

THE PRAIRIE CATHOLIC

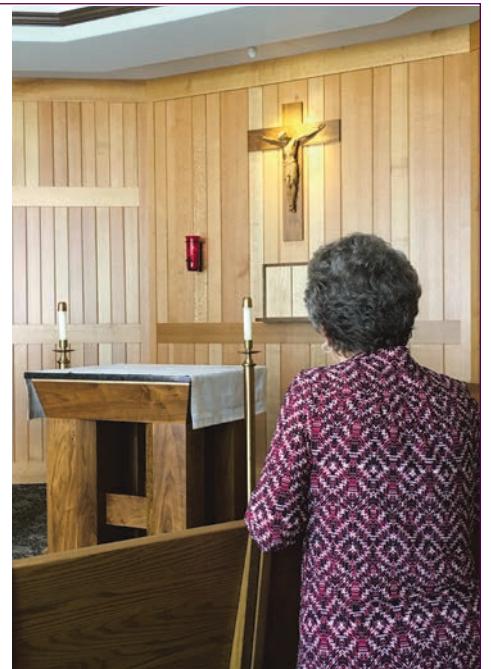
Pastoral news from across the Diocese of New Ulm

Minnesota's Most Rural Diocese Diocese of New Ulm Vol. 32 No. 6 April/May 2018

Prayers for priests

WILLMAR – Seven Sisters Apostolate is a group of women from St. Mary's parish in Willmar who are committed to praying a Holy Hour, each on a different day of the week, for the intentions of their parish priest.

(Read more on page 5)



Pastoral planning a necessity as diocese embraces continued change

by Tom Keaveny, director
Diocesan Pastoral Planning

NEW ULM – On Nov. 18, 1957, Pope Pius XII officially established the Diocese of New Ulm. The territory of the new diocese – until then the western two-thirds of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis – included 15 of Minnesota's most fertile and productive agricultural counties. This papal decision was a product of pastoral planning on a larger scale, especially influenced by the unprecedented post WWII growth of the rural population on small family farms and in the rural communities that supported these growing families.

The people of this diocese have maintained a deeply rooted faith.



On April 16, parishioners from St. Brendan parish in Green Isle met with Bishop John M. LeVoir and the parish's parochial administrator Fr. Aaron Johanneck, to discuss the future of their parish as well as that of the neighboring parishes in and around the Ss. Michael, Mary, and Brendan Area Faith Community.

(photo by Tom Keaveny)

This rural diocese has come to describe itself as “a loving people in a holy place.” For many in the diocese this holy place is their parish; a place where their faith has been practiced and handed down for generations.

Now, this faith and parish identity is being challenged by the same forces that have transformed rural life throughout the United States: an aging population, declining birth rates, and the advanced technology in agri-business. The population of the diocese continues to decline: we are now a diocese of 53,329 Catholics as compared to over 68,000 in 1957.

As small parishes are unable to sustain themselves with fewer households and reduced participation, as well as the declining number of priests

available to serve our parishes, pastoral planning and its on-going implementation is crucial.

Pastoral planning an on-going effort

The diocese has always been in some process of planning. In the 1950s and 1960s many new churches and several Catholic grade schools were built or expanded upon. While the growth of the diocesan population had stabilized, parishes were moving forward in a “boom” that included new structures and expanded parish facilities for religious education.

In 1971, Bishop Alphonse J. Schladweiler, the first bishop of the diocese, gathered the priests to discuss and study population statistics, migration patterns, numbers of priests in the diocese, and possibilities for the future

ministry. The diocese formulated goals and objectives that guided the planning process into the 1980s.

In 1986, Bishop Raymond A. Lucker, the second bishop of the diocese, assembled a Task Force on Parishes that consisted of a group of church leaders from across the diocese that would assist him in developing a plan for the restructuring of parishes. Following a diocesan process of parish consultation, the task force drew up the first *Plan for Parishes (1988-1995)*. During this time, pastoral administrators (religious or lay) were appointed in as many as 23 parishes in the diocese.

In 1988, the Task Force on Parishes became the Committee on Parishes, continuing to serve as an advisory body to the

bishop as the *Diocesan Plan for Parishes* was implemented and revised. From 1988 to 2003 many parish clusters formed as pastoral administrators worked with their parishes and a priest from a neighboring parish who served as a sacramental minister. Other models involving the sharing of staff resources and parish talents were initiated.

