by the Most Reverend Hilary B. Hacker on June 1, 1973, at St. Mary's Church in Bismarck.

His first assignment in the Bismarck Diocese was assistant pastor at the Church of St. Joseph, Mandan along with teacher at St. Mary's Central High School until June 1976. He then served as chaplain and director of religious life and religious education at Trinity High School along with assistant pastor at the Church of St. Wenceslaus in Dickinson. He was named co-principal of Trinity High School in 1977. From 1978 to 1987, he was the chaplain at St.

Joseph's Hospital in Minot. He returned to Bismarck to serve as vice-chancellor until June 1988. His next assignment was director of pastoral care at St. Joseph's Hospital in Minot until May 2002. During this time, he served for three months as pastor of the Churches of St. Agnes, Kenmare, and St. Anthony, Donnybrook. He served as pastor at the Churches of St. Francis of Assisi in Burlington and St. Vincent de Paul in Des Lacs until they both closed July 1, 1994. He also served as pastor at the Churches of St. Mary, Foxholm, and St. Ann, Berthold, from 1991-2002. His final assignment was pastor of the Church of Corpus Christi, Bismarck, until his retirement July 1, 2020.

Father Becker is survived by his sisters Paulette Schatz, Carolyn Decker and Susan Bosch. He was preceded in death by his parents and his siblings Robert Becker, Mary Klooster and Patty Sokoloski.

Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB

Brother Benet Tvedten passed to his eternal reward, attended by his brothers, on the March 17, 2026, at the Richardton Health Center in Richardton, N.D. Brother Benet was 89. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at the Assumption Abbey in Richardton on March 24, followed by burial in the abbey cemetery.



Denis Tvedten was born in St. John's Hospital, Fargo, on Nov. 22, 1936, to Carl Olaf Tvedten and Margaret Rose O'Neill Tvedten of Casselton, N.D.

He joined two brothers who were already in high school. Denis was educated at public schools in Casselton.

An interest in monasticism was piqued in high school when he read Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*. College studies took him to the Benedictine St. John's University, then to Moorhead State College, and then back to St. John's where he graduated in 1957 with a B.A. in English. While at St. John's, he travelled with a friend to the newly founded monastic community of Blue Cloud in Marvin, S.D. So taken with that experience, he entered community life there in 1958.

On his first day, he was assigned to wash windows in the newly-built guest wing. Having seen the guest master, Brother Simeon, wash windows by crawling outside to the ledge, Denis attempted to do the same and fell ten feet. Result: he broke four bones in his left foot. Back from the hospital with a cast, he was given work in the appeals office. It was presumed he would not injure himself addressing envelopes and recording donations.

As a novice he was given the name Benet. On Feb. 10, 1960, he professed vows and, for the next 50 years, he lived monastic life at Blue Cloud Abbey serving at various times as prior, subprior, junior master, novice master, vocation director, oblate director, editor of *The Blue Cloud Quarterly* and mail carrier to and from Marvin, S.D.

Besides producing *The Blue Cloud Quarterly* for which Benet did most of the writing, he edited a

Native American poetry publication which proved so successful that, in 2000, he received an award from The Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers at their annual gathering in Tahlequah, Okla. There, he met poets and writers he had published. In the meanwhile, he had been writing his own material. In 1985, he received the yearly fiction prize from New Rivers Press of St. Paul, Minn., for the novella *All Manner of Monks*. He continued publishing short stories and books, among them a commentary on the Holy Rule for oblates, and a personal memoir of monastic life, and *How To Be A Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job*, which is still in print.

With experience as Blue Cloud's oblate director for many years, in 1997, Benet was elected first director of the newly-organized North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors.

On Aug. 5, 2012, Blue Cloud Abbey was closed. The abbey had only 12 monks, and only two under the age of 70. Brother Benet chose to move to Assumption Abbey, "coming back to my beloved North Dakota" as he often said. His vows were transferred to Assumption Abbey on July 26, 2013. By then, he had already been appointed manager of the abbey gift shop, and editor of the in-house *Abbey News*. He also became the friendly voice on the phone and greeter in the visitor's center during morning hours.

