As tens of thousands of workers pour into Western North Dakota, it is a unique time to be a priest in the Bismarck Diocese’s oil patch region. Booms came and went in the ’50s and ’80s, but this time is different. It is bigger, expected to last for many years, and it coincided with a national economic slump.

For many of the oil refugees, North Dakota is their last hope to escape ruin. Often, that means arriving here with little money and no place to stay. Loneliness, temptations, language barriers, economic hardships, and adjusting to a new world, are all part of the needs our priests must address.

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Fr. Brian arrived in Watford City as pastor for Epiphany in the summer of 2012. He came after serving his first two years at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. Watford City has gone from 1,400 people to over 3,200 in the last six years. According to Fr. Brian, Epiphany’s congregation has grown 50 percent since he arrived for an average of around 250 Mass goers each Sunday.

“But, around 50 faces in the pews change from week to week,” he said. “We don’t know from weekend to weekend who has left and gone home, who just didn’t come to Mass, or whose job has moved.”

One big challenge, he said, is filling in the gaps among so much transience. “A lot of people are trying to bring order to their lives but in some sense, the reason they are here is because their life was already chaotic.” He said that this often means children have not been baptized or received the sacraments or parents are not in valid Catholic marriages.

His work in Watford City has given him a new perspective. “I’ve learned what intercessory prayer really is,” Fr. Brian said. “I am responsible for everyone within my boundaries.” He explained that in spite of a generally positive attitude in Watford City there is a lot of pain too. “There is the local 70-year old guy and his wife who are suffering that their town is not their town and never will be again; the guy who is there without his family and was not as faithful as he should have been; the isolation of a man camp room; trying to keep a marriage alive; loneliness and suffering from moving to a new community, or living cooped up in a camper...so many challenges.”

Ministry in the oil patch

Priests reflect on pastoring in boomtowns of the west

By Patti Armstrong

As tens of thousands of workers pour into Western North Dakota, it is a unique time to be a priest in the Bismarck Diocese’s oil patch region. Booms came and went in the ’50s and ’80s, but this time is different. It is bigger, expected to last for many years, and it coincided with a national economic slump.

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Continued on Page 5
Good Friday reflection

FROM THE BISHOP

Bishop David D. Kagan

With Holy Week and the Paschal Triduum upon us and, as I have done in past years, I offer this beautiful reflection on Good Friday. As we believe and know as Roman Catholics, Jesus is the beloved Son of God Who was obedient to His Father’s will that all human beings should be redeemed by His death on the cross and His glorious Resurrection on the third day. May each and every one of you receive the abundant blessings and graces of this Easter Sunday! Let us continue to pray for each other. Let us thank God, daily, for the gift of our redemption. Let us show our gratitude by lives lived in imitation of Christ Jesus, Son of God and Savior.

GOOD FRIDAY

It is Good Friday. The pain-racked body of the Savior has journeyed its last. The Redemption has been accomplished, the first to hear the joyous tidings are the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Law who patiently wait for the opening of heaven’s gates. Among them is St. Joseph. Is it not a scene that prompts meditation? The ancient greyness shifted suddenly and thinned like mist upon the moors before a wind. An old, old prophet lifted a shining face and said: “He will be coming soon. The Son of God is dead, He died this afternoon.” A murmurous excitement stirred all souls. They wondered if they dreamed—save one old man who seemed not even to have heard. And Moses, standing, hushed them all to ask if any had a welcome song prepared, if not, would David take the task?

And if they cared not could the three young children sing the Benedictine, the canticle of praise they made when God kept them from perishing in the fiery blaze? A breath of spring surprised them, stilling Moses’ words. No one could speak, remembering the first fresh flowers, the little singing birds. Still others thought of fields new-plowed or apple trees all blossom-bowed. Or some, the way a dried bed fills with water laughing down green hills. The fisher folk dreamed of the foam on the first fresh flowers, the little blossom-bowed. Or some, the way a dried bed fills with water laughing down green hills. The fisher folk dreamed of the foam on bright blue seas. The one old man who had not stirred remembered home. And there He was, splendid as the morning sun and fair, as only God is fair! And they, confused with joy, knelt to adore, seeing that He wore five crimson stars He never had before. No canticle at all was sung. None toned a psalm or raised a greeting song. A silent man alone of all that throng found tongue—not any other. Close to His Heart when the embrace was done, Joseph said, “How is Your Mother, how is Your Mother, Son?”

BISHOP IN ACTION

Bishop Kagan greeted residents and their family members at the Mass and pastoral visit to Sanford Health Marillac Manor, a senior housing facility founded by the Benedictine Sisters, in Bismarck.

Holy Father’s Prayer Intentions for April:

- Universal: Creation
  That people may learn to respect creation and care for it as a gift of God.
- Evangelization: Persecuted Christians
  That persecuted Christians may feel the consoling presence of the Risen Lord and the solidarity of all the Church.

Dakota Catholic Action

Reporting on Catholic action in western ND since 1941

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Get news, photos, videos and more from around the diocese.

BISHOP’S SCHEDULE

April 1 • Communal Penance Service, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 7 p.m.
April 2 • Mass of the Lord’s Supper, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
April 3 • Good Friday service, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 5:30 p.m.
April 4 • Easter Vigil Mass, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 7 p.m.
April 10 • Confirmation at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 7 p.m.
April 12 • Confirmation for Churches of St. Mary, Richardton, St. Stephen, Stark County, and St. Thomas, Gladstone, at Ricketts, 10 a.m. MDT
April 12-13 • Workshop for new priests, Radisson, Bismarck
April 15-16 • Spring Clergy Conference, Radisson, Bismarck
April 17 • Knights of Columbus Workshop for Priests with Cardinal McCarrick, Baymont Inn, Mandan
April 17-18 • Knights of Columbus Annual Convention, Baymont Inn, Mandan
April 19 • Confirmation for the Churches of St. Mary, Fosselman, St. Philomena, Glenburn, and St. Ann, Berthold, at Fosselman, 10:30 a.m. • Mass and Retreat for newly received Catholics, Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Bismarck, 3 p.m.
April 21 • Real Presence Radio interviews, 9 a.m.
April 24 • Confirmation at the Church of the Ascension, Bismarck, 7 p.m.
April 25 • Conference for the Year for Consecrated Life, University of Mary, Bismarck
April 26 • Confirmation for the Churches of St. Joseph, Bismarck, and St. Martin, Hazen, at Bismarck, 10 a.m.
April 27 • Confirmation at the Church of St. Joseph, Hazen, 7 p.m.
April 29 • Confirmation for the Churches of St. John the Baptist, Beach, and St. Mary, Golva, at Beach, 7 p.m. MDT

APRIL 2015
Doing what Jesus asked of us

By Sonia Mullally

DCA Editor

The purpose of St. Vincent de Paul Society is to fulfill the two great commandments—love of God and love of neighbor.

A local conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Bismarck was formed one year ago at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck. Deacon Tony Ternes said the motivation is simply, “doing what Jesus asked us of.”

“Jesus asks us to feed the hungry, shelter and clothe those without,” Deacon Ternes said. “We are called to do this. We have to do it. This is all part of the corporal works of mercy.”

The conference of St. Vincent de Paul in Bismarck formed by a group of volunteers who were called by this mission to serve as Jesus served. Vincentians, as they are known, are trained to help individuals in need, meeting physical and material needs, offering prayers and conducting home visits.

Member and vice president, Ted Maher, said because of memories of her parents’ involvement in a local chapter many years ago and calling she felt to help those in need. “We basically follow the guidelines of the national society to end poverty through systemic change,” Maher explained.