In 2003, Bishop John C. Nienstedt, third bishop of New Ulm, promulgated the *Third Plan for Parishes: Hope for Years to Come*. This plan established the area faith community model “to maximize our strengths and not duplicate our efforts.” Area faith communities (AFC) were created to move beyond the cluster model which was felt to foster parish independence at a time when more interdependence would be required. Seventeen AFCs were established and advanced models for sharing staff resources were implemented.

In 2013, Bishop John M. LeVoir introduced the *Fourth Plan for Parishes: Christ Our Life to 2020 and Beyond*. This *Plan* emphasizes that a single priest should be the pastor of each parish in an AFC. The *Plan* encourages parish mergers as the diocese continues to address population declines and fewer priests.

In accordance with the *Fourth Plan*, by July of 2018, all of the diocese's AFCs will be under the leadership of a single pastor or parochial administrator. Some parishes will be asked to join a neighboring AFC to further

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New papal document is a guide to holiness

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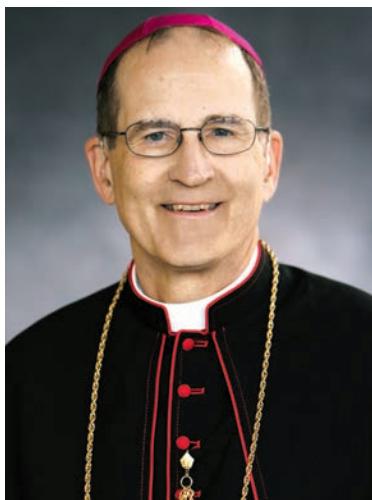
End of an era: Sr. JoAnne Backes to retire in June

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Safe environment efforts continue

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Fiftieth anniversary of Humanae Vitae



by Bishop John M. LeVoir

In May 1968, I graduated from the University of St. Thomas. At that time, the Catholic world was debating the merits and demerits of contraception. In my final year at St. Thomas, it was a frequent topic of conversation at the university. Some were in favor of contraception, and some were not and were in favor of natural family planning.

On July 25, 1968, fifty years ago, Pope Paul VI, now Blessed Paul VI, issued the encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (On Human Life). In it, he wrote: “The Church, nevertheless, in urging men [and women] to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by

its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life” (n. 11). In other words, in accord with natural law and Church teaching, each marital act must be open to life.

However, the encyclical goes on to state that if “there are serious motives to space out births, which derive from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external conditions, it is licit to take into account the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions.” Today, we call the observance of the natural rhythms immanent in the generative functions, natural family planning (NFP). NFP is to be used by couples within the context of responsible parenthood.

Little known at the time, the future pope, St. John Paul II, cardinal archbishop of Cracow, Karol Wojtyla, was a member of the commission advising Pope Paul VI on the issue of responsible parenthood. It was largely due to his influence that Pope Paul VI wrote *Humanae Vitae*.

Later, as pope, John Paul II

would write what has come to be known as the *Theology of the Body*, as well as the apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (On the Family), giving cogent, comprehensive, and understandable reasons for the Church’s teaching on birth control. During this fiftieth anniversary year, it would be well worth reading the three publications: *On Human Life*, *Theology of the Body*, and *On the Family*.

Sr. Candace Fier is the diocesan director of the Office of Family Life. She is a certified Natural Family Planning practitioner. The Office of Family Life helps the faithful of the Diocese of New Ulm to know, love, and serve God by promoting marriage and family life according to the teachings of the Catholic Church and by a diocesan-wide educational approach to natural family planning (NFP), the theology of the body, chastity education, and ethics and morality. Sr. Candace is always most happy to respond to inquiries.

The bishop’s priorities for the diocese

People often ask what the priorities of the Diocese of New Ulm are. I have been talking

about them in almost every place that I go. They are as follows: evangelization, pastoral planning, unity among clergy, and to make our way through the process of Chapter 11 Reorganization.

Currently, there are only one-third of our Catholics who attend Mass on any given weekend. Under the banner of missionary discipleship and the New Evangelization, the diocese is formulating ways in which to reach out and invite home the two-thirds of our Catholics who have drifted away from the practice of their faith. There is also an emphasis on forming our youth in the Catholic faith.

Please see this issue of *The Prairie Catholic* for news on pastoral planning efforts. We continue to implement the *Fourth Plan for Parishes*. The diocese has a declining number of priests and parishioners, as well as an aging population. Through pastoral planning, the merging of parishes will result in a greater number of worshipers at fewer weekend liturgies, a reasonable workload for our priests, and parishioners actively involved in missionary discipleship and the New Evangelization.

