



Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 85 No. 7 **AUGUST 2026**



THE JOY OF ORDINATION
WELCOMING OUR NEWEST PRIEST

www.bismarckdiocese.com



August is National Make-A-Will Month!

Protect what matters to you most – create your own will today!

Did you know that August is National Make-A-Will Month? It's an annual observance that emphasizes the importance of creating your own will. There are several important reasons why you might want to complete this important task.

Security: Creating your own will and estate plan allows you to communicate important financial and healthcare decisions so you are prepared for whatever the future may hold.

Peace of mind: A will allows you to provide for the people and pets you love, so you know that no matter what, they will be supported, the way you want them to be supported

In less than 20 minutes, write or update your will for free!

The Bismarck Diocese has a partnership with FreeWill, an online service that makes it simple, cost-free and accessible to create your own will. Nearly 67% of American adults do not have an estate plan, missing a crucial element of Catholic stewardship.

Here's how it works:

1. From the convenience of your home, log in at FreeWill.com/bismarckdiocese.
2. Select a username and password.
3. Begin typing your information.
4. Once completed, your free will is ready to print.
5. You sign and notarize with a local notary public.*
6. DONE!

Takes about 20 minutes to complete. **It's easy and 100% FREE!**

If your circumstances should ever change, it's easy and FREE to log back into FreeWill and change your will, then print the updated copy and have it notarized again.

**In the state of N.D., for a will to be legal, you MUST sign your will in front of a notary public. Most banks, insurance offices, investment offices and public libraries have notary publics who can witness your signature.*

For more information, contact Ron Schatz at (701) 204-7202 or rschatz@bismarckdiocese.com or Bryan Winterberg at (701) 415-0399 or bwinterberg@bismarckdiocese.com.

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PAGE 16: A couple from the Golva area recently donated land to support the formation of future priests.



Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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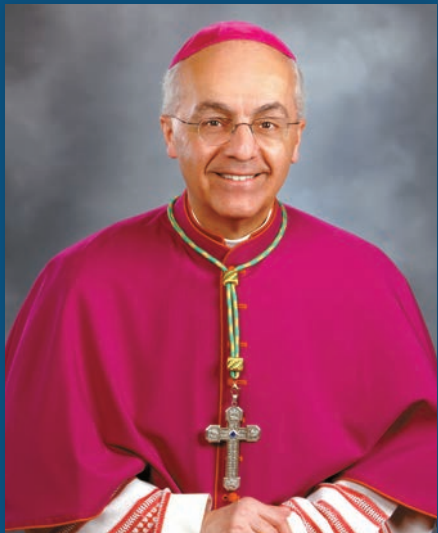
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FROM THE BISHOP

*We enter August with
a graced opportunity*

Bishop David D. Kagan

With the arrival of the month of August some things in our daily routines change. One of the most obvious is that our Catholic schools resume classes, followed by parish OCIA classes and their own faith formation classes. Another change to our daily routines is that most of our extended vacations come to an end and daily work schedules begin to return to normal. However, there are some things in our daily lives that do continue unchanged.

These things are the most important matters, and they concern our spiritual and sacramental lives. The most important of these is our faithful and faith-filled participation at Mass each Sunday and during the week when possible; the regular celebration of the sacrament of penance; and our daily prayer. Even though the months of June, July and August can give us more opportunities to relax a bit, they also give us more opportunities to devote time to our spiritual lives to fortify them and bring us into closer communion with our Blessed Lord.

In this month of August, the Church celebrates two beautiful feasts of Our Blessed Mother. On August 15, we celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and on August 22, we celebrate the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Along with all of the other



beautiful feasts of the saints which we celebrate in August, we have excellent examples of how we can cultivate and strengthen our spiritual lives and deepen that communion we are called to have with the Lord.

When we devote some of our time to our spiritual lives by the frequent reception of the sacraments, personal prayer, adoration and good spiritual reading, we discover soon enough how much we enjoy being with the Lord, Who always responds to us. So, we are entering August with a graced opportunity which we should not pass up. Like Our Blessed Mother, follow Jesus faithfully and allow Him to be your true joy, your consolation and your strength as He was for His Mother. †



Staff photo: At the Church of St. Anthony in New Town on June 28, Bishop Kagan signed the oath to install Father Dustin Johns as the new pastor there and St. Anthony in Mandaree.

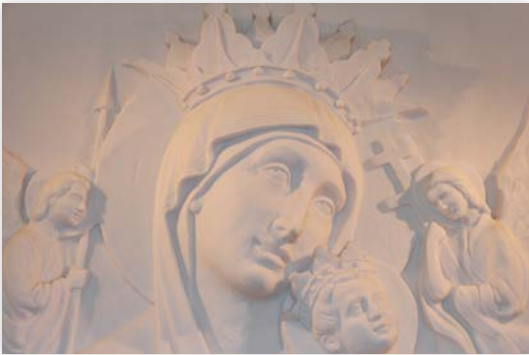
BISHOP IN ACTION



**Holy Father's Prayer
Intentions for August**

**FOR EVANGELIZATION
IN THE CITY**

Let us pray that in large cities, often marked by anonymity and loneliness, we find new ways to proclaim the Gospel, discovering creative paths to build community.



Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary
August 22

The Catholic Church celebrates the Memorial of the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary annually on August 22. This feast honors Mary as Queen of Heaven, recognizing her unique role in salvation history as the Mother of the divine King, Jesus Christ.

BISHOP'S SCHEDULE

AUGUST 2026

Aug. 5	Mass for Seminarians, Medora, 10 a.m. MT
Aug. 6	Serra Club Vocation Celebration, St. Mary's Central High School, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
Aug. 13	Expansion Board Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10:30 a.m.
Aug. 20	Installation Mass for Fr. David Richter, Church of St. Bernard, Belfield, 5:30 p.m. MT
Aug. 23	Installation Mass for Fr. Jarad Wolf, Church of St. John the Baptist, Beach, 10:30 a.m. MT
Aug. 30	Confirmation at the Church of St. John the Apostle, Minot, 10:30 a.m.

Father Colton Steiner

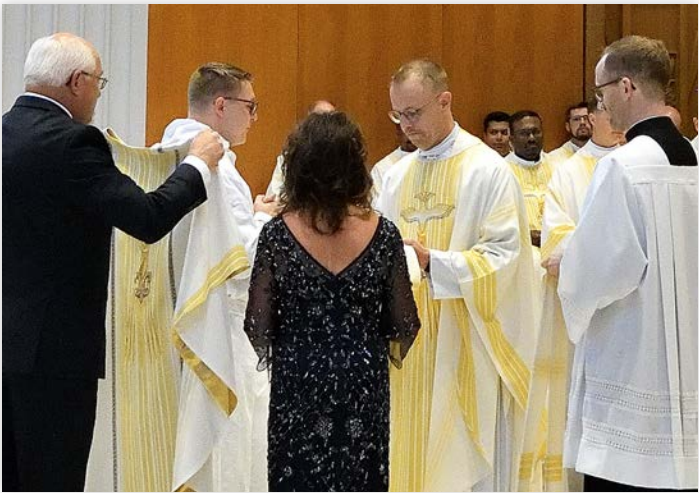
Photos by: Deacon Joe Krupinsky



After the June 12 ordination Mass, Father Colton Steiner stands at the front of the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit with Bishop Kagan. Father Colton began his first assignments on July 1 as chaplain for St. Mary’s Academy and part-time parochial vicar for the Church of Saint Anne in Bismarck.



Priests from near and far celebrated the ordination Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.



Father Colton’s parents, Rodney and Cindy, had the honor of assisting with the vesting of their son with the priest’s stole and chasuble.



Bishop Kagan laid his hands on Father Colton.



Bishop Kagan presented the newly ordained Father Colton with the chalice and paten, exhorting him to model his life on the mystery of the Lord’s cross.



Bishop Kagan anointed the hands of Father Colton with sacred chrism oil, consecrating him for his pastoral ministry.



Father Colton was greeted by Bishop Kagan sharing the sign of peace.

ORDINATION MOMENTS

Photos by: Deacon Joe Krupinsky



Thomas Kraljic, Alex Wilson, Joseph Richter, Father Colton Steiner, Joseph Schon, Aaron Ripplinger and Griffin Schaeffer, were part of the ordination Mass.