“Locally, we focus on being hands on to those in need, growing spiritually as a group and seeing all people equally.”

Vincentians also advocate for the poor, through referrals to existing community agencies. “We don’t set out to duplicate what’s already available. If there is a particular need better served by a local shelter, for instance, we would refer them,” Deacon Ternes said. “It’s more about filling the gaps. Let’s say someone is living in a shelter and is being held back by not having enough money for a deposit on an apartment. We could provide that to get them toward that next step.”

Maher added, “We are not social services. Our community already has a wonderful network of shelters, thrift stores and social programs. We refer people to resources they may not be aware of, offer financial support for an immediate need or crisis and meet those critical needs first.”

A unique feature of the society is the person-to-person involvement achieved through home visits, which are done in pairs. Maher said these home visits prove to be very uplifting for both the volunteers and those in need. “We seek to provide for their needs as well as assistance through prayer and show of support,” she said.

Requests range from just about anything relating to short-term needs for food, shelter and clothing. Those in need are sometimes seeking money for gas, rent, utilities, car repairs or something as simple as a dress they couldn’t afford for their daughter’s First Communion. The local conference also has a donated storage unit where they store gently used furniture given to the group. Most recently some of the furniture was given to an individual who was able to move into an apartment after being homeless and didn’t have furniture. “There are also generous contributing members who donate and maintain inventory of new items such as clothing, towels, bedding, household items, toys and such that can be distributed as needed.”

“It could be anything from what you might characterize as a bump in the road to a serious setback,” explained Maher. “Sometimes it’s a situation that is kind of like a job. Many see them suffering from addiction, mental illness or just plain poor judgment. But we are not here to judge. We are here to help. And sometimes that help comes through a group effort partnering with other agencies in the community."

“We are in each situation based on the individual circumstances,” added Deacon Ternes. “We function on generous donations from members of our parish or the public. We are also called to be good stewards of those donations. It’s something we take very seriously.”

Donations and volunteers needed

Donations have been coming in, but more are always welcome. “Our budget is based entirely on donations,” Maher said. “We work with local thrift stores to arrange for vouchers for free clothing and household items. Referrals are also directed to local soup kitchens, food pantries and services for reduced price medications and healthcare. Another wonderful partner has been Sister Kathleen Atkinson and the Ministry on the Margins program.”

A month to take part in prayer and training sessions. There is no membership fee and all members’ time is on the Parish level basis. There are also many opportunities to volunteer on special projects or contribute financially. Those wishing to make a financial contribution to the local conference may do so through the Website at www.svdpbismarck.org. Donations can also be directed to Deacon Ternes at the Cathedral parish. There are also two church collections during the year, one in the spring and one in the fall, designated for the St. Vincent de Paul Society. To learn more about the local conference at


Those with a request for a particular need can call 701-204-7111 or email svdp@svdpbismarck.org to set up a meeting in the Bismarck/Mandan area. Private meetings to preserve the privacy of those they help are set up to discuss individual needs and available resources.

Confidentiality is always honored.

“The local conference has taken on a life of its own through volunteer efforts,” Deacon Ternes said. “It’s still developing its unique identity and in the process doing some very good things for those in need. Other parishes in the diocese are welcome to start their own conference. It’s the type of thing that will run with the right people taking the reigns.”

The history of St. Vincent de Paul Society

The largest lay Catholic organization in the world, the St. Vincent de Paul Society is operating in every country and is best known for its thrift stores and food pantries, and for the personal visits of its members to the homes of the poor and needy. Established in France in 1833 by a college student named Frederic Ozanam, the Society began its existence in the United States in 1845 in St. Louis.

The Society’s mission, inspired by Gospel values, leads women and men to join together to grow spiritually by offering person-to-person service to those who are needy and suffering, in the tradition of its founder, Blessed Frederic Ozanam, and patron, St. Vincent de Paul. As a reflection of the whole family of God, their spirit of poverty, humility and sharing united members in an international society of charity, which is nourished by prayer and reflection, mutually supportive gatherings and adherence to a basic rule to serve as Jesus served. For more information, go to www.svdpusa.org.

Rite of Election

On the first Sunday of Lent Bishop Kagan met with catechumens who have formally expressed their intention of joining the Catholic Church. This is a part of the process for welcoming those who have not yet been baptized into the full communion of the Church. The ceremony was at Cathedral of the Holy Spirit in Bismarck.

Photo by Deacon Joe Krupinsky
is overwhelming at our office—another couple of weeks before three weeks to find a job and have a place to live. It can take come to get a job, but they don't challenge is homelessness. People Fr. Kovash said that their biggest days, we might have as many as 45, five years ago. Prior to that, he worked for 10 years in the insurance and financial planning fields. Every day, after Mass, he would ask God, "What do you want to do with my life?" He said he does not ask that question anymore. "It's crystal clear that this is what God has asked me to do," he said. "And it is a beautiful work, because it's easy to see Jesus in the people we help. Even if my tank is empty at the end of the day, there is great peace; it's a great job."

Part of the big influx has included a large Hispanic population. So many, in fact, that the Catholic Extension Society identified Williston as mission territory. They provided a five-year grant for three Sisters of Mary Immaculate of Guadalupe from Mexico to help serve the Catholics there that speak little or no English; to evangelize, teach religious education, and help families to prepare for the sacraments. "We will keep the sacraments. "We will keep the sacraments."

Fr. Kovash says he has seen is the increase in the Hispanic population. "It's funny, but I especially noticed it in the vegetable section at the grocery store. People would pull me over and ask, 'Hey, are you a Catholic priest? someone might say 'hola' at the checkout counter."

"One thing that I've seen among the Hispanics is a basic sense of the need for the sacraments. Even if they have been away, there is an appreciation for the sacraments so we often have to help prepare them to catch them up." St. Joseph's now has Mass in Spanish twice a month. People from the surrounding communities will also come. "We are not going to expand that though," he explained. "We don't want to be separate but to be one big community and attend Mass together."

Ministry in the oil field

Fr. Kovash said. "We are filling in the nooks and crannies for the abundant needs out there."

Fr. Kovash was ordained at the age of 43, five years ago. Prior to that, he worked for 10 years in the insurance and financial planning fields. Every day, after Mass, he would ask God, "What do you want to do with my life?" He said he does not ask that question anymore. "It's crystal clear that this is what God has asked me to do," he said. "And it is a beautiful work, because it's easy to see Jesus in the people we help. Even if my tank is empty at the end of the day, there is great peace; it's a great job."

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Continued from Page 1

The situation demands flexibility. "I meet with people for confession when they call because schedules are all over the place," he said. "I also spend a lot of time with guys here on their own that need to talk with someone." Fr. Brian said he tries to make himself present by being involved in the community and invites parishioners to encourage friends and co-workers to come to Mass. In spite of stresses and hardships, Fr. Brian pointed out that there is a lot of a good news. "People came because they had to," he said, "but many love the feel of this community and plan on staying." The oil boom also presents opportunities to live the Catholic faith, according to him. "For instance, we have one guy helping people to winterize their RV's when they get here and didn't realize how cold it would be."

The Catholic message, he explained, is that Jesus is always looking to do something good. "We need to be asking what good things does Jesus want us to do with this? He put the oil into the ground and he knew we were going to find it, so what does he want us to do with it?"