When Alzheimer's meant that he needed greater care, he moved into the Richardton Health Center in February 2024. He was preceded in death by his parents and his two brothers, Kenneth and Lee. †

May almighty God bless us with his peace and strength, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. May the Angels lead thee into Paradise. May the Martyrs receive thee at thy coming and take thee to the Holy City. May the Choirs of the Angels receive thee and mayest thou have rest everlasting. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.

A Catholic homecoming: How three unexpected interactions restored my faith

Jonathan J. O'Konek
Special Contributor to the DCA

Editor's note: The following is a faith conversion story of a local parishioner. O'Konek is an attorney, author and Army veteran who lives with his wife and two children in Bismarck.

During one of my daughter's recent parish religious education classes, she learned about the parable of the prodigal son. On the car ride home, we discussed the meaning of this parable; specifically, the relationship between the younger prodigal son and his father. My daughter explained how she learned that the father represented God and the younger son—who had left the family and squandered his father's inheritance—represented sinners. When I asked why the father would welcome his son, who had committed numerous transgressions, back with open arms, she responded beautifully. "Because he loved him so much." This conversation with my daughter made me realize that, for many years, I had also been like the prodigal son, and that God the Father had likewise received me back with open arms.

Only a few years ago, I was a non-practicing Catholic who had left the Church in high school during the confirmation process, seldom went to Mass and rarely prayed. Yet even though I was lost, the Lord worked in a mysterious way to find me—by enabling unexpected interactions with three different people: a chiropractor, a judge and a priest. Although it may sound like the opening line of a joke, these three interactions helped me find God, rekindle my faith and led me back to the Catholic Church.



Photo by Deacon Joe Krupsinky: Newly confirmed in the faith, Jonathan O'Konek, stands with Fr. Kregg Hochhalter, pastor of the Church of Saint Anne in Bismarck

Like how farmers tend to their fields, the chiropractor planted the seed of faith through kindness, the judge watered this same seed of faith through prayer and, finally, the priest harvested my blooming faith through compassion. And each of their actions rekindled my faith, transformed my spiritual life and led me to Christ.

You see, approximately six-and-a-half years ago, I was blessed to become the father of an amazing son. However, shortly after my son's birth, he was diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder, which required immediate medical attention and multiple surgical operations. In the coming years, he would experience many lengthy periods of hospitalization and, as a parent, each hospital stay caused me—and my family—intense fear and anguish.

Planting the seed of faith

As my son struggled with his health, by chance, a coworker referred me to a local chiropractor to help me relieve pain from an old injury. When I arrived at his office, I was instantly greeted by the sound of Christian music and met a man who cared deeply about the health and wellbeing of his patients. Over the years, I often met with the chiropractor, and we talked about my son's health conditions, which led to conversations about faith and prayer. He encouraged me to have faith in Christ and to turn to the Lord in moments of strife and trepidation. I did not know it at the time but—in addition to healing me physically—the chiropractor led me down a path that would heal me spiritually.

Nevertheless, by February 2023, I was at my lowest point. At that time, my son was severely ill and, that past December, had been admitted into a Bismarck hospital. By the end of the month, hospital staff flew my son to an out-of-state hospital, where he remained for an additional three months. My wife travelled with our son while I remained with our daughter in Bismarck. It was an exceedingly difficult time for our family that was filled with bouts of fear and uncertainty.

Watering the seed of faith

While my son was in the hospital, a local judge who knew about my son's hospitalization, contacted me to say that he was praying for him. He also told me that he would continue to offer up to God prayers for my son's speedy recovery and safe return to Bismarck. Even though I was still not practicing Catholicism at

that time, his words had a profound effect on me. I began thinking about what he said and how similar his words were to those of the chiropractor. I began thinking more about the power of prayer, with the judge's prayers for my son acting like water atop the seed of faith that was planted by the chiropractor.

Yet even though the Lord sent me these signs, it was not until February 22, 2023, which just so happened to be Ash Wednesday, that my faith was restored. That morning, my wife called me in tears about our son's poor health condition, and we both felt scared and powerless. And in this state of helplessness, I took out my phone and searched for local churches. It just so happened that Saint Anne Catholic Church had Holy Mass at 7:15 a.m., so I drove there, entered the church, knelt at a pew, prayed and—for the first time in many years—experienced Holy Mass.

