WABASSO, Minn. – St. Anne’s Catholic Elementary School (Pk-6 grade) in Wabasso began its 2023-24 academic year by celebrating its 100th year of providing young students a solid religious and academic foundation. The school will be having its official celebration on Saturday, Sept. 30, beginning at noon. Activities will include a parade, school tour, Homecoming football game and activities, and Mass followed by a catered dinner at the Wabasso Community Center (RSVP required). The public is invited to attend all events. For details, contact St. Anne’s School (507) 342-5389.
Gender ideology and how it affects us all to be addressed in November

by Christine Clancy

Mary Hasson, the Kate O’Beirne Senior Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., is scheduled to speak in November at several gatherings across the Diocese of New Ulm. Each of Hasson’s presentations will address the issue of the “Transgender Movement: What Catholics Need to Know.”

Hasson is co-founder and director of the Center’s Person and Identity Project, an initiative that equips parents and faith-based institutions to promote the truth about human person and counter gender ideology. An attorney and policy expert, Hasson has been a keynote speaker for the Holy See during the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, addressing education, women and work, caregiving, and gender ideology, and serves as a consultant to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family, Life, and Youth.

The Diocese of New Ulm Office of Continuing Education of Clergy and the Office of Marriage and Family Life first invited Hasson to the diocese in February 2022 for presentations addressing issues of sexual identity. She offered several workshop opportunities for clergy and an evening presentation for medical professionals, directors of religious education, and Catholic school principals. Her return to the diocese this November will be an opportunity for the diocesan faithful to understand the current landscape and be formed in Catholic teaching regarding sexual identity.

Hasson to present at three locations in the diocese:

Sleepy Eye - November 4, Diocesan Ethics Conference,
Montevideo AND Olivia - Nov. 5, Montevideo (afternoon), Olivia (evening),

*For details or to register for any of these opportunities visit www.dnu.org.

To provide a peek into Hasson’s presentations, Christine Clancy of The Prairie Catholic posed several questions to her concerning transgender and sexual identity issues versus our Catholic faith.

**The Prairie Catholic: Can you provide a brief overview of what your presentations will be about?**

In our culture today, the narratives about human identity (“who we are”) have become very confusing – and it’s important to know the truth. My talks will aim first to present the truth about the human person, according to Catholic teaching, and then to contrast this with the beliefs of gender ideology.

I’ll unpack how gender ideology is affecting all of us, particularly young people, who are absorbing the false beliefs of gender ideology through social media channels, peers, schools, and even healthcare. My closing talk will present some ideas on effective ways to deliver the truth and provide pastoral care on these issues.

**The Prairie Catholic: In general, our Catholic faith calls us to treat everyone with respect and kindness, acknowledging the dignity of the person. What is a practical and compassionate approach that Catholics can take toward a person who identifies as transgender but, at the same time, does not endorse gender ideology and transitioning?**

We need to have our hearts in the right place, which means truly loving and respecting every person – even those who might reject our faith or who lead lives that fail to align in some respect with the truth. We also need to realize that these situations are complicated – there’s no single explanation for why an individual might be experiencing identity or body-related distress. Nor do we always know the backstory of what led the person to reject his or her given sexual identity as male or female. Statistically, persons who identify as “transgender” tend to have pre-existing mental health issues and may have experienced trauma or loss that left wounds in need of healing. None of those deeper issues can be addressed in a casual or single conversation. In the context of a relationship, however, it may be possible to help the person find assistance or a path towards healing.

Even as we seek to be kind and compassionate, it is critically important that we are clear, in our own hearts and minds, about the truth: Every person is created either male or female, and sex cannot change. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that everyone must acknowledge and accept his or her sexual identity as male or female. Changes in name, clothing, appearance, or even to a person’s body parts or function do not change the fundamental truth that the person is - and always will be - male or female as created by God.

Every person is called to live in the truth about who they are - attempts to medically or surgically alter the body to deny that truth lead to serious harm.

Practically speaking, in our encounters with someone who identifies as transgender, we ought to treat the person with kindness and respect but also be willing to draw boundaries to protect our conscience rights and freedom. No one else has the right to demand...
One year later, bishop finds being here ‘an honor and a great blessing’

by Christine Clancy
The Prairie Catholic

NEW ULM – On Sept. 27, 2022, Bishop Chad W. Zielinski was installed as the fifth bishop for the Diocese of New Ulm. He had previously served as the bishop of the Diocese of Fairbanks, Alaska. In place of his regular pastoral column, That they may have life, the bishop sat down for a question and answer with Christine Clancy, editor of The Prairie Catholic, to reflect back on his first year of ministry, discussing what has surprised him about this diocese, what he is grateful for in his first twelve months, and what challenges he has faced.

Q. Bishop, you have served this small rural diocese for over a year. How would you assess your leadership thus far?

Bishop Zielinski: I remember having a conversation with a priest friend the first year I was ordained a bishop in Alaska. I was somewhat frustrated trying to figure out what it means to be a bishop, but really only operating from an officer leadership model. I had been trained as a military officer. You focus on the mission, you keep pushing people, you push yourself to the point of weariness, but it’s the mission. And as this priest patiently listened to me, he turned to me and said, ‘Who do you think you are? This diocese doesn’t belong to you; it belongs to Jesus Christ. And he’s the shepherd and leader.’ And then that scene of Jesus telling Peter, Get behind me and follow me, came to mind. Once I embraced that call to leadership as a follower of Jesus Christ, I felt a heavy burden was lifted. As a bishop, I have taken this to heart. I don’t live it perfectly, but I have tried to embrace following Christ and allowing him to lead, yet, bringing others to follow Jesus, the leader of our diocese, and truly, passionately believing in that.

I was once told by a priest friend that if I surrounded myself with people way smarter than me, I would be successful. There are a lot of wise people in this diocese, and I have been very blessed.

Q: What has been the most surprising thing about life in the Diocese of New Ulm?

Bishop Zielinski: As I have driven around the diocese these past 12 months, I have seen these very small farming communities that pop up in the middle of cornfields and bean fields. I find it very peaceful and prayerful. I have gotten to know many of the farm families who work long hours with equipment that produces this massive production of corn and beans that feed their animals and help provide for the world. I have been surprised and impressed that the people in these small communities are very tight-knit; everybody knows each other, and that is expressed in their faith communities.

I have been deeply touched by how the Christian faithful live a simple life here, and I don’t mean that in any pejorative sense at all. They are hardworking, and they step up when there is a need for something. I am amazed at the generosity and outpouring; whether it is a financial need, if it’s a family that needs something, people respond.

Q. What have been the most significant adjustments for you?

Bishop Zielinski: The shift in transportation has probably been the most significant adjustment. It has been a complete change in the pace of life, and I am trying to get used to that. In Alaska, spending days on snow machines and boats on the Yukon River to go and celebrate Mass at a parish was not unusual. Here in the diocese, it is nothing for me to get in my vehicle and drive two hours somewhere to offer a confirmation Mass, to be part of a pastoral visit, or a youth activity, and drive back home. In fact, right now, I think I am putting 2,500 miles a month on my vehicle, whereas in Alaska, I would put on about 3,000 miles a year, but at the same time, I was flying in airplanes, and it would sometimes take a few days to get out to a remote village.