Father Colton distributed Holy Communion to his mother, Cindy.



Father Colton was welcomed and celebrated by his brother priests after Mass outside of the Cathedral.



Father Colton Steiner with his parents, Rodney and Cindy, after the ordination Mass.



Father Colton imparted a blessing upon the faithful after Mass.



Father Colton Steiner

Promise of obedience

The candidate, placing his hands between those of the bishop, promises respect and obedience to His Excellency David D. Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck, and his successors.

“I prayed with the promises that I would make on ordination day for months before I actually made the promises. The Lord assured me that His abundant grace would allow me to live out such promises well. So, when the time came, I was ready to make these promises to Bishop Kagan, and ultimately, to God. Making these promises brought me a great deal of peace, which you may be able to tell by my face!”



Investiture with stole and chasuble

The newly ordained priest is vested with the priest’s stole and chasuble, the liturgical vesture of their new office in the Church.

“I had been looking forward to this moment for a long time! Since practicing Mass is part of our preparation in the seminary, I had worn a chasuble before. But in this moment, the chasuble manifests in a physical way what just happened in my soul: I was ordained a priest. I felt like my heart was going to leap out of my chest with joy! The fact that it was Father Grafsgaard who vested me, my chaplain while at Trinity High School, made it all the more special.”

Join us in prayer for our newest priest...
“O God, give him a deep faith, a bright and firm hope,
and a burning love which will ever increase during his priestly life.”
Amen



At the altar for the first time

“I was so nervous at this moment. It was the first time I prayed the Eucharistic Prayer as a priest. Although I had walked through concelebration the night before ordination, there is nothing that can truly prepare you for this moment. It was then that it really hit me: I’m a priest!”



First priestly blessing

“This moment was almost overwhelmingly surreal. Not long before this picture was taken, it was me who was kneeling before Bishop Kagan as he prayed the prayer of ordination over me. Yet, it was now me who was praying over and blessing him. I was thinking to myself, ‘Who am I to be blessing one who just ordained me? I should be kneeling before him and thanking him.’ This moment was both humbling and very profound.”

UPCOMING EVENTS



Vocation Celebration Aug. 6

All are invited to the first-ever Vocation Celebration on Thursday, Aug. 6. The event, sponsored by the St. Serra Vocations Apostolate of Bismarck-Mandan, will be held at Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary’s Central High School beginning with 5:30 p.m. Mass. Enjoy a German-style meal for a free will offering. Ten meat markets will be participating in a sausage competition. Come visit with our seminarians and men and women in formation for religious life.



International Peace Garden Mass Aug. 16

All are welcome to the International Peace Garden Mass on Sunday, Aug. 16 at the Burdick Auditorium for the Performing Arts at the music camp (park pass required). The celebrant is Archbishop Murray Chatlain from the Archdiocese of Winnipeg. The rosary in five languages starts at 11:30 a.m. The celebration of the Mass for peace follows the rosary. There will be a catered lunch after Mass for a cost of \$20 (age 12 and under eat free). The International Peace Garden Mass was started in 1960 and held annually until Covid, then started up again in 2024.



Marriage Retreat Aug. 21-22

There’s a weekend Marriage Retreat: Becoming One on Aug. 21-22. Join retreat leaders, Peter and Theresa Martin, founders of the Wojtyla Community & Institute, JP2Rule.com, for a powerful weekend retreat designed to help married couples step away from the busyness of everyday life and invest intentional time in their relationship and spiritual life together. Through inspiring talks, private couple dialogue, prayer and fellowship, couples will explore St. John Paul II’s “Rule for Marriage” and discover practical ways to grow in deeper love and unity. This will be held at Christ the King’s Parish Life Center at 505 10th Ave NW in Mandan, starting Friday at 6 p.m. and ending Saturday by 4:30 p.m. See all the details and get registered at www.ctkmandan.com/marriage-retreat. Early bird registration pricing is offered. Text or call Joanne at 701-527-0607 with retreat questions.



St. Mary’s social and raffle in Hague Sept. 13

St. Mary’s in Hague will hold their annual social and raffle on Sunday, Sept. 13 starting at 5 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Hague. Knights of Columbus members will be serving hamburgers, hot dogs, salads, desserts and refreshments, for a free will offering with proceeds benefitting St. Mary’s Church. Bingo starts at 7 p.m., followed by the raffle drawing. Raffle tickets will be available for purchase.



Dakota Hope Clinic fundraising banquet Sept. 20

Support Dakota Hope Clinic by attending their fundraising banquet on Sunday, Sept. 20 at the N.D. State Fair Center in Minot. The theme for this year’s banquet is “Chosen” based on the verse from John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you.” Special guest is Mark Schultz, a platinum-selling, award-winning Christian artist known for his 13 number one hits and national television appearances on 20/20, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition and CNN. Beyond his musical success, Mark’s story carries a deeply personal connection to our mission through his powerful journey of adoption, bringing a message of life, identity, and purpose that resonates with the work we do every day. Reservations are required by Sept. 1. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., event starts at 6 p.m. A complimentary dinner will be provided. Reserve free tickets by visiting dakotahope.org/events. For more information, call 701-852-4675.



Corazon weekend

Are you or someone you know struggling in a marriage? The diocesan program for troubled marriages called Corazon (Spanish for heart) is available the weekend of Sept. 25-27. Couples who may be in a marriage in crisis are encouraged to attend a weekend. 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.



Search weekend dates

Search for Christian Maturity is a weekend retreat experience which provides youth an opportunity to think, talk, question and dive deeper into their faith. The weekends are for any high school or college age person at least 15 years old. The program is both rooted in the Catholic faith and open to young people of any denomination or creed. Search weekends are held five times throughout the year at the Badlands Ministries Camp just south of Medora. Cost for the weekend is \$75. Partial scholarships are available. Weekends for the 2026-27 season are: Oct. 8-11, Nov. 12-15, Jan. 14-17, Mar. 4-7, and Apr. 15-18. Find more information at bismarckdiocese.com/search1.

Understanding and contributing to the cost of forming priests

Patti Armstrong
DCA Writer

The appeal to “pray for vocations,” has borne great fruit in the Bismarck Diocese. Our diocese consistently ranks at the top for seminarians per capita with one ordination for every 4,719 Catholics on average over the last five years, according to Georgetown’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). By comparison, there is roughly one ordination for every 38,487 Catholics in the U.S.

But along with praying for vocations there is the need to pay for them. Father Steven Vetter, Vocations Director for the Bismarck Diocese, explained that for women or men interested in a religious order, the costs involve helping them discern the order to which they feel called. Orders are part of worldwide communities (like the Jesuits or Franciscans) and have their own superiors, so the diocese is not involved financially in their formation.

For men entering seminary to become a priest in the Bismarck Diocese, however, Vetter is a liaison between them and the bishop. The diocese currently has 20 men enrolled and studying at three seminaries: Kenrick-Glennon Seminary in Missouri, St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. and the North American College in Rome.

Big investment

“Tuition and room and board is \$45,000 a year per seminarian just for the academic year,” Vetter stated. “The application process that includes psychological testing, dental, physical, vision testing, etc., is another \$5,000. My budget from the God’s Share Appeal was over \$702,000 for 2024-2025—the

largest budget in the diocese. This year, it will be over \$800,000 because we have more men this fall.”

As a general rule, when men join seminary formation, they typically spend four years in what is known as minor seminary earning an undergraduate degree and then four years in major seminary prior to ordination. That varies depending on a man’s prior education.

Eleven of the 20 current seminarians are still working on their bachelor’s degree, so the seminarian and/or their families are responsible for a portion of that. “The diocese has worked to get the cost down to \$20,000 a year,” Vetter said. “That is the amount to attend the University of Mary. It’s only been three years that we’ve brought that cost down. Before that, those still pursuing a college degree were responsible for the full amount. Many took out loans, grants and received scholarships to manage it. The diocese does offer a \$20,000 one-time payment at ordination.”

While attending a regular college, many students have employment to pay expenses which is not possible in the seminary, although the seminarians can hold summer jobs during their first two years in formation. After that, they are given summer parish assignments with modest pay.