Harvesting the bloom of faith

Thereafter, I began routinely attending Mass at Saint Anne's. During this time, a priest offered remarkable homilies about God's love and benevolence, which resonated deep within me. Through these homilies, he taught me how deeply God loves us and how this love is unending. Moreover, he helped me understand that times of distress can provide us with a deeper connection to Christ, who suffered untold pain to save our souls. Finally, he met with me and offered instruction on the virtues of saints, like Francis De Sales, who helped others rekindle their faith through gentleness and kindness. The priest's words about love, connection and faith, offered me hope, solace and comfort through Christ. And each week, he harvested and gave me encouragement to continue to grow in this faith.

And my faith did continue to grow. After my son's health recovered, and he returned to Bismarck, I found myself still attending Mass at Saint Anne's where I deeply enjoyed meeting with the friendly parishioners and staff. In the summer of 2024, my family registered with the church and together we began attending Mass. Not long after, both my daughter and I attended religious education classes

and, this past February, my wife and I convalidated our civil wedding by receiving the sacrament of marriage. I received the sacrament of confirmation on this past Palm Sunday.

What started as a seed planted by a chiropractor and watered by a judge, was harvested and replanted by a compassionate priest. As I reflect on this spiritual journey, I am thankful that God presented me with this unlikely trio of interactions because they led me back to Him and the Catholic Church. I am grateful to Saint Anne’s staff for their warm and welcoming atmosphere, and I will always be thankful to the priest who encouraged me to grow in my faith. Like the prodigal son, I was lost, but now I am found. And I am grateful to have been blessed with a Catholic homecoming.

Finding my faith was a three-year journey with many highs and many lows. One of the greatest highs occurred this past Palm Sunday when I received the sacrament of confirmation with my wife, daughter and son in attendance. And my son’s four-

month hospitalization three years ago represented my greatest low. Coincidentally, days before Palm Sunday, I received a notice on Facebook regarding a post I had made three years ago, on March 23, 2023, where I explained that my son would be returning home from his four-month hospital stay. The juxtaposition of these two moments—spaced almost exactly three years apart—taught me the importance of trusting in God’s plan.

Even though my son’s illness—which was a terrible moment—caused me great fear and pain, had this not occurred, I would not have found Christ and would not have been able to rejoin the Catholic Church with my family beside me—which was an amazing moment. Prior to rejoining the Church, I had always felt that there was a part of me missing. Now, I know what I was missing was a connection to a community with whom I could worship. This Easter, it felt amazing to have that connection with my family at Saint Anne’s. And, this Easter, for the first time in my life, I finally feel whole. †

CLERGY APPOINTMENT

The following appointment has been made with the permission of Bishop David D. Kagan.



The Reverend Mr. Colton Steiner, upon ordination to the sacred priesthood, to be chaplain for St. Mary’s Academy and part-time parochial vicar for the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck, effective Wednesday, July 1, 2026.



Fr. Gary Benz

Surveys have revealed that 30 to 40 percent of Catholics in the United States do not believe in the existence of hell, that place of exclusion from God and eternal punishment for those who die in mortal sin without repentance. One such Catholic called into *Mother Angelica Live* and told Mother Angelica that she did not believe in hell, to which Mother Angelica retorted, “Well, you will!” It was her direct way of reminding Catholics that hell does indeed exist, and there are a number of ways to posit faith in this Catholic dogma.

First, the Sacred Scriptures are replete with references to hell. In the New Testament alone, there are believed to be 162 references to hell, 70 references attributed to Jesus alone. For example, Mark 9:43: “And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, to the unquenchable fire.” We read as well in Matthew 25:11: “Then He will say to those on His left hand, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire . . .’” As Catholic Christians, we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and by His revelation (most definitively relayed to us by way of Sacred Scripture), He has offered us the fullness of truth for our salvation. Not believing in Jesus’ teachings concerning hell is a rejection of His teaching authority as God. It also places the soul in danger of facing eternal separation from God, along with everlasting punishment, after death.

Second, the Catholic Church, which continues Christ’s work of teaching the Gospel to all nations,

Fr. Benz is pastor at Sacred Heart, Glen Ullin, St. Ann, Hebron, and St. Joseph, Grant County. 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.