Also another significant change is that in the darker months of the winter in Alaska, there would be extended hours of darkness. Here in the diocese, the sun rises in winter around 8 a.m. and goes down around 4:30 p.m. That is a warm welcome!

Q: When you spoke to The Prairie Catholic last year, before your installation, you said Evangelization would be one of your priorities, helping the faithful embrace the core of their faith. How much progress do you feel has been made in this regard?

Bishop Zielinski: I really believe the Holy Spirit is out there, rekindling a fire of faith within us. Pope Francis’s first apostolic exhortation was “The Joy of the Gospel.” There was a simple threefold message I took away from that document: encountering Christ, being transformed, and being sent. And recently, the Holy Father has strongly emphasized to pastoral leaders that we should get out into the peripheries, not remain locked up in the rectory, get out there and meet people.

So, with that kind of call coming from Pope Francis along with the United State’s Catholic bishops’ Eucharistic Revival and the faithful’s thirst for the Eucharist, I saw a genuine need for Evangelization. The Diocese of New Ulm’s Eucharistic Revival Committee that has been formed, I think, is really the catalyst for a successful Eucharistic Revival here in the diocese. As a result, we have hired a diocesan director of Hispanic Ministry who will be “on fire” with the Hispanic community.

(Continued on page 5.)
New faces in ministry at the Catholic Pastoral Center in New Ulm

Office of Evangelization established to assist bishop in implementing evangelization initiatives

NEW ULM – Bishop Chad Zielinski hosted a supper at his home in New Ulm for four key leaders who will serve on his diocesan curia at the Pastoral Center in New Ulm.

The new appointments, effective immediately, include Fr. Brendan Rolling as director of the Office of Vocations and Fr. Tanner Thooft as associate director; Anisabel Palma, director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry, and Leonard Gutierrez, director of the Office of Evangelization, a new office that was established this year.

Vocations

Fr. Rolling is a native Minnesotan who grew up in rural Arco and attended Ivanhoe public schools. After high school, he enlisted in the United States Army National Guard, serving in Minnesota and Kansas from 1989-1995. In 1998 he took his Solemn Profession of Monastic Vows at St. Benedict’s Abbey in Atchison, Kan., and was ordained to the priesthood on July 1, 2000. He received faculties to serve in the Diocese of New Ulm in 2021 and was appointed by Bishop Emeritus John M. LeVoir to serve as parochial vicar at Christ the King Area Faith Community (Canby, Ivanhoe, Lake Benton, St. Leo, Tyler, and Wilno). Fr. Rolling now serves as parochial vicar of the All Saints Area Faith Community (Fairfax, Gibbon, and Winthrop in addition to his responsibilities as Vocations director.

Fr. Rolling brings to his new diocesan role grit and character, along with excitement to serve Christ in the young people of the Diocese of New Ulm. His associate director, Fr. Tanner Thooft, is eager to be working alongside Fr. Rolling to foster an openness and discerning spirit in the hearts of the many generous men and women of the diocese.

Recently ordained to the priesthood in 2022, Fr. Thooft can still recall the many questions and unknowns that arise as one seeks to give themselves to the Lord through a vocation in the Church. If he had one word of advice to young people considering this gift of themselves in their own life, it would be to simply respond to the current step the Lord is asking you to take in faithfulness and fidelity to his activity in your life. “We might not know where the road will lead, but if we follow the Lord, we know it will be a great adventure beyond anything we could imagine,” Fr. Thooft said.

Apart from his work in vocations, Fr. Thooft serves as parochial vicar in the Divine Mercy Area Faith Community (Comfrey, Morgan, Leavenworth, and Sleepy Eye). He also is assisting in the diocesan Office of Worship. If you or someone you know is interested in a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, contact the diocesan Office of Vocations (507) 233-5302; jimichaels@dnu.org.

Hispanic Ministry and Outreach

Anisabel Palma is the new director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry and Outreach for the Diocese of New Ulm. Palma brings a decade of experience in Hispanic ministry, previously serving as the Hispanic director at the Jesus Our Living Water Area Faith Community (Clara City, Willmar, and Spicer). She is looking forward to her new role and getting to know the people throughout the diocese. Her expertise lies in leadership, support, training, and Spanish language pastoral formation and catechesis for area faith community (AFC) and parish Hispanic Ministry. An estimated 14,000 Hispanics reside throughout the 15 counties that make up the Diocese of New Ulm. Spanish Masses are celebrated in Glencoe, Litchfield, Marshall, Montevideo, and Willmar.

Palma is available to speak at your parish or group, regardless of whether there are Spanish-speaking members. She offers captivating insights into the stories of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego and the special gifts and blessings Hispanic brothers and sisters bring to the Diocese of New Ulm. To arrange a speaking engagement or any other inquiries, email apalma@dnu.org or contact the Office of Hispanic Ministry and Outreach, (507) 233-5360.

Evangelization

Leonard Gutierrez will serve as the new director of the Office of Evangelization for the Diocese of New Ulm. He will be assisting the bishop in the implementation of all diocesan initiatives focused on evangelization, missionary discipleship, and Eucharistic Revival, helping to establish a shared understanding of authentic Catholic evangelization, equipping individuals and area faith communities to live as disciples and be sent out as missionary disciples.

Gutierrez comes to the Diocese of New Ulm with more than six years of experience with FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), a Catholic outreach program for American college students founded in 1997.

If you want to learn more about the Office of Evangelization or share how the office can accompany you in your discipleship journey, contact Leonard Gutierrez at lgtierrez@dnu.org, (507) 233-5361.

Diocesan retired priests honored; combined ministry of 1,347 years

NEW ULM – On July 13, 2023, Bishop Chad Zielinski hosted a supper at his home in New Ulm a supper to honor the retired and semi-retired priests of the Diocese of New Ulm.

The following retired priests of the diocese were honored: Fr. Jim Barry (62 years of ministry), Fr. David Breu (50 years), Fr. Gene Brown (64 years), Fr. Pat Casey (58 years), Fr. Jim Devorak (51 years), Fr. Fred Fink (62 years), Bishop Emeritus John M. LeVoir (42), Fr. Bob Mraz (49 years), Fr. Jack Nordick (33 years), Fr. Peter Nosbush (53 years), Fr. Jerry Paulson (47 years), Fr. John Pearson (57 years), Fr. Tony Platte (60 years), Fr. Germain Rademacher (65 years), Msgr. John Richter (59 years), Fr. Keith Salisbury (17 years), Fr. Phil Schotzko (46 years), Fr. Paul Schumacher (61 years), and Fr. Bernie Steiner (62). The priests who could be fully retired but have chosen to continue to serve are: Fr. John Goggin (59 years), Fr. Dennis Lahat (49 years), Msgr. Gene Lozinski (51 years), Fr. Andy Michels (38 years), Fr. Jerry Meidl (49 years), and Fr. George Schmit (55 years).

Together they have served a total of 1,347 years of priestly ministry. The diocese is grateful for their service.