After earning a degree, the next level for a seminarian is theological studies in what is known as major seminary. “The diocese then pays the full \$45,000 per year per seminarian, and a \$150 a month stipend, \$500 travel allowance and \$300 for books,” Vetter explained. “The Rome guys get three



Staff photo: The Bismarck Diocese seminarians at the 12th annual Seminarian Scholarship Golf Tournament in June. Pictured (l-r) are Alex Wilson, Tyler Selzler, Joseph Schon, Charles Richter, Paul Vetter, Nolan Johnson, Preston Barbie, Taylen Thomas, Griffin Schaeffer, Joseph Richter, Joseph Schweitzer, Thomas Kraljic, Dakota Johnson, Easton Hinnenkamp, Ben Schaff, Thomas Heen, David Vetter, Aidan Schaeffbauer and Ryan Bohrer. Not pictured is Aaron Ripplinger.

round trip plane tickets in three years of formation, but they don’t go home during the first year. Anything special like a wedding or funeral is on them.”

Vetter noted that the seminary is no ordinary university experience since psychologists, spiritual directors, instructors with advanced degrees who are both priests and lay people, are all part of that. There is also a pastoral dimension where the men work in ministry and have immersion experiences such as building a house for a poor family in Missouri at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary.

He also pointed out the investment of the propaedeutic year, the initial phase of formation mandated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, focuses on building a strong foundation in human and spiritual growth before students begin rigorous academic studies. “The faculty to student ratio is 12 to 1,” Vetter said. “Bishop Kagan says we have to invest this regardless of whether he becomes a priest or married layman and we will reap benefits in the diocese either way as these men become leaders in the Church.”

To help with the cost, the Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota has endowment funds for the major seminary and the minor seminary. Last year’s distribution was \$524,857, according

to Ron Schatz, Director of the Office of Mission Advancement for the diocese. Money from the God’s Share Appeal makes up the difference. Their annual fundraiser is the Seminarian Scholarship Golf Tournament in June begun 12 years ago. The event cleared a little over \$72,000 in 2025, Schatz said.

Knights of Columbus and Serra Club

Two groups in the diocese that facilitate donations to help seminarians based on need are: The Knights of Columbus (K of C) a fraternal organization of men serving the Church, family and community, and the Serra Club, an apostolate dedicated to supporting vocations.

According to Bismarck resident, John Berger, Deputy Director of Council 6540 for K of C at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, \$170,000 was donated for vocations in the Fargo and Bismarck Diocese from their endowment fund and from fundraisers from the 92 North Dakota councils with around 12,000 members. “The Knights are huge supporters of vocations,” Berger stated. “Pro-life and vocations are our biggest causes.”

Berger is also the President of Bismarck/Mandan Serra Club. This apostolate has had several fundraisers over the years, but this year is the first-ever Vocation Celebration on Thursday, August 6, beginning with Mass at Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck, along with a meal of traditional German food, a sausage competition and more.

“To help with the financial burden lightens the sacrifice already required of a family,” Berger said. “They are giving a son to the Church, and we are gaining a father. I can’t think of any better cause to give to than the formation of young men as priests. It has eternal rewards and because God is in charge, we know that the return on investment is quite literally going to be a hundred-fold.”

Brenda Zent Artz is the mother of diocesan priest, Father Eric Artz, and President of the Serra Club of North Central North Dakota based in the Minot area. At one point, she and her husband, Robert, had two sons, Austin and Eric, in seminary formation. Their daughter, Ashley, died as an infant and Eric’s identical twin brother, Nathan, died of cancer at age 17, so the emotional and financial sacrifice was great. Their oldest, Austin, now an attorney, was in the seminary for a year before discerning out and Father Eric was ordained a priest for our diocese in 2024.

“When my sons were in the seminary at the same time, I felt God had taken all my children although I was accepting of that,” Artz said. “Eric has so much joy; I am happy for him that he is a priest.”

Their Serra Club’s biggest fundraiser is “The Big Smoke,” an annual meat-smoking competition and BBQ held at the North Dakota State Fairgrounds in Minot in late June which has been raising over \$20k annually. It is a time to build up the Catholic community as the seminarians and many priests, and the St. Mary Sisters from Bismarck come and some even enter teams for the BBQ competition. “It’s so much fun and it’s a time when young people get to see nuns in their habit,” Artz said.

Their financial support includes making it possible for Bismarck seminarians to afford getting together for a meal a few times each month for fellowship with one another and unforeseen expenses such as when a seminarian’s car breaks down. They also pay stipends for every priest, deacon and seminarian to have a Mass said on their birthdays and anniversaries and give \$1,000 towards vestments for priestly ordinations and \$500 for deacons. Artz pointed out that there are many expenses people do not realize such as a traveling Mass kit, books and a chalice.

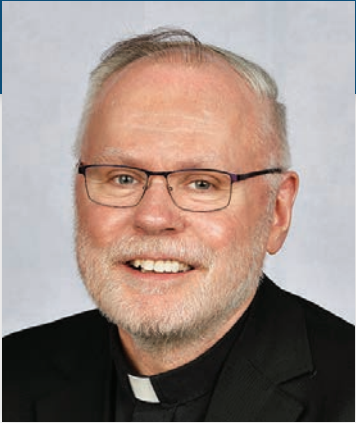
Since the Fargo Diocese has no Serra Club, Artz said they’ve helped some of the seminarians there too. “Without the priests, we do not get the sacraments,” she said. “It’s a struggle for some families with all the expenses, so we want to help.”

For more information on contributing to the seminarian scholarship fund administered by the Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota, go to cfwnd.com. For more information about the Serra Club, go to serraus.org.

CLERGY ANNOUNCEMENT

Bishop David D. Kagan made the following clergy announcement effective July 1, 2026.

The **Reverend Father Jeffrey Zwack**, parochial vicar for the Church of Saint Anne, Bismarck, with the permission of the diocesan bishop, has retired.



TOWN AND COUNTRY CELEBRATION 2026

Bishop Kagan celebrated the annual Town and Country Mass on July 19 at St. Vincent de Paul Church in rural Mandan (Crown Butte). The day began with Mass followed by a blessing of land, animals and equipment. Special thanks to the hard-working, hospitable parishioners along with Fr. Nick Schneider and Deacons Steve Brannan and Tony Ternes.†



Making an investment in future priests

Sonia Mullally
DCA Editor

One of Brenda Maus' favorite quotes is by business mogul, Warren Buffett. "Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago." It means the success and peace you enjoy today is often the direct result of the patience and hard work someone put in years prior.

Brenda and her husband, Gary, never planted many trees on their farm just outside of Golva, located in western North Dakota, because the soil isn't conducive to it. But the "trees" they planted recently were in the form of a major donation to the Seminarian Scholarship Fund managed by the Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota.

Gary and Brenda were married in 1974 and began living and working on Gary's family farm right away. It was their dream to farm and raise cattle, but it was a bit of a rough start

"We were broke, couldn't even buy groceries," Brenda shared.

Gary didn't want to ask for help from welfare programs. "We'll make it on our own," was a mantra that led to a lifetime of prayer and hard work to build a legacy.

"Gary's friend offered a quarter of land to us. We couldn't get money from the bank because we had no collateral. So, we borrowed \$5,000 from my parents, Ralph and Christine Finneman, to make a downpayment," she said.

With prayer, hard work and some money from the bank, they eventually got it paid for and paid her parents back. Over time, they increased their



Brenda and Gary Maus, longtime farmers and ranchers near Golva, N.D., recently donated land to the Seminarian Scholarship Fund.

milking herd, made more land purchases and raised Holstein steers to make the land payments. They milked anywhere from 95-103 cows that took no less than six hours a day—three in the morning and three at night—with just three machines. After that it was grinding feed, feeding baby calves, cleaning the barn out, feeding the cattle and all the other farm chores.

"So, a normal day was usually 16 hours," Brenda explained. "But we enjoyed our work."

Some 50 years later, Brenda felt strongly that it was time to give back for all the blessings they have experienced over the years. She and Gary recently donated a quarter of land to the Seminarian Scholarship Endowment Fund. Proceeds from the land sale went directly to fund the education of future priests for our diocese.

How did a young, broke married couple get to a point where they could make such a generous gift to the Church? It's a simple answer—plenty of hard work backed by tremendously strong faith.

