From Bishop Folda:  
Racism, violence, and our need for God

Free program offers emotional help for couples facing infertility issues

Sidewalk artist shares faith and art, reaching unexpected lengths

We gather together!  
Public celebrations of the Mass resume in the Fargo diocese

PLUS
Bishop's Charity Golf Classic

Monday, August 3, 2020
Rose Creek Golf Course
Fargo, North Dakota

11:00 AM - Registration
12:30 PM - Shotgun Start
Followed by Social and Banquet

To register your team, contact:
Brenda Hagemeier
701-356-7928
brenda.hagemeier@fargodiocese.org

Steve Schons
701-356-7926
steve.schons@fargodiocese.org

Register online:
http://www.fargodiocese.org/puttpurpose

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A few weeks ago, the people of this nation were appalled to see the brutal death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis. The death of George Floyd was shocking and demands a just response. It also sparked public demonstrations, and questions followed about the ongoing challenge of racism in our nation. It would be an oversimplification to assume that our whole nation is racist; it is not. It is also an oversimplification to assume that all police are racist; they are not. We should not ignore the strides that have been made to overcome racism and the real progress in overcoming prejudice and bias. But like it or not, the sin of racism is still with us, and we still need the healing grace that will allow us to recognize the innate dignity of every human person, regardless of race.

There was a justifiable outcry in response to George Floyd’s death, and many people have raised their voices in peaceful protest. But another, darker response in the aftermath of this tragedy has been indiscriminate violence across the country, even in the city of Fargo. People have been killed and wounded, and property has been destroyed. These too are sins that call for justice. Legitimate protest is right and just when an injustice has been done. The founding of our nation was built on protest against injustice, and our civic culture depends on the exercise of this right. But the legitimate protest to this tragic death was exploited and distorted by those with another agenda. George Floyd’s memory has been violated by the rampant violence perpetrated in his name, and his own family has disavowed these actions.

It seems that the violence unleashed in the last few weeks is a symptom of a culture that is unhinged from God and from any sense of objective morality. The death of George Floyd and the violent acts that followed show us how far wrong we can go when our culture is detached from God and the basic truth of human dignity. The rage, anarchy, looting, and attacks on innocent human life that we saw in the last few weeks are gross violations of justice and cannot be justified as a response to racism. These actions do nothing to heal racism; they merely inflame it.

Pope Francis expressed well the dilemma and challenge we face: “We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time we have to recognize that the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost.”

The first step that we as a society and nation must take is prayer. Unless we turn back to God, we will repeat again and again the descent into brutality and senseless violence that we have seen on display from coast to coast. Our founders recognized that democracy cannot survive long without religion and faith in a creator God. So, as people of faith, it is essential that we pray and fast for the peace and well-being of our nation and community. But we aren’t praying merely for the sake of material prosperity; we pray for a true peace and harmony built on the Gospel commandment of our Lord: “Love one another as I have loved you.” Our prayer is for the emergence of God’s Kingdom in our midst.

We must also actively work for a restored sense of human dignity in our culture. Our true well-being will only be attained when the God-given dignity and rights of all are respected and protected, no matter one’s race, age, social condition, or religion. Much of the unrest we have seen comes from a justified sense of injustice, and as disciples of Jesus, we are called to pay attention to the real needs of our brothers and sisters. Where human dignity is denigrated and where injustice rears its head, we Christians should do all we can to promote the innate dignity of every person and the justice that is our due.

We must also resist the temptation to brush aside the challenge of racism. God created every living soul on this earth, and he continues to form our human family out of every race under the sun. Some of the greatest disasters in human history have been over racial conflicts, and we should not be naïve about this persistent societal problem. Racism is hatred, and it is sinful. Racism foments violence and destroys peace. We cannot be followers of Jesus if we harbor racism and allow it to fester. Where we encounter racism, we must do what we can to challenge it and change it. And when we encounter a brother or sister of another race, we must always be sure that we encounter a beloved son or daughter of God.

Taking our cue from St. Francis, let us be instruments of peace and agents of mercy to those around us. Jesus called his followers to be a leaven in society, and we ask for the courage and grace to be his instruments in this difficult time. May all those who have suffered from violence, racism, or injustice be consoled, and may the peace of Christ descend upon our land.

The death of George Floyd and the violent acts that followed show us how far wrong we can go when our culture is detached from God and the basic truth of human dignity.

-Bishop John Folda
Diocese of Fargo
Official Appointments/Announcements
May 7, 2020

Most Rev. John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo, has made the following appointments, announcements and/or decrees.

PASTORS

Rev. Phillip J. Ackerman is appointed Pastor of Holy Cross Church, West Fargo for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Msgr. Brian G. Donahue is appointed Pastor of St. Philip’s Church, Hankinson and St. Anthony’s Church, Fairmount for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Rev. Michael W. Hickin is appointed Pastor of St. Alphonsus Church, Langdon; St. Edward’s Church, Nekoma; and St. Michael’s Church, Wales for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.


Rev. Jared C. Kadlec is appointed Pastor of St. Mark’s Church, Bottineau and St. Andrew’s Church, Westhope for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Rev. Matthew J. Kraemer is appointed Pastor of St. Cecilia’s Church, Velva and Sts. Peter and Paul’s Church, Karlsruhe for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Rev. James A. Meyer is appointed Pastor of Holy Family Church, Grand Forks for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Rev. Scott J. Sautner is appointed Pastor of St. Aloysius Church, Lisbon and St. Vincent’s Church, Gwinner for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.


Rev. Peter J. Sharpe is appointed Pastor of St. Francis Church, Steele; St. Mary’s Church, Medina; and St. Paul’s Church, Tappen for a term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

Msgr. Jeffrey L. Wald is appointed Pastor of St. James Basilica, Jamestown; St. Margaret Mary’s Church, Buchanan; St. Michael’s Church, Pingree; and St. Mathias Church, Windsor for a second term of six-years, beginning June 24, 2020.

PAROCHIAL VICARS

Rev. Mr. Riley Durkin is appointed Parochial vicar of Holy Cross Church, West Fargo effective August 8, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Thomas M. Feltman is appointed Parochial vicar of Nativity Church, Fargo effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Mr. Jered Grossman is appointed Parochial vicar of St. Michael’s Church, Grand Forks effective August 8, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Robert J. Keller is appointed Parochial vicar of Holy Spirit Church, Fargo, effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Prabhakar Marneni is appointed Parochial vicar of Holy Cross Church, West Fargo, effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Petro C. Ndinguru is appointed Parochial vicar of Holy Family Church, Grand Forks, effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Rev. Mr. Eric Seitz is appointed Parochial vicar of St. John’s Church, Wahpeton effective August 8, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

SPECIAL MINISTRY

Rev. Jayson T. Miller is appointed Secretary to the Bishop, Master of Ceremonies, Vice Chancellor and Director of Liturgy for the Diocese of Fargo effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

Mr. Timothy Olson is appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of Fargo effective June 24, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.

RETIREMENT

Rev. Jerald L. Finnestad is granted retirement from active ministry effective June 24, 2020.

Rev. Jerome E. Hunkler is granted retirement from active ministry effective June 24, 2020.

Rev. Robert Irwin is granted retirement from active ministry effective June 24, 2020.

Rev. William T. Ovsak is granted retirement from active ministry effective June 24, 2020.

DIACONATE

Deacon Thomas M. Vanorny is appointed permanent deacon of St. Catherine’s Church, Valley City effective May 7, 2020, and continuing ad nutum episcopi.
Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the gift of our priests. Through them, we experience your presence in the sacraments. Help our priests to be strong in their vocation. Set their souls on fire with love for your people. Grant them the wisdom, understanding, and strength they need to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Inspire them with the vision of your Kingdom. Give them the words they need to spread the Gospel. Allow them to experience joy in their ministry. Help them to become instruments of your divine grace. We ask this through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns as our Eternal Priest. Amen.

―St. Cyril of Alexandria, feast day June 27

June: The Way of the Heart
We pray that all those who suffer may find their way in life, allowing themselves to be touched by the Heart of Jesus.

July: Our Families
We pray that today’s families may be accompanied with love, respect, and guidance.

“Indeed the mystery of Christ runs the risk of being disbelieved precisely because it is so incredibly wonderful.”

―St. Cyril of Alexandria, feast day June 27
St. Thomas More was born in London on February 7, 1478. His father, Sir John More, was a lawyer and judge who rose to prominence during the reign of Edward IV. His connections and wealth would help his son, Thomas, rise in station as a young man. In 1490, he became a household page to John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England. Archbishop Morton was a Renaissance man and inspired Thomas to pursue his own education. Thomas More entered Oxford in 1492, where he would learn Latin, Greek, and prepare for his future studies. In 1494, he left Oxford to become a lawyer and he trained in London until 1502 when he was finally approved to begin practice.

In 1504, More was elected to Parliament. During his service to the people of London, he earned a reputation as being honest and effective. More also honed his skills as a theologian and a writer. Among his most famous works is *Utopia*, considered one of the greatest works of the late Renaissance and was widely read during the Enlightenment period.

From 1517 on, King Henry VIII took a liking to Thomas More, and gave him posts of ever-increasing responsibility. In 1521, he was knighted and made Under-Treasurer of the Exchequer, and became Lord Chancellor in 1529. During his tenure as Lord Chancellor, More prosecuted those accused of heresy and worked tirelessly to defend the Catholic faith in England. However, in 1530, as Henry worked to obtain an annulment from his wife, Catherine, Moore refused to sign a letter to the Pope, requesting an annulment. This was More’s first time crossing Henry. In 1532, More found himself unable to work for Henry, whom he felt had lost his way as a Catholic. Faced with the prospect of supporting Henry’s schism with the Church, More offered his resignation, citing failing health. Henry accepted it, although he was unhappy with what he viewed as flagging loyalty.