QUESTIONS I WAS AFRAID TO ASK

Q: How do we really know that hell exists?

affirms His teachings on hell. The Church fathers, the doctors of the Church, the ecumenical councils of the Church and the Magisterium have all been consistent in upholding the dogmatic belief concerning hell. Perhaps the most direct teaching was offered by the Council of Trent in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*: “Hell signifies those secret abodes in which are detained the souls that have not obtained the happiness of heaven. Hell is that most loathsome and dark prison in which the souls of the damned are tormented with the unclean spirits in inextinguishable fire” (1050). As the Church is the “pillar and bulwark of truth” (I Timothy 3:15), she speaks authoritatively for Jesus and must uphold, defend and preach His teachings, including those on hell. The Church does so out of obedience, but more so out of love. As our mother, the Church desires that we be spared the punishments of hell so that we may experience instead the eternal happiness and joy of life with the Blessed Trinity in heaven.

Lastly, a number of saints (St. Faustina, St. John Bosco, St. Theresa of Avila, et.al) have received special revelations from God concerning hell to warn souls about the reality of hell. These are private revelations and Catholics can accept or reject them, but we might humbly consider them as gifts from God to preserve us from eternal loss. Saint Theresa of Avila, the 16th century mystic and doctor of the Church, in her mystical experiences of hell, stated in *La Vida*: “I felt a fire in my soul.

Questions I Was Afraid to Ask continues on page 33



Obedience to God isn't easy—but it changes everything

James Odermann

“I know! I know!”

Hands quickly shoot up as young students want to share knowledge to a question in a classroom. This phenomenon carries into adulthood.

I get a full dose of this as I work and play with my grandchildren, talking about situations and potential solutions, whether simple or complex. In the end, these discussions, while riding through the badlands, fields, pens or pastures, usually take on a somewhat semi-serious note.

I recall a moment when there was a comment about a “think sheet,” which is really an opportunity for a youngster to review actions contrary to behavioral norms for the situation. (As youngster, I just hoped the teacher did not tell my parents about my misdeeds.)

So, as I discussed “think sheets” with the youngsters riding along, the conversation moved to the word “obey.” We went around the horn saying what the word obey means.

“It means to do what mom and dad say,” was one answer. “It means to follow instructions from the teacher,” another said. “It means to be good,” was a third answer.

There were a lot of other comments as we continued the drive. All were good and appropriate answers, even digressing to talking about having fun doing chores together (“C’mon, grandpa, is this supposed to be fun?” one quipped), eventually shifting to making sure everything is done correctly.

In the end, doing the task right is to obey God, to make sure the resources and duties entrusted to our care are protected and performed well. “We got it done right and

that is satisfying,” I said as everybody agreed, feeling a sense of accomplishment.

This discussion, however, piqued my interest to further investigate the word “obey.”

Obey is derived from a Latin word “obedire” calling one to listen attentively: following instructions and responding in an appropriate, respectful way. The conversation with the young minds really brought me full circle as I reflected on the context of the Easter Triduum—because the Easter Triduum is about listening (obeying).

The thoughts, emotions and impacts of Easter Triduum linger with me. The three days’ liturgies are, from my perspective, the heart and soul of the Catholic faith with which I am blessed.

Yes, Christmas is the beginning, if you will, because that is when Jesus was born. Jesus obeyed the will of His Father to become human, knowing full well what was in store, which is what Easter really and truly brings front and center: how to obey God.

The secular world spends exorbitant hours making sure best efforts are put forward to initiate and complete a work task. Energy, time and personal commitment become all-consuming to produce results that will please superiors, peers and customers, all to create economic opportunity, create a power base, influence opinion or enhance ego. These worldly outcomes perpetuate a lust for more. In the end, money, influence or ego have little sway with God at the passing from this life to eternity.

Jesus left me a model plan for a positive step into the next life: obey God and follow God’s commandments. Throughout His life, Jesus lived and preached a life of generosity.

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).

This is the message of the Easter Triduum. Jesus was all in as He said, “Father, your will be done” and accepted the cross and ultimately death. Jesus just obeyed, providing a pathway of salvation for me—and all my sisters and brothers.

What would happen if I decided to commit to loving God like God loves me—or at least as much as I am humanly possible? I asked myself, “How about loving as well as I can using the grace and commitment of God?”