"I feel very blessed," Brenda said. "God has blessed us. That's why I'm giving this donation. It was a lot of hard work, but we went from nothing to this and I am going to give back. This is the reward of our hard work. It feels good to give to our seminarians. We need priests. How would you feel if we didn't have the Eucharist?"

To trace to the root of the reason why Brenda feels so strongly about returning God's blessings to Him and His priests, it must start with her utter love of the Catholic faith that she inherited from her parents.

"My parents prayed every night together. We'd pray the rosary as a family in the living room. Boy, you better kneel up straight," she said with a chuckle in her voice. "There was no slouching. You'd see dad walking across the farmyard making the sign of the cross. Mom always had a holy water fountain in her bedroom. I'd use it about five times a day. If you passed by that fountain from one room to another, she'd grab your shirt and ask, 'Did you forget something?' Oh, I get holy water by the pint jar. I bless calves and other animals. I bury it in the pasture before we put cattle out, so they are safe. I'm big on holy water."

Brenda grew up seven miles southeast of her current farmstead. She admits to growing up "sheltered" as the sixth of 11 children, but they definitely learned the value of family.

"I milked my first cow when I was three years old," she said. They rarely left the farm, but she's proud to note that her and her siblings all get along, to this day. We grew up poor, but we were a very close-knit family. "I'd live my childhood over in a minute. I just loved the farm. I love farm life. I love animals."

So, marrying a farmer and living that life was a natural fit for Brenda. She tried college, but nothing interested her among the limited options for women in those days. Every weekend, she found herself traveling back to her home farm because she desperately missed that life.



In this photo taken in May 2026, Brenda proudly held an overview picture of their farmstead where she and her husband have lived and worked for over 50 years.

Once married, she and Gary settled into the only way of life they ever knew and loved—farm life.

"I was in charge of milking, grinding feed (five batches a week), feeding baby calves, breaking heifers and animal health. I did all the branding and vaccinating," Brenda explained. Gary, who is in partnership with Ron Zachmann owning Prairie Lumber of Golva and Beach, enjoyed haying season and feeding cattle. "We milked for 26 and a half years, sold them in the year 2000. The price of milk was \$8.50 when we started in 1975 and, in 2000, it was \$8.50. We were losing money. We had to sell."

It was hard at first to give up that chore that was such a dominant part of everyday life.

"My sister said, 'You'll get over it.' I cried when the cows left. It took me three days to get over it knowing how tired I was," she realized.

But selling the milking cow herd didn't mean it was time to rest and relax. That just wasn't their nature.



Milking cows was a huge part of their farm life for over 25 years before selling the herd in 2000.



Gary Maus farmed in the Golva area all his life.



A “typical” day on the farm for Brenda meant 16 hours of work to take care of the cattle and land but always included a faithful sidekick (her dogs).



Brenda bottle feeding a calf.

“Then, we got range cattle,” Brenda said. “Started out with 25 and built to 180. And then, years later, that got to be too much and we sized down. We have about 50 now.”

There were plenty of tough years—especially calving in the harsh winters. Brenda recounts that she’s had nine cow accidents over the 50 years. One encounter with an angry cow sent Brenda to the clinic to get stitches in her head. In another incident, she endured being trampled by cows and ended up almost losing a leg from an infection. The worst one was three years ago. She was asked to give a neighbor’s sick cow some medicine via a dart gun. The cow, though sick, quickly recognized Brenda as a threat and came after her.

“I had nowhere to go and honestly thought I was going to die that day. I don’t know what was guiding me, had to be the Holy Spirit,” she said. “She ran at me and hit me in several spots. I fell in the snow, and the dart gun broke in half. My face was in the snow, and I could hear her breathing over the top of me and just waiting for me to roll over. What told me to play dead? I have no idea; I’d never reacted like that before. If I would have moved, she would have finished me off.

“I still can’t believe I lived through that. When I got home, I realized that I had a rosary in my pocket. I think that’s what saved me.”

She’s also been in two wrecks while pulling a horse trailer. “That’s what the St. Christopher medal is for to protect me. Sometimes, I can’t believe I’m still here.”

And she’s still here on the farmstead today at age 72, still taking care of all the animals.

“When we started milking in 1974, I knew we were ‘stuck.’ You had to pay the bills. Back then, everyone milked to pay the bills. It was work, work, work. But I consider it a privilege to work. I feel for people who are bored or who don’t like to work. There was an old farmer that said, ‘The best days of your life are when you put in a hard day’s work and go to bed tired at night.’ That’s very true. I wish I could live those days over, knowing what I know now but having the energy that I had then.”

The workload has lessened a bit in recent years and it’s time to pass it along to the next generation under her watchful eye. Brenda and Gary have two children close by—their daughter, Nicole Davidson, works at the lumber yard in Golva and, son, Grant, has an autobody shop right next door. They also have six grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Grandson, Brannon, is taking over the farm with help with the chores from Brenda. “Family is his only hope because machinery, land and cattle are expensive for anyone just starting out,” she said. “He

wants to do this farm life. It’s his dream and I have to stay for him. A lot has changed. We have cameras now set up in the barn. I think about all those trips to the barn over the years and now we can just watch the cows on the cameras.”

In 2024, issues with Gary’s memory started when Brenda noticed that he forgot how to do chores that used to be second nature. Then, he was out in the field raking hay and was skipping rows and needed help from a neighbor farmer to find his way home. In 2025, he was injured after a fall in the shop and recovery was difficult. He’s currently in a memory care facility in Dickinson.

Brenda had thought about the land donation for several years, but when their pastor at St. Mary’s parish in Golva, Fr. Nicholas Vetter, started talking more about giving to the Church, it provided the extra encouragement to do it.

“I love the Catholic faith. If you don’t have priests, you don’t have the Eucharist!” Brenda exclaimed. “You must have priests. And we’ve had some darn good priests here.

“My mom wrote letters of encouragement to seminarians and supported them financially. My parents would be so happy about this land donation. They would love this. I never dreamed that 50 years ago that this would ever be possible. My mom loved

priests—they were like sons to her. She’d have them over for breakfast after Mass. When she was living in Golva, I was told that one of the priests even boosted up the Mass time, so he’d have more time at mom’s afterward,” she said with a proud smile. “That’s unverified.”

Brenda can’t fathom why anyone would stray from the Church. “Why would you ever leave the faith? When you walk out of Mass, you walk out with something—Jesus. I pray every day for my family members who have left the Church.”

Brenda is confident there are others in our diocese who could give a similar donation but might not realize just how fulfilling it is to make an investment in future priests.

To anyone contemplating this type of donation to the seminarian fund, Brenda offered, “Do it! I don’t know if there’s ever been anything that’s ever made me feel better than this. It’s something that’s going to be there in the future for generations. What would it be like if we didn’t have any priests? No priests means no Eucharist! There are a lot of people out there who could give this kind of donation. You’re not going to take it with you!” †

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OBITUARY

Father Leonard Eckroth

The Reverend Leonard A. Eckroth, 93, passed away at St. Vincent's Care Center in Bismarck on June 18, 2026. A Mass of Christian burial was held June 26, 2026, at the Church of St. Joseph, Mandan, with the Most Reverend David D. Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck, as celebrant. The priests of the Bismarck Diocese concelebrated. Burial followed at Union Cemetery, Mandan.

Father Eckroth was born on Oct. 7, 1932, in Mandan, N.D. to Louis and Hedwig (Grunenfelder) Eckroth. He was raised in Mandan and attended St. Joseph's School through the 8th grade. He went on to graduate from high school at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. Father Eckroth continued his seminary studies at St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., graduating in 1958. He was ordained by the Most Reverend Hilary B. Hacker on June 2, 1958, at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck.