Four new leaders have joined Bishop Zielinski’s diocesan staff at the Pastoral Center in New Ulm. Pictured l-r, Fr. Tanner Thooft is serving as associate director of the Office of Vocations, Leonard Gutierrez is serving as director of Evangelization, Fr. Brendan Rolling is serving as the director of the Office of Hispanic Ministry, and Anisabel Palma is serving as director of Hispanic Ministry and Outreach.

(Phot by Christy Baker)

El Obispo Zielinski reflexiona sobre su primer año en New Ulm

por Bishop Chad Zielinski

En una reciente sesión de preguntas y respuestas con Christine Clancy, editora de The Prairie Catholic, el Obispo Zielinski reflexiona sobre su primer año como obispo de la Diócesis de New Ulm, nos cuenta lo que le ha sorprendido sobre esta diócesis, por lo que está agradecido de sus primeros doce meses y los desafíos que ha enfrentado.

Pregunta: Obispo, usted ha servido a esta pequeña diócesis rural durante más de un año. ¿Qué hará para que esta diócesis se haga más conocida?

Obispo Zielinski: Recuerdo haber tenido una conversación con un amigo sacerdote el primer año que fui ordenado obispo en Alaska. Había sido entrenado como oficial militar, como tal se enfocaba en la misión, presiones a las personas, te empujas hasta el punto de estar dispuesto a morir por la misión. Y mientras este sacerdote me escuchaba pacientemente, se volvió hacia mi y me dijo: “¿Qué crees que es?” Esa diócesis no te pertenece a ti; pertenece a Dios, entregándote tu corazón, Dios, entregándole tu corazón, rezando para que en medio de esas dificultades y desafíos, en ti se forme el justiciero. Eso es lo que sigo haciendo.”

Pregunta: ¿Cuáles son los cambios más significativos para usted?

Obispo Zielinski: El cambio en el transporte ha sido probablemente el cambio más significativo. Ha sido un cambio completo en el ritmo de vida, y estoy tratando de acostumbrarme a eso. En Alaska, pasar días en motos de nieve y botas en el río Yukon para ir a celebrar la Misa en una parroquia no era habitual. Aquí en la diócesis, no es nada raro subirme a mi carro y manejar dos horas para algún lugar para celebrar una Misa de confirmación, ser parte de una visita pastoral o una actividad juvenil, y luego volver a casa. De hecho, en este momento, creo que estoy metiéndome 2,500 millas al mes a mi carro, mientras que en Alaska, recorría alrededor de 3,000 millas al año, pero volvía mucho en aviones, y a veces podía llevarme varios días para llegar a un pueblo remoto. Otro cambio significativo es que en los meses más oscuros del invierno en Alaska, había muchas horas de oscuridad. Aquí en la diócesis, el sol sale en invierno alrededor de las 4:30, y se pone alrededor de 4:30. ¡Es una bendición!

Pregunta: Cuando lo entrevistamos en The Prairie Catholic el año pasado, antes de su instalación, usted dijo que la Evangelización sería una de sus prioridades, ayudando a los fieles a abrazar el núcleo de su fe. ¿Cuánto progreso siente que ha logrado en este sentido?

Obispo Zielinski: Realmente creo que el Espíritu Santo está ahí afuera, reivindicando un fuego de fe en muchos corazones. Y viene de la apertura apostólica del Papa Francisco fue “La Alegria del Evangelio.” Hubo un mensaje simple de tres partes que se encontró en ese documento: encontrarse con Cristo, ser transformado y ser enviado. Y recientemente, el Santo Padre ha mencionado que es el testimonio de los líderes pastoreos que deberíamos saltar a las periferias, no quedarnos encerrados en la rectoría; salir y conocer a la gente. Entonces, con ese tipo de llamado profético del Papa Francisco junto con el Renacimiento Eucarístico de los obispos católicos de los Estados Unidos y la sede de los fieles por la Eucaristía, vi una necesidad genuina de Evangelización.

La evangelización se resume en salir y decirles a aquellos que no han abandonado la Iglesia o se han alejado de su fe católica, que son parte de una familia, Dios te creó para ser comunión y ser parte de una familia. Esa es nuestra misión como parroquia. Eres parte de esta familia parroquial, eres parte de esta familia diocesana, y es la familia de Jesús.

Pregunta: ¿Cuáles sientes que han sido tus desafíos más significativos en el último año?

Obispo Zielinski: Reconozco que hay preocupación por la reducción en el número de sacerdotes que tenemos en los próximos años. Y entrar en una diócesis para enfrentarnos una población y asistencia a la iglesia en declive no ha sido fácil. Creo que desde la fundación de la diócesis en 1957, ha habido 40 parroquias que se han fusionado o cerrado. Esa es una historia difícil. Es difícil ir a una parroquia y escuchar las historias de por qué la gente no quiere que su iglesia se fusioné o cierre. Son buenas personas de Dios. Aman su fe, y es simplemente un proceso horrible y doloroso de preservar, y no es agradable formar parte de ello. Así que rezamos para que en medio de estas dificultades y desafíos de fusiones y cierres de parroquias, seamos un pueblo esperanzado con una visión pastoral; escuchando a Dios, escuchando a las familias tu corazón, que es redimirse a él; confiar en él y luego tener esperanza. Y mientras avanzamos y las cosas cambian, los tiempos cambian y la demografía cambia, siempre tratando de que Dios todavía está aquí. Dios es un Dios amoroso que nos llena de esperanza y derrama grandes bendiciones sobre nosotros.

Pregunta: ¿Qué ha considerado como su mayor bendición en el último año?

Obispo Zielinski: Mi respuesta tiene dos partes. Puede que haya oído el refrán, “A tocar pasado, claridad.” O este otro dicho: “Con el tiempo, se entere de los entuertos.” Cuando dejé Alaska y vine aquí, no me di cuenta de la bendición que recibí hasta que estuve lejos y me di cuenta de que las hermosas personas a las que sirvi en el norte de Alaska dejaron huellas sagradas y perlas de sabiduría en mi vida. Así que esa es una bendición que he traido a esta diócesis. Al servir en esta diócesis, he dado cuenta de que en el Centro Pastoral trabajo con personal excepcional y que en la diócesis, he tenido varios sacerdotes que simplemente se sorprenden y se esfuerzan, algunos de ellos hasta el punto de quebrantamiento, pero aún así me reciben con amabilidad como a un hermano. Hay una tranquilidad en esta mentalidad rural estadounidense de la gente que te da el bienvenido, se acerca a ti y te pide que visites su granja, “¿Ven a conducir mi tractor?” me dicen con frecuencia.

La gente es la mayor bendición. Realmente estoy lleno de gran esperanza y alegría, y considero que estar aquí para servir a la gente de esta diócesis es un hermoso honor y una gran bendición en mi vida.

Palma es nombrada Directora del Ministerio Hispano

Anisabel Palma es la nueva Directora del Ministerio Hispano en la Diócesis de New Ulm. Anteriormente, trabajó en la comunidad del Área de Fe Jesús Nuestra Agua Viva (St. Clara, Clara City, St. Mary, Willmar, y Our Lady of the Lakes, Spicer) como Directora del Ministerio Hispano por nueve años, hasta que Dios puso en su corazón el deseo de servir a más feligreses.

Palma espera con ansias su nueva labor y conocer a la gente de toda la diócesis. Ella está emocionada de continuar con su trabajo preparando materiales para apoyar a los catequistas y líderes pastorales que acompañan a los miembros de la Iglesia de habla hispana.