Fr. Russ Kovash arrived as pastor at St. Joseph in Williston also in the summer of 2012. He serves with associates Fr. Joseph Ewing, and Fr. Biju Antony, who is originally from India. The city leads the way as the fastest-growing "micropolitan" area according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Population jumped from 13,014 in 2009 to 29,595 by 2014 and perhaps around 50,000 when temporary workers are included. "We have a school and church to run and a lot more going on here," Fr. Kovash said. "Some days, we might have as many as 20 people come in. Even person needs time for us to find out what they need." But, he said his staff is "phenomenal" so they handle it well.

In spite of the economic growth, Fr. Kovash said that their biggest challenge is homelessness. People come to get a job, but they don't have a place to live. It can take three weeks to find a job and another couple of weeks before a paycheck comes. "Some days it is overwhelming at our office—person after person coming to us to crying," Fr. Kovash said.

Although there are many high-paying jobs in Williston, rents are also very high. A one-bedroom apartment averages $82, 000 a month, according to Apartment Guide, an online site for apartment searches. Four churches pick up the slack that Human Services does not cover. "They don't buy bus tickets or home or buy a water pump for someone's car because he doesn't get paid for 10 more days."
What might look a lot like playtime is actually the blossoming of knowledge and love of Jesus right before your eyes. The hands-on lessons, which might resemble toys to the unknowing observer, allow the children to relate to Jesus in a new way. Children enrolled in religious education classes are often observers. We pour the information into the children and send them forth hoping that something “sinks in” on their journey to understanding and establishing a relationship with God. The youth faith formation program at Corpus Christi in Bismarck offers children a different way to foster the growth of that relationship through a program called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

The scenarios described above allow the child to direct his or her own learning process. The catechist’s role is to prepare the environment, and to give selected presentations from scripture and liturgy and stand back and observe the child’s response. “The children discover, in their own way, that they are the sheep in God’s flock,” explains Mariah Conner, director of preschool and elementary faith formation. “God and child are already in a relationship. Our job as catechists is to build on that and let them realize that Jesus was a real person, in a real city, in a real time and place.”

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the religious formation of children 3-12 years of age. It originated in 1954 in Rome by Sophia Cavalletti, and was inspired by the principles of Maria Montessori. The Catechesis is based on the conviction that given the right tools and materials, the children are able to develop and nurture their relationship with God on their terms.

Four years ago when Conner was teaching in the pre-school program at Corpus Christi, the opportunity was presented to travel to Denver to train for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. “I immediately fell in love with the program. As the children discover stories of the Bible, for instance, they pull that knowledge into their world and interpret and sort it out.” The place of learning is referred to as the atrium. Montessori coined this term recalling the part of the Early Christian church building where catechumens would gather in preparation to join the church. The website for Corpus Christi describes this as a special space as the meeting ground of two mysteries: the mystery of God and the mystery of the child. The atrium resembles a school classroom with different stations for learning and reflection. Conner explains that each atrium is specially designed with child-sized furniture including a prayer table for gathering, a model altar, as well as materials to deepen their familiarity with the parables and the Mass itself.

After being presented with new material in a small group, children are able to move about the room engaging in hands-on independent learning. The room is quiet for the most part so the children have a chance to absorb the information and engage their minds. Instructors are on hand to assist whenever the children request it.

The program is taught all over the world; and the staff at Corpus Christi Church was the first to be trained and implement the program in the diocese. Typically, the training involves travel, but in order to share the program locally, they are bringing trainers to Bismarck beginning May 22. Those interested will participate in five weekends throughout the year to complete level one certification.

Anyone interested in the training sessions or helping out with the program can contact Conner at 701-255-3104 or mariah.conner@corpuschristibismarck.com.
A concrete sign of love
Join the celebration of consecrated life on April 25

Each of us is called to a deep friendship with God. The consecrated life is a reminder of the ultimate vocation of every person: union with God in love. This idea is the central theme of Sister Anna Laura Karp’s keynote address at the conference to celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life on April 25.

The special event will be held at McDowell Activity Center on the University of Mary campus south of Bismarck. Sponsored by the diocese, Annunciation Monastery, Sacred Heart Monastery and Assumption Abbey, the conference is free and open to everyone. The schedule will feature two keynote speakers and six breakout sessions with three in the morning and three in the afternoon. Mass, with Bishop Kowalke, will be celebrated at the close of the day.

The breakout sessions will be a three-person panel consisting of a religious sister or priest, and layperson. Topics are: poverty and property; chastity and relationships of closeness and authority; prayer and work; stewardship and social justice; and vocation.

Keynote speakers
Sister Anna Laura Karp, O.P., a member of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia Congregation of Nashville, Tenn., will be the day’s first speaker at 9 a.m.

Sister Anna Laura says consecrated persons serve as a walking billboard for God’s love in the world, saying by their very lives: “God is real. His love is concrete in concrete ways,” she says. “The foundation of my vocation is prayer and as a religious sister, I am entrusted with praying for the whole world,” she notes. “This is an awesome gift and gives meaning to everything I do: nothing is meaningless, no matter how small, because in union with Christ everything is offered up to the Father for the salvation of others.”

The afternoon keynote speaker, Fr. Roger Landry who is a priest of the Diocese of Fall River, Mass., will begin at 1 p.m. He says he intends to focus on the ten ways every Catholic can spiritually profit from this year of celebration of consecrated life.

“Every ecclesiastical holy year is a time for us to focus on a specific aspect of our faith—like faith, the priesthood, St. Paul, the Eucharist, the Holy Rosary or Mary—that sometimes we can take for granted,” Fr. Landry explains. “In addition to thanking God for the gift of religious sisters, brothers and priests, consecrated virgins, hermits and widows, and members of secular institutes or societies of apostolic life, this special year is a chance for all of us to learn from those living the consecrated life how to take our baptismal consecration more seriously and learn from it.”

Why are the nuns not at the Chrism Mass?

By Mother Mary Baptist Carmelites in Hague, N.D.

The Chrism Mass is a beautiful liturgy, celebrated in the Cathedral of the Holy Spirit every year before the Sacred Triduum of Holy Week. Last year, we were privileged to participate in it, having been expressly invited by Bishop Kowalke. We had only arrived in the diocese a month earlier and had not yet been enclosed in our monastery according to the customary enclosure ceremony, we were fortunate to be able to unite with all the other religious and lay faithful in support of the priests as they renewed their promises. This was a very edifying experience for us.

One and a half weeks later, we were meeting all those who came to our open house and we explained to them a little bit about our manner of life. After the bishop celebrated Mass for us and blessed the monastery on April 26, he locked the enclosure door of the monastery and returned to us the key through the turn. This simple ceremony marked the beginning of our life of enclosure here in the monastery. The word Carmel actually means enclosed garden. The parts of the house and the outside grounds reserved exclusively for the nuns are called the cloister.

There are varying ways and degrees of living enclosure in the Church, which are particular to each cloistered order. The Discalced Carmelites, founded by our Holy Mother St. Teresa of Avila in 1562, observe one of the strictest forms of enclosure. This is what we are. Discalced means that we don’t wear shoes. We wear rope sandals, which are traditionally considered the footwear of the poor. St. Teresa had experienced a relaxed manner of observing enclosure in the convent where she began her religious life. She was frequently asked to entertain visitors in the parlor and was many times called to live in the houses of rich benefactors of the monastery. Some of the nuns had rich relatives and were able to live comfortably, but others in the same monastery had no food at all and had to survive on what the more capable nuns were able to obtain by begging. When Our Holy Mother began her reform, she was convinced that if she and her nuns were faithful to living their vocation of prayer, that because of, and not in spite of, their rigorous enclosure, God would be faithful and provide for their needs.