In his first year of priesthood, he served as chaplain of St. Joseph's Hospital, Dickinson; assistant of the Churches of Saint Anne, Bismarck; St. Michael, Sentinel Butte; and Home on the Range, Sentinel Butte. He then served as assistant of the Pro Cathedral of St. Mary, Bismarck, until October 1960. His next assignment was administrator of the Church of St. Michael, rural Linton. In August 1961, he became pastor of the Churches of St. John, New Leipzig, Sacred Heart, Bentley, and St. Mary, Miner. He then became pastor of the Church of St. Joseph, Bowbells, and St. John the Baptist, Portal. From July 1970 to June 1978, he served as pastor of the Churches of St. Thomas, Tioga, and St. James, Powers Lake. Father Eckroth's next assignment was serving as pastor of the Churches of St. Martin, Huff, and Immaculate Conception, Fort Rice, serving there until July 1987. He was

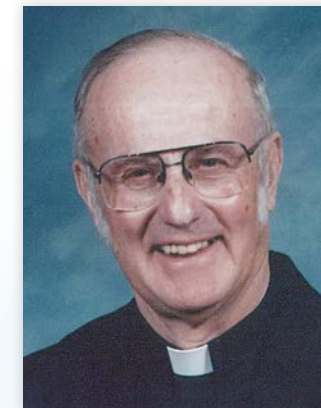
then appointed pastor of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul, Strasburg, until July 1, 2009, and the Church of St. Aloysius, Hague, until July 1, 1989. He also served as pastor of the Church of St. Michael, rural Linton, from July 1993 to December 1998. He served as pastor of the Church of St. Mary, Hague, from July 1989 to July 2009.

Along with his parish duties, he was defender of the bond for the Tribunal Office for 28 years and vice-officialis for nine years. He also served as chaplain of the North Dakota State Industrial School, North Dakota State Penitentiary, Columbian Squires, and the cloistered Carmelites in Hague. Father Eckroth entered retirement on July 1, 2009, after serving the faithful of the Bismarck Diocese for 51 years. He lived at the Emmaus Place before moving to St. Vincent's Care Center.

Father Eckroth is survived by his brother and sister-in-law, Anthony and Joan Eckroth of Mission, Texas and his nephews and nieces: Teresa (Don) Busse of Klawock, Alaska; David Eckroth of Everett, Wash.; Scott and Kristine Eckroth of Mandan, N.D.; and James (Barb) Eckroth of Indianapolis.

He was preceded in death by his mother and father, Hedwig and Louis Eckroth, and 12 of his brothers and sisters. †

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.



Fellowship at the smoker: The 2026 Big Smoke BBQ Competition

Julie Eisenbraun
Special Contributor to the DCA

An exciting gathering in spirit of faith and fellowship welcomed attendees to the 9th annual Big Smoke BBQ Competition. Hosted by the Serra Club of North Central North Dakota, the event brings together priests, pitmasters and parishioners united in a common mission of supporting the formation of our diocesan seminarians.

The Serra Club, an organization dedicated to fostering and affirming vocations to the priesthood and religious life, structures the competition with a single goal of directly benefiting the next generation of spiritual shepherds. The funds raised throughout the event provide support to our seminarians during their demanding years of academic, human and spiritual formation by helping to assist day-to-day needs and personal necessities as they arise.

This gathering provides a powerful, visible sign of encouragement from the faithful to our seminarians, revealing their steadfast prayers and support as they discern God’s call.

The June 21 competition at the Flickertail Garden on the N.D. State Fairgrounds in Minot always carries an extra layer of excitement when several diocesan priests step up to the smokers as pitmasters. Representing their parishes, these priests and their teams spend the day monitoring temperatures and preparing their entries alongside other grillers passionately dedicated to the perfection of the patient craft of slow-smoked barbecue.

Their active participation outside of the parish highlights the beauty of the priesthood. Not only do they feed their flocks spiritually, but it also offers a unique opportunity for parishioners to connect with their priests in a relaxed, unforgettable demonstration of joyful priesthood, strengthening community connections.

With pitmasters working to perfect their turn-in boxes, the competition is intense as each group eyes the coveted awards of Judges’ Choice, People’s Choice and the Sauce

Boss. A panel of three judges faces the task of blind-scoring the meat entries on appearance, tenderness, taste and presentation, followed by a separate blind-tasting of submitted sauces. Meanwhile, the crowd joins the excitement by tasting samples and casting ticket votes for the People’s Choice category.

In addition to the public sampling at each competitor’s station, the Serrans provide a full barbecue meal of pulled pork, chicken and traditional sides. In a beautiful display of service and gratitude, the meal is served by the diocesan seminarians. This gives attendees a wonderful opportunity to meet the very men their generosity supports.

After hours of barbecuing, tasting and scoring, the atmosphere becomes electric. As ballots are tabulated and tickets are counted, and then counted again, a wave of anticipation fills the room, until finally it is time to announce the 2026 Big Smoke champions in the three categories:

The results

- People Choice: 1st - Little Flower Smokers, Little Flower; 2nd - Burning Bush, Our Lady of Grace
- Judges Choice: 1st - Burning Bush, Our Lady of Grace; 2nd - Meat Your Maker’s Mark, Bishop Ryan
- The Sauce Boss: 1st - St. Leo’s Smokin’ Saints, St. Leo the Great; 2nd - Sts. Jerome, James and John, Mohall, Sherwood and Lansford.

The countdown to the 2027 Big Smoke has officially begun, and we look forward to gathering again for diocesan fellowship and visiting with our seminarians as they follow their path to priesthood.

We are thankful to everyone who supports this event and the generosity of our sponsors. †



Photos by Lucas DeMers, Lucas Lloyd Productions, LLC: Judges’ Choice first place was Burning Bush of Our Lady of Grace led by Fr. Adam Maus.



People’s Choice first place was Little Flower Smokers led by Fr. Ken Phillips.



Best Sauce award went to St. Leo’s Smokin’ Saints team.



Father Corey Nelson, leader of the Sts. Thomas, Michael and James Smokers, Tioga, Ray and Powers Lake team, visited with Deacon Tom Magnuson.



The meal is served by the diocesan seminarians.

Caritas Award celebrates extraordinary commitment to service

On June 8, Catholic Charities North Dakota welcomed more than 100 guests to the Church of Corpus Christi in Bismarck for the 2026 Caritas Award Luncheon, honoring Leon and Alicia Heick for their extraordinary commitment to service.

The event brought together community members, staff and supporters in a spirit of gratitude and celebration, with Bishop David Kagan joining as a special guest.

The program began with a warm welcome from Deacon Tony Ternes, Chairman of the Board for Catholic Charities North Dakota, followed by an opening prayer from Bishop Kagan. From the start, the luncheon reflected the heart of the Caritas Award—recognizing compassion, faith and service lived out through everyday actions.

Executive Director Kari Dew then provided an overview of Catholic Charities North Dakota, highlighting the organization’s statewide impact and the inspiring example set by Leon and Alicia—whose lives have been marked by a deep and enduring commitment to serving others.

That commitment has taken many forms. Leon spent over three decades working as a programming consultant and assistant manager before serving as an auditor for the State of North Dakota, while Alicia dedicated 58 years to nursing, including work in labor and delivery and as a nursing educator, ultimately serving as a tenured assistant professor.

Their service also extends far beyond their professional careers. The Heicks participated in mission work in Guatemala and later served as missionaries at the diocese’s Bismarck African Mission in Kisii, Kenya, where they supported

clinics, assisted with medical care, coordinated home building projects and cared for vulnerable families in need.

Closer to home, their generosity continues to shine through their involvement in parish life, including sharing their musical talents at Corpus Christi and local nursing homes, and Alicia’s volunteer work supporting individuals experiencing homelessness.

Pastor of the Church of Corpus Christi, Msgr. Patrick Schumacher, gave remarks outlining why he nominated the Heicks for the Caritas Award, sharing powerful reflections on their lifelong dedication to faith and service.

Bishop Kagan then presented Leon and Alicia with the 2026 Caritas Award. In their response, the couple humbly expressed gratitude, noting that they are surrounded by so many others who quietly give of themselves in service to others.

The luncheon concluded with a closing prayer from Fr. William Gerlach, of the Diocese of Fargo and member of the Board for Catholic Charities North Dakota, sending attendees forth inspired by the example of the Heicks and the mission of Catholic Charities North Dakota.

The Caritas Award is given annually to individuals or organizations who exemplify outstanding service and love for others—qualities that Leon and Alicia Heick have demonstrated throughout their lives.