Palma está disponible para hablar en su parroquia o grupo, independientemente de si tiene familias hispanas que hablan español o no. Ella ofrece cautivadoras historias de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe y San Juan Diego, así como los dones esenciales y bendiciones que nuestros hermanos y hermanas hispanos aportan a nuestra Diócesis. Para programar una charla o cualquier otra consulta, no dude en contactar a Anisabel apalma@dmu.org o comunicarse con su oficina en el Centro Pastoral: 507-233-5560.

God loves a cheerful giver!

by Bishop Chad Zielinski

On August 10 we celebrated the Feast of St. Lawrence, deacon and martyr who lived from 225-258. In 253, Valerian became the Roman Emperor. He tolerated the Christians at first but soon accelerated a persecution and ordered Lawrence to surrender the treasures of the Church. In the words of St. Ambrose of Milan recalling the martyrdom of Lawrence, quotes, “For when the treasures of the Church were demanded from him, he promised that he would show them. On the following day he brought the poor together. When asked where the treasures were which he had promised, he pointed to the poor, saying: ‘These are the treasures of the Church.’ And truly they were treasures, in whom Christ lives, in whom there is faith in Jesus Lawrence pointed out, and prevailed, for the persecutors could not take them away…”

Through the intercession of St. Lawrence, may our hearts, minds and eyes be anointed to always see the poor and those less fortunate than us as treasures of the Church.

To learn about the ministries supported by the annual Diocesan Ministries Appeal visit www.dnu.org/dma.
‘Hear God, hand Him your heart, have hope’: A brief look back at the bishop’s one year of ministry

(Continued from page 2.)

because they are the number one growing community in our diocese right now.

Also, we have developed a new diocesan Office of Evangelization whose young director has a zeal and a missionary heart. His role will support my office and accompany our parishes and schools by providing resources, consultation, training, and leadership development that help engage in this call to be sent as missionary disciples.

Evangelization boils down to going out there and telling those who feel isolated and alone or those who have left the Church or fallen away from their Catholic faith that they are part of a family. God created you to be communal. And that’s our mission as a parish, as a diocese. You’re part of this parish family, you’re part of this diocesan family, and it is the family of Jesus Christ.

Q. What do you feel have been your most significant challenges over this past year?

Bishop Zielinski: I recognize there is a concern about the reduced number of priests we will have in the upcoming years. And stepping into a diocese where we face a declining population and church attendance has not been easy. I think since the inception of the diocese in 1957, there have been 40 parishes that have been merged or closed. That is a difficult story. It is tough to go to a parish and hear the stories of why people don’t want their church to merge or close. They are good people of God. They love their faith, and it is just a horrible, painful process to watch.

So I pray that amidst those difficulties and challenges of parish mergers and closures that we are a hopeful people with a pastoral vision; hearing God, handing him your heart, which is surrendering to him, trusting him, and then having hope. And, as we move forward and things change, times change, and demographics change, we always remember that God is still here. God is a loving God who fills us with hope and pours great blessings upon us.

Q. What have you considered your greatest blessing this past year?

Bishop Zielinski: My answer is two-fold. You may have heard the phrase, “Hindsight has twenty-twenty vision?” When I left Alaska and came here, I didn’t realize the blessing I received until I was away and realized that the beautiful people I served in northern Alaska left sacred footprints and pearls of wisdom in my life.

So that is one blessing I have brought to this diocese. Serving in this diocese I have realized that I work with an outstanding staff at the Pastoral Center and that our priests are wonderful guys that are just pushing and pushing themselves, some of them to the point of exhaustion but yet receiving me with kindness as a brother. There is a peacefulness in this rural American mindset of people welcoming you, approaching you, and asking you to visit their farm.

The people are the greatest blessing. I am really filled with great hope and joy and consider just being here to serve the people of this diocese as a beautiful honor and a great blessing in my life.

Bishop Zielinski has found a “peacefulness in this rural American mindset of people welcoming you, approaching you, and asking you to visit their farm.”

Bishop Zielinski celebrated a May Crowning Mass on May 10, 2023, at St. Edward’s Catholic School in Minneota. Following the Mass he stopped by each classroom to visit with students.

The bishop administered the sacrament of Confirmation to youth of St. Isidore the Farmer Area Faith Community held at Sacred Heart, Murdock on April 23, 2023. Also pictured, Fr. Jeremy Kucera.

The bishop administered the sacrament of Confirmation to youth of St. Isidore the Farmer Area Faith Community held at Sacred Heart, Murdock on April 23, 2023. Also pictured, Fr. Jeremy Kucera.

The bishop blesses a baby Jesus figurine during the diocesan Advent Prayer Service held at St. Philip’s, Litchfield on Dec. 18, 2022.

The bishop blessed a baby Jesus figurine during the diocesan Advent Prayer Service held at St. Philip’s, Litchfield on Dec. 18, 2022.

Bishop Zielinski’s video reflection on his one year in the Diocese of New Ulm is available at www.dnu.org/bishop.

Bishop Zielinski’s video reflection on his one year in the Diocese of New Ulm is available at www.dnu.org/bishop.

The bishop celebrated Mass at St. Mary’s, Willmar on Dec. 10, 2022, in honor of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Dec. 12).
Tips for overcoming back-to-school anxiety

by Sam Rickertsen, MS LMFT
Catholic Charities
Diocese of New Ulm

Back-to-school or college can be both a time of excitement and worry for students. For some, the fear and worry associated with going back to school can be overwhelming.

For students struggling with back-to-school anxiety, there are things you can do to help them manage their worries.

First, start by identifying what their concerns are. Let them know that it is normal to feel some anxiety about going back to school. There are also things you can do to help.

- Encourage your student to express their feelings. It is important to allow your student to express their feelings about going back to school, both positive and negative. Avoid dismissing their fears or telling them they shouldn’t feel nervous.

- Assist your student with developing coping skills. There are several coping skills that can help students manage their anxiety, such as positive self-talk, relaxation skills, and deep breathing. Help your student learn these skills and practice using them when they start to feel anxious.

- Be patient and understanding. It may take some time for your student to adjust to their new routine and environment. If your student’s anxiety is severe or interfering with their ability to function at school or college it is important to seek professional help. A therapist can help them develop coping skills and strategies for managing their anxiety.

Practical tips for helping reduce anxiety in younger children include:

- **Start preparing** your child for the new school year a few weeks ahead of time. This will give them time to adjust to their new schedule and make a smoother transition.

- **Visit the school** with your child before the first day of school. This will help them become more familiar with the new environment and reduce their anxiety.

- **Encourage your child** to reach out to friends before the first day of school. This will help them feel more comfortable and supported on their first day.

- **Help your child organize** their supplies before school starts so they can feel more prepared and in control.

- **Review your child’s daily school schedule** with them for the first several weeks until it becomes routine. It is important that you manage your own worries so that it doesn’t exacerbate the situation.

**Totus Tuus summer program shares the Gospel with youth, promotes the faith**

NEW ULM – Another successful summer of the Catholic youth program Totus Tuus (Latin for “Totally Yours”) wrapped up in August. Throughout the summer, 12 young adult missionaries visited 18 parishes in the Diocese of New Ulm, serving around 650 elementary, middle, and high school-aged youth.