In speaking to other bishops,

they tell me that unity among clerics is an issue that they continue to work on. I addressed this issue in the homily at the Chrism Mass and will continue to ask our clergy to work toward a unity among themselves in Jesus Christ. I ask your prayers and involvement in all of these efforts.

With regard to Chapter 11 Reorganization, the two goals are to work for healing for those who have been sexually abused as minors by clergy and providing compensation that is as fair as possible, while continuing the good work of the Church. It has been a little over one year that the diocese has been in Chapter 11 Reorganization, and since the beginning of the process, these have been our steadfast goals.

Diocese of Winona–Rochester

The Congregation for Bishops has decreed that the Diocese of Winona will now be called the Diocese of Winona-Rochester and that St. John the Evangelist Church of Rochester will be designated as a co-cathedral. Congratulations to our neighbors to the south!

Bishop LeVoir’s May and June calendar can be found at www.dnu.org/calendar/.

Fourth Plan offers hope for our parishes, diocese

(Continued from page 1)

consolidate resources and some parishes will be asked to merge or to consider closing.

Senior associates a core component to Fourth Plan

In June 2018, three priests (currently assigned as pastors of nine parishes) will be retiring. This is in addition to the retirement of a senior associate and a pastoral administrator assigned to two small parishes.

Fortunately, two of these newly retired priests will continue to serve as senior associate pastors assigned to assist with the pastoral care of eight parishes in three different area faith communities. Other priests in retirement share weekend assignments or assist where needed.

Without the full-time presence of these retired priests and their willingness to serve as associates celebrating multiple weekend Masses, more parishes would now be considering mergers.

Parish merge set for June

The parishes of St. Paul in Walnut Grove and St. Brendan in Green Isle are considered the smallest parishes remaining in the diocese.

Earlier this spring St. Paul parishioners met with Bishop LeVoir to discuss the future of their parish. Recognizing their pastor will be leaving to serve as a senior associate in another parish, the parish agreed that they would merge with the Church of St. Mary in Tracy. The last formal weekend Mass at the Church of St. Paul in Walnut Grove will be June 10.

St. Brendan parishioners are in the early stages of planning their future. Similar planning discussions are being scheduled throughout the diocese as the implementation of the *Fourth Plan* continues.

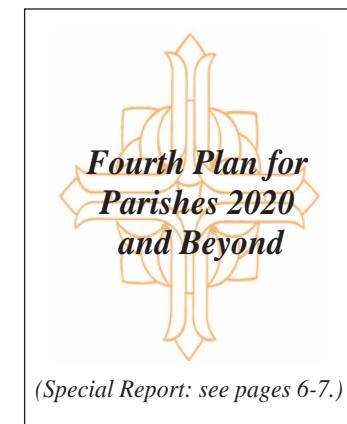
Fr. Anthony Hesse chairs the Diocese of New Ulm Committee on Parishes. In July, he will become the pastor of six parishes who will work together in an expanded area faith community.

Regarding the pastoral planning efforts of the diocese, Fr. Hesse referred to the apostles who were confused with the unknown after the resurrection. “Jesus gave them reason for hope that he will be with them and so it will be for our parishes and diocese,” said Fr. Hesse.

“We do not always understand

God’s will for us and for our parishes,” he said.

“I know that it will only be through much prayer and unwavering faith that we will accomplish these pastoral transitions and emerge as a community of the faithful fulfilling what is truly God’s plan for our future,” said Fr. Hesse.



(Special Report: see pages 6-7.)

THE PRAIRIE CATHOLIC

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Pope Francis issues exhortation praising the ‘middle class’ of holiness

by Hannah Brockhaus
Catholic News Agency

Editor’s note: An apostolic exhortation is considered the second-highest form of papal teaching after an encyclical letter.

VATICAN CITY (CNA/EWTN News) – Pope Francis released an apostolic exhortation in which he aims to “repropose” the universal call to holiness – which he says is the mission of life for every person.

Published April 9, *Gaudete et exultate*, or “Rejoice and be glad,” is Francis’ third apostolic exhortation. It is subtitled “On the call to holiness in the contemporary world.”

The 44-page exhortation explains that holiness is the mission of every Christian, and gives practical advice for living out the call to holiness in ordinary, daily life, encouraging the practice of the Beatitudes and performing works of mercy.