This year’s celebration was a powerful reminder that true impact is often found not in recognition, but in a lifetime of faithful, compassionate service.†

—Submitted information



Staff photo: Bishop Kagan, along with Catholic Charities North Dakota Executive Director Kari Dew (far left), presented the Caritas Award to Bismarck residents, Leon and Alicia Heick, at a luncheon at the Church of Corpus Christi on June 8.

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Providing a place of healing and hospitality

Sr. Idelle Badt
Special Contributor to the DCA

Editor’s note: Stepping Stone Medical Respite Center officially opened in Bismarck September 2025—a place of healing and hospitality for those who are without housing and qualify for medical respite care following illness or injury. Sister Idelle Badt, CEO, and member of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery shared her perspective of learning, teamwork and hope.

Stepping Stone Ministries has now been open to residents for a little over seven months. This milestone has been a joyful opportunity for our staff to pause, reflect and celebrate all that we have learned and all that has been accomplished in such a short but deeply meaningful time.

From the very beginning, we have been intentional about building a culture of reflection and growth. Whenever a resident is discharged, we come together as a team. We ask: What went well? What can we learn? How can we grow? These conversations strengthen us and reaffirm something we hold at our core: we are truly a team. And when we work together, even the most challenging situations become opportunities for grace, growth and shared strength.

We have been richly blessed with an exceptional staff of individuals who care deeply about the people we serve and about one another. One phrase I often use is that we are all “broom pushers.” If something needs to be done, we simply do it. We step in for one another without hesitation. This spirit of shared responsibility creates a culture of humility, mutual respect and joyful service that is at the heart of everything we do.

We are also incredibly grateful for our social work and communications interns, who bring energy,



Submitted photo: Stepping Stone staff, Amelia Gold (left), outreach coordinator, and Sister Idelle Badt assisted a resident.

compassion and fresh perspective to our community. We celebrate their contributions and look forward with hope as they carry this experience into their future vocations.

Another tremendous gift to our residents has been our partnership with the University of Mary. Each week, students and faculty from the occupational therapy and physical therapy programs come to Stepping Stone to work directly with our residents. Without this partnership, many of those we serve would not have access to these essential services. Beyond clinical care, these encounters foster dignity, human connection and healing in profound ways.

This partnership is just as transformative for the students. One physical therapy student recently

shared, “Stepping Stones is always an absolutely fantastic experience, and I can never say enough about how this contributes to my development as a future PT (physical therapist). I learn more in five minutes at Stepping Stones than any class could teach me. It only further fuels the fire of wanting to be a service-oriented PT in my future practice. It shows me that there is a population that is so lonely, and would do anything to just have human experiences, and just have anyone show that they care for them. Stepping Stones also helps give me the ultimate humility in that life, and PT care is never about me, but how I can use my gifts to pour out to others.”

As our work has grown, we have also taken a step to more clearly share who we are with the broader community. While our legal name remains Stepping Stone Ministries, we will now also operate under the name (DBA) Stepping Stone Medical Respite. This will help reduce confusion with another local organization and better communicate the life-changing services we provide.

It is difficult to fully express how meaningful this work is to us. We love what we do, and we see every day the difference it makes. In just over seven

months, we have served more than 30 individuals. Of those who have been discharged, the overwhelming majority have transitioned into stable housing—into their own apartment, a home or with family. A stable environment, combined with compassionate care and community, makes this transformation possible. We are continually in awe as we witness how our residents change within the first few days of staying with us. Stability is life changing.

These outcomes are far more than numbers. They are stories of lives changed, dignity restored and hope renewed.

As we look ahead, we do so with deep gratitude and great hope. We remain committed to learning, to serving and to walking alongside each person who comes through our doors. We are especially grateful for the support, prayers and encouragement of the wider community, including the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, who share in this mission of care and compassion.

Please know that your support is truly making a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.✝

For more information, go to www.steppingstonemr.org.

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SSPX: AN OVERVIEW

1. The Society of St. Pius X is a traditionalist Catholic priestly fraternity. It was founded by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1970.
2. Archbishop Lefebvre rejected many teachings and reforms of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council (1962-1965) and, despite warnings from Pope St. Paul VI and Pope St. John Paul II, consecrated four bishops in 1988 without a papal mandate. That act resulted in the excommunication of Lefebvre and the four bishops he consecrated.
3. Status: In 1991 Lefebvre died without any public signs of repentance and thus died as an excommunicate who was not fully reconciled to Rome. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunications of the four bishops consecrated by Lefebvre but said that the SSPX has no canonical status and that “its ministers do not exercise legitimate ministries in the Church.” Pope Francis, during the 2015-2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy granted SSPX priests faculties to validly and licitly hear confessions. In 2017, Pope Francis authorized diocesan bishops to delegate SSPX priests to witness marriages under specified conditions. The SSPX has two chapels in the Bismarck Diocese, one in Mandan (Bismarck) and one in Dickinson.
4. Latest Action: The SSPX disobeyed Pope Leo XIV and on July 1, 2026, attempted the consecration of four bishops in Switzerland. July 2, 2026, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a decree of excommunication (refer to my letter accompanying this overview for the details).



Finally, I quote from an editorial published by Vatican News on July 2, 2026. In part it stated: “In recent days, many have recalled the words of Saint Pius X, the Pope from whom the Fraternity takes its name, who said in 1912: ‘And how must the Pope be loved? *Non verbo neque lingua* – not in word or with the tongue – *sed opere et veritate* – but in deed and in truth. To show our love for the Pope, it is necessary to obey him. Therefore, when one loves the Pope, one does not debate what he commands or requires, or how far obedience must go, or in what matters one must obey’.”

— The Most Reverend David D. Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck

The following letter was issued by Bishop Kagan on July 9, 2026, and read to all those who attended Mass in our diocese on the weekend of July 11-12.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

No doubt you have heard the very tragic news regarding the public and intentional disobedience of the Priestly Society of St. Pius X (SSPX). Against the stated will of the Holy Father Pope Leo XIV, they attempted to ordain four men as bishops. This action is an ecclesiastical crime which carries with it automatic excommunication.



Despite the pleas of our Holy Father, they disobeyed and took this schismatic action on July 1, 2026, in Switzerland. On July 2, 2026, the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, with the Holy Father’s approval issued a decree of excommunication for the crime of schism. This excommunication applies to all clergy of the SSPX, they are schismatics; it applies to all adherents to the SSPX be they religious or laity and they are now schismatics also.

An adherent would be a person who attends SSPX services exclusively because they consider the *Novus Ordo* Mass to be invalid. They are members of the Third Order of the Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X, do not participate in any true Catholic parish, they formally share the doctrinal positions of the SSPX, and they do not accept the Second Vatican Council as valid. As such, if they persist in their schism, they can be denied Catholic burial. If they attempt to receive the Sacrament of Penance from an SSPX cleric the absolution is invalid; and if they attempt marriage in the presence of an SSPX cleric it is invalid, all as of July 2, 2026. All other sacramental rites administered by the SSPX are gravely illicit.

The decree of excommunication states in part: “The excommunication newly separates the bishops and priests of the Fraternity of St. Pius X from the Church of Rome. As for the lay faithful, those who formally adhere to the Fraternity are to be considered excommunicated.” Holy Mother Church is always ready and willing to reconcile the clergy, religious and laity of the SSPX. It has set down specific procedures for the clergy and laity to follow.

The procedure for the laity who have formally joined or who regularly attend the SSPX and who request to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church involves a formal act of full adherence to Catholic doctrine and obedience to the Catholic hierarchy, under the jurisdiction of the local Diocesan Bishop who guarantees the unity of the particular Church. Any lay person to whom this applies should contact the Office of the Bishop in Bismarck.

The procedure for the laity who attended the SSPX for liturgical or spiritual reasons only, and who, while aware of the tensions with the Holy See, did not and do not reject the Magisterium or the authority of the Roman Pontiff, is simpler. For these lay persons it is sufficient for them to address themselves to a priest in full communion with the decision not to attend the SSPX in the future.

One of the explanatory notes attached to the decree of excommunication is addressed to all Roman Catholic lay faithful. “Finally, all the faithful are urged to remain steadfast in communion with the Roman Pontiff, with the Bishops in communion with him, and with the whole Church, and to refrain from taking part in celebrations and activities promoted by the aforementioned Priestly Fraternity of Saint Pius X.”