Totus Tuus missionaries host a daytime agenda consisting of games, skits, catechesis, and daily Mass for elementary students, and an evening program of small group discussion and a talk on how to live the Catholic faith for middle and high school-aged youth.

Missionaries serving this summer were Hazel Chvat (St. Philip, Litchfield), Luke Hasson (Mater Ecclesiae, Berlin, NJ), Ellie Kirby (St. Columbkille, Dubuque, Iowa), Zach Koralewski (St. Mary, Arlington), Anissa Kulzer (St. Philip, Litchfield), Maryanne Larsen (St. Michael, Morgan), Brendan MacLeod (St. Patrick/St. Anthony, Grand Haven, Mich.), John Mendiola (St. John, Dassel), Sarah Mendiola (St. John, Dassel), Julia Nilles (St. Dionysius, Tyler), David Rabaey (St. Eloi, Ghent), and Noah U’Ren (St. Catherine, Redwood Falls).

Relics of three remarkable saints coming to the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

The relics of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and her parents, Saints Zélie and Louis Martin, will be touring Minneapolis and Saint Paul between October 4 and October 15.

Following are the locations and dates open to the public. Visit the following websites for details.


Oct. 7–10: Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis – www.mary.org


**What is a relic?**
Relics are classified as first, second, or third class. A first class relic is part of a saint’s body (e.g., bone, blood, flesh). Second class relics are possessions that a saint owned such as clothing or something used by a saint. Third class relics are objects that have been touched to a first, second, or another third class relic of a saint. They will be displaying first class relics of the visiting saints for veneration.

**Why venerate relics?**
There are many healing examples after exposure to relics from Sacred Scripture to online references. The healing is from God; relics are the means through which he acts. Any good that comes about through a relic is God’s doing. By venerating or honoring the saints whom God has worked through in an extraordinary way, we adore and glorify God who worked so beautifully in their lives.

Our veneration of relics also reminds us that we are part of the Communion of Saints, the great cloud of witnesses who have run the race before us (Heb. 12:1).

Visit www.st-therese.org/st-therese-relics for information about this inspiring and rare opportunity to venerate this family of saints outside of France.

For questions about the Twin Cities opportunities contact Laura Hunziker, relics@st-therese.org.

New leadership at School of St. Philip

LITCHFIELD – Andrea Dietrich is excited to begin as principal at the School of St. Philip in Litchfield. With a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minn., Dietrich brings experiences which include 15-plus years of teaching in both the Diocese of New Ulm and the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

Dietrich feels she knows and understands how God is working in our Catholic schools to call each of his children to be of service to one another. “There is a great beauty in that, and I am honored to be a part of preparing young minds to receive this call,” she said. “With God’s help and the support of this wonderful community, I hope to continue with the great tradition of Catholic education at the School of St. Philip.”

Andrea Dietrich
Counseling services are available at four locations throughout the diocese, New Ulm, Marshall, Hutchinson, and Willmar. Call 1-866-670-5163, pkral@dnu.org.
Mathiowetz’s conversion to the Catholic faith meant ‘finding a new beginning’

by Ronda Mathiowetz

Growing up Evangelical United Brethren, which eventually merged with the Methodist Church, I had experiences in Sunday School, Sunday Service, Bible School, Easter Sunrise Service, summer camps on Lake Koronis, and Lay Witness Missions in Minnesota and Iowa. What a gift it was to have my parents support my choice of religion. In 1980, there was not yet a Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) program in the Catholic Church. I began learning about the Catholic faith through resources I received from the Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis. I would answer the questions and return them for evaluation and a possible response.

Since I was already baptized, these resources, in addition to the marriage preparation meetings Brian and I attended as a couple, prepared me for receiving the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. A year into my marriage, I began my journey of receiving the sacrament of Confirmation and in 1983 I was confirmed. After that I became highly involved in teaching confirmation, leading music for Mass, and youth ministry in my parish. In 1993, I attended World Youth Day in Denver.

However, it was when attending a TEC (Together Encounter Christ) weekend that during Mass, I felt that I had experienced the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Our preparation for Mass the night before was experiencing the Stations of the Cross and receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation. It was a wonderful time to focus on Christ and what I wanted my life to be with him. Reconciliation washed all my shortcomings and sins away to give me a new beginning.

Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist gave me the courage to continue searching to improve my ways of following Christ. “Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist gave me the courage to continue searching to improve my ways of following Christ.” - Ronda Mathiowetz

Lessons from St. Monica for those whose children have left the Church

by Isabel Barry

Catholic News Agency

Hundreds of thousands of young adults filled the streets of Lisbon, Portugal, for the 2023 World Youth Day in early August – gathering together for Mass, eucharistic adoration, prayer, and fellowship. The event was powerful and moving, but for some Catholics reading or watching the news coverage of World Youth Day, their interest may be tinged with sadness that their own children or grandchildren don’t share the exuberant faith of the young WYD attendees.

This scenario is a very common one, as religious disaffiliation is rapidly on the rise. Nearly one-third of U.S. adults identify as nonreligious, and in particular, more than half of those who were raised Catholic end up leaving the Church at some point in their lives. Four in ten never return.

Parents and grandparents whose loved ones have left the Church often seek out the prayers of, and find inspiration in, the example of St. Monica. Although she lived more than 1,600 years ago, her story is remarkably familiar to many Catholic parents today.

St. Monica was the mother of St. Augustine, who is today one of the best-known theologians and saints of the Church. But for a long time, it didn’t seem like he was headed for holiness.

Monica’s non-Catholic husband wouldn’t let her baptize Augustine as a child, and while she yearned for her son’s conversion, he resisted joining the Church as a young man for 17 years. Monica never stopped praying in hopes of his conversion and he was eventually received into the Church just a few months before her death.

If this story sounds familiar, a new book from Ascension Press might speak to your heart and offer hope and consolation. It’s called “What Would Monica Do?”, and its authors, Patti Maguire Armstrong and Roxane Beaulac Salonen, are themselves mothers who offer guidance, practical advice, and prayers for navigating the difficulty of losing a loved one to the world through their reflections on St. Monica.

“What Would Monica Do?” recently earned first place in the Family Life and Pastoral Ministry/ Parish Life categories at the 2023 Catholic Media Association’s Book Awards.

St. Monica’s inspiration

Armstrong and Salonen seek to bring hope and solidarity to parents grieving their child or grandchild leaving the Church.

“We saw the book as a way to extend the support of friendship to others in the same situation and to offer understanding, support, and hope,” Armstrong said.

“So many of Patti’s and my prayer swaps had to do with this shared heartache,” Salonen added. “We knew we weren’t the only ones. We were very prayerful about whether we would venture out with this heartache, but in the end, we took that love and poured it into others.”

St. Ambrose, who served as bishop of Milan from 374–397, told Monica to “speak less to your son about God, and more to God about your son” – advice Armstrong and Salonen took to heart.

“She had to learn the art of letting go – of her desire to control her son’s soul, and place her worries for him into God’s heart,” Salonen said. “We all seek the peace with which she ended her life, knowing her son had reclaimed Christ. But in the meantime, we can do what Monica did, deepening our faith, bringing others who are ready to Christ, and living in hope.”

