



Dakota **Catholic Action**

Vol. 85 No. 8 **SEPTEMBER 2026**



SERVING THE SHEPHERD
ASSISTING IN SERVICE TO GOD'S PEOPLE

www.bismarckdiocese.com

Corazon

Have you lost hope in your marriage? **You are not alone!**

- Is your marriage in crisis?
- Do you feel like you want to give up on your marriage?
- Are you and your spouse struggling to communicate?
- Is your marriage falling apart?
- Have you lost sight of why you fell in love with your spouse in the first place?
- Does your marriage feel cold and distant?
- Do you feel alone, helpless or frustrated with your spouse?
- Are you separated or divorced but want to try again?

Corazon (Spanish for *heart*) helps couples

- Understand more fully the Sacrament of Marriage
- Grow together in a marriage founded on God
- Communicate more clearly
- Forgive
- Soften hardened hearts
- Pray together
- Explore how family of origin experiences influence your marriage
- Love unconditionally and courageously

Upcoming weekend:

Sept. 25-27, 2026

The weekend runs from Friday morning to Sunday afternoon.

Testimonials:

"We came into the weekend not knowing whether our marriage would survive and left revitalized with hope that it can be more beautiful than I even imagined."
- Corazon Attendee

"Corazon was a very effective tool as it provided us with much needed time away from the craziness of daily life. It served as a great refresher and reminder that God should be the center of our relationship. If we put Him first, the rest will fall into place. We had to be willing to show up, actively listen and do the work while everything else was taken care of by the team."
- Corazon Attendee

For questions or to get more information, contact Amanda at the Bismarck Diocese, 701-204-7205.
Register at bismarckdiocese.com/corazon

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Dakota Catholic Action



Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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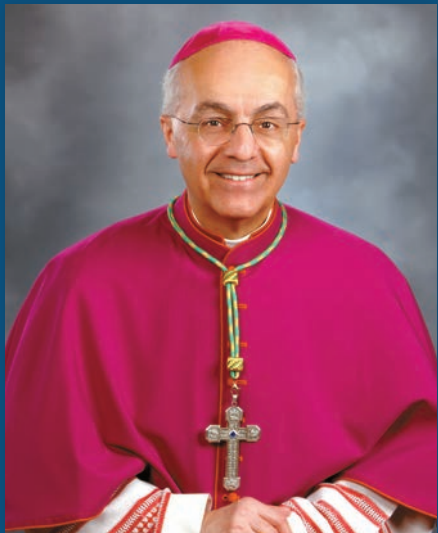
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FROM THE BISHOP

September is a month of tremendous graces if we celebrate it with devotion

Bishop David D. Kagan

As we enter the month of September, it occurs to me that this month does not get enough attention from our society. Since most schools are already back in session in August, most vacations have already been taken and we are back to a normal schedule for work, the weather is in between extremely hot and extremely cold, September could be called the “forgotten month.”

While all the above might be true, it is not true for our Catholic Church! The month of September is anything but “forgotten.” In September, we as Catholics celebrate several important feasts which I will name but I would like to draw attention to three in particular. The first is celebrated on September 8, the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This feast is a preparation for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception celebrated on December 8.

The second is the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and is celebrated on September 14. It follows upon our feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord which was celebrated last month on August 6. The third feast is that of Our Lady of Sorrows celebrated on September 15, and this feast draws us into the beautiful relationship between Jesus and His

Holy Mother throughout the course of Our Lord’s earthly life.

While none of these three feasts are days of obligation for us, they are important days for the right living of our Catholic faith. If possible, make the effort to go to Mass on these days in order to be strengthened in our faith and to be nourished by the precious Body and Blood of Our Dear Lord Jesus.

How these feasts in September affect our faith is seen in the several feasts of the angels and saints we celebrate also this month. We celebrate the feasts of Pope St. Gregory the Great, St. Teresa of Calcutta, St. Peter Claver, St. Robert Bellarmine, St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist, St. Pius of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio), Sts. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels, and St. Jerome. When you read the lives of these saints, it is evident that Jesus is the heart and center of their earthly lives, and Our Blessed Mother is the model for their lives of prayer and discipleship.

So, far from being the “forgotten month,” September is a month of tremendous graces if we choose to celebrate it with devotion. †

BISHOP IN ACTION



Photo by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Bishop Kagan raised the chalice of the Precious Blood during Mass at Our Lady of Victory Chapel on the campus of St. Mary’s Central High School in Bismarck on Aug. 6.



Holy Father’s Prayer Intentions for September

FOR THE CARE OF WATER

Let us pray for a just and sustainable management of water, a vital resource, so that everyone may have equal access to it.

BISHOP’S SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER 2026

Sept. 6	Confirmation at the Church of St. Joseph, Dickinson, 9:30 a.m. MT
Sept. 7-10	Fall Clergy Conference, Medora
Sept. 11	Cabinet Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Sept. 14	Women’s Care Center Board Meeting, Chancery, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
Sept. 17-20	Region VIII Provincial Bishop’s Meeting
Sept. 22	Presbyteral Council Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Sept. 24	Finance Council Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 10 a.m.
Sept. 25	Home On The Range Board of Directors Meeting, Center for Pastoral Ministry, Bismarck, 1 p.m.
Sept. 27	Confirmation at the Church of Our Lady of Grace, Minot, 10:30 a.m.
Sept. 28	Mass for Catholic Home Educators of Bismarck-Mandan, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
Sept. 30	Women’s Care Center Luxury Bingo Fundraiser, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.

Seminarian to be ordained transitional deacon on October 1

Sonia Mullally
DCA Editor

Soon, Seminarian Joseph Richter will be one step closer on his journey when he is ordained to the transitional diaconate on Oct. 1.

For the past three years, Richter has been studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. He will be ordained to the priesthood for the Bismarck Diocese, God willing, in the summer of 2027 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.

Joseph grew up in Bismarck attending the Church of Saint Anne with his family. He’s a graduate of St. Mary’s Central High School. The first time he heard a call toward the priesthood was as a fifth-grade Mass server while watching his uncle, Msgr. Tom Richter, celebrate Mass.

Growing up, he described his faith at “lukewarm” in high school. But the call to the priesthood was always in the background. He dismissed it thinking that he desired marriage and fatherhood. After getting on track by enrolling in college and getting a job, things started going in the direction he thought they should be headed. But all the worldly paths that were laid out for him still didn’t seem to make him happy. Once he realized that he had to explore the idea of being a priest, he was more at peace than he had ever been.

With six years of seminary study under his belt, the first three at St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington, D.C. and the past three years in Rome, he reflected on his journey so far. He recently shared an update on what he’s learned and experienced during this past formation year that has helped him prepare for this next step.

“This past June, I finished my third year in Rome,” Joseph said. “One of the highlights of this past year was

that I successfully wrote a capstone paper and passed comprehensive exams to receive a bachelor’s in sacred theology (S.T.B.). I was incredibly blessed to serve as one of the chaplains for the University of Mary Rome Campus and get to know the wonderful students who spend anywhere from a month to an entire semester in Italy. The most important lesson that I learned was one of trust/abandonment. Seminary life in Rome takes its character after the city. At times it is tranquil and beautiful, but a lot of times it can be full of chaos. In that environment, I have been able to learn how God is the one who is at work through all of it. It is not men who form themselves into priests through their cleverness and ingenuity. It is God who forms, encourages and sustains ordinary and unworthy men to be His priests. Being formed in the heart of the Church has helped me receive that lesson in a unique way.”

The ordination brings about a profound change in the life of the man who receives it, as he passes from the lay to the clerical state. At the ordination, the man makes a public commitment to certain promises, namely, obedience to his ordinary, maintaining a life of chaste celibacy, and being a man of prayer—specifically by praying the Liturgy of the Hours on behalf of the Church and the world. Joseph is enthusiastic, yet humbled, about being ordained to the transitional diaconate after years of formation.