Francis mentioned the holiness

“in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence. We might call them ‘the middle class of holiness.’”

Francis said that all Catholics that, like the saints, “need to see the entirety of your life as a mission,” and explained that this is accomplished by listening to God in prayer and asking the Holy Spirit for guidance in each moment and decision.

“A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness,” he stated, explaining that this path has its “fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him.”

Using the words of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Francis wrote



Pope Francis. Credit: Daniel Ibáñez/CNA

that “holiness is nothing other than charity lived to the full.” As a result, the measure of our holiness stems not from our own achievement, but also “from the stature that Christ achieves in us.” Therefore, Pope Francis said, to walk the path of holiness requires prayer and contemplation alongside action; the two cannot be separated.

The pope also touched on what he calls the “two enemies of holiness” – modern versions of

the heresies of Pelagianism and Gnosticism, saying that these lead to “false forms of holiness.”

In the modern form of Gnosticism, Francis said, one believes that faith is purely subjective, and that the intellect is the supreme form of perfection, not charity.

This can lead Catholics to think that “because we know something, or are able to explain it in certain terms, we are already saints,” he said, when really, “what we think

we know should always motivate us to respond more fully to God’s love.”

In contemporary Pelagianism, he said the common error is to believe that it is by our own effort that we achieve sanctity, forgetting that everything in fact “depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (*Rom. 9:16*).”

The pope explained that “the Church has repeatedly taught that we are justified not by our own works or efforts, but by the grace of the Lord, who always takes the initiative,” and that even our cooperation with the gift of divine grace is itself “a prior gift of that same grace.”

Some may be asked, through God’s grace, for grand gestures of holiness – as can be seen in the lives of many of the saints, Francis said – but many people are called to live the mission of holiness in a more ordinary way, and in the context of their vocation.

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Two priests to celebrate milestone anniversaries; celebrations to be held

by Christine Clancy
The Prairie Catholic

50 years of ministry

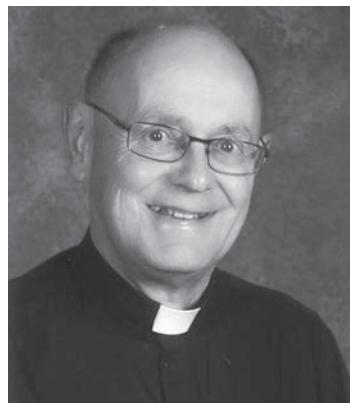
Fr. George Schmit credits his pastor at St. Peter parish in Eden Valley, Fr. Ambrose Filbin for inspiring his vocation. “He was a happy priest and related well to the youth,” said Fr. Schmit. “He bought me my first St. Andrew’s Daily Missal and told me to use it for daily Mass,” he said.

Now 50 years later, Fr. Schmit continues to love being a priest, especially planning and celebrating the Eucharist along with preaching.

When asked what has surprised him the most about his vocation he said that despite the fact that he is not a father of a “family,” he has been invited by so many to be part of their family. “I have been included in those special family events like baptism, marriage, and even death,” said Fr. Schmit.

“I have been honored to be a part of those special times,” he said.

In recognition of his 50 years of priestly ministry, Fr. Schmit will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, June 24 at 4 p.m. at



Fr. George Schmit

the Church of St. Mary in Bird Island. Bishop John M. LeVoiur will be in attendance. Following Mass there will be a reception, dinner, and program at the Island Ballroom in Bird Island. Everyone is invited to attend.

Fr. Schmit was ordained to the priesthood on March 10, 1968, at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Winsted by Bishop Alphonse J. Schladweiler.

During his priestly ministry he has served the parishes of St. Anthony, Watkins; St. Mary, Sleepy Eye (also served as religion teacher and school principal); St. George, West Newton Township; St. Mathias, Wanda; Cathedral of the Holy



Fr. Brian Oestreich

Trinity, New Ulm; and St. John, Searles.

He currently serves as senior associate pastor of the Heart of Jesus Area Faith Community (St. John, Hector; St. Mary, Bird Island; St. Aloysius, Olivia; and Holy Redeemer, Renville).

On the diocesan level, Fr. Schmit has served as vicar general, director of the Office of Vocations, and coordinator of Catholic High Schools.

25 years of ministry

Fr. Brian Oestreich credits his parents for inspiring his vocation. He said that growing up his parents instilled in their children a sense of ministry and service.