Society calls—or rather judges—based on how well I would use life’s opportunities to rise to the earthly top, like cream rises to the top of a pail of fresh milk. But, is rising to the top of the earth the goal of this life?

Jesus obeyed God and died on the cross. Do I have that type of obedience to God? Do I obey—listen—to God in a way pleasing to God?

This means accountability to God, to myself, to my sisters and brothers. By holding myself accountable, I can be a better version of myself, a better version of what God wants and a better version of friendship with the world.

Accountability is a finite way I can lovingly engage God in my thoughts, words and actions to improve myself and truly share God’s love in personal interactions. I just need to obey God and hopefully realize the eternal satisfaction of “doing it right.”

Care to join me? †

QUESTIONS I WAS AFRAID TO ASK (continued)

My bodily sufferings were unendurable. I have undergone most painful sufferings in this life, yet all these were as nothing in comparison with what I felt then, especially when I saw that there would be no intermission, nor any end to them.” These private revelations concerning hell do not alter, add to or improve upon the public revelations of Jesus Christ and the Church, yet they are helpful tools to help us grow in our faith. If the saints’ warnings about the reality of hell can lead us to a conversion from sin and a turning back to God, then they are great aids to our salvation.

As Catholics, we believe that hell exists, and the Church, always faithful to Jesus Christ, will continue to preach and teach about the reality of hell. This teaching is not meant to lead us to despair, but instead encourages us to pray always, to reject sin and to choose God, to frequent the sacrament of penance, to be devoted to the Holy Eucharist, and to seek extreme unction and viaticum before we die. With the grace of Jesus and the spiritual gifts of His holy Church, we have no need to fear hell because when we love our Savior and order our lives accordingly, then we are assuredly on the way to eternal life with Him in Heaven. †

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BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

The Christian virtue of patriotism

David Tamisiea

This year our country celebrates its 250th anniversary which began with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. We are rightly proud of our country’s founding principles, storied heritage and monumental achievements, while at the same time feel shame about its moral failures, social injustices and historical dark spots.

How should we as Catholic Christians view our country considering both its accomplishments and failures? As this year unfolds, it provides a good opportunity for us to consider the Christian virtue of patriotism.

Patriotism is commonly understood as love and respect for one’s own country. While some today dismiss it as overly sentimental, uncritically naive or even bigoted, the Catholic Christian tradition teaches that patriotism is a moral virtue necessary for living a good and holy life and that its absence is a vice.

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains in the *Summa theologiae* that patriotism is a form of the virtue of piety, which is itself a sub-virtue of justice, one of the four cardinal virtues (along with prudence, temperance and fortitude) around which all other moral virtues are grouped. Justice directs us to give God and neighbor their due, that is, what we owe them as a matter of right. Whereas religion is a special kind of justice which entails giving honor and love to God “as the most excellent of all and the first principle of both our being and existence,” piety is a special kind of justice whereby we give the appropriate honor and love owed to our parents and homeland on account of their also being, in a secondary and lesser way, “principles of both our being and governance” (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 101, a. 1).

Every one of us owes God, our parents and our country different degrees of love and respect because each in some manner is a source of our existence. God deserves our highest honor and love because our entire existence depends completely upon Him. Yet, parents and country are also owed love and honor in a secondary and lesser way because they too in some way give us life. Parents give life to their children and raise them, and the country supports and shapes the lives of its citizens.

Our country forms and supports us more than we often realize: the laws and institutions, freedoms and rights, organizations and associations, traditions and customs, cultural and historical heritage and other innumerable benefits of being a citizen of the United States all go towards shaping us into the persons we are and supporting us in everyday life. The pagan philosopher, Socrates, expresses the indebtedness every person has to his homeland in Plato’s famous philosophical dialogue, *Crito*. In the *Crito*, Socrates argues, from his prison cell, with his friend, Crito, to explain that he will not attempt to escape an unjust death sentence because of his duty to his homeland. In answer to Crito’s objections, Socrates personifies what the laws of Athens might say to him if he were to try to escape: “It is not just for you to try to do to us what you’re now attempting. For we gave birth to you, brought you up, educated you, and gave you and all the other citizens everything we could that’s good” (*Crito* 51.d). While we might disagree with his decision, Socrates nevertheless expresses well the moral obligation each person owes to his home country.