Seminarian Joseph Richter will be ordained to the transitional diaconate on Oct. 1.



Submitted photos: Seminarian Joseph Richter met Pope Leo XIV.

“My thoughts around diaconal ordination are of excitement, joy and eagerness,” Joseph explained. “On October 1st, I will promise to be obedient to my bishop, to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and to live celibate chastity. Each of these promises are for the rest of my life. These are promises that the Church does not take lightly, and neither do I. Although the priestly ordination is the more ‘coveted event’ in the Church’s life, the diaconate is a serious commitment as well. This step establishes a permanent covenant between me and Christ and His Church. It is a joyous culmination of the previous six years of formation, yet it is also just the beginning of the mysterious and beautiful life of ministry.”

Studying in a city so rich in Catholic history for these past few years so far from home has been both a challenge and a blessing.

“One thing that has sustained me throughout the years away from home has been friendships,” Joseph shared. “First and foremost, the most influential friendship has been with Jesus Christ. As the landscape and residence

changes often, the comforts of having the same house, neighborhood and people around cannot provide the same comfort as it does at home. This reality drew me into finding my home not in comforts, but in the Eucharist. Wherever I was, whether it was on language immersion, Christmas break or on a parish assignment abroad, the one constant that is forever constant is the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. Wherever I went, He was waiting in the tabernacle for me to welcome me home.

“The second kind of friendship that has sustained me has been that with my fellow seminarians. They have been able to understand what I am going through and what I aspire to more than almost anyone else. They have become true brothers to me, as we have been ‘forged’ in the fires of our seminary formation abroad.”

Coming from a large extended family, Joseph anticipates a large contingency of family and friends traveling to Rome for the ordination Mass.

“Having so many friends and family come to Rome for my ordination is incredibly special,” Joseph noted. “For



For the past three years, Richter has been studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome.

me, it will be a ‘colliding of worlds’ as they will be able to experience those people and places that have become most dear to me over the last three years.”

Joseph will soon put his knowledge and years of formation into practice as a deacon—a true servant of the Church.

“I am looking forward to serving others as Christ as a deacon,” Joseph expressed. “One of the common images for diaconal ministry is the washing of the feet. The deacon is called to make Christ present to others by lowering himself in service as Christ did. I am also looking forward to being able to preach the Gospel. Preaching has profoundly impacted my life in my adolescence and still to this day. The opportunity to give back to others what I have first received as well as helping people encounter Jesus as I have is my greatest dream. There is nothing that I desire to do more than that.”

After spending this past summer serving at a parish, Joseph returned to Rome for his final year before coming back to his home diocese for priestly ordination. There is much in store for him. It proves to be a busy but fulfilling year of formation.

“I am very excited for this final year of seminary in Rome,” he shared. “I will be working on a diploma in spiritual theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, while taking additional courses at the Gregorian and Teresian Universities in Rome. At the seminary, I will be able to serve at the altar as a deacon

during Mass, preside at Eucharistic adoration and Evening Prayer for the community, as well as bring the Eucharist to those who are sick in the community. Last but not least, I will serve as a chaplain for the students at the University of Mary Rome Campus where I will have the opportunity to preach, give talks and walk with the students as they embark on a semester in the Eternal City. It will be a year marked by service that is so characteristic of the diaconate.”

Joseph shared his thoughts about his final year of formation as he moves toward priestly ordination.

“Each year in formation, there seems to be exponential graces that are poured out on those who are in formation. In this final year I have seen it in men that have gone before me that this holds to be evermore true. By participating in more direct sacramental ministry, I get an ever-closer taste to the priestly ministry that God is calling me to. I also have an awareness that this upcoming year is a time of bringing to fruition the years of resources, prayers and sufferings invested in me by the Bismarck Diocese, Bishop Kagan and the Church as a whole. They get a chance to see once more that all these things are worth the toil so that they can be provided with men who have a real chance of becoming good and holy priests. In other words, this upcoming year is one that is focused less-and-less on me, and more and more on the people whom God has called me to serve.”

Joseph added a message to the people of our diocese, “I would like to express a word of gratitude for all those who have supported me in any way over the past six years. I have been fortunate to receive the abundance of generosity of the good people of our diocese, and it has sustained and encouraged me to make this gift of my entire self to our diocese and our Church. Second only to the mysterious goodness of God calling me to be His deacon and priest, the good people of the diocese are the reason why and the reason how I am becoming a deacon and priest.”

Watch the ordination

The 2026 diaconate ordination for the Pontifical North American College will take place Thursday, Oct. 1 at 6 p.m. local time in Rome, which is 11 a.m. central time, inside the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter. It is scheduled to be livestreamed on YouTube via EWTN. Check the local listings on EWTN for more information. †



Photos by Deacon Joe Krupinsky: Diocese seminarians were among those celebrated at the event on Aug. 6. In attendance were: (front, l-r) Joseph Schon, Paul Vetter, Joseph Schweitzer, Ben Schaff, Preston Barbie, David Vetter, Vocations Director Fr. Steven Vetter; (middle, l-r) Aaron Ripplinger, Griffin Schaeffer, Dakota Johnson, Aidan Schaeffbauer, Ryan Bohrer, Alex Wilson, Joseph Richter; (back, l-r) Tyler Selzler, Thomas Heen, Taylen Thomas, Nolan Johnson, Charles Richter, Easton Hinnenkamp, and Thomas Kraljic.

Inaugural Vocation Celebration was a tremendous success

The members of the Bismarck-Mandan Saint Serra Vocations Apostolate hosted its first-ever Vocation Celebration on the Feast of the Transfiguration, Aug. 6, at the campus of St. Mary’s Central High School in Bismarck.

The purpose of the event was to invite the Catholic faithful to come together to “prayerfully celebrate” the gift of those men and women who have committed their lives to a vocation in religious life and to show our prayerful support to those in formation.

With approximately 1,000 people in attendance, the event began with Holy Mass celebrated by Bishop David Kagan in the beautiful Our Lady of Victory Chapel. Following Mass, the attendees were treated to an old-fashioned German-style dinner consisting of sausage, knoephla, kraut and kuchen. To the delight of the attendees, 10 meat markets from across Western North Dakota participated as contestants in a “Supreme Sausage Competition” where the crowd was given the opportunity to cast a vote for their favorite.



Overwhelmed by the outpouring of support, Bismarck-Mandan Saint Serra Vocations Apostolate express their deepest gratitude to all the sponsors, volunteers and attendees. A more comprehensive follow up will be published in the next issue of the Dakota Catholic Action. †

—Submitted information

Surprise discovery of ancient Church history

Sonia Mullally
DCA Editor

A remarkable collection of sacred treasures, including purported first-class relics of St. Vincent de Paul, St. Paul the Apostle, St. Joseph paired with the Veil of Mary, a fragment of the True Cross, and many others was uncovered in a dusty box under a stairwell at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Mott. This unexpected discovery at a small parish on the prairie connects a tiny rural community to the ancient heart of global Church history.

Father Chris Kadrmas described the discovery as a “happy accident.”

The unassuming brick walls of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Mott have served local generations of farmers and ranchers for more than 100 years. In a complete surprise, during a search for an old nativity scene in the rectory, the parish employee, Kylie Mayer, made the extraordinary find.

“We were actually looking for the baby Jesus, and I was in the closet under the steps,” Kylie, who serves as the director of religious education, explained. “I found a box that looked smaller and opened it. I thought, ‘What am I looking at?’ Is this what I think it is?”