Many parents think they are alone in this suffering, but it’s actually remarkably common.

Armstrong and Salonen host a private Facebook group called “Catholic Parents: What Would Monica Do?” where loved ones of fallen away Catholics share resources, triumphs, and sorrows.

“We’d love to have [anyone] join us and pray with us as we walk through this journey together, with St. Monica and Our Lord ever near,” Salonen said.

“Receiving Jesus in the Eucharist gave me the courage to continue searching to improve my ways of following Christ.” - Ronda Mathiowetz

If you or someone you know has a story to share with The Prairie Catholic about “why you became Catholic,” email cclancy@dnu.org; (507) 233-5332.
Church must accompany people, tell truth about gender ideology

(Continued from page 1.)

that you endorse their beliefs or self-perception (especially when those beliefs do not align with reality) or to insist that you use particular language not grounded in the truth or refer to the person in ways that contradict the truth. Pronouns, for example, have a specific meaning. They take the place of a noun and indicate sex (male or female). It is not compassionate or kind to refer to a person by chosen pronouns that conflict with the truth. This validates the person’s false belief that feelings determine reality or that a person can “be” someone other than the male or female they are simply by calling themselves something different. True accompaniment leads others along the path of truth to draw closer to Christ. True compassion requires us to see clearly the good for that person, according to God’s plan, and to help them see and embrace that truth as well.

The Prairie Catholic: In one of his first acts in office, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to expand sexual discrimination in federal law to include sexual orientation and gender identity. The executive article “Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation” impacts all sectors of society, including school sports, the privacy of single-sex bathrooms, and faith-based organizations. What impact does gender ideology have on our society, and why do you believe that redefining sex to mean sexual orientation and gender identity is problematic?

“Sex” has an objective biological meaning that, until recently, was accepted by everyone. Biologists define sex as a classification based on the design of the person’s body to fulfill one of two reproductive roles: a female body designed to make large gametes (ova) or a male body designed to make small gametes (sperm). Sex is binary because reproduction is binary because reproduction is biological. The attempt by the government to make large gametes (ova) or to pursue changes to the body because the person’s interests or feelings don’t “fit” certain stereotypes is still a way for kids to forget the stereotypes, embrace the reality of sex, and then embark on the exciting journey of discovering and cultivating their talents and gifts. The Catholic perspective celebrates each person as “unique and unrepeatable,” as Pope St. John Paul II once said while accepting our sexual identity as unchangeably male or female as a gift from God’s own hand.

Parents need to be protective. Children – especially adolescents – are immersed in a peer culture that promotes gender ideology at every turn. Smartphones are especially problematic. We know that increased smartphone use is linked to rising rates of depression (including over half of teen girls). And social media algorithms send poisonous content to kids celebrating double mastectomies in teen girls and encouraging every adolescent to “try out” alternative “identities.” It is critical for parents to consider how peers, school, social media, and even trusted adults (teachers, coaches, counselors) are affecting their child’s self-perception and beliefs.

Ask your child questions about what they are hearing and experiencing. Listen to their replies and address concerns about the body, identity, or sexuality directly. Be willing to take action and change a child’s environment. There are no do-overs in childhood, and parents have the irreplaceable responsibility of protecting their children from harmful influences. At the same time, work on strengthening your relationships with your children. They need you – your presence, guidance, and prayers.

The Prairie Catholic: How should Catholics engage with others in their families or the workplace when these topics arise?

Charitably and truthfully. Always be kind and remember that those who experience identity or body-related distress often suffer greatly. At the same time, be willing to stand up for the truth. We are created male or female, and sex cannot change. No matter how uncomfortable a person is with their body or identity, using medical or surgical interventions to alter the body is not the pathway to happiness. (“Transition” does not prevent suicide or bring happiness in the long run.) Engaging in conversations on these issues requires some prudence.

It is helpful to highlight the evidence about the reality of sex and the importance of protecting sex-specific spaces. Even in progressive Scandinavian countries and the U.K., the tide is turning on “transgender” issues.

Those countries now prioritize psychotherapy as treatment for minors experiencing identity or body-related distress. And in the U.K., as in the U.S., there is growing recognition that women’s rights are threatened by “gender identity” laws and policies. So share facts, ask questions, and be kind – but be willing to speak the truth in fidelity to God and conscience.

Growing in union with God
Two from Willmar enjoy charisms of Secular Carmelites

by Christine Clancy
The Prairie Catholic

SPICER, Minn. – The Divine Mercy Chapter of Secular Carmelites has been meeting at the Church of Our Lady of the Lakes in Spicer since 2011 and has 15 members in different stages of its formation.

“Secular” in the Secular Carmelites is what formerly was referred to in the Church as a “third order,” a group that is associated with a religious order in the Church such as the Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Benedictines, but as lay people who live “in the world” while observing as much of the charism and life of the religious order as they are able, in their vocations and work.

In May, Kathy Schwantes of Willmar received her brown scapular as her formal entrance into the Divine Mercy Secular Carmelites, and Ed Green, also of Willmar, has made first promises in the Order during a Mass on May 21 celebrated by spiritual assistant Fr. Mark Steffl at Our Lady of the Lakes in Spicer.

Kathy Schwantes (left) of Willmar has received her brown scapular as her formal entrance into the Divine Mercy Secular Carmelites, and Ed Green, also of Willmar, has made first promises in the Order during a Mass on May 21 celebrated by spiritual assistant Fr. Mark Steffl at Our Lady of the Lakes in Spicer.

Photo submitted

The Secular Carmelites are associated with the Order of Discalced Carmelites, whose spirituality is based on the writings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Lisieux, and other noted Carmelite saints. To be a Secular Carmelite involves a commitment to meet monthly with other group members, a half-hour of meditative prayer each day, morning and evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, and daily Mass when possible, along with continued study of the faith and spiritual reading.

For more information about the Divine Mercy Secular Carmelites contact Jane Gahlon at jgahlon@gahlon.com.
Life-giving water in India

**NUDCCW water project to continue through April 2024**

by Sheryl Kaiser
NUDCCW Service
Commission coordinator

Spirituality, leadership, and service make up the mission of the New Ulm Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (NUDCCW). Through their annual service project initiative, the NUDCCW addresses communities’ needs both within the diocese and internationally by supporting programs and organizations that strive to improve the lives of those in need.

Since April 2022, through their International Service Project effort, the NUDCCW has helped provide life-giving water to many near St. Benedict’s Monastery in Sivagangai, India. Through the generous contributions from parish CCWs, to date over $12,300 has been raised.

The NUDCCW has a special three-year initiative to inspire neighbors, a few hundred families touched by miscarriage. Following a 2019 Pew Research study that suggested only about one-third of U.S. Catholics believe the Church’s teaching that the Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus in the Eucharist was brought to streets and neighborhoods, a few hundred gathered at the Diocesan Pastoral Center in New Ulm on Sunday, June 11 for Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the diocesan chapel and then, led part way by Bishop Chad Zielinski, processed to the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.

The procession took place as the Church in America enters its second phase of the U.S. bishops’ National Eucharistic Revival, a three-year initiative to inspire renewed belief in the Eucharist and there are hopes that the area can be expanded over time.