You see, the enclosure is a help to recollection and prayer. It is a help to keeping mind and heart focused on the Lord. It is a way of creating a desert experience so that the soul can leave more quickly the finite things of earth to be united to God in an intimate and loving encounter. “Thus says the Lord, I will allure her, I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart...” (Hosea 2:16) This encounter with God, in turn, bears fruit for the Church and for the world.

Our particular mission in the Church as contemplative Carmelites requires that we give our undivided attention to God alone, but that doesn’t mean that we are strangers to the needs of the Church and the people of the world. Like our divine model and teacher, Jesus Christ, we are desirous of the salvation of all mankind. Yet, it is our mission to imitate Him in His hidden life, in His life of deep prayer and intimacy with His Father, when He would spend whole nights in prayer or away from the crowds in the mountains and deserted places.

So, last year, as we witnessed the priests renewing their promises and the union in worship of all the people of God at the Chrism Mass, we were encouraged to live our own vocation in the Church with even more dedication and love. That is why we were not a visible part of the celebration. By being true and dedicated to our particular charism in the Church, we strive to obtain those graces that will support and sustain our vocation, prayer, religious and lay charitable in their vocation.

Mother is prioress of the cloistered Discalced Carmelites nuns who live a life of enclosure in their monastery near Hague, N.D. She explains that even through they are absent from diocesan events, their time is dedicated to prayer and sacrifice within their life of solitude.
LIVING A UNIQUE CALLING

By Sister Gerard Wald, OSB, Annunciation Monastery

Editor’s Note: In honor of the Year of Consecrated Life, this is the second in a series of personal perspectives from those living this holy life.

In 2013, Pope Francis declared that a Year of Consecrated Life (YCL) be celebrated throughout the world. YCL began on the first Sunday of Advent, November 30, 2014 and will close on the World Day of Consecrated Life, February 2, 2016.

In his Apostolic Letter to all consecrated men and women, Pope Francis wants religious institutes to look at the past with gratitude. Recounting our history is essential for preserving our identity, for strengthening our call, and fostering a sense of belonging to the Church and its ministries. This year calls consecrated persons to live the present with passion, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and to implement even more fully the essential aspects of consecrated life.

Consecrated men and women are called to “wake up the world.” Religious have a history of being prophets of the time as they witness to the Gospel of Jesus lived. They continue to be prophetic as they discern how God is calling them to explore new ways to bring the gospel message of hope to the world.

The consecrated life is a unique calling that comes from God and is lived out in a community to which a person is called. In God’s mysterious way he called me to live as a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery. As a young girl and teenager I felt a deep tug in my heart to become a Sister. I felt a call to prayer and to the community, the Liturgy of the Hours, with a community. As Benedictines our prayer life is the essential element of our vocation. Our prayer intentions include the needs of the world, the church, national and local needs. Many prayer needs come to us through our website and from local people making a special request.

Annunciation Monastery became my home in 1962. My formation as a Benedictine Sister provided me with the foundation needed to live as a Benedictine Sister, and to serve in our sponsored ministries as a nurse at St. Alexius, and as an educator and administrator at the University of Mary. Being a part of our religious communities allowed me to be part of the ministries of the church where all are received and served as Christ. The greatest blessing about ministering in Catholic-sponsored institutions is the freedom to express one’s faith, and pray with and for each other in the workplace. It is a gift to be able to freely express what one believes.

St. Benedict, our founder, wrote a short rule for Benedictines to follow. Some of the primary values found in the rule are prayer, respect, hospitality, moderation, silence, beauty, and stewardship. These values serve as the guiding principles for our life at the monastery, and have universal applications. So choose that we serve in health care, education, social services and pastoral care.

There is an urgent need in today’s world for men and women living the vocation of consecrated life, called to be “Benedictines.” Living the Gospel-based rule of St. Benedict, we bring to the world the community life enriched with prayer and hospitality that gives hope to those seeking to follow Christ’s example, knowledge and guidance.

Our current cultural context calls for the incarnation of Christ within the families and communities of the world that witness to the joy and fruitfulness of gospel living.

Pope Francis in his message to Consecrated persons at the prayer vigil of the opening of the Year of Consecrated Life said: My first words, on this occasion, are of gratitude to the Lord for the precious gift of consecrated life to the Church and to the world. May this Year of Consecrated Life be an occasion for all men and women of the People of God to thank the Lord, from whom every good gift and of the fruitfulness of gospel living. The Church, the world, and the world. May this be an intense time to celebrate with the whole Church the gift of your vocation and to revive your prophetic mission. I repeat to you today what I have said at other times: Awake the world! Awake the world! Put Christ at the center of your existence. The essential norm of your life is to follow Christ as taught at the Beatitudes.

The Sisters of Annunciation Monastery invite the people of the Diocese of Bismarck to thank God for all the religious men and women that have and are still serving the Church in this Diocese. We invite you and your family to visit Annunciation Monastery. Our Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy is always celebrated at 9 a.m. in the Monastery Chapel.

We ask your prayers that God will bless our religious communities with hope that young women and men will continue to respond to God’s call to live this unique calling: the consecrated life.

Meeting Pope Francis

Fr. Joshua Ehi recently had the opportunity to meet Pope Francis in Rome. He was part of an event where the Pope addressed the Young Catholic Movement (YMCA) for the inauguration of the judicial year in late January. Fr. Ehi is currently in Rome studying Canon Law and is expected to complete his studies there in June.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Marriage encounter weekends

The next Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekends are April 17-19 in Frontenac, Minn.; May 1-3 and July 17-19 in Buffalo, Minn.; September 11-13 in Irvine, S.D.; and all over the world. Early registration is highly recommended. For more information visit the website at: wwwwyw.org or contact Rob and Angie at applications@wyw.org or 701-347-1998.

Benefit supper is April 18

A spaghetti supper to benefit and long-time parishioner of the Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Andy Eberle, who has been unable to work since November 2014. Andy was diagnosed with stage 3 cancer - transitional cell cancer of the renal pelvis and urethra. Due to his severe pain and need for pain medication, Andy has been unable to work since November 2014.

Cardinal McCarrick to visit April 16-19

Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, will celebrate Sunday Mass at St. Joseph’s Church in Bismarck. Silent auction will be held 3-7 p.m. Supper is from 4-7 p.m.

The Diocese of Bismarck 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: Dale Eberle, Chancellor, Diocese of Bismarck, PO Box 1575, Bismarck, ND 58502-1575.

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 Pastoral Conduct is defined for the Diocese of Bismarck and it provides a foundation for implementing effective and enforceable standards for all personnel. View the Code of Pastoral Conduct at http://www.bismarckdiocese.com.
Newcomers share their experiences in the oil patch region

By Patti Armstrong

While newcomers seeking a fresh start have poured into North Dakota from around the world, it is often the dark side of the oil patch that is the backdrop surrounding the oil fields that makes headlines. Yet many newcomers are bringing a light of their own to the region, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ in and around the oil fields. Here are a few who shared their stories for the DCA.

Anthony Loyola

My first week as a co-worker tried to buy me a beer for $27,000, but I was soon treated like never before.

Anthony became the butt of jokes when he turned down the offer for the prostitute. He sought guidance from his pastor, Fr. Brian Streifel around 18 months ago in Tucson, Arizona.