She said she fell to her knees right there in awe of what she found. She immediately asked Father Chris to take a look to verify. The forgotten container held nine reliquary stands, wooden and metal, each with the theca and relic installed. The theca is the small, round locket-type container used to hold the relic. The stands were all wrapped in newspaper. As they unwrapped each, they were



Nine relics in stands were recently found at St. Vincent de Paul Parish in Mott.

stunned. Each tiny capsule held a saintly relic—a collection of microscopic bone splinters, fabric threads, ash or bone fragments accompanied by fragile, yellowed paper labels written in Latin, bearing the name of the saint or artifact.

A roll call of ancient Church figures

The roster of names identified on the labels reads like an all-star cast of Christian history. In addition to the discovery of the nine relics in stands under the stairwell, there was a treasure trove of 30 relics in small thecas found stored in a small box under the altar in the church. Among what Fr. Chris would choose as the top four are:

- **St. Vincent de Paul:** The parish’s patron saint, a 17th-century champion of the poor.
- **St. Paul the Apostle:** The great missionary of the early Church.
- **St. Joseph and the Veil of Mary (combined):** The foster father of Jesus, whose relic represents a rare link to the Holy Family and a fragment of fabric traditionally revered as part of the Blessed Virgin’s attire.
- **Wood of the Cross:** A microscopic particle traditionally venerated as a piece of the True Cross from Christ’s crucifixion.

Among the notable other relics are the apostles Saints Thaddeous and John, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Justin, St. Stephen, King of Hungary, St. Benedict, St. Lawrence and St. Teresa of Avila.

Preserving a legacy of faith

To be considered authentic for public veneration, a relic must meet precise criteria governed by Catholic Canon Law. Over the long history of the Catholic Church tradition, relics have been moved, traded, sold and owned by the local Church or private citizens.

The verification of sacred remains follows strict procedures established by the Vatican to prevent fraud and ensure proper reverence. The process relies heavily on historical documentation and strict physical protocols. Unfortunately, there was no documentation or paperwork with the relics found at the church in Mott.

Another way to judge authentication is to inspect the relic and look for a silk red thread and a wax seal. Father Chris and the staff have not been able to open every theca, however, the ones they have opened clearly show a wax seal and thread, all suggesting authenticity.

Father Chris said that they’ve asked around with some of the oldest parish members and a previous pastor to see if they recall anything regarding the relics. One or two people have expressed a vague



One reliquary is labeled with relics of St. Joseph and the veil of Our Blessed Mother Mary.



One relic is labeled as belonging to St. Vincent de Paul, the parish’s patron saint and a 17th-century champion of the poor.



Among the relics is one of St. Paul the Apostle, the great missionary of the early Church.



A microscopic particle traditionally venerated as a piece of the True Cross from Christ's crucifixion is contained in one of the reliquaries.

memory of the artifacts, but nothing concrete. The only “clue” as to when the relics may have been placed there under the stairs, according to Kylie, was the newspapers stored with them dated from the 1970s.

“Like many things in life, these relics are going to have to be taken on faith,” Father Chris said.

The three classes of relics

Catholics venerate relics to honor holy men and women, to connect with the physical reality of God's work in human history and to raise their minds toward God. Relics are physical objects like bones, clothing or items touched by saints.

The relics found in Mott appear to be an array of different types of artifacts connected to saints or items sacred to the Church. The Catholic Church categorizes these sacred items into distinct levels of spiritual and physical proximity: first-class are physical remains of a saint, such as bone fragments, hair or blood; second-class includes items personally worn or used by a saint during their lifetime; and third-class are objects, usually cloth, touched to a first- or second-class relic.

Our faith draws a distinct line between *veneration* (showing respect and honor to a holy person or object) and *worship* or adoration (which belongs to God alone). Honoring a relic is like keeping a loved one's photo or clothing to remember them.

“Just like we might carry a photo or memento of someone we love, or we've been close to in our lives, relics are much the same in a way of staying close to someone's memory,” Father Chris added.

He is working with others in the parish to move the recovered artifacts into a secure environment, planning for careful restoration into a proper reliquary and future opportunities for quiet veneration by the faithful.

“We plan to fully authenticate the relics and proceed with public veneration according to the newest laws of the Catholic Church, which we are currently exploring with the bishop's oversight,” Fr. Chris added.†

UPCOMING EVENTS



Beginning Experience program starting Sept. 13

Beginning Experience, a non-denominational peer ministry, helps people who are dealing with the pain of losing a love relationship through death, separation or divorce. A 10-week program called “Coping with Life Alone” is being offered with the first session starting Sunday, Sept. 13 in Bismarck. Those interested are invited to contact Elaine at 701-400-1941. Brochures are available upon request. For more information, visit these websites: www.beginningexperiencewesternND.com or beofwnd@yahoo.com.



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.



Society of St. Vincent de Paul 5K Friends of the Poor Walk Sept. 27

Join in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul 5K Friends of the Poor Walk on Sunday, Sept. 27. The walk begins at the Sertoma Park Community Center in Bismarck at 4 p.m. Registration is at 3:30 p.m., or you may pre-register at svdpbismarck.org. This is a noncompetitive walk/run to raise money for the poor in our local community. The Cathedral Knights of Columbus will provide a picnic lunch following the walk. There is no registration fee, but free will donations are much appreciated.



Red Mass Oct. 5

The public is invited to the Red Mass on Monday, Oct. 5 at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at 5:30 p.m. This Mass celebrates with those involved in the administration of justice—judges, attorneys, law professors, law students and government officials.



North Dakota March for Life Oct. 9

Take the opportunity to stand up for the unborn at the North Dakota March for Life on Friday, Oct. 9. Begin with Mass celebrated by Bishop Kagan at 10:30 a.m. at the Bismarck Event Center (door A1 opens at 9:30 a.m.) followed by the rally at the same location. Lunch will be served to registered attendees after Mass. Rally at the event center begins at 12:30 p.m. Immediately following the rally, a march will proceed to the N.D. State Capitol south lawn leaving from door A1. Register at bismarckdiocese.com/ndmfl for an accurate lunch count. The public is invited to attend. Bishop Kagan will lead a Holy Hour for Life on Thursday, Oct. 8 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit.



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.



White Mass Oct. 26

The public is invited to attend the Bismarck Diocese's annual White Mass, which will be held on Monday, Oct. 26 at 5:30 p.m. at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. The special Mass honors physicians and those involved in the medical field.



Presentation on the Shroud of Turin Nov. 5

All are invited to a special presentation on the Shroud of Turin that has captivated scientists, historians, and believers alike, standing as one of the most studied and debated artifacts in human history. Acclaimed speaker and retired educator Jim Bertrand, M.Ed., will bring his internationally acclaimed lecture to the Pro-Cathedral of St. Mary in Bismarck on Thursday, Nov. 5 at 7 p.m. The event is open to the public, offering community members a rare chance to examine the mysteries of the Shroud up close.

CELEBRATING JUBILEES

We honor and celebrate the years of religious profession of the sisters and brothers who live and serve here and those who live elsewhere and have ties to the diocese. Join us in prayer and thanksgiving for all who have dedicated their lives in service to God’s people.

Sister Eva Roehrich

Bismarck Diocese native, Sister Eva Roehrich, celebrated 80 years as a member of the Sisters of the Precious Blood. Sister Eva Roehrich (M. Lelia) grew up as a member of St. Bernard Catholic Church, which was built on her family farm about 20 miles outside of Linton in Emmons County. After the eighth grade, she left for Dayton, Ohio, to join the Sisters of the Precious Blood, whose members ministered in Linton from 1945 to 1976.



80th Jubilee

During her years of active ministry, Sister Eva served wherever there was a need, including over two decades in culinary service at St. Gregory Seminary in Cincinnati; St. Thomas Seminary in Denver; Lourdes Hall, the Congregation’s former retirement center for Sisters in Dayton; and the Maria-Joseph Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Dayton. She especially enjoyed creating special dinners and themed table settings for events and holidays.