Eventually, More was executed for not supporting Henry’s annulment and break from the Catholic Church. St. Thomas More has been widely remembered as a man of tremendous integrity, and he has since been described as a martyr.

**Feast day:** June 22  
**Patron:** adopted children, lawyers, civil servants, politicians, and difficult marriages  
**Birth:** 1478  
**Death:** 1535  
**Beatified:** December 29, 1886 by Pope Leo XIII  
**Canonized:** May 19, 1935 by Pope Pius XI

Your support is treasured by all those who are unable to join in our greatest form of prayer, the Mass. Watch Sundays:
- 10:30 a.m. – Fargo, WDAY, Ch 6 or Grand Forks, WDAZ, Ch 8.  
- 11:00 a.m. – Bismarck, KNDX, Ch 26 or Minot, KKND, Ch 24.
PLEASE JOIN BISHOP JOHN FOLDA AS WE CELEBRATE OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES AND INVOKE GOD’S BLESSING UPON OUR LAND

3rd annual RURAL LIFE celebration
SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020

SCHEDULE
1:30 PM Welcome
1:45 PM Blessing of Land, Machinery and Animals
2:00 PM Mass & Procession
3:30 PM Meal, Entertainment, horse and buggy rides & games for kids

LOCATION
Frank & Helen Braun Farm
5972 Hwy. 3, Napoleon ND 58561
(3 miles north of Napoleon)

FOR MORE INFORMATION
fargodioocese.org/rural-life

RSVP
*This event is free. RSVP recommended, but not required. RSVP at (701) 754-2860 or evangelize@bektel.com
Please come rain or shine; if it rains we’ll move indoors

ALSO...
*Please bring a lawn chair or blanket to sit on
*Bring a small container of soil or seed from your fields or garden to be blessed

SPONSORED BY THE DIOCESE OF FARGO
Can a bishop restrict how we receive Holy Communion?

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or many Catholics this has been a difficult time. Many have not been able to receive the Eucharist since mid-March. In parts of the country this is now changing and bishops are authorizing public Masses, with modifications to allow for proper social distancing to avoid spreading the virus.

However, almost as soon as this was announced, it ignited a new front in the liturgical wars. Some bishops have restricted reception of Holy Communion solely in the hand and prohibited Holy Communion on the tongue. Can they do this canonically? Before I answer, let me say that many traditional Catholics have suffered greatly from some who flouted the law and their rights in the past. There has been a lack of charity and justice shown toward traditional Catholics. Those who often talked about being “inclusive” tend to exclude those who are more traditional. This has often created division by insisting on liturgical practices that often deviate from liturgical law. It has created a hypersensitivity among traditionally oriented Catholics. Therefore, they react quickly to defend what they see as their rights.

That said, the answer is yes, bishops can restrict the manner of reception of Holy Communion temporarily in extraordinary circumstances. A pandemic certainly qualifies. Many will point to Redemptionis Sacramentum 92, “Although each of the faithful always has the right to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, at his choice….” This looks pretty cut and dried that it’s up to the communicant, but it’s not quite that simple. The minister of Holy Communion and the other faithful also have rights.

According to the Church’s law, the rights of the faithful are not absolute. The Code of Canon Law states in canon 223 that: “§1 In exercising their rights, Christ’s faithful, both individually and in associations, must take account of the common good of the Church, as well as the rights of others and their own duties to others. §2 Ecclesiastical authority is entitled to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights which are proper to Christ’s faithful.” In addition, the bishop is the moderator of the liturgy in the diocese, see canon 835 which states: “§1 The sanctifying office is exercised principally by Bishops, who are the high priests, the principal dispensers of the mysteries of God and the moderators, promoters and guardians of the entire liturgical life in the churches entrusted to their care.”

These canons tell us that for the common good and to protect the rights of others, bishops can restrict rights in ways they would not in normal times. The common good is that the virus does not spread and that others have the right to worship without being needlessly exposed to it. This restriction is a temporary measure to allow for Mass and the reception of Holy Communion while avoiding the spread of illness. In canon law, according to the regulae iuris, if one can do the greater one can do the lesser. If the bishops can restrict public Mass, which they can, they can restrict the manner of receiving Holy Communion.

St. Thomas, in the Summa Theologica (First part of the Second Part, Q. 96.) states: “Now it happens often that the observance of some point of law conduces to the common weal in the majority of instances, and yet, in some cases, is very hurtful. Since then the lawgiver cannot have in view every single case, he shapes the law according to what happens most frequently, by directing his attention to the common good. Wherefore if a case arises wherein the observance of that law would be hurtful to the general welfare, it should not be observed.”

Therefore, St. Thomas gives the rationale that for the common good, in extraordinary circumstances and in matters of urgency, rights can be regulated by those who have authority. The bishops are acting within Catholic tradition and canon law. When the necessity ends, so will the authority of these restrictions on the reception of Holy Communion.

Bishop David Kagan of Bismarck, who is also a canonist, wrote, “The general principle of Church law, which includes liturgical law, is that Church law always admits exceptions unless the proper authority (pope or bishop) makes it explicit that there is no exception to it. Let us also keep in mind those who are now making an issue of a certain form and discipline have missed what is essential altogether. It is not our physical posture that determines our moral and spiritual worthiness to receive Holy Communion, it is the state of our souls.” Canon 87 reflects this principle in giving the bishops the authority to dispense from universal and particular law, especially when there is imminent grave harm.

Now is not the time to fight unnecessary battles in the liturgical wars. We should rejoice at being able to assist at Mass again. If someone in conscience feels he cannot receive Holy Communion in the hand he can simply refrain from reception. We are not obliged to receive Holy Communion every time we assist at Mass. Mass is more than the reception of Holy Communion. Instead of fighting, to the detriment of our Christian witness, let us unite together in the supreme worship of the Triune God and especially pray for an end to this pandemic. Many are seeking God in this time of suffering and we have an opportunity to introduce them to the Lord Jesus Christ who conquered death and offers the hope of eternal life. Let’s focus on that mission and obey the supreme law of the Church which is the salvation of souls.
Father Damien Schill, chaplain of the Minneapolis VA Health Care System, received the employee of the month award for his dedication to the spiritual needs of COVID-19 patients on June 1. Father Schill is one of 4,700 employees eligible to receive the award and 12 are chosen each year.

The nomination states: “Father Damien has always been renowned for his responsiveness to calls for last rites 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. During the COVID-19 crisis, this has become even more meaningful, especially to family members that cannot be near the Veteran as often as they would like. In a card from a patient’s family to Father Damien they expressed it this way: ‘Losing our dad to the COVID-19 virus was truly awful. Your visit to him to bring the Sacrament of the Sick and Holy Communion at the risk of your own life stands out as a witness of Jesus in the world. We can’t describe how much it meant to us when we were kept away from him. You have been a great comfort to Dad and his seven children.’ This letter is not unusual as recognition for Father Damien and the whole Chaplain staff he leads. He is a role model to us all of dedication and sacrifice for the care of our Veterans. He provides a critical spiritual component to the well-being of our patients, staff, and families.”

Father Schill says he’s seen hundreds of patients since the virus broke out.

“My experience is pretty much the same as it is with all patients,” Father Schill said. “I don’t have a different mindset. We don the proper PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) that we wear when we go in the room. We take all the precautions, but the patients are regular people. Though it’s really hot. The face shield is like an oven on your head.”

Father Schill has served parishes in Edgeley; Nortonville; Holy Spirit, Fargo; Oriska; Buffalo; Fingal; Dazey; and Sanborn before beginning his service to the Military Archdiocese in 1998.

During the stay-at-home orders, when Father Schill wasn’t seeing to the needs of patients at the hospital, he finished the third installment of his cookbook trilogy: *Cooking and Eating with Father Damien and Friends*. The trilogy has taken him four years to complete.

“Writing these three cookbooks has been a stroll down memory lane for me,” he writes in the introduction, “So many fond memories of dinner parties, Jubilee parties, desserts, Christmas parties, etc. over the years. Just bringing back all these memories has made it special in writing these books.”

His books are available at Hurley’s Religious Goods in Fargo.
Kathy Loney, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry for the Diocese of Fargo, retired on June 5 after serving the diocese for 15 years.

Prior to her time serving the diocese, she was the Youth Minister at Blessed Sacrament Church in West Fargo from 1986–90, and then a travel agent for 13 years before returning to Blessed Sacrament to be their DRE/YM full time. It was during her time both working in a parish and as a travel agent that she discovered a passion for leading pilgrimages, especially to World Youth Day.

“Any time I could travel with students, youth ministers, DREs, and take them somewhere I know they are going to have a transforming opportunity and conversion experience... that’s been the best,” Loney said. “You get them away from their everyday life and see them rejuvenated and excited for the faith. To see kids go into a stadium with thousands of people in front of Jesus for adoration and see them silent and on their knees is awesome and beautiful. It’s worth everything you do to organize those events. It’s worth every penny. It tells you they know God’s there. I’ll miss seeing that.”

Loney has planned multiple events throughout the years including Mission Immaculata (MI) camp, summer retreats for young men and women, middle school and high school rallies, and National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC). She also supports other youth ministry efforts in the diocese such as SEARCH retreats, NET ministries, scouting awards, and Center for Ministry Development workshops (CMD).

“It’s been my constant mantra that we need to pay attention to our youth and young adults in our parishes,” Loney said. “We need to have someone hired very willing to do the job. The whole parish needs to concentrate on these age levels. They don’t have to have a college degree, but someone who really cares and is willing to walk with them.”