Again, this is a sad turn of events. Let us all pray daily that the SSPX recant and repent totally and unconditionally of their schismatic activity and that they return to the one true Roman Catholic Church. Let us all continue to pray for Our Holy Father Leo XIV that Almighty God will grant him in abundance the graces to continue to teach, to sanctify and to govern all of us in accord with His holy will.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

Catholic Charities North Dakota unveils new brand identity and website

Catholic Charities North Dakota (CCND) recently announced the launch of a comprehensive rebranding initiative in collaboration with Spotlight Media, marking an exciting new chapter for the organization as it continues to expand its impact across the state of North Dakota.

While CCND’s mission and core services remain unchanged, the organization’s refreshed visual identity, messaging and digital presence reflect its tremendous growth and evolving role in communities throughout North Dakota. With four physical office locations in Fargo, Grand Forks, Minot and Bismarck, and services reaching individuals and families statewide, the rebrand better represents the scope and strength of CCND’s work today.

“At its heart, Catholic Charities North Dakota remains deeply committed to serving individuals and families with compassion, dignity, and hope, rooted in the teachings and tradition of our Catholic faith” said Kari Dew, Executive Director of Catholic Charities North Dakota. “This new brand identity allows us to better tell our story, connect with communities across the state, and reflect the incredible growth our organization has experienced in recent years.”

Rooted in mission

For decades, Catholic Charities North Dakota has worked to strengthen individuals, families and communities through compassionate services and meaningful support. CCND’s mission is to serve individuals and families with compassion, integrity and respect by providing meaningful support, fostering hope and strengthening the well-being of the communities they serve.

As the organization has grown, leadership recognized the need for a brand identity that more accurately reflects both the statewide reach of CCND and the life-changing impact of its work. The rebrand reinforces the organization’s dedication to meeting communities where they are while continuing to evolve to serve emerging needs across North Dakota.

One of the most visible aspects of the rebrand is the launch of CCND’s newly redesigned website. The updated digital platform serves as a modern, accessible hub for community members seeking information, resources, support and opportunities to engage with the organization’s mission.

The new website highlights CCND’s programs and statewide impact while making it easier for North Dakotans to access services, learn about community needs and share stories of hope and transformation. Community members are encouraged to explore and share the new site as a way to help spread awareness of CCND’s mission and services.

As part of the rebranding effort, CCND is also announcing a new name for one of its longstanding programs. Pregnancy, Parenting, and Adoption Services (PPAS) will now be known as Strong Roots Bright Futures, a name that reflects the program’s commitment to fostering resilience, stability and hope for generations to come.

“The name Strong Roots Bright Futures reflects the strength, support, and hope we strive to provide to expectant parents, children and families across North Dakota,” said Dew. “Whether someone is seeking pregnancy and parenting support, adoption planning services, or guidance during a difficult season of life, this new name represents our commitment to helping families build strong foundations and brighter futures for generations to come.”

Catholic Charities North Dakota invites community members, partners, donors, and stakeholders to join in this exciting journey and continue supporting the organization’s mission to serve vulnerable individuals and families across North Dakota.

For more information about the rebrand and to explore the new website, visit catholiccharitiesnd.org. †

—Submitted information



James Odermann

My how time flies, especially when one is having fun. Another school term will start soon. Where have the lazy days of summer gone?

I am sure this sentiment has been felt for many generations. How I have enjoyed having young minds and bodies to help with day-to-day tasks—and most importantly to watch them squirrel around with others. “Hello, Papa. How are you doing? Having a good day so far?” were intonations that warmed my heart. And, sometimes, “What can I do to help?”

Hanging around with youth truly does warm one’s heart—and stretch one’s appreciation of God’s love. Life is not always about spreadsheets, work schedules, one more round in the hayfield or digging that next post hole.

Young people seem to have a perspective of enjoying the moment God has created for the world. The rush to get the next deadline met will come soon enough. For me, the luxury relishing the love of Christ in my family and fellow sisters and brothers is a priceless gift.

Summertime happens annually and each is special in its own way. “Hey, grandpa, let’s go to Medora—and see the (Theodore Roosevelt Presidential) Library,” one youngster suggested in between helping build sickles for haying. “Or,” another quipped, “we could just play a round of mini-golf.” “Or, how about getting an ice cream cone?” my granddaughter excitedly asked.

The priorities of youth are far different than the life of adults. The conversations in the shop are God-moments, times when I can feel the spirit of Jesus just hovering and creating opportunities in time.

This energy was front and center for my spouse and I as children and grandchildren gathered. This was especially evident at meal time: hours of preparation consumed in seconds to energize another round of activities. Oh, how I wish I had that energy!

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

The seeds of virtuous life spring from fertile choices

“Let’s go grandpa,” one preschooler tugged at my hand. “You promised you would play with us after dinner (which is at noon).”

And, I had. So off I went wondering as I went, “Do I appreciate these moments—in the moment and as reflections of souvenirs presented by God? “

Each day is a day God created just for me (and each person in the world). What am I doing to make maximum use of the time and the events of the day whether it be cold, hot, windy, etc.? Is it talking, playing with grandchildren, going on a drive with my spouse, heading to the hayfield, moving cattle or multiple other tasks that occupy my time on the ranch.

The Gospel of St. Matthew really addresses these concepts in ordinary time during the summer growing season. Jesus, in parables, talks about seed. In reality, Jesus is creating a metaphor for my life, for my relationships with family, friends and all my sisters and brothers in the world.

The truth is I am the seed, created and placed on this earth by God, to take root in the image and likeness I am called to become. There is a need to commit to making sure my relationships are firmly planted in fertile soil, where good can emanate and fill the world with virtues. The rapport I assemble in my lifetime with the world reflects choices I make.

Saint Matthew recorded the life of Jesus as He relates to my needs, my commitment to lay a foundation on which a virtuous life resides. This is especially important answering God’s call and enjoying the spontaneity of Jesus’ chosen: the young people.

This summer really drove the point home—and guess what, it was St. Matthew (18:3) who recorded Jesus’ call: “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

I truly feel blessed. I need to be forgiving like little children. I pray I can be up to the task. Care to join me? †



QUESTIONS I WAS AFRAID TO ASK

Q: If God is all-knowing, why does He need me to pray for what I need?

Fr. Joseph Evinger

A great privilege I had when I was young was my dad's woodshop in the basement of our house. Dad would build things and have scraps left over. We children would ask Dad to have these scraps, something he often freely gave. We learned carpentry skills in the process.

At some point my oldest brother, 10 years older than I, built a kite. He built a large rectangle kite made from paper, wood, glue and a long nylon string. His kite was no ordinary kite. He got it to fly hundreds of feet in the air and hundreds of yards away from where he was standing. As a young lad, I was utterly amazed! The whole family was! It was so inspiring that I wanted to do the same but with my own style. Mine was going to be a triangle kite, not rectangular like his. So, I began.

I knew the components he made his from: paper, wood and glue. After asking Dad for some scraps of wood and to use the glue, I got an old newspaper and was ready to show everyone what I could do all by myself. When it came time to glue the last pieces of wood together in the vise-grip, my brother looked at my kite and said: "That ain't gonna fly. It's too heavy. What does it weigh? Three pounds?" I knew he was wrong. Of course, it's going to fly. I'm using all the right components, paper, wood and glue. At some point, Dad saw it too and made a similar remark. The conversation even made it to the dinner table, with the main consensus being: "It isn't going to fly." I knew they were all wrong.

Now, flying kites takes some skill. Not only does it take skill, you need wind to fly a kite. So, on the windiest day I got my little triangle kite out, a kite most boys would be proud of. I climbed the hill where the wind was fiercest. I tied the nylon string to the kite so I wouldn't lose it to the clouds. Showtime was ready to begin!

With a big smile on my face, I threw it into the air. And away it went! All the way to the ground. It didn't fly at all! After

multiple attempts, the kite hit the ground one last time and broke.

My oldest brother knew how to build a kite. My Dad knew how. I thought I did, but I didn't. I knew the materials I needed but I didn't know how to combine those materials into something that flies high. You likely can guess what I was missing. I needed to ask my brother or Dad 'the-how' of doing it. They didn't need my advice nor my questions. But I needed their answers on how to build a kite.