Sister Eva also ministered as the school secretary in Falls Church, Virginia, and as a receptionist, switchboard operator, and aide and hostess responding to the needs of residents and visitors at Maria-Joseph and at Salem Heights, the Congregation’s central house in Dayton.

The Sisters of the Precious Blood were founded in Switzerland by Maria Anna Brunner in 1834 and currently minister throughout the U.S. and in Chile. Their central house has been located in Dayton since 1923.

Sister Gemma Peters

Sister Gemma Peters, 93, a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, celebrated her 75th Jubilee in a private ceremony with her monastic community on July 12.



75th Jubilee

She grew up on a farm near Rugby, N.D. Her first yearnings to become a sister became evident after meeting the Benedictine sisters who taught vacation Bible school. Their joyful spirit, concern for others and complete trust in God left an impression on her.

Sister Gemma made her first profession on July 11, 1951. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in education from Minot State University, majoring in elementary education with a minor in speech pathology. She pursued Graduate Study in Education from DePaul University in Chicago and Clark College, Dubuque, Iowa, and earned a Master of Religious Education from Seattle University.

She taught at Cathedral Grade School in Bismarck and at St. Patrick School in Dickinson where she also served as principal. She later became principal of Christ the King School in Mandan before returning to the classroom at Trinity Catholic Schools in Dickinson and St. Mary’s Elementary School in Bismarck. Sister Gemma has experienced the growth of Annunciation Monastery from its earliest days since the days of living at the community’s original motherhouse (the C.B. Little House) located at 304 Ave. A West.

Sister Gemma valued her time as a religious education coordinator, choir director, and pastoral minister at Corpus Christi Parish. At the University of Mary, Sister Gemma taught Scripture classes and served on its board of trustees.

At the monastery, Sister Gemma served as a house director and novitiate director, as spiritual director, as sacristan, and formation team coordinator. Her enthusiasm and energy were greatly appreciated when she served as hospitality coordinator at Annunciation Monastery. In addition to her many ministries, Sister Gemma volunteered with the St. Vincent DePaul Society, as a house director and novitiate director at Annunciation Monastery.

Now retired, Sister Gemma treasures daily prayer, the Eucharist with her sisters and the “indoor walks” that remain part of her daily routine.

Sister Loretta Frank

Bismarck Diocese native, Sister Loretta Frank celebrated her 70th jubilee this year, as a member of the 1956 entrance class of Maryknoll Sisters in New York. Sister Loretta was born in Dickinson, and entered Maryknoll on Dec. 30, 1956, from St. Pius Parish of St. Pius (Sheffield, N.D.).



70th Jubilee

She received her first foreign assignment in 1963 to Japan where she studied the language and taught English until 1965. From 1965 to 1970, Sister Loretta did parish work and taught English in Tsu, Hikone and Muroran. She then went to Tokyo, where she earned a B.A. in Far East Asian Studies and an M.A. in the same field, this time with a specialization in sociology.

While residing in Kichijoji, Sister Loretta worked at the National Catholic Committee, as assistant editor of the Tosei News, an international bilingual publication, from 1974 to 1977. During this period, she assisted at several Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) in Asia and was involved in various social justice activities in the Tokyo area. Then she returned to the Maryknoll Center in Ossining, N.Y. to work for several years in computer services.

In 1981, she returned to Japan and began teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at Rissho College. In addition, she did editorial work for Oriens Institute for Religious Research, both in Tokyo, until 1983. Sister Loretta later returned to Sophia University where she

taught ESL and was involved with its student ministry from 1983 to 1990. In 1990, she returned to the Maryknoll Sisters Center in New York to work in the Congregational Leadership Team (CLT) Secretariat.

In 1995, Sister Loretta returned to Japan and moved to Kyoto where she taught ESL at Notre Dame Women’s College until 2004, simultaneously she served as bookkeeper for the Maryknoll Sisters Regional office from 1995 to 2008 and gave private English classes from 2004 to 2008.

Sister Loretta Frank returned to the Maryknoll Sisters Center in 2008. Her service there involved working in congregational services, where she assisted its Rogers Community Sisters and their coordinators, until her retirement in 2019. She continued doing various volunteer activities within the center.

Father Benedict Fischer

July 11 of this year marked the 25th anniversary of vows for Father Benedict Fischer. Benedict was born in Owatonna, Minn. The family moved to Bismarck when Benedict—then known as Daniel—was eight. He attended Cathedral Grade School and St. Mary’s Central High School. He attended Bismarck State College for one year then moved on to Moorhead State University. He wanted to be a film maker, and for two years he studied theater at MSU.



25th Jubilee

Then, he experienced a religious awakening and asked God to guide him. He quit school and went to work for Butler Machinery to earn enough money to fly to Guatemala, there to help with the God’s Child Project. Being exposed to the lively Catholic faith of Guatemalans was transformative.

After Guatemala, he returned to MSU and received an undergraduate degree in English, then went to Cardinal Muench Seminary in Fargo when a call to the priesthood began to surface in 1997. He joined the Abbey in January of 2000. After solemn vows, he went to St. John’s School of Theology in Collegeville, Minn.

Benedict has an appreciation for living the day-to-day order of monastic life at the abbey. He’s always adapted to whatever the community needs and how he can fulfill that need. He’s currently near completion of a PhD in Theology from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

Magnifica Humanitas: An introduction

Fr. Gregory Luger
Censor Librorum

Editor’s note: This is the first in a series of articles examining Pope Leo XIV’s encyclical letter.

Earlier this year, Pope Leo XIV issued his first encyclical letter, *Magnifica Humanitas*, to the entire Church and much of this letter is concerned with AI (artificial intelligence). This shouldn’t surprise us as the Holy Father mentioned that he took his name after Pope Leo XIII, who was pope during the industrial revolution, seeing that his own papacy began during what he calls the AI revolution.

The encyclical itself can be a bit daunting in its length and so my intention here is to break it down into more easily digestible parts. This article will concern itself with the introduction, which “sets the stage” for the rest. So let’s get into it (and one quick note: if you see a number in parentheses at the end of a sentence, just know that that is the paragraph number of the encyclical from which the quote was taken).

Leo XIV begins by saying that man, with the dawn of AI, is today facing a “pivotal choice”: to build a new Tower of Babel or the City of God (we should note here Leo makes a subtle hint at his Augustinian background, as one of St. Augustine’s most famous works is called “The City of God”). Are we going to use this new tool to protect the dignity of the human person or will it create a more inhumane world?

To adequately discern what lies before us, we must look to the Incarnate Word: Jesus. It is in Him that the “mystery of humanity truly becomes clear”

(*Gaudium et Spes*). This is to say that Christ, being true God and true man, reveals to us what humanity really is. The Holy Father then explains that founded on the Incarnate Word, we experience the action of the Holy Spirit, and our efforts to cooperate with Him will be blessed by the Father. But what does this have to do with AI? Everything. If we are not rooted in this “Trinitarian dynamic,” then we are sure to go astray. Put another way: if the use of AI is not guided by this “Trinitarian dynamic,” it can have disastrous consequences. Furthermore, the Gospel constantly challenges and directs human experience, meaning that no matter the activity, it must always be informed by Gospel wisdom. New times bring new challenges and, as Leo XIII observed, “the proclamation of the Gospel cannot overlook the concrete lives of people,” hence, the Church “reflects on social issues in the light of the Gospel.” The dawn of AI is no different.