Loney encourages teens especially, to keep God central in their lives, no matter where it leads.

“You don’t know what you’re going to encounter once you leave home. If you don’t have God to lean on, it can be really tough out there. You need him to talk to and rely on. I’ve had so many prayers answered throughout the years. It’s amazing how he can work in you.”
Organic Conceptions
Free program offers emotional help for couples facing infertility issues
By Paul Braun

Couples dealing with infertility issues often times face isolation, guilt, a degree of separation from couples with children, and even the Church. The Diocese of Fargo is now offering a program to help couples face these issues by offering a road map for maintaining emotional wellness and health during the process of treating or coming to terms with infertility.

Organic Conceptions is a program that offers audio courses to guide couples to emotional wellness. It was initially a program for doctors to share with their patients dealing with infertility and was promoted as something to integrate into their practices.

“The subject of infertility has been on the diocesan radar for some time,” said Brad Gray, Director of the Marriage and Family Life office for the Diocese of Fargo. “Lately more and more couples are dealing with infertility than ever before. It’s often a cross that can be so burdensome, so crushing for couples that it becomes their identity… they see themselves as an infertile couple.”

The goal of the program is not to eventually help couples to conceive, but to help them to better deal with either positive or negative results of trying to conceive. Scientific studies have shown that when couples learn to navigate, cope with, and adjust to the stress of infertility, there’s a physiological effect that makes conception more likely, and if conception cannot take place, it helps the couples be more open to their issue and to other means of having a family, like adoption.

“When you are struggling to build your family, it’s so easy to become fixated or even obsessed with the physical and mechanical side of conception,” said Marc Sherman, the founder of Organic Conceptions. “We often dismiss the importance of our emotional health as we ‘give up living because we are living to try.’ Through this unique research, our program is able to help couples ensure that there is alignment and harmony between their physical, emotional, and spiritual state.”

Often times couples feel neglected or forgotten by the Church, especially on Mother’s Day or Father’s Day when moms and dads are asked to stand and be recognized and to receive a blessing. It becomes all that more poignant for these couples on what they don’t have. According to Brad Gray, it’s the goal of the diocese to try to express to couples dealing with infertility that they’re not forgotten, that the Church cares about them, recognizes their suffering as significant, and wants to draw them closer.

“Infertility can become such a strain on a relationship,” said Gray. “With this program, couples can learn to become emotionally healthy and connected. Couples dealing with infertility many times come to see themselves as broken or something that doesn’t work, which is so contrary to Christian teaching. The program helps them to see themselves as not broken and that they are truly loved by God, and that he delights in every one of us at every moment.”

What’s different about this program is it deals much more with the emotional aspect of infertility than the physical treatments, but it can be mutually beneficial.

“It’s more about preparing our minds for conception just as you would prepare your body for conception,” said Sherman. “Within just a few months of trying unsuccessfully, there is a high level of doubt, worry, and fear that begins to build. For many couples, they are worried and fearful before they even start trying. The goal is to ensure that we normalize these emotions and use the wisdom of these stories and research to provide clarity, trust, and unity as we progress forward.”

The program involves a degree of anonymity for couples facing infertility issues, unlike a public Mass or support groups that many dioceses still offer. Couples are, understandably, hesitant to participate in those kinds of programs.

The Diocese of Fargo’s partnership with Organic Conceptions offers couples a three-month program at no charge. For more information, go to www.fargodiocese.org/infertility under the Emotional and Relational Support section. There is also a video available there to learn more about the program.
Priests of the diocese gathered at St. Mary’s Cathedral June 3 to celebrate the Chrism Mass. Bishop Folda consecrated the sacred oils used for Baptism, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, and Holy Orders. Each parish then received its annual supply of the oils. The priests also renewed their priestly promises and their fidelity to Jesus Christ. (Kristina Lahr | New Earth)
As Bishop John Folda made his way down the center aisle of the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo the first Sunday of May, he couldn’t help but notice how much he had missed celebrating Mass with the faithful. Since March 17, Mass had been celebrated daily in an empty cathedral and in local parish churches, with many joining in the celebration of the Mass by livestream. Although the cathedral was nowhere near full this day due to social distancing requirements, Bishop Folda couldn’t help but feel that those present were smiling behind their precautionary face coverings. He shared some of those feelings with *New Earth*.

“It was very strange and a little sad to celebrate Mass in the empty Cathedral, especially during the celebrations of Holy Week and Easter,” said Bishop Folda. “But, it was good to know that so many of our people could still participate from their homes. Thousands of people were following by livestream, which made it clear how important the Mass is to our faithful.”

Public celebration of the Mass resumed in the Diocese of Fargo May 4, but with some restrictions:

- In accord with current public health recommendations, the faithful should wear cloth face coverings when they come to church. Children under 2 years of age are not recommended to wear a face covering.
- Federal and state guidelines for strict physical distancing
will be observed, namely, the faithful should maintain a six-foot distance from each other at all times. Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other, but will need to practice it with those who are not members of their household. The six-foot distance should be maintained not only in the pews, but in all spaces within the church complex.

- In order to follow guidelines for physical distancing the number of persons admitted to each church at any given time will be limited.
- Because the virus seems to be spread largely by dispersion of respiratory droplets, and vigorous singing tends to produce such droplets, congregational singing and singing in choirs is not allowed.
- Although the faithful are entitled to receive Holy Communion either on the tongue or in the hands, in order to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus, the extraordinary measure will be taken of only receiving Holy Communion in the hand. For this to have its intended effect, however, the faithful must practice good hand hygiene.

“I consulted with infectious disease specialists, and it seemed that we could open up again if we took a few extra precautions,” said Bishop Folda. “We limited the number of people who could be in the church and made sure that they followed social distancing guidelines. We also tried to minimize the risk of infection during the distribution of Holy Communion. Some people were unhappy about receiving Communion only in the hand, but this is only temporary. A few people believed I was violating the Church’s liturgical law, but I studied those laws too, and we’re taking the same precautions that the Pope and bishops around the world are taking. My aim was to allow the celebration of Mass and to make the Eucharist available again with as little risk as possible.”

Bishop Folda admitted that one of the hardest decisions he’s ever had to make was the decision to suspend public celebration of the Mass, something that hasn’t happened in the diocese since the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918.

“The Mass is so important to our faith, so I knew there would be disappointment, and that some would disagree with the decision. With a few exceptions, the overwhelming response that I heard was supportive. I think most people understood that this was necessary for everyone’s safety, at least for a while. As the virus began to spread throughout the nation and in North Dakota, I realized we would need to take precautions to avoid a major outbreak. When the situation worsened in mid-March, all schools were closed and many dioceses began to suspend public Masses. I hated the idea of closing our churches, especially during the seasons of Lent and Easter. But Bishop Kagan (Bismarck) and I talked about our situation here in North Dakota, and we agreed that it was necessary to suspend Masses and other activities for the safety of our people and the whole community.”

Parishes across the diocese have taken the suggested precautions very seriously. Many parishes that schedule multiple Masses over a weekend have volunteers clean and sanitize pews and other public areas between Masses. Funerals and wedding celebrations have resumed, but social distancing and other precautions are being observed for those ceremonies as well.
The pandemic also hit during a busy time in the Church, especially for those finishing their road to initiation into the Catholic Church and for young people waiting to make their First Communion and Confirmation. Bishop Folda has given local priests permission to administer these sacraments over the spring and summer months, but he hopes to take part in as many as he possibly can.

“I had just finished one weekend of these celebrations when we had to put everything on hold,” said Bishop Folda. “The most important thing is to make it possible for our children to receive the sacraments, so I delegated the pastors to administer Confirmation and First Communion in their own parishes, or they could work out a later date for me to come. I’ve already made it to a few more parishes, and I’m glad to have the chance to celebrate with the kids.”

One of the more puzzling restrictions in place for the faithful is the discouragement of congregational singing. Health experts believe that public singing can lead to transmission of the COVID-19 virus, especially after multiple choir members were infected as a result of a church choir rehearsal in the state of Washington during the early days of the virus breakout. Many church cantors, who have been trained to encourage the participation of the congregation by leading them in song, are suddenly soloists, which is a little strange to them.

“I think people want to come back… they want to sing,” said Steve Loegering, one of the cantors at the Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo. “We’ve worked so hard over the past few years to get more in the congregation singing. I just hope that when we bring singing back that they’ll continue to do so instead of having to start over.”

Bishop Folda knows that getting back to normal will take time, and that the progress towards normal depends on developments concerning efforts to further control the virus. Livestreaming of the Sunday Mass from the cathedral will continue into the near future for those still not ready to make the return.

“I know some people are still unsure about coming back to Mass, and that’s fine,” said Bishop Folda. “The obligation to attend Mass is still dispensed throughout the diocese. But I hope we’ll all be able to come together again very soon. The Eucharist is Jesus himself, the center of our lives as Catholics, and we can’t live our faith without him. This has been a difficult time for everyone, but the Lord will see us through it.”
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If you were to come to our home for a visit, one of the first things you would notice is a plethora of books. Our family values books, and they have a special place in our hearts. Reading books aloud often allows our family to make meaningful connections with each other and our faith.

These books, through their narration, cadence, and rhythm seep into our minds and form deep bonds in our family. They help us walk in someone’s shoes or escape our own world into another one like the snowy woods of Narnia. The stories contained in the pages captivate our minds and imaginations, delving us deep into our critical thinking skills and at the same time drawing us closer to our creator. Stories remind us of the triumph of good over evil and should leave us feeling hopeful.