The NUDCCW Board has voted to continue this water project effort through April 2024. To donate contact sherylkaiser@charter.net.

**NUDCCW Fall Gatherings**

**Deanery 1**
Tuesday, September 19 at
St. Raphael in Springfield.
Registration begins at 4:30 p.m.
Presentation by Mary Warner speaking on the Dresses for Africa project.

**Deanery 2**
Monday, September 18 at
St. John Cantius in Wilno.
Registration begins at 4:45 p.m.
Presentation by Cynthia Sheppard speaking on ‘fall cleaning’ - our hearts of envy, pride, and worry; replacing them with gratitude, prayer, and humility.

**Deanery 3**
Saturday, September 16 at
St. Anastasia in Hutchinson.
Registration begins at 9 a.m.
Presentation by Katie Braulick speaking on ministering to families touched by miscarriage.

Faithful participate in diocesan Corpus Christi Sunday procession in New Ulm

NEW ULM – In celebration of the solemnity of Corpus Christi, a more than 700-year-old feast day that commemorates the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, this summer, Catholics from across the nation participated in local eucharistic processions in a public display of faith.

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Encountering Jesus through the Gospel

by Leonard Gutierrez
Office of Evangelization

I

Imagine looking into a telescope. It is a clear and beautiful Minnesota night sky. You lean in, wondering what your eyes are about to see, and then BOOM! Your world just got much bigger. You see stars light-years away, and it seems as if you can touch them. Galaxies. Planets and their cloud coverings. Things that are literally out of this world.

Can you think of something that has taken your breath away? Something you looked into that grabbed ahold of your mind and heart?

For me, it was seeing our first children, fraternal twins, move and jump in my wife’s womb as when we went in for an ultrasound check-up. They were eight weeks old at the time and about the size of a kidney bean. I could hardly believe it. What was growing, moving, beating, and living in the shadows and darkness, my eyes were seeing. And in every moment were they seen and loved by the Father. They took my breath away.

It was a glimpse into the mystery and reality of life that I realized at that moment that I was being invited to see a new mystery. To see something out of this world, what my own eyes and my own doing could never do on its own.

These encounters can be what leads us to prayer and silence with God. They are invitations into deeper trust and relationship with him.

Mother Theresa once asked, “How do we learn?” She said, “Through prayer, we talk to God, listening than speaking. This is prayer. If we have not listened, we have nothing to talk about. So we must take the trouble to listen. For this, we need silence of the mind, silence of the heart, silence of the eyes, silence of the hands.”

In their book “Personal Prayer: A Guide for Receiving the Father’s Love,” authors Fr. Thomas Acklin, OSB, and Fr. Boniface Hicks, OSB, ask, what makes prayer universal? “Silence! People who cannot speak, from infants in utero to elderly with dementia, from the severely disabled to the man drawing his dying breath, can all pray by being in relationship with God in silence,” they answer.

How may God be inviting you to meet him where you may least expect it? How have you seen the face of Christ? Who is someone you can share that with today?

Over the next nine months, through this column, I invite all to join me as we explore the Gospel through the encounters and breathtaking moments of Jesus’ disciples.

May you experience a love in the midst of their humanity so piercing that it will seem too good to be true.
The high cost of assisted reproductive technologies

The desire to be a parent is natural to our being and runs so deep that bearing the cross of infertility can leave couples with a devastating longing. This devastation is a reality for about nine percent of men and 11 percent of women. Amid this painful longing, too often couples seeking answers and options are placed on the assisted reproduction track – a dangerous and expensive endeavor that generates many ethical dilemmas – with the promise that the couple can create (or even design) a child.

More than financial cost
During the 2023 legislative session, a bill, S.F. 1704, nearly passed that would mandate insurance coverage by large group health plans for infertility and fertility preservation services, such as in vitro fertilization (IVF). For married couples who have tried to conceive naturally for six to twelve months depending on the woman’s age, for single individuals, or for same-sex couples. No exemptions exist for companies or organizations who do not agree with these controversial practices. Fortunately, this bill did not make it to the finish line. It is bound to re-emerge in 2024.

Were this bill to pass, a single person or gay or lesbian couple would be granted insurance coverage to create a family by way of technology, contrary to how God intended the family unit to grow. Obvious ethical concerns are present in these instances, such as selling sperm and egg cells, the renting of women’s wombs as surrogates, and intentionally creating circumstances in which a child is separated from the parents who share the child’s DNA.

Mandating insurance coverage will impact insurance premiums across the board. It often takes three to four IVF cycles on average before a viable pregnancy is achieved. One cycle can cost between $15,000 and $30,000 depending on the clinic and the individual health needs of the patient. Multiplying that by three cycles, insurance companies are looking at a $45,000 to $120,000 price tag. But the great financial cost is just one negative facet of this bill.

Begotten not made
The root issue is the human cost – the lives created and intentionally killed or abandoned and the disruption of the natural marital act. The Church raises ethical concerns about assisted reproduction such as IVF, which creates an excess of embryos, as written in Dignitas Personae: “The process of in vitro fertilization very frequently involves the deliberate destruction of embryos . . . [and] subsequent experience has shown, however, that all techniques of in vitro fertilization proceed as if the human embryo were simply a mass of cells to be used, selected, and discarded.” Concerns are also raised about genetic screening and testing so that the “best” embryo is implanted into the mother’s womb, tantamount to eugenics. For married couples, it is good to try to overcome obstacles that may be preventing the conception of a child, and there are many incredible medical advances that are morally licit for married couples. In the document Donum Vitae (Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation) the Church teaches that if a given medical intervention helps or assists the marital act in achieving pregnancy, then it is moral. If the intervention replaces the marital act, it is not moral.

To learn about the morally licit means available to couples trying to overcome infertility visit www.USCCB.org/topics/natural-family-planning.

Stay up to date on the Minnesota Legislature’s attempts to mandate insurance coverage for unethical fertility treatments and more, join the Catholic Advocacy Network at www.MNCatholic.org/join.
From heartache to healing, Widows of Joy ministers to those grieving loss

by Katie Roiger
Prairie Catholic correspondent

WINSTED, Minn. – Anyone who knows their Beatitudes will remember that Our Lord promises comfort and peace in heaven to those who are mourning here on earth (Mt 5:4). In the spirit of his words, a ministry in Winsted aims to bring comfort to mourners on this side of heaven.

Widows of Joy foundress Roxanne Felder, a member of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Winsted, Minn., first became interested in forming a grief support group for the widows in her parish in September of 2021. A regular pilgrimage coordinator, she was journeying with a group to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in New Franken, Wis., when she realized that her group of pilgrims had a unique composition.

“Many of them were widows,” Felder recalled. “The nurse on our pilgrimage was a recent widow, too.”

During the pilgrimage, Felder ensured that the group offered prayers for the members’ deceased husbands. After the trip was over, however, she couldn’t stop thinking about the widows and their individual grief journeys. Her continued prayers for them led her to reflect on Pope Francis’s encyclical Fratelli Tutti, which discusses fraternal bonds between all the members of the Church, regardless of their walks of life. Felder said she felt a call from God to extend that fraternal love to the widows of her parish.