Leo XIII recognized in his own day that the industrial revolution, while bringing with it many wonderful new things and advantages to humanity, there was also great threat. New technologies made farming more efficient and the transportation of goods easier. At the same time, the rights of the human person were often violated

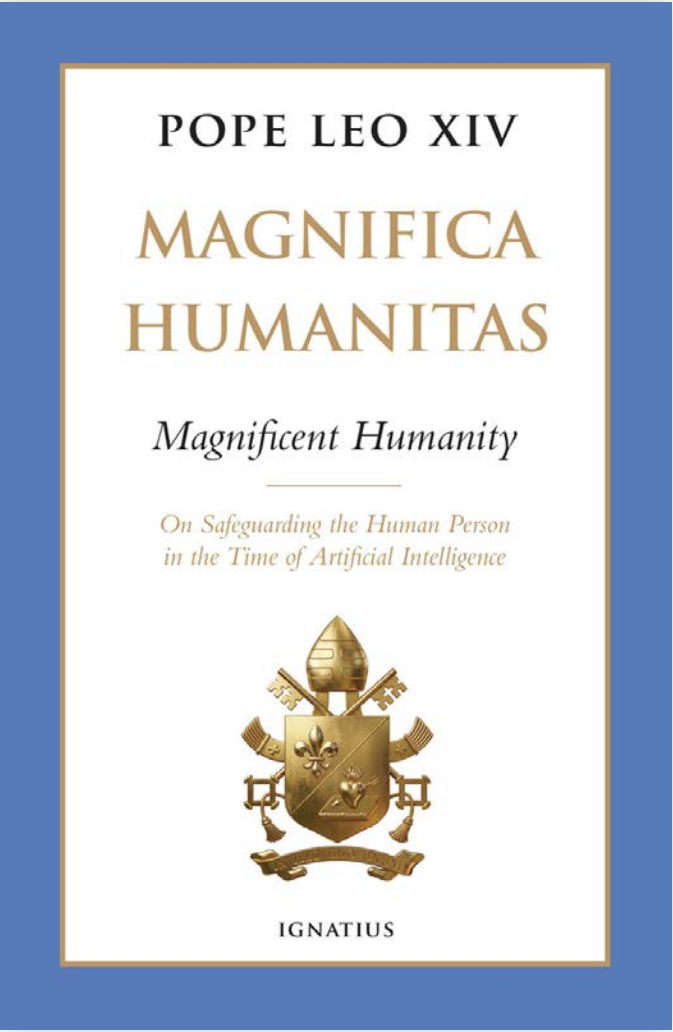


Fr. Gregory Luger

by the underpayment of employees and dangerous working conditions. While the new technologies were neither good nor evil in and of themselves, the Church strove to keep the good while eliminating the bad. Leo XIV sees a similar dynamic with digitization, AI and robotics. New technology in our own day has improved people’s lives but can cause harm if not ordered to the common good.

Hence, we must ask ourselves, “Where are we going? To what goal do we wish to orient ourselves? What direction should we choose as a people and as a human community?” To answer these questions, His Holiness directs our attention to two biblical images: the Tower of Babel, found in the Book of Genesis, and the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem, found in the Book of Nehemiah. Babel “was a project conceived without reference to God” (7). It was built on pride and a claim to self-sufficiency, arose from self-affirmation, and sacrificed “human dignity for efficiency” and “aspired to reach heaven without God’s blessing” (7). This ended in disaster. By contrast, the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem had God as its center. Whereas language was confused at Babel, now in Jerusalem common language is rediscovered. In Babel, the Tower was constructed out of pride and self-exultation. In Jerusalem, the people come to true communion, recognizing that their strength comes from God.

Applying this to today, we must realize that the new technology is not good or evil, however, its use is never neutral taking on the characteristics of those who build and use it. Therefore, “the primary choice is not between a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to technology, but rather between constructing Babel or rebuilding Jerusalem; between a power that claims to dominate the heavens and a people who work together in the presence of God to rebuild the walls of fraternal coexistence” (9). “We must, then, avoid the “Babel syndrome,” namely the idolatry of profit that sacrifices the weak, a uniformity that neutralizes differences and the pretense that a single language—even a digital one—can translate everything, including the mystery of the person, into data and performance. The risk of



dehumanization—of building a future that excludes God and reduces the other to a means—is an ancient and ever-new temptation that today takes on a technical guise. Instead, let us choose the ‘way of Nehemiah,’” (10).

That’ll be enough for this article. The pope develops these ideas further throughout the rest of the document. These will be treated in detail in the coming months.†

Father Gregory Luger is the censor librorum (Latin for “censor of books”) for the Bismarck Diocese. He is an official expert appointed by Bishop Kagan to review a text. His job is to check if a written text or book has errors against Church faith or morals. He also serves the diocese as pastor of the parishes of St. Jerome in Mohall, St. James in Sherwood and St. John in Lansford.

Uniting parish families through prayer

Amanda Evinger
DCA Writer

When life throws you a curve ball, it is consoling to know that God “has your back” through the generous prayers of your brothers and sisters in Christ. When the going gets tough, the Catholic tough get going. Through thick and thin, it is rewarding to know that your parish family is speaking to the Most Merciful Heart of Our Lord on your behalf, and He is listening.

“It’s a wonderful opportunity to be aware of the needs or struggles of our fellow parishioners,” said Jan Monson, who has served as the prayer chain leader at St. Joseph Parish in Williston for over 10 years. “Sometimes there is not much else you can do to help in a given situation but to pray. And this is essentially the most important thing we can do for each other as members of a parish family, anyhow.”

By lifting up one another through the grace of prayer, parishioners strengthen each other. Each prayer you say for your fellow parishioner fills your soul with peace and brings each of you one step closer to Heaven. Ultimately, praying wholeheartedly for a brother and sister in Christ means performing a great, honorable work of mercy, one which will draw down a little—yet often hidden—shower of blessings.

“Praying for one another is such a very special gift we can give one another as members of our parish family,” Jan said. “This ministry is an amazing blessing to so many—both to those who are praying and to those they are praying for.”

The parish prayer chain is a powerful ministry because it encourages a supernatural outlook



on life, as well as all of the joys and struggles that come along with it. It reminds us that as Catholics, we never need to ride the storms of life alone; we always have the love of God to keep us afloat. In the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta, “How does love begin? By loving one another. But we cannot love one another unless we pray... the family that prays together, stays together.”

By praying for one another, parishioners are united in God’s love and peace.

“Praying for one another brings the parish family closer together and closer to God,” Jan said.

The unity that this ministry brings is unique to the Christian spirit, which surrenders all to the loving providence of God and turns to the Heart of Christ in all things.

“The Prayer Chain keeps our parish family connected with one another,” said Fr. Paul Eberle,

“The prayer chain reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and that what affects one of us affects the other.” — Fr. Eberle

Pastor of St. Joseph’s Parish in Williston. “When someone has a prayer intention, they can always count on others willing and happy to pray for them.”

Ministries like the prayer chain give members of a parish family a sense of serenity, knowing that all of their joys, sorrows and needs are confidently placed in God’s hands—through the prayerful hands of their fellow pilgrims in this “valley of tears.”

“The prayer chain reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, and that what affects one of us affects the other,” Fr. Eberle shared. “Knowing we can count on others provides a sense of wellbeing and security as the grace of God is at work through our prayers.”

When asked what he may say to those who are considering joining the Prayer Chain, Fr. Eberle says, “I would encourage others to be active in prayer chain ministries because others need our prayers and support, and some days, we especially need theirs. As the Gospel says, ‘Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.’”

For, according to their faith, let it be done to those who pray.

“The power of prayer is real,” Fr. Eberle remarked. “We know that God always hears and answers our prayers. Sometimes the answer is ‘yes’ and sometimes ‘no’ and sometimes ‘not yet,’ but we can rest assured that God always has our eternal salvation in mind when He answers our prayers.”

In addition to St. Joseph’s, many other parishes in our diocese have prayer ministries, such as Ascension Parish in Bismarck, which has a “prayer line.” Their prayer line, which is faithfully coordinated by Pauline Mueller, has touched many hearts and souls for a number of years, serving as a spiritual pillar for their parish family to lean on in times of need.