Shawn and Stephanie Ray and family

Shawn grew up in several Protestant churches but then learned about Catholicism, he embraced it and is doing work to praying the rosary. His faith, he said, has helped him to adjust to a very difficult life than the one he left behind. He works now as a plant operator for an oil company. “It was overwhelming at first, but humbled down and learned,” Shawn explained. “The only way I could have gone through this was by praying. The Lord has been a friend of mine. Brian has taken us through a lot of spiritual desolations, being away from anything we’ve ever known.”

Shawn explained that he has learned to give it all to God since other avenues were closed off. “We came through hard times, but God has blessed us,” he said. “We have five acres, scenery and butterflies behind us, wonderful neighbors and our faith has been strengthened.”

The Rays are in Watford City because God has led them there, according to Shawn. “I share Mass here and I let people know. I tell my story with others, even at work,” he said. “God has blessed us richly and I share that unashamedly.”

Sometimes, people share they also feel blessed by God and it opens an avenue to share and grow in our faith.”

Ricardo Ortiz

When his parents and four siblings needed financial help in Mexico, Ricardo Ortiz took a break from his semiconductor job for three years, and before that, two years in Mexico City. His goal in coming to Williston was to make money so he could stay and he is making money to help his family. He met Casimiro Pal banc a few years ago during a reconciliation service in Tucson. “At that time where he goes in the winter,” Ricardo said.

“ar the church, the Mass is a dinner with music and many of the city leaders including the mayor and people of other faiths joined in the festivities, which lasted until midnight. “It was the first time in the diocese that we celebrated the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.”

Ricardo said, “We had a First Communion last year, there had some weddings, and we hope in the near future we can invite Bishop Kagan to a Spanish Mass,” he stated.

He invited me to Dickinson to work and we’ve been keeping in touch. Fr. Palbank said that he helps Fr. Keith Streifel develop a Mexican ministry.”

“Somewhere in this job, my faith may be on the council," he said.
Camp ReCreation transforms lives

Director reflects on the camp’s mission

By Jackie Lausch

Camp Director

After our long and cold winters, warmer days are met with kids squirming on the edge of their seats impatiently waiting for summer break to begin. For a lot of kids, summer means weeks of bike riding, swimming, fishing, baseball, and many other recreation activities.

As a young girl, I loved all those things just as much as my peers, but there was one thing I looked forward to more. There was one event that I waited for each year with great anticipation. I knew I would see many friends that I missed over the past year and always looked forward to meeting more. It was the only place I remember seeing so much beauty in so many people, and such absolute unconditional acceptance and love. It took place in a small, typically uneventful and quiet little town. But for two weeks each summer we filled the days with prayer, laughter, singing, learning, teaching and love.

This wonderful event was Camp ReCreation. Camp ReCreation is a summer camp for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and takes place in two separate 4-day sessions each June in Richardton. The first time I attended, I did not know what to expect. I was anxious, nervous, scared, and a little homesick. Those feelings were short-lived because almost immediately the other volunteer counselors were introducing themselves. We would soon be called together to gain a snapshot of what we could expect in the days to come. As a counselor, I learned I would be paired with a camper who would arrive the next day. Our most important responsibility was to ensure the campers had the best time possible. Suddenly, I was able to imagine what it was like to feel those nervous feelings as I tried to imagine what was ahead.

The first day the real journey would begin and we would be joined by campers from all different places with each their own individual story and background. When my camper arrived, I extended my hand to shake hers, but was greeted with a breathtaking embrace instead. She didn’t even know my name, but she had been to camp before and was excited to meet me. She knew better than I that we would become wonderful friends in the next few days. I would love her as much as she already loved me. The days came and went and were filled with more smiles and hugs than I had ever gotten in such a short time. That was 21 summers ago and I have not missed a week of camp since. In my first years as a counselor, I did not understand or anticipate the impact that camp had on me from the very beginning. We face many junctions in our life journey, and this was the first in mine. I didn’t know it at the time, but camp has shaped who I am and directed me in my career choices, as it has for many.

I enjoy camp now from a different view, as a director. My joy now comes from watching youth come their first time, just as I did with those same first day jitters and leave with a new love in their hearts that they do not yet fully understand. My excitement comes from seeing the same campers, I came to love as a counselor, walk through those doors with the same energy that they have come with each year as if it was their first year, barely able to wait for the activities to begin. We become a family and in the blink of an eye, each year our family expands, then just as quickly disperses until the next time.

Saying goodbye is where my tears came from all those years ago and where they still come from today. We shed tears as we depart until another whole year goes by and our camp family comes together again. We feel sadness as we each realize we are about to return to our realities where the love, compassion, and understanding that others have for us are just not as prevalent. In the most amazing way, when we all come together where abilities and disabilities fade and we blend together with more likenesses than differences. Truly seeing God in each other and in us. Leaving behind that which hinders us in our daily lives and bearing our souls. He works through us and becomes more present within us.

As a teenager, Lausch volunteered at Camp ReCreation as a counselor. She now manages a group-home in Bismarck, is the camp director each summer and serves on the board of directors.

Camp ReCreation transforms lives

Camp near Mandaree looking for volunteers

Each year the Church of St. Anthony, located four miles east of Mandaree, provides three, five-day camps called Christian Life Camp for youth during the month of July. In past years, teams running these three camps came mostly from Minnesota and Wisconsin. This year, St. Anthony is establishing a new team made up of people from the Bismarck Diocese to provide camp for children in grades 3–4 beginning July 13.

A new facility has been built for these camps and now volunteers are needed. A team of four or five coordinators is needed to organize the five-day camp. In addition to coordinators, teachers, counselors, a nurse, and a cook are needed, as well a prayer support team. Volunteers must be at least 18 years old. Those interested call 701-759-3412 or email at StAMandaree@restel.com.

Volunteers camps in June

Camp ReCreation currently is seeking volunteers for many roles including counselors, group activity leaders, night supervisors, and task force. Entertainment acts are also welcome. Camp dates for volunteers are June 7-11 and 14-19. Help is also welcome for set up and move out on June 6 and June 19.

For more information, visit camprecreationnd.com, email staff@camprecreationnd.com, or call 701-974-3774.

Diocese Roundup

Camp near Mandaree looking for volunteers

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Diocese Roundup

AIDS orphans. To schedule the Naslund family at a speaking engagement June 1-29, contact Chuck and Tip Reichert at info@bismarckdiocese.com or 701-258-4866.

Ascension seeking parish manager

Church of the Ascension in Bismarck is seeking a parish manager to support the pastor in the management and stewardship of the parish’s physical, financial and personnel resources. Qualifications include business administration or accounting degree with at least five years of supervisory or management experience. This person is to possess a keen appreciation of the Catholic faith and complete a background check as required by the Diocese of Bismarck. Submit a cover letter and resume to: Search Committee, Church of the Ascension, 1905 5 3rd St, Bismarck, ND 58504.
Minot Bishop Ryan Girls Basketball team recently claimed their third straight Girls Class B Basketball Championship.

Photo credits: Michelle Schmidt and Sara Kasper

Cardinal McCarrick to visit

The Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, D.C., Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, will be in Mandan in April for the Knights of Columbus Convention. While here, Cardinal McCarrick will be celebrating Mass and attending convention activities.

As special guest of the 108th Knights of Columbus convention, Cardinal McCarrick will be in Bismarck-Mandan April 16-19. The public will have an opportunity to meet the Cardinal at several Masses at Mandan churches and social functions at the Baymont Inn and Suites (formerly the Seven Seas Hotel). Fargo Bishop John Folda and Bishop David Kagan will be hosting Cardinal McCarrick at a clergy workshop during the convention welcoming priests from both N.D. dioceses.