“Helping others and doing the Corporal Works of Mercy were common everyday events in our lives,” said Fr. Oestreich.

“We never knew who would be stopping by for a meal or who we would be helping. We just did it,” he said.

“Helping at church was a huge component of our lives too and still is for our family,” he added. “Family and faith go hand in hand,” he said.

When Fr. Oestreich was asked if he could say one thing to the diocese’s seminarians, what would that be, he said: “Incorporate the prayer ‘Thy Will Be Done’ into your daily prayers. Totally submit yourself to what God asks of you. You’ll be amazed and humbled at the ministry you are called to do!”

In recognition of Fr. Oestreich’s priestly anniversary there will be a Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated by Bishop LeVoiur on Saturday, June 16 at 5 p.m. at the Church of St. John in Ortonville, followed by a pork picnic dinner in the church hall. The celebration will continue from 7 to 10 p.m. with live music and a street dance. There will also be

fun activities for kids. Everyone is welcome to attend the day’s activities.

Fr. Oestreich was ordained May 29, 1993, at the Church of St. Philip in Litchfield by Bishop Raymond A. Lucker.

Over the past 25 years, Fr. Oestreich has served the parishes of: Holy Redeemer, Marshall; Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, New Ulm; St. Mary, Tracy; St. Paul, Walnut Grove; Japanese Martyrs, Leavenworth; St. Paul, Comfrey; St. Mary, Sleepy Eye; Holy Family, Silver Lake; St. Michael, Madison, St. John, Appleton (with some pastoral responsibilities at the Prairie Correctional Facility in Appleton), and St. James, Dawson.

He currently serves as pastor of the Spirit of Life Area Faith Community (Holy Rosary, Graceville; St. Michael, Madison; St. John, Ortonville; and St. Joseph, Rosen), and the merged parish of St. Mary Beardsley.

On a diocesan level Fr. Oestreich has served as co-director and director of the Office of Vocations.



por Obispo John M. LeVoir

En Mayo de 1968, me gradué de la Universidad de St. Thomas. En aquella época, el mundo católico estaba debatiendo las ventajas y desventajas sobre la anticoncepción. En mi último año en la Universidad, fue un tema muy frecuente de conversación. Algunos estaban a favor de la anticoncepción mientras que otros a favor de la planificación familiar natural.

El 25 de Julio de 1968, hace 50 años, el Papa Pablo VI, hoy conocido como el Beato Pablo VI, emitió la encíclica *Humanae Vitae* (sobre la vida humana). En él, escribió: “La Iglesia, no obstante, exhorta a hombres [y las mujeres] observar los preceptos de la ley natural, que interpreta por su constante doctrina, enseña que todos y cada acto marital tiene necesariamente que retener su relación intrínseca con la procreación de la vida humana” (n.11). En otras palabras, de acuerdo con la ley natural y la enseñanza de la Iglesia, cada acto marital debe estar abierto a la vida.

Sin embargo, la encíclica continúa afirmando que si “para espaciar los nacimientos existen serios motivos, derivados de las condiciones físicas o psicológicas de los cónyuges, o de circunstancias exteriores,” la Iglesia enseña que entonces es lícito tener en cuenta los ritmos naturales inmanentes a las funciones generadoras.” Hoy se conoce como la planificación familiar natural (PFN). La PFN se utiliza por las parejas dentro del contexto de la paternidad responsable.

La Hna. Candace Fier es la Directora de la Oficina para la Vida Familiar en la Diócesis de New Ulm. Ella es una enfermera certificada de Planificación Familiar Natural. La Oficina para la Vida Familiar provee ayuda a los feligreses de la Diócesis de New Ulm a conocer, amar y servir a Dios promoviendo el matrimonio y la vida familiar de acuerdo con las enseñanzas

No Tengas Miedo

El 50 Aniversario de la Encíclica Humanae Vitae

de la Iglesia Católica y con un enfoque educativo diocesano de planificación familiar natural (PFN), la teología del cuerpo, la educación de la castidad y la ética y la moralidad. La Hna. Candace siempre está dispuesta a responder a sus preguntas.

Las Prioridades del Obispo para la Diócesis de New Ulm

Frecuentemente, los feligreses se preguntan sobre las prioridades de la Diócesis de New Ulm. He estado hablando de ellos en casi todos los lugares que voy. Las prioridades son las siguientes: La evangelización, la planificación pastoral, la unidad entre los sacerdotes, y avanzar con el proceso de la Reorganización financiera.