For our oldest child, stories have become her source of play. One day she’s “Ma” from Little House on the Prairie, another day it’s Mary taking care of Jesus from the Nativity stories in the Gospel, or off to Italy for the tales from Strega Nona. We have many Arch Books, which share a Bible story in a fun, rhythmic rhyme while remaining true to the biblical text. These Arch Books taught our daughter a number of Bible stories and provided many hours of play. My daughter’s knowledge of Bible stories grows through the liturgical seasons and so does mine!

Stories become engrained into our hearts and minds, and the lessons they provide come out in real life. I remind my daughter to be obedient by telling her that she doesn’t want to be like Jonah. She knows Jonah was disobedient to God. I can remind her to be kind and generous like Strega Nona. Books often have heroic virtues that our children can emulate. Most recently we listened to The Wizard of Oz and we used the Lion acting with courage in spite of being scared as a foundation of what courage looks like for our daughter as she learns to ride a bike.

Reading aloud to your child allows your child to fully take in a story. They do not have the hard work of decoding or figuring out the cadence; it’s done for them by your reading. Growing up, I remember my favorite time of the school day was read-aloud time where my teacher read stories to us. I loved it so much that when I was a fifth grade teacher, reading aloud was a sacred time in my classroom. I fought hard to maintain that daily 15 minutes of reading to my students. When I teach third grade religious education, I have my students do the hard work of looking up a Bible verse or finding a Catechism paragraph that correlated to our lesson. I choose to read everything to my students for their sakes, not mine. I want my students to be able to dive into the event of Pentecost—to feel the howling wind of the Holy Spirit and not be concerned with how to say Pentecost. By reading to them, none of them needed to be nervous of their lack of skill, or feel insecure because there are harder and unfamiliar words in scripture. They only had to show up and listen.

As a parent all you have to do is show up. What I mean by that is grab a book, any book, and read cuddled up on the couch or in bed. If you as a parent have a hard time reading aloud, find an audiobook and cuddle up or gather around the table to color/draw/eat. For our family, often our days are formed by this “read aloud” format. We read books and scripture in the morning and at lunch we learn about a saint or read a beautifully illustrated picture book. Sometimes the afternoon is filled with craft time with audio books playing in the background. At the end of the day, there is one final read-aloud story, and an audiobook for the older one to listen to while falling asleep. I enjoy listening to a book as I work on a project, clean the house, or do the dishes. We love to listen to stories in the car, often times driving around the block a few extra times to hear “just a few minutes more.”

I encourage you to start making your own meaningful connections as a family through reading aloud, whether you have big kids and/or little ones. I guarantee it will change your life and your family culture.

Resources:
- Read Aloud Family by Sarah Mackenzie. More resources can be found at readaloudrevial.com.
- The Read Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease
- The Catholic Children’s Bible from St. Mary’s Press
- Picture Book of Saints by Lawrence G. Lovasik
- Anything by Tomie dePaola
- Audible for audio books
- Librovox for free audio books

Katie Zubrod is a parishioner of Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church in Reynolds and a wife and mother of two children.
At certain times in our lives, we all need guidance. Everyone needs that friend who knows our strengths, weaknesses, and quirks—friends who can see our situation with a deeper clarity than we can amid our experience of it. Their words can both console and convict us. Sometimes God sends us a saint to be that friend.

I first heard of *The Way* by St. Josemaría Escrivá in college from a peer minister at the Newman Center. While giving a presentation, he pulled out the pocket-size book and read, “‘The Mass is long,’ you say, and I reply: ‘Because your love is short.’” (529, *The Way*). He closed the book and continued his talk, but my interior bristled at the quote. “Can a saint say something like that?” The bluntness of the phrase struck me. Then, deep in my heart, I realized I had sometimes interiorly rushed the Mass along in my mind. My love was short.

After that, the more from *The Way* I read, the more excerpts both struck me and stuck with me. His clear, concise, and often blunt style continued to console and convict me as I spent more time with the little book. Fourteen years later, when my mind wanders at Mass, I often remember that phrase from *The Way*. I sigh and pray “I am sorry Lord that my love is short. Please help me to love.”

St. Josemaría Escrivá was canonized in 2002 by Pope St. John Paul II and was the founder of Opus Dei, which is a religious apostolate that means “the work of God.” He has also been called the saint of the ordinary because of his ability to see everyday circumstances in light of faith and to live heroic sanctity in day-to-day life. He encountered people in their struggles and hardships, and offered counsel that helped his directees see more clearly how the Lord was at work in whatever the situation.

St. Josemaría Escrivá is like an uncle up in heaven who effectively calls us out when we need to be convicted but also provides consoling advice when we’re troubled or desire to grow in holiness. He balances wisdom with wit, depth with succinct clarity. Besides his characteristic succinctness, there is also a beauty and intimacy with Christ that is the thread that ties all of the collected sayings of *The Way* together.

If you would like to incorporate more reading into your life but lack the time, you might appreciate that *The Way* is formatted as a collection of sayings divided by topic, making it a quick read. This little work also fits into your purse or coat pocket, making it easily accessible when you’re waiting in line or for an appointment, which can give you brief quotations to mull over throughout the day.

Some of the 46 topics in this collection include prayer, luke-warmness, examination of conscience, perseverance, joy, humility, character, the will of God, spiritual childhood, and many more.

- “May your behavior and your conversation be such that everyone who sees or hears you can say: This man reads the life of Jesus Christ” (2).
- “Jesus is your Friend—the friend with a human heart, like yours, with most loving eyes that wept for Lazarus. And as much as he loved Lazarus, he loves you...” (422).
- “You don’t know how to pray? Put yourself in the presence of God, and as soon as you have said, ‘Lord, I don’t know how to pray!’ you can be sure you’ve already begun” (90).

Other works by St. Josemaría Escrivá that are published as collections of sayings are *Furrow* and *The Forge*.

*Ashley Njaa is the Director of Evangelization for the Diocese of Fargo.*
"What do you do when it rains?"
Sidewalk artist shares faith and art, reaching unexpected lengths
By Kristina Lahr

On May 4, the Diocese of Fargo spotted a photo on Facebook showing 17-year old Maria Loh from Fargo drawing a chalk image of Our Lady of Lourdes outside her home.

When the diocese posted the photo on Facebook, it reached over 675,000 people, catching the attention of Catholic News Agency, Epic Pew, and other Catholic news outlets.

“I never imagined how far it would go,” Loh said. “I enjoy working in quiet and solitude, and sudden publicity isn’t exactly what I would’ve wanted or expected. However, working in a public area for the first time has shown me many things. I’ve found a way to share my faith through art. I never would’ve chosen it myself, but God in his brilliant plan used my hands and talents to hopefully bring others to him, and I’m awed at the results.”

She says that part of being an artist is revealing what you value in your work. As she worked on her most recent piece, Our Lady of Lourdes, passerby asked her who the lady was, giving Loh an opportunity to share her devotion to Mary, not only as the Mother of the Church, but also as her mother.

“Mary’s figure is an image many artists have tried to capture throughout history,” she said. “Of all people, she is the most worthy of being depicted. The purity of Mary is cause enough for admiration, but in her great humility, she accepted the will of God and became the Mother of our Lord. No one is as close to God as she is, and when I depict her, I hope she will bring others closer to God too.”

Some of the most common questions she gets are: what do you do when it rains, and why do you work in such a temporary medium?

She says that while seeing her art wash away isn’t always enjoyable, it allows her to be detached knowing it isn’t permanent.

“As an artist, I think it’s natural to aim for excellence in your chosen craft or medium. I’ve found myself wasting hours upon hours trying to get a face right or correcting a fold of fabric, but no matter how much time I spend working, there will always be something else I’m dissatisfied with. The temporary element of the chalk reminds me that eventually it will rain, and when it does, the imperfections will be washed away with it. That’s part of the reason why I love chalk so much and why I’m comfortable working with it. In the four years I’ve spent working on the sidewalk, I’ve learned many things, one of them being that my mistakes aren’t set in stone; they’re just briefly set upon it.”

Her most recent work was completed just as North Dakota was beginning to reopen after the COVID-19 shutdown. During the shutdown, Loh took more time for self-reflection and prayer, recognizing that she never knew how much she’d miss the Eucharist when Mass was temporarily suspended.

“My greatest comfort in those moments was remembering that God will never abandon his Church, and that even the most difficult and confusing situations are under his will. I want to encourage everyone, young and old, to continue making the world a brighter place. We all know too well how dark and foreboding these times have been. But despite this, each one of us has the potential to illuminate our lives like beacons if we allow God to work through us.”

Maria Loh has since created a Facebook page to showcase her art called Art by Maria Loh.
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* As of 01/2018, rated A+ Superior by A.M. Best

The Dolan Agency
The Shanley Catholic High School Class of 2020 stand at a wind-swept Sid Cichy Stadium in Fargo on May 20 to take part in their graduation ceremony. The Shanley event is believed to have been the first graduation held in the state since state officials increased the number of people allowed at public events to 250. The 88 graduates, who finished their senior year online through distance learning, practiced social distancing, wore face coverings, received their diplomas through a no-contact receiving line, and were allowed to have just two family members present at the ceremony. In his remarks, Bishop John Folda asked the graduates not to dwell on what they missed at the end of their senior year but to celebrate their accomplishments and to look forward to the future before them. (submitted photo)

St. Joseph students present virtual science fair

St. Joseph School in Devils Lake held their annual science fair, virtually this year. Students were required to video their project presentations and send them to the judges, who were biology students of Mrs. Shaun Prince, Associate Professor of Biology at Lake Region State College in Devils Lake. Awards were given to the top three projects on May 13 through Zoom, an online video service used for teleconferences, distance education, and social relations.