Masses in Mandan

At Christ the King, Masses will be held: Thursday, April 16 at 4 p.m.; Friday, April 17 at 4 p.m.; and Saturday, April 18 at 4:30 p.m. The Cardinal will celebrate Sunday Mass at St. Joseph at 8 a.m. on April 19.

Following the Masses on Friday and Saturday, banquets are scheduled at the Baymont Inn and Suites in Mandan that are open to the public. Contact Knight of Columbus member Kent Brick at 701-226-5572 to purchase tickets for these events.

About Cardinal McCarrick

Cardinal Theodore Edgar McCarrick was born in New York City on July 7, 1930. Following education in his formative years; he studied in Europe for a year and a half before returning to Fordham University, his mind already made up to study for the priesthood. He entered St. Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers, NY; and was ordained to the priesthood in 1958.

Father McCarrick’s first assignment was as assistant chaplain of Catholic University where he went on to serve as dean of students and as director of development. He was named president of the Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce in 1965. That same year he received the title of monsignor from Pope Paul VI.

In 1977, Pope Paul VI named Msgr. McCarrick Auxiliary Bishop of New York. While auxiliary bishop, he served as Vicar of East Manhattan and the Harlems. In 1981, Pope John Paul II appointed him to be the first Bishop of Metuchen, a newly-established diocese in New Jersey. From 1986 until his appointment to the Archbishopric of Washington, he served as the fourth Archbishop of Newark.

On January 2, 2001, he was installed as Archbishop of Washington, a position he held until May 16, 2006. Just seven weeks after his installation, on February 21, 2001, he was elevated to the College of Cardinals by Pope John Paul II. He took possession of his titular church, Ss. Nereus and Achilleus, on June 28, 2001.

Among many notable events, Cardinal McCarrick was one of 115 Cardinals in the world who participated in the conclave that elected Pope Benedict XVI as the successor to Pope John Paul II in April 2005.

Dosch receives ministry of acolyte

In March, during Mass in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the Pontifical North American College in Rome, His Excellency Bishop Paul Loverde of the Diocese of Arlington conferred the Ministry of Acolyte on several students including diocesan seminarian, Jordan Dosch.

During his homily, Bishop Loverde charged those being installed as acolytes as well as all the members of the faithful to be willing, in contemplating the Transfiguration of Christ as proclaimed in the Gospel, to be transformed in mind, heart, and will, into living reminders of Christ for the whole world to see. The seminarians, currently in their second year of formation for the priesthood, would have two additional years of theological studies and spiritual formation before being ordained to the priesthood in their home dioceses.

As part of the rite, the Bishop placed the paten, which contains the hosts for the celebration of Mass, in the hands of each candidate and said, “Take this vessel with bread for the celebration of the Eucharist. Make your life worthy of your service at the table of the Lord and of his Church.”

— Submitted by Pontifical North American College

Lady Lions Capture 3rd Straight

Front row: Katie Mayer, Gracie Feist, Shayla Elm, Sheyenne Schmidt, Sealy Rozy and Maddie Wald.


Photo credits: Michelle Schmidt and Sara Kasper
By Douglas Krebs  
Dioecesan Seminarian

I have spent now about five and a half years in the seminary. In a little more than six months, I will be ordained a deacon with around 40 other men from my class at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. Timothy Cardinal Dolan of New York in St. Peter’s Basilica will ordain us.

I was raised in ascetic under almost every altar there are tombs of different popes who have become saints, among my favorites being St. Gregory the Great, St. Leo the Great, and St. Pius X, who so generously erected the Diocese of Bismarck. These men and the many other saints that are buried in St. Peter’s have been an incredible witness to me of my years studying in Rome. They weren’t men who were weaklings and gave up when times were tough, but men who stood strong and defended the Church in her weakest moments. These saintly popes were men who have laid down their entire lives for the Church and didn’t look back. Some men are called to do the same as these saints. I happen to be one of them, and God and His Church have asked me to lay down my life in three particular ways.

There are a lot of questions these days when it comes to the subject of marriage. Marriage laws are being challenged in the nation’s highest courts and it’s reported in the news regularly. Bishop Kagan has recently issued a pastoral letter titled “And the Two Shall Become One” on the Catholic belief in and practice concerning marriage. In it, he writes that the letter is offered as an encouragement to all to thank Almighty God for the precious and singular gift of the holy union of one man and one woman for the salvation of their immortal souls and those of their children.

In short, when it concerns the sanctity of marriage, it is the Church’s duty to the truth. Bishop wrote that the Roman Catholic Church, founded by Jesus Christ, has received from Him the mission and authority to teach this truth, to sanctify all who believe in it, and to guide all in the truth so as to transform and elevate every person after the pattern of His life. I know what you’re thinking. You’re pretty sure you know where the Catholic Church stands on marriage. Your answer to anyone who asks is that the Church does not believe in same-sex marriage. You may like that conversation a step further and answer the “why?”

Bishop issues these letters for the faithful to use as a resource. First, it helps us “brush up” on the Church doctrine we are bound to adhere to and profess to follow. Secondly, it reawakens the truth which we know exists and gives us something to hold knowledgeable enough to explain or defend when questioned.

For the Catholic Church, marriage between a man and a woman is non-negotiable. It’s not simply the coming together of two people who really love each other. It’s a complete, unbreakable, sacramental covenant among a man, a woman and God. The Church holds marriage to a high standard, and it should.

Certainly, the Church’s view on marriage is neither the popular nor politically correct one. The Church is veiled for defending it’s position on marriage based on Scripture and doctrine simply because it is counter-cultural. In a corrupt world where it’s difficult to be any kind of faithful Christian, it’s even harder to be a faithful Catholic in a society that has decided we have a right against women’s rights, homophobic and intolerant.

In his letter, Bishop also discusses some related subjects that are of equal importance. For faithful to understand such as divorce, contraception, cohabitation and marriage, and chastity. The reason these are difficult subjects is that they involve sacrifice.

Oftentimes, the Catholic Church is deemed by society as outdated, discriminatory or unaccepting that all people deserve love. That couldn’t be further from the truth. The Catholic Church wants it’s faithful to know, serve, love and be loved by God. But it’s in God’s plan, not ours. The rules are His, not ours. And sometimes following those rules requires sacrifice and standing against secular culture. Jesus gave us rules so we could stay on the right path to know Him and His Father. No one ever said that path to heaven would be without challenges.

Sometimes, as a faithful Catholic, the storm of public opinion is difficult to weather. It’s not okay to waiver in the face of popular opinion, but it is okay to question, wonder and learn. Documents such as Bishop’s recent pastoral letter might help and assist you in understanding the basis of the Church’s stance on topics related to marriage. If nothing else, think of this letter as a tool to get to know Jesus better. We might think we’re pretty clear on where the Church stands on the subject of marriage, but Bishop’s letter will make it even clearer. Plus, the next time you get the raised eyebrows because you tell someone you don’t believe in same-sex marriage or that strange look you get when you say you use natural family planning, you can have a sound defense backed up with Scripture to share.

My vocation became clear and my desire to be a priest grew as I went along in the seminary, because I wasn’t discerning by myself without anyone else’s help. God gave me the voice of the Church to help me discern, which means that the bishop, vocation director, and the seminary were, and still are, here to help me know God’s will. I have trusted what the Church has told me about my vocation, and contrary to worldly belief, and brought me great joy. With all this and the constant help of God’s grace and many hours of prayer have led me to confidently believe that God is calling me to be a Catholic priest.
In the United States of America we are driven by work. I would argue that it is the single most important defining characteristic of the modern man. We don’t know who we are unless we are working. Our work defines us and gives us meaning. In a word, our work gives us our identity.