The same thing applies to the spiritual life. As the question of this article assumes, God knows everything and we don't. As Jesus says, "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8). God doesn't "need me to pray" to Him. Nevertheless, I "need me to pray" to Him so I can find out who He is and who I am. We really don't know what we need unless we ask Him what I need. It is He who knows how human beings ought to live to come to their fullest potential and reach heaven.

In other words, for anyone of us to get to God, to heaven, we must wholly love God above all things and love our neighbor as ourself. For this to happen, we must have a relationship with God, we must realize our dependence upon Him as creatures, we must know the identity we received in baptism as children of God, and we must know that God wants to bring about our full conversion from a state of self-centeredness to the state of godliness. And for this to happen, we need to ask and ask and ask again, calling out to Him day and night with great persistence. As St. Augustine said, "Man is a beggar before God."

In time, we will no longer be anxious that we ought to pray, or what we ought to pray for. We will be so aware of the desire to be with God that we'll constantly relate everything to Him. God realizes that to stay alive we need Him. In order for us to realize this same truth, we need to pray. †

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

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BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

The American ideals of equality and liberty through a Catholic lens

David Tamisiea

G.K. Chesterton famously observed that “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed.” This creed, of course, is the Declaration of Independence. Chesterton further observed that America “has the soul of a Church” because of its adherence to this creed. Unlike other nations that developed organically through a shared ethnic background, culture and history, the United States began with a distinct set of values and principles articulated by the Founding Fathers in the Declaration of Independence.

The most famous line in the Declaration of Independence is found in the second paragraph: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Among other things, this profession emphasizes two American ideals our country is known for around the world: equality and liberty.

As our country celebrates its 250th anniversary that began with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, it would be good to reflect upon the meaning and significance of equality and liberty and see how our Catholic Christian faith helps us understand more clearly these quintessential American values.

As the Declaration makes clear, *equality* is rooted in our common human nature that comes to us from God the Creator. It does not mean that we hold that all people are the same or even that we are striving for everyone to have all the same advantages in life. Individuals differ so widely in their innate talents and deficiencies and inherited advantages and disadvantages, that it would be impossible to level the playing field in every way. Being created equal does, however, mean that every person has in common certain inherent natural rights that must be protected: rights like the right to life, to practice our religion freely, to think on our own and speak our mind, to associate with others with whom we choose and the like.

Our Catholic faith can help us see more clearly the meaning of the Declaration’s proclamation that “all men are created equal.”

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* puts it, “Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity” (CCC 1934). The fundamental principle being pointed out here is that every human person has equal dignity, that is, the same immeasurable value and worth, from the first moment of conception until natural death. The equal dignity of human persons is not something that can be earned or taken away but rather is intrinsic to every person and a gift from God the Creator.

The corollary to man’s transcendent dignity is that all human life is sacred, from “womb to tomb,” since every person is a living icon of God, an “image of God,” whom God wills to share in his own divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). The lofty dignity of the human person and the sacredness of human life demand we treat others with honor, respect and love, uphold and defend basic human rights and work to establish conditions in society for the full flourishing of every person. It also means that we should have laws that uphold and protect the life and dignity of each person and uphold basic human rights.

The other fundamental American value upheld by the Declaration of Independence is *liberty* or freedom. Liberty has always been central to the American identity, and America is renowned for being the freest country in the world. Our country’s commitment to liberty is evident not only in the Declaration of Independence but also in the preamble to the Constitution, where the Founders established our form of government to “secure the Blessings of Liberty.” Our national devotion to liberty is expressed in our national anthem, the “Star Spangled Banner,” as we sing about our country as the “land of the free, and home of the brave” and in other patriotic songs like “My Country ‘Tis of Thee,” which refers to America as a “sweet land of liberty.” It is also professed in our Pledge of Allegiance to the United States, where we pledge our fidelity to our nation that provides “liberty and justice for all.” The word “liberty” is printed on our currency to remind us of our country’s dedication to this value, and the Statue of

Liberty greets newcomers to our land. Liberty or freedom is at the core of who we are as a people.

Liberty is a principle that shapes America’s political and social foundations. Our country prioritizes individual rights, self-governance and democratic participation in civic life. The Constitution safeguards essential freedoms like speech, religion, the press, association and assembly. Throughout our nation’s history, the United States has attracted immigrants from around the world who seek greater opportunities and economic independence in our land. America is seen as a land of opportunity where, if a person has talent and determination and works hard, he or she can achieve great success, because he has the freedom to do so.

But what at its core is liberty or freedom? Freedom is a property of the human will that gives human beings the capacity to make choices, to do this or do that, to act or not to act at all (CCC 1731). Unlike irrational animals that are driven to perform actions by their instincts, passions and appetites alone, human persons have agency that gives them mastery over their own actions. Through the exercise of his freedom, man can deliberate over possible actions, make a choice and thereby direct himself toward his desired goals and, ultimately, his final end: “By free will one shapes one’s own life” (CCC 1731). For this reason, man is responsible and accountable for the free choices he makes.

While human beings are free, they are not absolutely autonomous in the choices they make. Human persons are not a “law unto themselves” but are subject to the universal moral law established by God. Freedom, in other words, is not a license to do anything one pleases. The moral law provides a set of guardrails to the kinds of choices a person can make. The irony is that, if a person transgresses the limits imposed by the moral law, it leads to the loss of freedom: “To choose to disobey the moral law and do evil is an abuse of freedom and leads to ‘the slavery of sin’ (Rom 6:27)” (CCC 1733). Anyone who has struggled with serious sin knows how easily it leads to enslavement and ends up controlling the person.

America has not always lived up to its ideals of equality and freedom. Slavery in the past and abortion in the present are examples where human beings have been denied equal dignity and basic freedoms in violation of the universal moral law governing all people. Our Catholic faith can help us have a deeper and more precise understanding of these fundamental American values so that we can live them out more fully and better flourish as a nation. Let’s remember how blessed we are to live in a country that was founded upon equality and liberty as we celebrate our 250th anniversary as a nation. †

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

Aug. 1	Fr. Ben Franchuk	Aug. 17	Deacon Les Noehre
Aug. 2	Fr. John Paul Gardner	Aug. 18	Fr. Julian Nix, OSB
Aug. 3	Lay Ministers	Aug. 19	Deacon Bob Nutsch
Aug. 4	FOCUS Missionaries	Aug. 20	Fr. Jolly George
Aug. 5	Deacon Ryan Nelson	Aug. 21	Deacon Robert Olson
Aug. 6	Fr. Paul Gardner	Aug. 22	Msgr. Chad Gion
Aug. 7	Sr. Jill West, OSB	Aug. 23	Sr. Agnes Reinert, OSB
Aug. 8	Seminarians in Formation	Aug. 24	Fr. Tom Grafsgaard
Aug. 9	Pope Leo XIV	Aug. 25	Deacon Stan Piasecki
Aug. 10	Deacon Bob Nickola	Aug. 26	Catholic School Educators
Aug. 11	Deacon Candidates in Formation	Aug. 27	Fr. Brian Gross
Aug. 12	Deacon Donald Nistler	Aug. 28	Deacon Steve Quintus
Aug. 13	Sr. Gemma Peters, OSB	Aug. 29	Fr. John Guthrie
Aug. 14	Seminarian Aidan Schaefbauer	Aug. 30	Fr. Fred Harvey
Aug. 15	Liturgical Ministers	Aug. 31	Consecrated Virgins of the Bismarck Diocese
Aug. 16	Bishop David Kagan		

Tamisiea serves as the executive director of the N.D. Catholic Conference, the official liaison for the dioceses of Fargo and Bismarck in matters of public policy.



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.

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.



Staff photo

Seminarian scholarship golf tournament winners

Congratulations to the winners of the Catholic Foundation of Western North Dakota 12th Annual Seminarian Scholarship Golf Tournament held June 15 at Prairie West Golf Course in Mandan. The winning team was Father Jordan Dosch, Zach Dosch, Brennan Quintus and Brian Quintus, pictured here with the diocesan seminarians and vocations director, Father Steven Vetter. Proceeds from the tournament help to form and educate our diocesan seminarians to one day become your priests. Find more information at cfwnd.org.