When asked what she most appreciates about the prayer line, Business Manager Beth Kathol said, “I appreciate how it helps people open up and become vulnerable. Our faith calls us to be vulnerable to each other. We also have to be vulnerable to get to know God.”

Beth is also profoundly grateful for the charity that it nurtures in their parish family.

“I really like how it makes our parish more supportive. It shows what a parish family is about, and that we are a community outside of the walls of our parish building. It helps us to be Christian witnesses and hold each other up in prayer. Our pastor Fr. Russ Kovash is on the prayer line as well, which is a testimony to the fact that he really cares about what is going on in the lives of his parishioners.”

As Christians, our hearts are meant to be woven together through prayer and worship. As St. Angela Merici once exhorted, “Be bound to one another by the bonds of charity, treating each other with respect, helping one another, bearing with each other in Christ Jesus: if you really try to live like this, there is no doubt that the Lord, our God, will be in your midst.”

Those who would like to join the prayer chain at St. Joseph’s Parish or submit an intention may call or text Jan Monson at 701-770-2655 or notify the parish office at 701-572-6731. To join the prayer line at Ascension Parish, call the parish office at 701-223-3606.

For both prayer ministry groups, intentions are considered highly confidential and will not be listed in the bulletin; prayer requests are welcome to be given anonymously. Submitted prayer intentions do not need to include the name(s) of those in need of prayer, just a brief description (e.g. please pray for an older gentleman with recent major health issues). †

Fall Dinners

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.

St. Hildegard fall dinner Sept. 13

St. Hildegard's Church in Menoken will host their annual fall dinner on Sunday, Sept 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The homemade dinner will feature traditional sausage, roast beef, pies, buns and all the trimmings. There will be fun for all ages including games, bingo, sale of home baked goods and fresh garden produce. Cost is \$17.50 for adults, \$8 for children ages 4 to 12 years; free for children ages 3 and under. Raffle tickets are available for \$10 each, or 3 for \$20, with over \$15,000 in prizes. Winners will be drawn at 4 p.m. St. Hildegard is located at 17200 Hwy 10, Menoken (10 miles east of Bismarck).

Fall festival in Linton Sept. 20

The Church of St. Anthony in Linton is hosting their fall festival on Sunday, Sept. 20 at the (Linton Civic Center (formerly Our Club Hall). The meal of fried chicken, ham, hamburger rice, mashed potatoes and all the trimmings, pies and desserts will be served from 4 to 7 p.m. West doors open at 3:45 p.m. There will be a silent auction throughout the evening, bingo in the church basement starting at 5:15 p.m. and raffle drawing at 7:30 p.m. at the civic center. Cost is \$15 for adults, \$8 for age 6-12 and free for ages 5 and under.

St. Wenceslaus fall festival Oct. 3

St. Wenceslaus Church in Dickinson hosts their feast day festival on Saturday, Oct 3. The meal of deep-fried turkey, roast beef, chicken noodle soup, mashed potatoes and gravy, side salads, rohlky, kolache and desserts will be served from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. There will be fun for all ages from 5-7 p.m. including bingo, raffle, silent auction, a St. Ann's booth and cake walk. Suggested donation is \$16 for adults; \$6 for children ages 6 to 9 years; free for children ages 5 and under. Meal delivery is available by calling Renae at 701-290-7518 or Gayle at 701-290-1813 (call by Sept. 30).

German dinner in Mandan Oct. 3

Christ the King Church in Mandan will be hosting their annual German dinner, handmade quilt auction and raffle drawing on Saturday, Oct. 3 in the school gymnasium. Enjoy a delicious homemade German meal of cheese buttons, kraut nip, country style sausage, coleslaw, German potato salad, and

ice cream. The meal will be served from 4:30 to 7 p.m. and the quilt auction will begin around 6:30 p.m. The quilt auction will also be available online. Watch the Christ the King Facebook page for more information and photos of the quilts. There will also be an online silent auction as well as a beer garden. The cost of the meal is \$15 for adults, \$8 for children and \$4 for a hotdog meal. Takeout is available. Raffle tickets are available to purchase for \$10; prizes include an ATV, guns and cash.

Dinner in Foxholm Oct. 4

All are invited to St. Mary's Church of Foxholm for a roast beef dinner on Sunday, Oct. 4. The meal will be served from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. There will also be a raffle.

St. Anthony fall dinner Oct. 4

The St. Anthony Church in St. Anthony will hold their fall dinner, fair and raffle on Sunday, Oct. 4. Following the 10:30 a.m. Mass, dinner is served in the church basement. The menu includes fried chicken, roast beef, potatoes, kuchen and trimmings. Cost is \$15 for adults and children aged 11 and older and free for children ages 10 and younger. Verein Hall activities include bingo, silent auction, paddle wheel and other games. Drawings for parish and Christian Mothers raffles will be at 4 p.m. St. Anthony Church is handicap accessible.

Sacred Heart in Wilton Oktoberfest Oct. 4

Sacred Heart in Wilton is hosting their annual fall dinner on Sunday, Oct. 4 at the Wilton City Hall. Homemade dinner of roast beef, mashed potatoes, corn, salads, buns and pies will be served from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Cost is \$14 for adults, \$5 for children ages 4 to 12 and free for children ages 3 and under. There will be kid's games, an auction and bingo.

St. Martin fall dinner Oct. 4

St. Martin in Hazen will be hosting their annual fall dinner on Sunday, Oct. 4 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. The menu includes roast beef, potatoes, corn, coleslaw, pickles, buns and pie/ice cream. Cost is \$12 for adults, \$10 for seniors age 65 and over, \$8 for children ages 6-12 and free for children ages 5 and under. A basket auction and two raffles will be offered.



Dinner in Richardton Oct. 4

The Church of St. Mary in Richardton will be hosting a parish dinner in their social center on Sunday, Oct. 4 after the 10 a.m. Mass from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. MT. On the menu is chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, creamed corn, trimmings and apple and pumpkin pies for dessert. Cost is \$15 for ages 12 and older and \$6 for children ages 6-12. There will be raffle, silent auction, food booth (with kuchen, strudel, noodles, etc.), cakewalk, bingo, Christian Mothers raffle and kid's games.

St. Katherine fall dinner Oct. 11

St. Katherine in Braddock will hold their annual fall festival on Sunday, Oct. 11 in the church basement from 4:30-7 p.m. The meal consists of chipped beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, hamburger rice, coleslaw, glazed carrots, relishes, homemade buns and pie. There will be raffle prizes and bingo at the Braddock Community Hall starting at 5:30 p.m. Cost is \$15 for adults, \$8 for age 6-12 and free for ages 5 and under.

Sacred Heart in Glen Ullin dinner Oct. 11

Sacred Heart in Glen Ullin is hosting a parish dinner on Sunday, Oct. 11 from 11:30 to 2 p.m. The menu features turkey and roast beef with all the trimmings. Free will offering will be taken. There will be bingo, Chinese auction and a general store with canned goods and baked items.

St. Theresa Oktoberfest dinner Oct. 18

St. Theresa's in Carson will host their annual Oktoberfest dinner at the Grant County Fair Building on Sunday, Oct. 18 starting at 10:30 a.m. MT. The dinner will include fleischkeuchle, strudel, German sausage, kraut nip, German potato salad, glorified rice, coleslaw, knoephla and borscht soups, kuchen and blachinda. Bingo starts at 1 p.m. MT and the raffle drawing will be at 2 p.m. MT. There will also be midway booth, children's activities and a silent auction. Cost is \$15 for adults, \$8 for children ages 4-12 and free for children ages 3 and younger. Raffle tickets will be available for \$2 each. Winners will be drawn at 2 p.m. Mass starts at 9:30 a.m. MT at St. Theresa Church at 204 2nd Ave NE in Carson.