A few articles back, I spoke about our insatiable need for distraction and how it blocks us from silence and hearing God’s voice. Just as distraction blocks us from truly hearing the voice of God, so does work block us from our true identity.

If our work is our identity what happens when our work fails? Imagine if Jesus would have let his relationship with the Father and he tries to tempt us not sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. In the measure that we know this, we know who we truly are. We are not defined by what we do, but by who we are. It is important to note that the devil’s first attack on Jesus after His baptism, which inaugurates His public ministry, is on His identity. In the Gospel of Matthew, we read that immediately after the baptism, “Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” (Mt 4:1) Many people think that the temptations in the desert were directed towards pleasure, honor and power. This is a mistake! The devil certainly uses enticements of pleasure, honor and power in his temptation, but at the core of these temptations is an attack on Jesus’ identity as being the Beloved Son of the Father. With each of these temptations the devil begins with, “If you are the Son of God...” He is trying to get Jesus to doubt His identity as the Father’s Beloved Son.

The devil’s tactics have not changed a bit since the foundation of the created world. He attacks all of God’s beloved sons and daughters the same way. He gets us to believe the lie that we are not sons and daughters of the Father and He tries to tempt us to find our identities elsewhere (i.e. work, human relationships, material goods, money, etc.). Why does he focus on our identity so much? Because the devil knows that if we truly believe that God is our Father and provides for all our needs, then he will lose all power over us, just as he lost all power over Christ. There will be nothing to fear because God is with us no matter what situation we are in. (Lk 7:14)

We must continually ask God for the faith to know our true identity and to realize that we are loved not because of what we do, but because of who we are.

(Suggested Scriptural passages: Mt 3:13-17; Mt 4:1-11, Is 62, and Is 7:10-17)

Fr. Waltz is director of vocations for the Bismarck Diocese. His quarterly column, “Into the Deep,” discusses topics on prayer and discernment.
Questions I was afraid to ask
FR JASON SIGNALNESS

My son wants to get married, but wants to know why all the class work and all? Who are they (the Church) to judge? The harder he tries to get married in the Catholic Church, the more he is pushed away to find what he feels is a better religion. What do I do to keep him in the Catholic Church?

First of all, I would say congratulations to this man on his engagement. Marriage is a good and holy thing, and those called to it by God are truly a blessing for their spouses, to any children that come about through their union, and to society as a whole. We need good, solid, and holy marriages in our society and Church.

But why all the class work? First of all, let’s be honest. The Church doesn’t require all that much work on the part of couples preparing for marriage. It normally involves a few meetings, some paperwork, a weekend, and some instruction in natural family planning. All of this can be accomplished in a few months.

Consider how, when we feel drawn to a particular career, we’re willing to devote years of our lives to obtain the knowledge and degrees required for our chosen career. This makes total sense if we are to be successful.

So it is with marriage. Marriage is beautiful, but our culture is very confused about it. I’m not sure that people who “pop the question” really know what they are proposing. What are the terms of the marriage covenant that is being proposed? What does grace do the sacrament of marriage bestow? What does God require of spouses? What are they, in fact, saying, “I do” to? A couple should know before they tie the knot.

To the question, “Who are they (the Catholic Church) to judge?” I would respond that marriage preparation work is not about judging the couple. It’s about helping them to understand what they are doing, and to prepare well. The Catholic Church really does have incredible wisdom about marriage, sexuality, and all of life, to share with us. It has seen countless marriages succeed and, sadly, fail. We can all learn from that collective experience, and from the teachings of Jesus, which the Church offers us.

The question suggested that the Church, through its marriage preparation programs, is pushing people away. Sadly, some Catholics do leave the Church when challenged by its teachings. This situation brings to my mind Jesus’ efforts to teach people about the Eucharist: “many of his disciples who were listening said, ‘This saying is hard; who can accept it?’” Jesus was teaching them something that was challenging, and they had not soften the teaching because what he had told them was true. The Gospel continued, “As a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you also want to leave?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’” (John 6:60-68).

There is an objective reality and truth about marriage, and the Church has been entrusted with preserving and passing on this truth. It is, like the truth of the Eucharist, challenging to many people. When faced with this challenge, couples can do two things: they can walk away from the truth proposed by Jesus, or they can follow him—difficult (and rewarding) as that can be. Somewhat like Peter, we might say, “To whom shall we go? The Catholic Church has the sacrament of marriage.”

Lastly, the one asking this question wondered what might be done to keep this man from walking away from the Catholic Church. First and foremost, of course, we should pray for him and those preparing for marriage. I would also urge him to have patience and trust in Jesus’ Church. It knows something about marriage. I’d urge him to be docile to the preparation process and learn what he can. I’d remind him that receiving the sacrament of marriage validity bestows great, and very real, blessings on the couple that will help them for the rest of their lives together. I’d urge him, as a Catholic bound to the rules of the Church, not to forfeit all the blessings God wants to bestow upon him and his fiancé.

The sacrament of marriage, as I said, is a good and holy thing. It’s worth efforts put into it and well to receive it. Those who prepare well will not regret it.

Signaress is pastor of Sts. Peter and Paul in Strasburg, St. Michael in rural Linton and St. Mary in Hague. If you have a question you were afraid to ask, now is the time to ask it! Simply email your question to info@diobismarckdiocese.com with the “Questions I was afraid to ask” in the subject line.

The appropriation bill for the Department of Human Services (DHS) may be the most important bill you never hear about.

The DHS is the department of government that funds the largest portion of state government. The budget for the 2013-2015 biennium was over $3 billion. This session’s bill requests the governor, Tim Walz, to expect the final bill to be less after adjustments in light of falling oil revenues. The department has over 2,200 full-time employees. (Full disclosure, my wife is one of them.)

While it may be tempting to some to see the department’s budget as proof of an overgrown bureaucracy, the truth is that the department’s services include a wide range of programs that, if looked at individually, are not particularly large or expensive. About 33% of the budget consists of Medicaid and children’s health insurance payments, but the rest covers many other services. These include: long-term care, which includes nursing homes; special need adsorption; foster care; care for individuals with developmental disabilities, including guardianship; autism services; abortion alternatives services; guardianship establishment and vulnerable adult protective services; National Student Nutrition Assistance Program; temporary assistance for needy families.

And there are many more. In fact, the budget request had 55 separate line items, most of which are for unique services. Chances are, if you or a family member has ever been sick, struggling financially, in a nursing home, disabled with a mental illness or behavioral health problem, divorced with a child, or unexpectedly pregnant, you have had contact with the DHS.

It should be pointed out that about 60% of the department’s budget comes from federal, not state dollars. Nevertheless, the breadth of the department’s actions and size of the total budget can make it seem overwhelming and an easy target when it comes to “trimming” government spending. After all, the poor, sick, and struggling don’t have strong lobbying organizations.

Another challenge is that some people believe that these services should be provided entirely through private charities, especially the churches. Certainly churches have a role to play. Charity is a Christian obligation, but there is, however, a difference between charity, which is freely given in response to an immediate need and justice, which is due to a person because of their dignity as a human person. The Church teaches that we should not leave to charity that which is already due as a matter of justice.

We also need to recognize that, mostly out of a desire to protect citizens, the provision of human services has become professionalized and regulated. As a consequence, the cost of covering all these services will be beyond the capability of the charitable sector. If you are already tired of the diocese’s capital campaigns, imagine what it would be like if charitable donors had to raise another $4.5 billion annually.