Teachers from St. Joseph surprised the winning students by gathering outside their homes during the usual daily morning prayer. The gathering was recorded via Zoom so all students, families, and staff were able to witness the excitement. Third place went to Madilyn Dion with her project “Beagle Bells,” second place to Chloe Lundquist with “Boom Big Barley,” and first place went to Mitchell Gerhardt (pictured here) with “Ready, Set, Levitate.”
In a recent essay in the Wall Street Journal, Kimberly Cutter chronicled the death of her father by suicide. As he struggled with rapidly progressing prostate cancer, he lost more than 30 pounds, becoming gaunt and emaciated. Back pain and nausea forced him to spend much of his time in bed.

A few days before Christmas, he shared with Kimberly that he was thinking about shooting himself. Kimberly argued with him, stressing that she and her sisters couldn’t accept a violent ending: “If he shot himself, my father would die alone. Someone in our family would have to find him,” she wrote.

His daughters convinced him to look into other options. When he started investigating lethal drugs he ran into questions of reliability. He encountered horror stories about “wrong dosages and unreliable contents, painful, draw-out demises.” A lifelong marksman, he deemed the gun his best option: “If I shoot myself, I know I won’t miss.”

Kimberly then describes an important decision she made: “I couldn’t accept my father’s threat to shoot himself. I thought about violence and the fear that always lies beneath it. How violence, in essence, is a twisted cry for help. At some point, it occurred to me that what I needed was a way to make my father feel loved. If I could make him feel loved enough, maybe he would not forget my sisters and me in his lowest moments and do what his darkest impulses urged. Late that night, I had an idea. It was childishly simple. Corny, really. I would start sending him daily love notes. I sent the first email the next morning. The subject line read: ‘Reasons Why I Love You.’ …As soon as I sent it, I knew I was onto something. …For the next 99 days, I continued sending my father a different reason why I loved him each morning. They ranged from the ridiculous to the sublime—from memories of snorkeling with him through a school of angelfish in Jupiter, Fla., to his incomparable Daffy Duck imitation: ‘Suffering Succotash!’ …I could tell the emails were working; I could hear it in my father’s voice when I spoke to him on the phone; could feel it in the grateful emails he sent back in response. The daily act of pulling up a reason I loved him and sending it to him seemed to restore him in some essential way… My father never again discussed with me his plans for how or when he would die.”

Kimberly’s hundred love letters emboldened her dad to live out his life more fully and resist his fears for much longer than he would have otherwise. Tragically, however, they did not stop his suicide. He ended up purchasing lethal barbiturates from a company in China and, late in his illness, consumed the fatal powder.

His death left painful contradictions, as suicide always does. He had acceded to his daughters’ requests to avoid shooting himself, using drugs rather than a bullet, but he still died alone, discovered by a stunned family member. And while his suicide was perhaps not as violent, death by overdose can feel just as violent as death by gunfire. The underlying reality of pills, powders, or poisons still involves a brutal devastation of our physiology. Our bodies often resist, with the vomiting of pills, convulsions, paralysis, and the like. Although Kimberly and her sisters may have preferred that their dad succumb to toxins instead of a bullet, those sentiments, in the final analysis, are more poetic than rational.

Sometimes the poetic may feel like all we have when we’re confronted with the tragedy and incoherence of certain human choices. Another incoherent part of Kimberly’s story is the fact that, despite her father’s suicide, she seems to support the idea of physician-assisted suicide. While no one wants a loved one to experience pain and agony in the final days, only a false and misguided sense of compassion could conclude that instead of eliminating the suffering, we should eliminate the sufferer.

Kimberly may well have been aware of these inconsistencies as she embarked on the project of crafting a hundred love letters to her father, striving to help him understand that he was treasured by his father, striving to help him understand that he was treasured, he was treasured and still a source of blessing to others in spite of his painful trials. Each of our loving human gestures speaks volumes about the singular power of love to overcome fear, and to strengthen us in adversity.

While the hundred letters did not ultimately dissuade him from giving into the temptation to take his life, they nevertheless give us a step we can take when confronted with loved ones who think their life no longer has meaning or that death is better than life. And there is no need to wait until loved ones are in agony to pick up the pen to say, in one or more ways, how much and why they’re loved.

Diocesan policy: Reporting child abuse

The Diocese of Fargo is committed to the protection of youth. Please report any incidents or suspected incidents of child abuse, including sexual abuse, to civil authorities. If the situation involves a member of the clergy or a religious order, a seminarian, or an employee of a Catholic school, parish, the diocesan offices or other Catholic entity within the diocese, we ask that you also report the incident or suspected incident to Msgr. Joseph Goering, vicar general, at (701) 356-7945 or the victim assistance coordinator, at (701) 356-7965 or by email at victimassistance@fargodiocese.org. To make a report of sexual abuse of a minor and related misconduct by bishops, go to ReportBishopAbuse.org or call 1-800-276-1562.
There are a lot of things in life that we are bad at, and the world is good at letting us know this! For example, there are some of us who just can’t dance. Whether it’s because we have two left feet or because we can’t carry a beat, we just don’t have that gift. Others can’t sing. Thankfully, with enough training they might be passable at it, but it’s still definitely not one of their best gifts. In fact, there may even be people out there who are relieved we have temporarily stopped singing at Mass!

Why do I mention this? Because while there may be things we’re not great at, there are also areas of life where we really excel—skills we have that we can share with others. Some gifts are easily recognized, like someone who has a beautiful voice. Sports and athletics is another talent greatly valued by our society. Certainly a knack for technology is a great gift, and so is being handy with tools and fixing things.

The ability to see how details fit together can also be a powerful gift. People with this strength can take huge projects and help accomplish them more quickly than others. They have that skill, and by working with them, we can see how projects are done and learn how to organize better ourselves. By sharing our strengths, we may become much better than we ever could on our own.

Other gifts can be more hidden, which can be more challenging to share. Some people have a great gift for spirituality. For those who don’t work in ministry, this can be difficult to share with others. But even without a formal position, they can participate in a Bible study or book club, or simply share their faith with others as it comes up in how they live their lives.

The takeaway I want to offer here is that all of us have unique strengths and talents to share. Many require years of practice, like sports or the arts. For Christians, additional graces are received through Baptism and Confirmation with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But these aren’t given for our own use. Rather, as members of the Body of Christ, we are called to share these gifts with others (Rom. 12:3-8). Likewise, we are called to love sincerely, to hate what is evil, and to hold on to what is good. (Rom. 12:9). Of course this isn’t always easy to do, and if we aren’t in the habit of sharing our gifts with others it’s very challenging. But if we don’t regularly practice sharing our gifts, how can we become better?

Sometimes we may feel like we don’t have any strengths to share. If you are not sure of your own gifts, I suggest a couple strategies. One idea is to complete a strengths finder or another personality assessment and inventory. The StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Gallup and Tom Rath has been a popular tool for many years within many businesses and organizations. Another popular resource among Catholics for identifying and sharing our talents is *Forming Intentional Disciples* by Sherry Wendell.

As important as this is, sharing our strengths or talents doesn’t replace sharing our treasures. Even in this time of struggle for so many, I was awed by the unselfishness of others. For example, someone gave us a gift a few week ago with a short note on it. They explained that the gift was from their government payment. Surely they could have used it on themselves, but instead they thought others could use it more. They gave the funds away to help their neighbors affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through gifts to Catholic Charities North Dakota and another local ministry.

During these times, it may be more challenging than before to share our talents with others, but that doesn’t give us an excuse not to. Look around and think about how we can make the world a little better. In a time of crisis, isn’t there an even greater need and opportunity to do good? What would happen if we all shared our strengths with each other in our parishes and communities? As we return to our parishes, let us truly live out the final words of Mass, “Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life!”

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**CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF NORTH DAKOTA**

Chad Prososki
Director of Development and Community Relations for Catholic Charities North Dakota.

**WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF WE ALL SHARED OUR STRENGTHS WITH EACH OTHER IN OUR PARISHES AND COMMUNITIES?**

As we return to our parishes, let us truly live out the final words at Mass, ‘Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life!’ –Chad Prososki

Why do I mention this? Because while there may be things we’re not great at, there are also areas of life where we really excel—skills we have that we can share with others. Some gifts are easily recognized, like someone who has a beautiful voice. Sports and athletics is another talent greatly valued by our society. Certainly a knack for technology is a great gift, and so is being handy with tools and fixing things.

The ability to see how details fit together can also be a powerful gift. People with this strength can take huge projects and help accomplish them more quickly than others. They have that skill, and by working with them, we can see how projects are done and learn how to organize better ourselves. By sharing our strengths, we may become much better than we ever could on our own.

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Pandemic could awaken us to see Christ’s light

CATHOLIC ACTION

Christopher Dodson
Executive director of the North Dakota Catholic Conference, which acts on behalf of the Catholic bishops of N.D. to respond to public policy issues of concern to the Catholic Church.

Events that disrupt and radically alter our daily lives can also provide opportunities to see our world more clearly and then change for the better.

Quoting a hymn that was already sung in his time, St. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians:

“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph. 5:14).

The passage speaks to us on many levels. While the stanza may refer to those who have fallen asleep in the Lord, it also applies to us during our life now on this earth. To “awake” means to turn from sin, to turn to the Light of Christ.

In times like these, we ask ‘What really matters?’ –Christopher Dodson

There is another kind of sleep that affects human persons, especially in our times. It is a kind of malaise, or “mere” existence where we get stuck in theordinariness of things. Indeed, writing in the early 4th Century, one of the earliest commenters on St. Paul’s letters wrote that “by sleep [Paul] signifies a stupor of the mind.”