St. John in Minot dinner Oct. 25

St. John the Apostle in Minot is hosting their fall dinner and bake sale on Sunday, Oct. 25 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the parish hall. The menu is roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, corn, coleslaw, rolls, special pumpkin dessert, coffee and milk. Gluten free options available on request. Cost is \$15 for adults and \$8 for children. Children under six years old eat for free. Take-out dinners will be available.

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SCHOOL TESTIMONIALS



"We are blessed in the Diocese of Bismarck! I am convinced one of those blessings is the Encounter School of Ministry. In working with the team, I have been completely convinced that God is working through them and their mission. **The School is leading people to a deep and real encounter with God that is life-changing.** In my own life as a priest, that encounter has led me to ask God even more what He has to say. Whether that is in the Confessional, preparing Homilies, or even in conversations with people, God has something to say and that is way more powerful than anything I have to say.

Fr. Ben Franchuk | Year 2 Student | Pastor of St. Charles, Bowman



"Before becoming an Encounter student, we had been pursuing an activity as a married couple that would help us grow closer as a couple, help us to grow in our faith, and connect us with positive, virtuous people. Encounter checked all of the boxes. It provided structured, intentional time for us to spend together each week in learning about our faith, learning new ways to pray together, and sharing in a common objective as a couple in ministering to others, which has enriched our relationship deeply. We have also encountered some amazing people, who have become friends and support in our lives. **The experience has enriched and deepened our individual relationship with Jesus as well as made us a stronger couple.**"

Jackie & Jess Friesz | Alumni | Spirit of Life, Mandan

AG ATTITUDES



James Odermann

Learning to pray is a harmony of life

School bells are ringing. The routines of summer are being replaced with a schedule to prepare for instruction and learning.

Sleeping-in is an envied memory. Watching bees pollinate plants and make honey is a foregone fascination. Hauling (or pumping) water in pastures to (or for) livestock is in the rear-view mirror.

For me, the completion of a summer is bittersweet. Summer visits of family and friends and opportunities to do ranch work with those school-age youngsters is a blessing.

There is an emptiness in the shop: no hammer banging on the anvil to see how much noise it will make; no wooden dowel placed in the vice to see how it can be crushed, no whirring of power tools (impact drivers, drills, ratchets, etc.) to see how they work.

And, perhaps, the most unusual thing is tools are in their place in the toolboxes. (And, if the tool is not where it is supposed to be, no blaming the grandkids!) The focus now is school.

The daily smiles and the "Hi, Grandpa" greetings are gone. These moments will return at least on the weekends when there is more time—and next summer, hopefully.

More time? I cannot make more time but I can prioritize how I relegate my time. I felt a sense of emptiness, a desire to stop the clock and extend the joys of summer vacation. (And, it was a vacation for me. I had companionship and help.)

Stopping the clock, however, would be selfish, robbing youngsters (everyone for that matter) of the opportunity to grow gifts given by God. In fact, truthfully the love of learning is an affair that should last a lifetime.

The love of learning is for everyone. Learning is the outgrowth of a curiosity that can immerse one in a profound respect for everything in the world. The desire—and commitment—to learn is the harmony to a life of opportunity.

So, as I reflected on the need for learning (education), I blushed at my selfish thought of having the chatter and camaraderie of young hands, faces and voices helping me instead of enjoying friends and learning in school. I learned so much just listening to the verbal interchange.

What sounded nonsensical to me was an exchange of ideological, simple things of life that are the founding blocks of a young person's spiritual and mental formation. I was reminded of the expression "you are what you consume."

The consumption includes all things my body (and my sisters' and brothers') need to grow the soul, body and mind. Raised voices, coarse words and selfish actions are not the foundational blocks for Catholic virtues: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance. These virtues are the benchmarks for life—augmenting the principles Jesus and His disciples lived. The application of these virtues in daily life can assist me in living a life filled with unconditional love exemplified through, with and in Jesus.

God calls me to exhibit patience, understanding, respect and gentleness, in all cases, for all ages, towards my sisters and brothers. Education for me is making sure I consciously choose to consume sustenance that will create outcomes of Christian love. One thing I need to learn to be better at is prayer.

No person is too old to learn to pray, to talk to God. I need to have an open mind and the fortitude to admit the lessons of life are not always easy. Each soul—whether young or old—is different and those talents mature at different speeds.

Obstacles in life occur yet the key to being truly Christ-like is to be patient and gentle throughout the learning process. I pray God is manifested in my thoughts, words and actions. This commitment requires humble acceptance of my role within the greater universe. I am called to a calm that Jesus displayed. I am challenged to listen, love and learn with justice.

With God's help, I pledge to do my best. Am I up to the task? Care to join me? †

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



BALANCING CHURCH & STATE

Pope's encyclical on safeguarding the human person in the era of artificial intelligence

David Tamisiea

When Cardinal Robert Prevost was elected the first American pope last year, he explained that he was taking the name “Leo” to signal his commitment to continue the work of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), whose landmark encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed urgent social problems created by the Industrial Revolution and initiated modern Catholic social teaching. Pope Leo XIV has similarly expressed his desire to address the challenges arising from today’s digital revolution, especially with the advent of artificial intelligence.

Artificial intelligence or “AI” is dramatically changing our world at an unprecedented rate. AI refers to the use of computer systems to simulate complex tasks normally performed by human beings like thinking, reasoning, understanding, learning, and problem-solving. AI can handle many tasks with exceptional speed and reliability, promising to free human beings from tedious and repetitive work.

Pope Leo XIV recently issued his first encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*. Throughout the encyclical, Leo returns to one central question: How do we safeguard the human person in the era of AI? The pope makes clear that AI is a technological tool that is neither good nor bad. Like all technology, however, it has tremendous potential for good or evil, depending upon how it is developed and how it is used.

Leo depicts the choice facing humanity today through two biblical images: the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9) and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Neh 2–6). The Tower of Babel represents a technological project rooted in pride, lust for power, and a false sense of self-sufficiency apart from God, ultimately resulting in confusion, disunity, and ruin. By contrast, when Nehemiah led the exiled Jews back to Israel to rebuild Jerusalem, it was founded upon prayer, sacrifice, coordinated efforts, and shared responsibility of all the people, ultimately resulting in the restoration of the city and a renewed nation.

Leo applies these two images to the development of AI: Humanity can either follow the “way of Babel,” using technology to pursue power, efficiency, and control while treating people as instruments, or it can choose the “way of Nehemiah,” working

together under God’s guidance to ensure that technological progress serves the human person and the common good.

Pope Leo emphasizes that Catholic social teaching offers an essential framework for responding to the challenge of AI. Catholic social teaching refers to a body of doctrine rooted in divine revelation and natural law that offers guidance for building a just, peaceful, and charitable society. It includes guiding principles for social life like the dignity of the human person, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, and social justice. Leo considers these principles so essential to the challenges of AI that he devotes an entire chapter to summarizing the history of Catholic social teaching and another to explaining the meaning of these principles.

Pope Leo sees two principles as especially relevant: the dignity of the human person and the common good. Human dignity refers to the inherent and immeasurable worth of every human being, created in God’s image and likeness and called to share in his divine life. Leo stresses that AI can never be allowed to violate human dignity or the human rights that flow from it. Leo warns against a technocratic mindset that focuses strictly on efficiency, in which “human beings are tempted to see themselves as a project to be optimized rather than as persons called to relationship and communion” (MH 112). In such an environment, human beings would be judged solely on their contributions and treated as things to be used instead of persons to be loved, so that vulnerable people like the sick, the disabled, or the elderly would be seen as expendable.

Pope Leo also emphasizes that AI must serve the common good. The common good is defined as “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily” (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 26). The power of AI cannot be allowed to remain concentrated in the hands of a few at the expense of the many but should be shared and support the full flourishing of all the people.