The DHS bill is not like an abortion or school choice bill, where you can email your legislator with a simple “yes” or “no” request. The bill will be passed. The question is what in it will be funded and at what level. How will those citizens, who do engage in the development of such a bill?

Something the Wisconsin Catholic Conference recently wrote about budget bills in general applies to the DHS bill as well. Written while they contained numerous facts, data, and projections, state budgets are documents through which our state makes choices and sets priorities. They are about how needs are met and which are deferred or denied. As such, they are moral documents that define the values of those who enact them.

While the WCC does not take a position for or against the state budget, it does address aspects of the budget that advance or hinder important priorities. For Catholics, a critical priority is always that of meeting the needs of the poor, disadvantaged, and marginalized.

Ultimately, the budget bill is a moral document that reflects who we are as a state. The least we can do is pray for the legislators who will review the department’s bill.

Heavenly Father, grant wisdom and open hearts to our elected officials as they decide how best to help our neighbors, especially the least among us. Amen.

Questions I was afraid to ask is written by Christopher Dodson, executive director of the N.D. Catholic Conference, the official liaison for the dioceses of Fargo and Bismarck in matters of public policy.

Test yourself! What was the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham? A. The rainbow B. The circumcision C. Sabbath D. Barabbas

Who did Pontius Pilate release instead of Jesus? A. Simon B. Barabbas C. Judas D. James


CATHOLIC TRIVIA

1. D (Circumcision) 2. B (Barabbas) 3. C (J.R.R. Tolkien)

APRIL 2015

Featured Columnists

4. E (The rainbow)

5. A (The rainbow)

6. B (The rainbow)

7. C (The rainbow)
Finding patience to fulfill God’s plan

Patience! What is it? What does it mean? How can I practice it?

Patience requires self-control, trust and humility. Patience is the necessary ingredient to fulfill the wishes of God and the commandments. Patience is about total commitment.

Spring really brings the message of patience front and center. In the world of agriculture—especially at this time of the year in the Bismarck Diocese—there exists a desire to rush into spring and the new life that comes with the new season.

Patience is something that is especially important when it comes to seeing the arrival of lambs, calves, ducklings, chicks, etc. Patience is equally necessary when deciding to enter the fields to prepare, nurture, harvest and store the crop.

For some there is panic to be the first in the field or to be done with lambing or calving first. These decisions are manifested (and rewarded) in most cases with material returns in the investment. The real richness of patience, however, shines through in the relationships I have established with my sisters and brothers.

A while back I recounted the story of a vivacious, energetic woman who told me she was dying “inch by inch.” She died, but in doing so she left an example of love, tolerance and patience. To say she faced the pain fearlessly would be false. To say she was always accepting of the fact that her dying was taking so long might be inaccurate. In the end, however, she endured the suffering in a manner that showed her faith in and total commitment to God.

This is an especially important lesson for the Lenten season. Jesus came into this world with one purpose in mind: to die for humankind. Jesus knew from the get-go that death on the cross was inevitable. Jesus patiently lived, committed to fulfilling the will of God.

This is what Lent is about: accepting the joys, the sorrows, the challenges, the will of God, and answering the call. This means ministering to those in need, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, sharing clothes with the naked, visiting the sick or imprisoned, providing shelter to those in need. It means emulating Jesus.

Spring brings a whole new lease on life in the country. Easter reminds me Jesus gave me a new lease on eternal life.

This Holy Week (and throughout the year) it is my personal prayer to display the patience Jesus showed when fulfilling the request by God. I am human. I know I will fail, but I need to pick myself up, try to be Christ-like. I hope I am up to the task. Care to join me?

JAMES ODERMANN

Undoing a chemical abortion

In 1978, Charles E. Rice, a former Professor of Law at Notre Dame Law School made this prediction in his book Beyond Abortion: The Theory and Practice: “The abortion of the future will be by pill, suppository, or some other do-it-yourself method. At that point the killing of a baby will be wholly elective and private. We have, finally, caught up with the pagan Romans who endowed the father, the pater familias, with the right to kill his child at his discretion. We give that right to the mother. But it is all the same to the victim.”

His prediction was prescient, given that “chemical abortions” are now widely available in the form of the French abortion pill, RU-486. The abortion pill has been available in the U.S. since 2000. By 2008, approximately 25 percent of abortions prior to 9 weeks relied on RU-486, also known as mifepristone. A 2010 scientific review on RU-486 noted that chemical abortion “has been used successfully in the medical termination of pregnancy for over 25 years, and the method is registered in 35 countries.”

In recent years, there has been a small but important glimmer of light piercing through this dark backdrop of widespread RU-486 utilization, namely, that it is sometimes possible to reverse a chemical abortion if a woman comes to regret her decision soon after taking the abortion pill.

Carrying out a chemical abortion actually requires two different pills to be taken sequentially. RU-486 is administered prior to reaching the 10th week of pregnancy, and about two days later, a hormone called prostaglandin is given that causes contractions and expels the unborn child. Reversal may be possible when the second pill has not yet been taken. RU-486 itself is often described as a “progesterone antagonist” or as an “antiprogesterone.” These names indicate the extent of its hostility towards the vital hormone, progesterone. What this means is that RU-486 blocks progesterone, a hormone needed to build and maintain the uterine wall during pregnancy. Thus, RU-486 can either prevent a developing human embryo from implanting in the uterus, or it can kill an implanted embryo by essentially starving her or him to death.

The reversal technique relies on using progesterone itself to counteract the effects of the abortion pill. In a study published in the Annals of Pharmacotherapy in December 2012, successful reversal was reported for four of six women who took RU-486; these women were able to carry their pregnancies to term after receiving an intramuscular injection of progesterone. Since 2012, dozens of other women have successfully reversed their chemical abortions. Thus far, no side effects or complications associated with reversal of the abortion pill have been reported.

On the other hand, the abortion pill itself has notable side effects and risks associated with its use. Common side effects include: uterine cramps, high blood pressure, bleeding not related to the menstrual period, overgrowth of the uterine lining, nausea, vomiting, headaches, dizziness, reduced blood potassium, and nausea. Some women also experience fever, chills and infection.

Among the more serious possible side effects would be death of both mother and child arising from endometriosis (infection of the uterine lining) and septic shock. A December 2005 article in the New England Journal of Medicine indicated that women are about 10 times more likely to die from RU-486 abortions than surgical abortions in early pregnancy, partly because of the risk of infection.

Another complication of using RU-486 is incomplete abortion, with embryonic/fetal parts remaining. In the first six years of RU-486 availability in Australia, for example, there were 792 reports of adverse effects, 570 of which pertained to parts of the embryo/fetus remaining, and 126 of these required follow-up surgical abortion.

Time is clearly of the essence: the longer a woman waits after taking RU-486 before attempting a reversal, the lower the likelihood of success. Healthcare professionals should become informed about the possibility of using progesterone to reverse the effects of RU-486 in women who have begun the chemical abortion process and then changed their minds. The website for the Abortion Pill Reversal Program, a national effort to encourage and support abortion pill reversal, can be found at: http://abortionpillreversal.com/. As noted on the site, “The Abortion Pill Reversal Program has a network of over 200 physicians worldwide that assist the women that call our hotline. This hotline is manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by one of our Registered Nurses... if you've taken the abortion pill, it may not be too late. Call 877-558-0333 right away.”

This remarkable initiative has already saved the lives of many children, and has brought the blessing of motherhood to fruition for many women who recognized the mistake they had made in taking the abortion pill.

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 Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. See www.ncbcenter.org.
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