Big things like natural disasters or terrorist attacks can awaken us from this type of sleep. So can little things. Catholic novelist and existentialist philosopher Walker Percy’s antagonists are often awakened by little things that cause the subject to reevaluate or see for the first time their entire life and the world they inhabit. COVID-19 and the responses to it, however, have not been little things. The pandemic has upended our world, from our personal lives to entire economic systems and government. Moreover, the effects of this disruption will be long lasting.

With pain and struggles, however, can come awakenings. The things we have overlooked because we were lost in daily ordinariness might come into sharper focus or might be appreciated again. They might even be grasped for the first time. In times like these, we ask “What really matters?”

Besides our own salvation and path to greater holiness, the Catholic view of the social world might gain greater appreciation. In Catholic social doctrine “what really matters” is the life and dignity of every human person. It is not the economy. It is not our individual freedoms. It is not governmental laws. It is not scientific advances. All of those “goods” have their importance and role, but all must serve and respect the life and dignity of every human person from conception to natural death.

Our response to COVID-19 has highlighted our natural ability to recognize this truth. It is natural, because it is part of the natural law written into our hearts (Rom. 2:14-15). We stopped what we were doing and the way we were doing things to put the health and safety of others first.

Our response has also highlighted that we are social creatures. Humans were not created to be autonomous individuals. We are meant to be connected to each other and to creation. The response to the pandemic has brought this truth forth in several ways. The spread of the virus revealed the interconnectedness of our world. At the same time, it has become apparent that attacking the virus requires reaching out across communities, countries, professions, and disciplines. Meanwhile, as we practice social distancing, staying at home, and even missing church, we feel the pain of isolation. The pain tells us something about who we as creations of a Triune God and made in his image.

We have also seen a refocus on what is the common good. Community responses to the pandemic, especially government responses, should always promote the common good. The common good, however, does not mean what is best for the highest number of individuals.

The common good means “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfilment more fully and more easily” (Gaudium et Spes, no. 26). “The common good, in fact, can be understood as the social and community dimension of the moral good” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, no. 164).

This means that the responses, in addition to always respecting the life and dignity of everyone in the context of community, should look at the broader, moral, aspects of human dignity and development. This includes the principles of solidarity, a preferential option for the poor, respect for creation, recognition of the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and the importance of local decision-making when appropriate.

Catholic social doctrine does not provide answers to all the decisions that we must make during the pandemic or any other time. It does, however, provide principles for guidance. Straying from these principles harms human persons, our environment, and God’s plan.

Too often we do not realize that we have strayed until a disaster strikes. The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences could awaken us from our sleep and again see his light.
When I began my first year of seminary at St. Gregory the Great Seminary this past August, I thought I had some idea of what was in store for me. I anticipated that my first year at seminary would be a considerable adjustment, but despite this, I began the year excited to see what God had in store for me.

Upon arriving, one of the first things I noted was the new freshman feeling despite being in my third year of higher education. The other seminarians and faculty, however, quickly welcomed me into the community. The first few months of seminary were one long orientation. They consisted mainly of adjusting to seminary life: accustoming myself to the structured schedule, familiarizing myself with the classes in philosophy, and wrestling with this additional aspect of my identity.

At first, adjustment to seminary life was difficult. I did not know anyone well, and the schedule and classes were unlike what I had experienced before. With time, I got to know more of the seminarians and found myself enjoying the classes. By second semester, I was much more at home and adjusted to seminary, so I could enter even more into formation, since everything was no longer brand new. However, I was soon reminded by the outbreak of COVID-19 that I am still not in control. The world has weathered many plagues and pandemics, but naturally, one thinks of them as mere stories, having occurred decades and centuries ago, not as possibilities in one’s lifetime. Yet, here we are.

At the seminary, the spread of the virus seemed surreal. As cases were confirmed nearer to us, we stopped leaving the seminary as much. Not long after, our regional health department mandated the previously recommended health measures of social distancing that are all too familiar with us now. Some things changed, but many remained the same. We still had classes, only online with the lay professors videoing in. We still had Mass in the morning and prayed some liturgy of the hours in common. These things helped keep some sense of normalcy, which was appreciated.

Despite life at seminary not being as drastically affected as many of those in the world, the turmoil that was arising still hit hard. Though we were secluded and likely relatively safe, we were concerned for family and friends without such luxuries of seclusion, the sacraments, and a sizeable supporting community within their household. Also, an outbreak at seminary would spread quickly. In response, we had more holy hours with exposition available throughout the week and a solemn Eucharistic procession to ask for protection in these times.

I found during my time at seminary as this outbreak was unfolding, I grew more than I could have if all had been placid. All the extra time for prayer and time with my brother seminarians and the priests, helped me to better understand the call of a priest—to be an intercessor on behalf of the people of God. With having Mass, communal prayer, and confession readily available, I had many opportunities to offer my intentions at Mass, my rosary, or other prayers for those struggling in the world with the coronavirus. I found that offering my prayers for others both in and out of the community helped me to love them even more. Praying for my brother seminarians allowed me to better live in unbroken community with them for months with much less difficulty than I expected living locked in a house with 50 men for two months would entail. Praying for those outside of the seminary allowed me to accustom myself to offering myself on others’ behalf and helped me appreciate my family more when I saw them. Despite the difficulties that arose and remain, I find myself thankful for this year and all the growth that Jesus lovingly guided me through.

Editor’s Note: Seminarian Life is a column written by current Diocese of Fargo seminarians. Please continue to pray for them.

All the extra time for prayer and time with my brother seminarians and the priests, helped me to better understand the call of a priest—to be an intercessor on behalf of the people of God. – Garrett Aberle

At first, adjustment to seminary life was difficult. I did not know anyone well, and the schedule and classes were unlike what I had experienced before. With time, I got to know more of the seminarians and found myself enjoying the classes. By second semester, I was much more at home and adjusted to seminary, so I could enter even more into formation, since everything was no longer brand new. However, I was soon reminded by the outbreak of COVID-19 that I am still not in control. The world has weathered many plagues and pandemics, but naturally, one thinks of them as mere stories, having occurred decades and centuries ago, not as possibilities in one’s lifetime. Yet, here we are.

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The Friday before Memorial Day, I accompanied my mom on her annual pilgrimage to rural life in the southeast part of North Dakota. Since the early 80s, Mom takes her regular journey to the cemetery near Rutland to care for the headstone and burial plot of her parents: my grandparents. This was my first year going with my mom.

After an hour’s drive, we both agreed it was a blessing to get out of the house and office after being cooped up for the past few months. As we rolled into the cemetery, it was obvious that someone, or group of someone(s), had spent time sprucing up the grounds. The grass had been recently cut and looked sharp. The trimming around headstones and trees was obvious. Trees and bushes were pruned and looking healthy. Buds of flowers were starting to pop on the trees and many annual flowers were ready to bloom.

On our way home, both Mom and I remarked how nice the cemetery looked and how well it was cared for. I imagine most folks want their body interred in a cemetery that is cared for and remains a peaceful place for family and friends to visit. This cemetery fit the bill. Sometimes I forget that when I visit the cemetery of my dad or other relatives, there are people who dedicate their time and efforts to make sure my visit is a pleasant one.

In our diocese alone, there are over 160 cemeteries. Unfortunately, many of our cemeteries don’t have the funds to provide the care and upkeep the cemetery deserves.

There are a number of ways to support your local cemetery. First and foremost, your pastor or cemetery caretaker would most likely welcome any help with upkeep of the grounds, especially before Memorial Day. General cash donations are always helpful; however, I encourage all Catholics who have a cemetery that is near and dear to them to strongly consider a provision in their estate plan for their local cemetery. Many of these cemeteries have a “perpetual care” fund and in some cases a permanent endowment fund.

Hopefully, through some thoughtful planning on our part, we can help provide a peaceful cemetery visit for the generations that will come after us. If you would like to learn more about how to support your local cemetery, please contact your pastor or send me an email at steve.schons@fargodiocese.org.
During these past few months, while we “shelter in place” to prevent the spread of COVID-19, we have repeatedly heard the phrase “we are all in this together.” We have seen how the ordinary, unassuming workers have become essential, so that the majority of us can stay home. We have learned the concept of “social distancing” and have had to become creative about visiting our friends and family, especially those most vulnerable to the virus. For those who have lost a loved one, either to the virus or some other cause, we have been unable to gather to mourn the loss. Celebrations of life, birth, and death have been either canceled or postponed. This has been a time of uncertainty and everyone has been impacted in some way by the pandemic.

My religious community, the Union of Sisters of the Presentation, has also been impacted, having closed our doors to friends, visitors, even our employees who help provide for our daily needs. We’ve been unable to visit some of our sisters who live in long-term care facilities away from us. We, as Presentation Sisters, claim hospitality as one of our gifts, welcoming friends as well as strangers. We hope that when people come through our doors, they feel the presence of God and come to know how the Holy Spirit is working in and through their lives. Like many, we shut our doors to protect ourselves from acquiring COVID-19. Like many, we have become creative in welcoming others into our lives in different ways. I am grateful for the opportunity to share with you some of those ways.

Following in the footsteps of our foundress, Nano Nagle, we recognize that the source of our lives together is Christ, expressed in word and sacraments. Twice daily we gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours; we pray for the needs of the Church and the entire world. We are especially mindful of those who are directly impacted by the effects of the virus. We never forget how fortunate we are that through the diligent efforts of our chaplain we are able to receive the Eucharist on a daily basis. One of our sisters livestreams the service over the internet, allowing others to join us. These livestreams began during Holy Week and continue as a way of being in community with others who shelter in place; it is a way of being together in this time of uncertainty. Daily, one of the sisters who resides in a long-term facility is called to connect her into the liturgy. We are grateful for the opportunity to celebrate together and at the end of the Eucharist, when the sisters are leaving the chapel, many stop at the phone to give her a greeting. Hopefully this simple gesture helps her to know that she is not forgotten.