With these principles as a foundation, Leo focuses on four ways to safeguard the human person in the age of AI:

(1) *Rediscover Truth as a Common Good*: AI can be used to create distorted narratives, spread disinformation, manipulate images, and generate “fake news.” Leo, however, insists that the search for objective truth is essential to a healthy culture and vibrant democracy. Everyone, therefore, must recognize that truth is a common good necessary for human flourishing. Policymakers, educators, tech companies, and digital creators themselves share a responsibility to establish standards that promote honesty, accountability, and respect for the truth.

(2) *Protect the Dignity of Work*: Work has tremendous value for human beings. Our work contributes to society, improves and beautifies the world, engages us with others in cooperative relationships, and supports our families. In short, we need to work to be fully human and realize our potential. As Leo puts it, “work is not simply an instrument: it expresses and enhances the dignity of our lives” (MH 149). While AI and other technologies can relieve human beings of arduous, repetitive, and dangerous tasks, it should never entirely replace human workers in pursuit of efficiency and profit. According to Leo, both the public and private sector must establish prudent policies that ensure meaningful employment is available to all.

(3) *Safeguard Human Freedom from Dependence and Commercialization*: The digital revolution has resulted in new forms of slavery. Online platforms are used to exploit human vulnerabilities, foster addictions, collect massive amounts of personal data, and use algorithms to manipulate human

behavior for profit or influence. Criminal networks also use online platforms for human trafficking and other abuses. These practices commodify human beings and threaten human freedom. According to Leo, this calls for vigilance and a shared responsibility among governments, businesses, educational institutions, families and others to establish policies to ensure the new technology promotes authentic human development rather than exploitation.

(4) *Prevent AI from Replacing Human Decision-Making about War*: Leo warns that AI and other technologies detached from human decision-making could lower the threshold for entering armed conflicts and accelerate warfare around the world. As the pope notes, the digital revolution is already changing the nature of warfare through cyberattacks, online propaganda, and, increasingly, automation of strategic decisions. Leo urges world leaders not to relinquish moral decision-making about war to AI but to perform the difficult work of peacebuilding through diplomacy, negotiation, and dialogue, rather than too easily turning to armed conflict.

Pope Leo calls all of us, within our own spheres of influence, to become wise builders in this new era of AI. Relying upon God and guided by Catholic social teaching, we can help direct the digital revolution in a manner that safeguards human dignity and promotes the common good, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem instead of constructing the Tower of Babel. †

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.

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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Sept. 3	Seminarian Joseph Schweitzer	Sept. 18	Pope Leo XIV
Sept. 4	Deacon Kris Ringwall	Sept. 19	Seminarian Tyler Selzler
Sept. 5	Fr. Joshua Hill	Sept. 20	Fr. Jared Johnson
Sept. 6	Deacon Dennis Rohr	Sept. 21	Deacon Kenneth Schmit
Sept. 7	Lay Ministers	Sept. 22	Fr. Jerome Kautzman
Sept. 8	FOCUS Missionaries	Sept. 23	Deacon Ervin Schneider
Sept. 9	Deacon Gerald Rustand	Sept. 24	Sisters Ministering in Fort Yates
Sept. 10	Fr. Greg Hilzendeger	Sept. 25	Deacon Doyle Schulz
Sept. 11	Deacon Randy Schmidt	Sept. 26	Fr. Marv Klemmer
Sept. 12	Fr. Kregg Hochhalter	Sept. 27	Deacon Alvin Schwindt
Sept. 13	Fr. Stepan Ivanchyk	Sept. 28	Fr. Russ Kovash
Sept. 14	Seminarians and Religious in Formation	Sept. 29	Deacon Robert Stockert
Sept. 15	Deacon Aaron Schmit	Sept. 30	Fr. Bruce Krebs



MAKING SENSE OUT OF BIOETHICS

The ethics of genetically modifying human embryos

Fr. Tad Pacholczyk

A recent set of experiments at Columbia University seeking genetically to modify human embryos has rightly generated shock waves.

Led by geneticist Dieter Egli, the research relied on a newer technology for modifying genes known as “base editing.” In contrast to earlier methods like CRISPR that typically cut and replace longer stretches of DNA, base editing, as summarized in news reports, “allows scientists to replace individual genetic letters more carefully. In simple terms, it works less like cutting a page out of a book and more like correcting a typo.”

Attempting to make genetic modifications in a more efficient manner than had been previously achieved is precisely the kind of experiment that could and should have been carried out in animal embryos, not human embryos. The same basic biological information reported in these studies could readily have been obtained that way.

Moreover, the human embryos produced in these experiments were often intentionally sacrificed to obtain their embryonic stem cells, which were used for additional research. Creating humans for the purpose of destroying them is invariably unethical and should be illegal.

The experiments at Columbia University were unethical from the outset: researchers sought out eggs from women for the purpose of fertilizing those eggs to create embryonic humans in glassware, so they could then serve as raw materials for research and experimentation. Researchers also obtained embryos directly from “patients who decided that their treatment in the fertility center was complete and that the embryos were no longer needed for the purpose of reproduction,” to borrow the phrasing included in the original paper. In other words, parents were asked to hand over their “leftover” tiny children from fertility clinics so scientists could carry out experiments on them.

The fact that the Columbia University Human Embryonic and Human Pluripotent Stem Cell Research Committee as well as the University’s Institutional Review Board granted their approval for these procedures and experiments reminds us of the moral bankruptcy surrounding so many of these review entities at our renowned universities. Too often such committees and boards end up rubberstamping offensively unethical experiments if they can find even the thinnest shred of a rationale or justification for doing so.

This research quintessentially involves a basic moral mistake that is becoming ever more widely accepted in the biosciences: The youngest human beings, whether abandoned in fertility clinics or created *de novo* in petri dishes and test tubes, are treated not as ends, but as research fodder to help scientists achieve particular investigative goals.

Informed consent is always important when dealing with humans who are very vulnerable, particularly when they are being used as research subjects. The parents of the children created *in vitro* for these experiments could not give valid consent because ethical consent by definition focuses on improving health. It excludes directly causing their death or otherwise using them merely as a means to an end.

It is important to note that the Catholic Church is open, in principle, to gene editing to fix genetic abnormalities, as long as the risks are very low for the embryonic patient and heritable changes to the DNA of our species are not made. Such repair is simply a form of direct medical therapy for the afflicted individual. If such therapy on embryos were technically feasible, it should occur in the womb of the mother following a natural conception, not through procedures reliant on the immoral practice of IVF. The experiments reported by the Columbia University researchers were clearly nontherapeutic, as the plan always involved destroying the embryos.

Rev. Tadeusz Pacholczyk, Ph.D. earned his doctorate in neuroscience from Yale and did post-doctoral work at Harvard. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Senior Ethicist at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org and www.fathertad.com.

Human embryos are among the most vulnerable of God’s creatures. They constitute a unique class of individuals deserving of special protections. The complex science of genetic modification at this time still involves enormous risks to the embryo. Those who encourage such practices suggest that parents should have the right to make changes to their children to help them and future generations. The science, however, including the unintended effects, remains only dimly understood. For example, when the tp53 gene was genetically modified in mice to offer them protection from cancer, it unexpectedly also contributed to the mice’s premature aging.

Catholics need to be concerned about the prospects of genetically modifying future generations.

In the past, many Catholics seem to have missed the boat in recognizing and articulating the moral unacceptability of creating children in test tubes via IVF and now participate in such technologies at rates that don’t differ significantly from the general population.

As genetic enhancement of embryonic children becomes more commonplace, it is important to learn from that failure. Now is the time to remedy the widespread lack of understanding and serious reflection on the moral and ethical issues involved in genetic modification of human embryos, lest Catholics and others be swayed by the technological temptation to do further harm to the youngest and most vulnerable human beings. †

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

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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.

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