Patriotism is a kind of familial love that parallels the love and honor owed to parents. Just as one owes a special debt of gratitude and honor towards one’s own parents, so too does one owe a special debt of gratitude and honor to one’s own country. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* places its teaching of patriotism under the Fourth Commandment that requires children to honor their father and mother: “[This Commandment] extends to the duties of pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders, citizens to their country, and to those who administer or govern it” (CCC 2199). The *Catechism* further goes on to emphasize that the duty to be patriotic flows from our indebtedness to our homeland: “The love and service of one’s country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity” (CCC 2239). While good and evil are found in every nation, true patriots are still obliged to love their country. Just as the Fourth Commandment’s demand for children to honor even imperfect parents is unconditional, so too patriotism requires love and respect for even a morally flawed nation.

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Does this mean we ought to accept and condone everything our nation does or stands for? Absolutely not. Like every moral virtue, patriotism stands as a mean between two corresponding vices of excess and defect: extreme nationalism (excess) and hatred and ingratitude for one’s country (defect).

Excessive nationalism is a vice of excess marked by idolatry of one’s country and hatred and contempt for other countries. Extreme nationalism can lead to the conquest of other sovereign nations and trampling upon the rights of other peoples. As G.K. Chesterton observes, the expression, “my country, right or wrong” is like saying “my mother, drunk or sober” and a thing that no patriot would think of saying (*A Defense of Patriotism*). It involves whitewashing national sins and involves a kind of narrow, even egotistical, pride in one’s own nation over others. A patriot who truly loves his country cannot be indifferent to its faults, however, but rather wants it to be good and recognizes the good in other countries. The Reverend Martin Luther King, for example, was a true patriot insofar as he challenged America to live up to its ideals of liberty and equality in his fight for civil rights for black Americans.

Hatred and ingratitude of one’s country is a vice of defect also opposed to patriotism. Sometimes this defect can manifest itself in selfish egoism whereby a person has no concern for the good of his country or his fellow citizens. Other times, this defect in patriotism can lead to violence against one’s fellow citizens and actions aimed at creating chaos and havoc in society. This defect can also be expressed in a kind of global humanitarianism where a person claims to love humanity but has no special loyalty towards his own country. Chesterton argues this detached humanitarianism is much like those who say nobody should go to Church, since God is everywhere. It removes a person from those concrete links that bind men together in the same homeland. As Chesterton puts it, “They are ceasing to be human in the effort to be humane. ... A man who loves humanity and ignores patriotism is ignoring humanity” (*The Patriotic Idea*).

The real patriot feels pride for his country’s merits and achievements but also shame for its moral lapses and failures. In this year dedicated to our 250th anniversary as a nation, let’s commit ourselves to fostering in ourselves true Christian patriotism that loves and honors the United States of America, upholding with pride all that is noble and good in our country and opposing vigorously all that is shameful and wrong. †

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

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May 4	Br. Alban Petesch, OSB	May 20	Deacon Ken Klein
May 5	Sr. Madelyn Louttit, OSB	May 21	Fr. Dominic Bouck
May 6	Seminarian Griffin Schaeffer	May 22	Sr. Maria Bernadette Neel, SMS
May 7	Fr. Anthony Baker, OSB	May 23	Deacon Mohn Koble
May 8	Deacon Ron Hogan	May 24	Msgr. James Braaten
May 9	Sr. Anna Rose Ruhland, OSB	May 25	Deacon Leonard Kordonowy
May 10	Seminarians and Religious in Formation	May 26	Sr. Raquel, Daughters of Mary Immaculate in Williston
May 11	Br. Symeon Rubbelke, OSB	May 27	Sr. Pavana, CTC
May 12	Sr. Dolores Heidt, OSB	May 28	Deacon Loren Kordonowy
May 13	Sr. Nancy Miller, OSB	May 29	Br. John Seiler, OSB
May 14	Religious Educators	May 30	Fr. Phillip Brown, S.S.
May 15	Deacon Wayne Jundt	May 31	Consecrated Virgins of the Diocese
May 16	Deacon Ron Keller		

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.

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