The Presentation Associates or Friends of Nano, are an extension of our community. These women and men join with us in following in the footsteps of Nano, serving God’s people where they live and work. We are grateful to them for their attentiveness to us as well as to the people with whom they work. Following the Eucharist on each Friday, we have the opportunity to connect with some of our Associates through a Zoom call, giving us an opportunity to find out how everyone is doing. We miss their presence in person and look forward to the time when they are able to join us again for the Eucharist and brunch.

Soon after the Eucharist on the Feast of Pentecost, some of our Associates in the Fargo/Moorhead area surprised us with a parade. As each of the 30 cars drove in front of us an occupant of the vehicle exited and presented a gift to a sister whom she or he had adopted to pray for. It was a lovely exchange of unity that tells us that even though we continue to shelter in place, we are not forgotten. Each of the sisters, too, has adopted at least one Associate to call or write to offer prayer, encouragement, and support. A ministry that some of us participate in is sewing masks for people who might be in need. One of our Associates stops by the convent to collect them for distribution to various shelters and communities. Again, it is a way we might connect to others. Though it is a time of uncertainty, I am grateful for these expressions of hospitality to us. I can never stop expressing to God my gratitude for the many good gifts that I have received.

“Though it is a time of uncertainty, I am grateful for these expressions of hospitality to us. I can never stop expressing to God my gratitude for the many good gifts that I have received.” — Sister Shawna Foley, PBVM
75 years ago — 1945

Over thirty young ladies, representing four dioceses from North Dakota, Montana, and Wisconsin, came together in Devils Lake at the week-long Grail School of Apostolate. The School was entitled “The Good Ground” and was the second of its kind in N.D. The young women endeavored to see the importance and dignity of work in the Christian pattern of life in the home and on the land. A picture taken shows some of the students as they pause in the fields to pray the Angelus.

50 years ago — 1970

Edgeley parishioners of the Church of the Transfiguration concluded a five-year plan on schedule with the dedication and altar consecration of their new church on June 12. A committee, assisted by Father Cote, worked on the design of the church with George Rutter of Moorhead, architect. The building cost $115,000.

St. Philip Neri Church, Napoleon, was dedicated June 13. The new church replaced the one that was in the same location and had served the parish for 51 years. Lunn Construction of Bismarck built the Church, with Bernard Hillyer, architect.

June 27 and 28 marked the 100th anniversary of the founding of St. Benedict’s Church in Wild Rice. The centennial celebration began with an auction, bazaar and games as well as a historical pageant. A party on the church lawn for parishioners and friends followed that evening. A concelebrated outdoor Mass of Thanksgiving with Bishop Leo F. Dworschak took place the following afternoon.

20 years ago — 2000

Three Harvey artists (Curt Joern, Judy Keller, Jackie Young) worked together to create an oil painting for their parish, St. Cecelia. The image is of the Blessed Virgin Mary holding the Christ child and is the latest in a series of artistic works to recently grace the parish. It was dedicated to a special parishioner, the late Isabelle Ripplinger, who had a great devotion to Mary. The mural stands 6-feet high and 5-feet wide and joins a collection of other works painted for St. Cecilia Church by its parishioners that are displayed at appropriate times throughout the year.

These news items, compiled by Danielle Thomas, were found in New Earth and its predecessor, Catholic Action News.

Bonus entry… 1919, Spanish Influenza

Pastor of St. Charles in Oakes, Fr. J.P. Zimmermann, wrote an entry in the parish journal on January 2, 1919. “The year 1918 (Fall) brought us a 9-week quarantine on account of the Spanish Influenza in church and school. This quarantine was fully unnecessary as there were never a very great number of cases in Oakes and vicinity. Churches were closed while the more dangerous places like depots and stores were wide open and without any restrictions.”

Life’s milestones

Joanne (Kester) and Elmer Bouch-er, parishioners of Little Flower Church in Rugby, celebrated their 60th anniversary on June 9. Joanne also celebrated her 80th birthday on April 30. They have 4 daughters, 10 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren.

Gerry and Mary Joyce celebrated their 68th anniversary on June 2. They were married at St. Patrick Church in Fremont, Neb. and are now parishioners at Holy Family Church in Grand Forks.

Wayne and Carol Denault celebrated their 50th anniversary on June 8. They were married at St. Mark’s Church in Conway, and now are parishioners at St. Catherine’s Church in Valley City. They have 5 children and 13 grandchildren.

Wayne and Evangeline Gerig will celebrate their 69th anniversary on June 25. They are parishioners of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Balta. They have 8 children, 6 grandchildren, and 7 great-grandchildren.
The children of Laddie and Rose Marie Pecka congratulate their parents on their 65th anniversary on June 8. They are blessed with 4 children, 7 grandchildren, and 4 great-grandchildren and have enjoyed over 70 years of playing in a band together. They are parishioners of St. Mary’s Church in Lakota.

Robert (Bob) and Margaret (Peggy Fitzgerald) Plemel celebrated their 65th anniversary on May 21. Peggy celebrated her 85th birthday April 26, and Bob will celebrate his 90th birthday July 1. They were parishioners of Assumption Church in Starkweather until they moved to Sacred Heart Church in Cando. They have 9 children (1 deceased), 31 grandchildren, and 46 great-grandchildren.

Walter and Mary Jo (Carvell) Seeba celebrated their 69th anniversary on June 9. They were married at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Fargo and are parishioners at Holy Spirit in Fargo. They have been blessed with 10 children, 19 grandchildren, and 22 great-grandchildren.

Regina Eisenzimmer of Rugby and Balta parishes will turn 90 on July 9. She grew up in Karlsruhe and was married to Bennie Eisenzimmer until his passing in May 2004. Currently she attends Little Flower Church in Rugby.

Christ Heintz will celebrate his 85th birthday on June 28. Christ and Judy are parishioners of Little Flower Church in Rugby and have been married 58 years. They have 5 children and 13 grandchildren.

Theresa Klosterman celebrated her 90th birthday on June 8. She was married to Mark who died in 2000. She is a parishioner of St. Anthony Church in Mooreton and St. John Church in Wahpeton. They have 6 children, 12 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren. She currently lives in Wahpeton.

Helen Volk, parishioner of St. Cecilia’s Church of Harvey, will celebrate her 90th birthday on June 18. She is the favorite “auntie” to many nieces, nephews, and great-great nieces and nephews.

Robert (Bob) Lamotte, parishioner of St. Joseph Church in Devils Lake, celebrated his 80th birthday on June 11. Bob was married to Maidell (Lambert) Lamotte for 55 years until her death in 2012. They have 3 children and 6 grandchildren.

Share life’s milestones
As a way to celebrate life and love, we encourage parishioners throughout the Diocese of Fargo to send a photo and news brief about golden anniversaries and anniversaries of 60 or more years or birthdays of 80 or more years to: New Earth, Diocese of Fargo, 5201 Bishops Blvd. S., Suite A, Fargo, ND 58104 or news@fargodiocese.org.
The pandemic that we are living through has provoked deep reflections from my life in two worlds. While we struggle through the health and economic destruction of this virus in the United States, our resources to fight this battle are significant. As the Executive Director of Friends of Chimbote, my other world is in the poorest barrios of Chimbote, Peru. Our Mission was founded and continues to operate to serve the least of our brothers and sisters as called for by Christ in Matthew 25.

I returned to Fargo on March 14 from a week-long Mission Trip to Chimbote that included a team from FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) Ministries. We built three wooden homes, assessed community needs, and worshipped. It was truly a miraculous trip with many blessings and solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Peru. On March 15, President Vizcarra closed the country of Peru. All Peruvians have been quarantined ever since. The quarantine will last 105 days if it ends on the target date of June 30.

This is devastating for the poor we serve who need to work each day to buy food, water, medicine, and basic supplies. The poor of Chimbote are a cash society. During our Mission Trip, we spent each day with these Chimbotanos as we removed their shanties and built their wooden homes. We witnessed that they do not have two days of food in their homes. These poorest barrios do not have running water or sewers.

This drastic quarantine (with military and police enforcement) is necessary to prevent widespread infection and death. The country is plagued with diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, and other conditions like weakened immune systems from poor diet and hygiene that make COVID-19 so deadly. Combine that with the lack of ICU beds and ventilators (350 ventilators for 35 million people) and the results could be even more disastrous. The virus is spreading in the crowded living conditions of the poor.

We are doing all that we can to alleviate the suffering—distributing food, water, medicine, and facilitating telephone health calls for Mission beneficiaries who have COVID-19 symptoms but cannot get in to see a doctor. The care packages that we provide cost $18 and include food and water for five days for a family of four. Many of the barrios have organized Olla Comuns (Common Pot) where neighbors work together to cook for their block and provide food for those most in need. We are providing supplies. Even the city of Chimbote has asked for our help with food supplies for the residents of the poorest barrios. Unfortunately, we do not have enough funds to meet the city’s request.

The sobering fact is the majority of our beneficiaries do not exist in the government’s system. They do not have a bank account or identification to receive the small amount of funds available from the national government ($223 for the 105 days).

A powerful and favorite hymn that comes to mind in these conditions is based on Psalm 34: “The Lord hears the cry of the poor.” The privilege and burden of our Mission and living in two worlds is to provide the voice of the poor even when we too suffer and struggle. Our Mission workers in Chimbote and our beneficiaries ask us “please do not forget us.” We humbly bring forth their cry.