“My prayers kept leading me to help through ministry,” she said.

Fortunately, Felder’s parish pastor, Fr. Matthew Wiering, also wanted to serve the bereaved better. When she spoke to him about her interest in starting a ministry, he gave her the needed help and resources.

The first Widows of Joy meeting was held in March of 2022 and continues to meet on the first Saturday of each month. Every meeting has a similar schedule. Group members begin by participating in morning Mass, followed by a video reflection and time to share.

“The videos talk about the grief experience,” Felder said. “It answers questions like whether [the group members’] experience is normal, and the intensity and duration of their emotions. Afterward, the ladies can discuss and share their own experiences, or just know that they have someone there that can relate to them.”

Margaret Rognli of Silver Lake, one of the first members of Widows of Joy, said the group feels like a real community. As a table leader who helps facilitate discussion, she has seen the real bonds that form from sharing and listening.

“You could tell the Holy Spirit was present,” Rognli said.

In his talks, Deacon McKeown discussed the process and pitfalls of grief, two topics that he felt were universal to mourners.

“Grief is a multifaceted trauma,” Deacon McKeown said. “You can’t just approach it from one angle.” During the retreat, he spoke about the grieving process and common struggles many people experience along the way. He also focused on the guilty feelings that individuals may find themselves grappling with after the death of a loved one.

“Sometimes we blame ourselves for our loved one’s death,” said Deacon McKeown. “We say, ‘I didn’t pray hard enough or see the signs early enough.’ Sometimes we say, ‘God has abandoned me. He doesn’t care about me, or he never would have let this happen.’ We may have feelings that God is getting back at [us] for past sins.”

Deacon McKeown expressed admiration for Felder’s ongoing vision. Besides scheduling various events and fostering community, the Widows of Joy foundress is passionate about creating offshoot ministries in other parishes in the New Ulm diocese.

Felder said that she is happy to see the Widows of Joy members form close relationships with one another. Several current members get together for lunch and other social activities, and the group is conscientious about making sure that elderly or homebound widows have rides if they need them. She recalled one widow who, though unable to attend meetings, sent a poem titled “As I Sit in Heaven” to be shared at a retreat.

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The ladies were crying and so touched by it,” Felder said. “It was really great that we could have a homebound widow give to the Widows of Joy and be included in that way. It’s so great to see ladies move through the stages of grief and know their lives are being renewed through hope. It’s all glory and praise to God.”

On July 1, 2023, some members of the Widows of Joy along with Holy Trinity, Winsted pastors Fr. Matthew Wiering (l) and Fr. John Hayes (far right), enjoyed an outdoor gathering at the Holy Trinity Grotto in Winsted. Members pictured l-r, Joan Fiecke, Opal Schumacher, Shirley Fiecke, Marion Moy, Monica Mahon, Carol Kappel, Marge Rognli, Michelle Schesso, Mary Wessling, Diane Hirsch, and Chris Boerner. Back row, Mary Adelmann, Pat Marquardt, Gloria Raddle, Kathy Baldwin, Barb Millerbernd, Joann Wegscheid, Evonne Kremer, Sandy Bayerl, Mavis Weber, Carol Cuhel, Joan Lynch, Kate Jones, and Ann Dalheimer.

( Photo submitted)

The Prairie Catholic

NEW ULM – About 400 family members and well-wishers joined Bishop Chad Zielinski and other bishops, priests, women religious and dozens of sisters from the Handmaids of the Heart of Jesus as two sisters made their perpetual vows on Saturday, June 17, 2023, at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm.

Bishop Chad Zielinski served as the ceremony’s principal celebrant. Bishop Emeritus John M. LeVoir, former bishop of New Ulm, established the Handmaids in 2010, the first new group of its kind in the Diocese of New Ulm since its formation in 1957. There has never been a motherhouse within the diocesan boundaries. Over the past 13 years, the order has grown to 36 sisters, with convents in the dioceses of New Ulm, Duluth, St.Paul, Minneapolis, and Bismarck, ND.

Two Handmaids make profession of final vows

Bishop Zielinski receives the perpetual vows of Handmaids (l-r) Sr. Thérèse Marie and Sr. Mary Angela, both originally from North Dakota. (Photo by Jeanine McMahon Photography)

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Bishop Chad Zielinski served as the ceremony’s principal celebrant. Bishop Emeritus John M. LeVoir, former bishop of New Ulm, established the Handmaids in 2010, the first new group of its kind in the Diocese of New Ulm since its formation in 1957. There has never been a motherhouse within the diocesan boundaries. Over the past 13 years, the order has grown to 36 sisters, with convents in the dioceses of New Ulm, Duluth, St.Paul, Minneapolis, and Bismarck, ND.

Two Handmaids make profession of final vows

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VATICAN CITY – Pope Francis has announced he will release a follow-up environmental document to the 2015 encyclical Laudato Si’ on Oct. 4, the feast of St. Francis of Assisi.

Speaking at the end of his general audience Aug. 30, the pope said he plans “to publish an exhortation, a second Laudato Si,’” at the end of a Vatican-supported ecumenical initiative that will run Sept.1 through Oct. 4. The “Season of Creation” will begin, Pope Francis said, on Sept. 1, which is the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation. This year’s theme is “Let Justice and Peace Flow.”

“Let us join our Christian brothers and sisters in the commitment to care for creation as a sacred gift from the Creator,” Francis urged at his public audience.

“It is necessary to stand with the victims of environmental and climate injustice, striving to end the senseless war on our common home, which is a terrible world war,” he added. “I urge all of you to work and pray for it to abound with life once again.”

The pope said with this new writing he is updating Laudato Si’ to cover current issues. Laudato Si’ is the second of three encyclicals published in Pope Francis’ pontificate thus far. It was released in June 2015.

The theme of the encyclical, which means “Praise be to you,” is human ecology, a phrase first used by Pope Benedict XVI. The document addresses issues such as climate change, care for the environment, and the defense of human life and dignity.

Pope Francis said that the second part to Laudato Si’ would be the kind of papal document known as an “exhortation.”

WASHINGTON – For over 40 years, the Catholic Church in the United States has celebrated National Migration Week (NMW), which has traditionally been linked to the Vatican’s World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR). This year’s theme is “Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay.”

As in year’s past, NMW will use the theme chosen by the Holy Father for his World Day of Migrants celebration: “Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay.” This theme calls attention to the conviction that persons have a right not to migrate and if a person migrates it should be done by choice and not by necessity. In their pastoral letter “Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope,” the bishops of United States and Mexico highlight this theme and note that “all persons have the right to find in their own countries the economic, political, and social opportunities to live in dignity and achieve a full life through the use of their God-given gifts. In this context, work that provides a just, living wage is a basic human need.”

Unfortunately, forced displacement is at an all-time high; according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2021, 89.3 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. This includes: 27.1 million refugees, 53.2 million internally displaced people, and 4.6 million asylum seekers.

In preparation for National Migration Week 2023, the faithful are asked to take a moment to reflect on what kinds of concrete efforts they can make on the local level to help those who have been forcibly displaced and what kinds of policies can be implemented to ensure that more people are in a position to choose whether to migrate or to stay.

Visit justiceforimmigrants.org/ to access resources and other information.

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