We trust in God and will get through this to continue to impact and transform the lives of the poorest of the poor in Chimbote, Peru. We pray to continue Christ’s work for another four decades. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to make this possible. We ask for your continued prayers and support.
A reporting system accepting sexual misconduct allegations against U.S. bishops and eparchs is in place. Called the Catholic Bishops Abuse Reporting Service, or CBAR, the system became operational March 16.

The mechanism incorporates a website and a toll-free telephone number through which individuals can file reports regarding a bishop. The nationwide system is being implemented by individual dioceses under the direction of each respective cardinal, archbishop, or bishop. The information gathered will be protected through enhanced encryption.

Approved by the U.S. bishops in June 2019 at their spring general assembly, the reporting mechanism meets the requirements established by Pope Francis in his “motu proprio” *Vos Estis Lux Mundi* (You are the light of the world) to have a way of receiving reports of sexual misconduct by a bishop.

Under CBAR, people with complaints about any other actions of a bishop, such as diocesan assignments, church closings, liturgy or homily content, will be asked to contact the appropriate diocese or eparchy directly. Allegations of sexual abuse by a priest, deacon, religious, diocesan staff member, or volunteer, will be directed to the local diocesan or eparchial victim assistance coordinator under the process that has been in place under the 2002 “Charter for Protection of Children and Young People.”

Pope Francis released his “motu proprio” in May 2019 following a worldwide meeting of bishops’ conference leaders at the Vatican early in 2019 to discuss the church’s response to clergy sexual abuse. The document specifically addresses allegations of sexual misconduct and other accusations of actions or omissions intended to interfere with or avoid civil or church investigations of such misconduct by clergy.

The “motu proprio” requires dioceses and eparchies worldwide to establish “one or more public, stable and easily accessible systems for submission of reports” by May 31.

Editors note: The website and telephone number may be found on the Diocese of Fargo website at www.fargodiocese.org/catholic-bishop-abuse-reporting-system.
As dioceses across the United States begin to resume public Masses amid the coronavirus pandemic, many are taking additional precautions to stay within guidelines from local health officials. In some instances, bishops have prohibited the distribution of Holy Communion on the tongue in an effort to prevent the spread of the virus.

But can a bishop order that the Eucharist be distributed only on the hand?

Timothy Olson, a canonist for the Diocese of Fargo and the secretary of the Canon Law Society of America, told CNA that a bishop does have the authority to restrict the distribution of Holy Communion to in the hand alone, when it is a matter of necessity.

“Ordinarily, there is no doubt that a bishop lacks the authority to restrict the reception of communion to the hand only,” Olson said. “Redemptionis sacramentum [a Vatican instruction on Eucharistic matters] is explicit about this fact.”

“At the same time,” Olson continued, “canon law, including liturgical law, is the Church’s practical expression of her theology and philosophy. Thus, sometimes it is necessary to make recourse to sources beyond the mere and obvious legal texts.”

Olson pointed to the Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas as instructive on the matter.

“In this case, Thomas Aquinas is a valuable source for understanding how human law operates looking at the Summa Theologiae, I-II, Q. 96,” Olson said.

“Aquinas teaches that every law is directed to the common good of man. He also teaches that, unlike the Divine Lawgiver, a human lawgiver is incapable of foreseeing every circumstance in which the law will be applied.”

“As a result, a human law that in most circumstances promotes the common good, can in an individual situation actually harm the common good. Aquinas concludes that in such a case, the observance of the human law is able to be dispensed.”

Fr. James Bradley, assistant professor at the School of Canon Law at The Catholic University of America, disagreed, arguing that the decision to prohibit the distribution of the Eucharist on the tongue should lie with Rome, not with diocesan bishops.

“The liturgical discipline of the Church, because of its importance in relation to the nature of the sacraments and the deposit of faith, is generally reserved to the Apostolic See,” Bradley told CNA.

“Since the Second Vatican Council there has been a broadening of what the diocesan bishops and episcopal conferences can regulate in the liturgy, but what this entails is quite narrowly defined in the law,” said Bradley.

Olson agreed that “ordinarily, the dispensation of a law is reserved to the authority who issued the law.”

“However,” he said, “Aquinas notes that in the case of necessity where action must be taken urgently in order to prevent the harm, ‘the mere necessity brings with it a dispensation, since necessity knows no (human) law.’”

Olson offered Aquinas’ example of a city whose ruler orders the city gates closed at a certain time, but an army of the city’s defenders become stuck outside the gate with an enemy force in pursuit.

“Aquinas concludes that if the rightful authority can be reached in time to open the gates with his permission, it ought to be done,” Olson said. “However, if there is danger in the delay caused by referring the matter, necessity itself allows the gates to be opened.”

Olson said when it comes to the liturgy, there are “some aspects that are of divine law, and thus never subject to dispensation, such as the matter and form of a sacrament.”

“Other aspects of the liturgy, however, are of human law, such as which readings are to be read, or the manner of reception of Communion,” he said. “Although these human laws are written to protect the dignity and efficacy of the liturgy, they are able to be dispensed in cases of urgent necessity.”

He added that there is precedent for such decisions.

“A stark example of liturgical laws being dispensed by necessity occurred in the concentration camps of WWII,” Olson said. “Priests, such as St. Maximilian Kolbe, always observing the matter and form for the confection of the Eucharist, held extremely truncated Masses while imprisoned, only observing those rubrics that were possible in the situation.”

Olson said that “provided that a true urgent necessity is present, a diocesan bishop can recognize that a human law, even if it is liturgical, or ordinarily reserved to a higher authority, has been dispensed.”

But Bradley cautioned against presuming the ability to dispense with liturgical laws in the Church.

“It seems to me that the fact that the liturgical law is specifically reserved to the Apostolic See, except in limited cases defined by the law, means that changes to liturgical discipline and practice are not within the competence of the diocesan bishop unless the law prescribes such,” Bradley said.

“Of course,” Olson told CNA, “canonists will always present different opinions on how the law can be interpreted and applied, that’s the job of lawyers. In the end, the final authority of interpretation lies with Rome, and it will be for Rome to intervene—or not—as they decide.”
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NEW EARTH  JUNE 2020
Okay, then, let’s talk about that word, “choice”

By the time I arrived that day, the sidewalk advocates who’d come earlier had bad news. “Women have just been pouring in today. Maybe 25 have gone in already.”

It wasn’t what I’d hope to hear as I assumed my post at our state’s only abortion facility, but there it was. About five additional women came in during my couple hours on site; meaning that, all told, around 30 children had died, 60 women and men had become parents of dead children, and 120 grandparents had, knowingly or unknowingly, lost their grandchildren.

All in a day’s work for the Red River Women’s “Clinic.”

Not only was it a busy day, but a lot of hardened hearts had shown up, according to the morning crew. “There was a lot of anger today.” I also observed an unusual number of passersby stopping to talk to the escorts with the typical, demonstrative prattle: “I just had to tell you what a wonderful job you’re doing! Keep up the good work!”

I don’t usually intervene in these conversations, but something compelled me that day. “You know, they’re not doing good work,” I said to one of those who offered commendations to the abortion assistants. “Babies are being killed in there.” After a few terse words back, she shot at me, “Well, it’s not your choice!”

I couldn’t argue. “You’re absolutely right.” It was most certainly not my choice—in fact, I’d never assumed otherwise. Even if abortion were to become illegal again, it would still be a choice whether to obey that civil law. We are free agents, tasked with deciding how we will use the choices, the freedoms, God has given us.

I agreed with her and wanted her to own her choice. Everyone who makes any kind of move on the sidewalk—including those who coddle the escorts—have made a choice. If you stop by and tell us you appreciate what we are doing, that also is a choice, and we are grateful.

Soon, an older gentleman approached on a bike, stopping mid-sidewalk to chat. “Are you the ones for or against abortion?” he asked me through a mouth of stained or missing teeth. After we established our positions—he was pro-life too, he said—he posed a question that had been pressing on him. Did we happen to know when a heartbeat could be detected? He seemed shocked at the answer. “Really? Only 18 days?” he responded.

The conversation then diverged toward something he’d experienced years ago working, he shared, as a pollster for the Boston Globe. He was at the Democratic presidential convention, tasked with asking people, “Does life begins at conception?” A well-known physician, top notch in his field, answered, but not in the way my cycling friend had predicted, given his profession. “He said, ‘I used to believe that, but not anymore.’”

What had changed from before to that moment, we wondered? Certainly, not the science, for we have a better understanding now than ever of life’s beginnings. My biking comrade said he’d thought of that often through the years; it bothered him. Then, he returned to the heartbeat question. “That’s really something,” he said, thanking us for filling the gap, then off he went.

I then joined a friend, near where she’d written, in chalk, information to reverse the effects of the abortion pill: abortionpillreversal.com. Suddenly, a man came by and began trying to rub off the chalk with his shoe. A nearby business owner, he didn’t like the message, he said, noting that he had a choice to rub it off if he wanted.

There it was again: choice. Again, we couldn’t argue. He was free to try getting rid of the message. Maybe he felt it would erase whatever was tugging at his conscience. Did he realize that tug wouldn’t disappear, even if the words did?

God chooses too. He chose to love us into being. And, knowing we’d mess up sometimes, he chooses to forgive us if we approach him with a contrite heart. If we follow him, he chooses to offer us. Roxane B. Salonen, a wife and mother of five, is a local writer, and a speaker and radio host for Real Presence Radio. Roxane writes for The Forum newspaper and for CatholicMom.com. Reach her at roxanebsalonen@gmail.com.
Do you know where we are? The answer will be revealed in the July/August New Earth.

Where in the diocese are we?

Last month’s photo is from St. Therese Church in Rugby.