Actualmente, solo un tercio de nuestros católicos asisten a misa en un fin de semana determinado. Bajo el lema del discipulado misionero y de la Nueva Evangelización, la diócesis busca maneras para acercarse e invitar a los dos tercios de nuestros católicos que se han alejado de la práctica de su fe. También es importante formar a nuestros jóvenes en la fe católica.

Les pido que vean esta edición del *The Prairie Catholic* e informarse sobre los esfuerzos de la planificación pastoral. La implementación del Cuarto Plan para las Parroquias continúa. La Diócesis de New Ulm está pasando por una fase de decadencia ya que cada vez tenemos menos sacerdotes y feligreses, así como una población que envejece. A través de la planificación pastoral, la fusión de las parroquias dará como resultado un mayor número de feligreses, pero menos liturgias los fines de semana, menos trabajo para nuestros sacerdotes y los feligreses estarán involucrados en el discipulado misionero y en la Nueva Evangelización.

En conversación con otros obispos, me cuentan que la unidad entre los sacerdotes es una preocupación, pero a la misma vez seguimos trabajando

activamente. Durante, la homilía de la Misa Crismal hablé sobre este tema y les seguiré pidiendo a nuestros sacerdotes que sigan trabajando para lograr la unidad entre ellos en el nombre de Jesucristo. Les pido sus oraciones y su participación en estas iniciativas.

Con respecto a la reorganización financiera, los dos objetivos son trabajar por la sanación de aquellos que fueron abusados sexualmente cuando menores por el clero y proporcionar una compensación lo más justa posible, mientras la gran labor de la Iglesia continúa. Ya ha pasado más de un año desde que comenzó la reorganización financiera, y desde su inicio, estos han sido nuestros objetivos.

Diócesis de Winona-Rochester

La Congregación para los Obispos decretaron que de ahora en adelante la Diócesis de Winona se llamará la Diócesis de Winona-Rochester y la Iglesia de San Juan Evangelista de Rochester será designada como una co-catedral. ¡Felicitaciones a nuestros vecinos del sur!



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May 20, 2018

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Holiness is the mission of life for every person

(Continued from page 3)

However large or small one's call seems, Francis said that acts of charity are always undertaken “by God's grace,” not as people “sufficient unto ourselves, but rather “as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10),” he said.

The pope offered several practical recommendations for living out these “small gestures.” In addition to the frequent reception of the sacraments and attendance at Mass, he said that in the Beatitudes Jesus explains “with great simplicity what it means to be holy.”

He also said that a way to practice holiness is through the works of mercy, though he warned that to think good works can be separated from a personal relationship with God and openness to grace is to make Christianity into “a sort of NGO.”

The saints, on the other hand, show us that “mental prayer, the love of God, and the reading of the Gospel” in no way detract from “passionate and effective commitment to their neighbors.” The pope highlighted several qualities he finds especially important for living holiness in today's culture, including: perseverance, patience, humility, joy, a sense of humor, boldness, and passion.

Boldness and passion, he said, are important in order to avoid despondency or mediocrity, which he said can weaken us in the ongoing spiritual battle against evil.

In the journey toward holiness, “the cultivation of all that is good, progress in the spiritual life

and growth in love are the best counterbalance to evil,” he said, emphasizing that the existence of the devil is not a myth or an abstract idea, but a “personal being that assails us.”

“Those who choose to remain neutral, who are satisfied with little, who renounce the ideal of giving themselves generously to the Lord, will never hold out” against temptation, he stated.

“For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, missionary outreach,” he listed.

About the importance of prayer on the path to holiness, the pope said that though “the Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others and at every moment . . . we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer.”

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), welcomes the release of Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation. In his statement, Cardinal DiNardo expresses his deep gratitude to the Holy Father for the exhortation and the call for each Christian to “acknowledge and be open to what God wants them to be.”

► **Printed copies of “Rejoice and Be Glad” can be ordered online from the USCCB, <http://store.usccb.org/rejoice-and-be-glad-p/7-599.htm>. The Vatican has also posted the exhortation online.**

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Seven Sisters Apostolate prays for intentions of parish priest

by Debra Skelley Blaschko
Prairie Catholic correspondent

WILLMAR – What started out two years ago as a prayer intention for priests by St. Mary, Willmar parishioner Linda Zeug, has become an organized effort to have someone pray an hour each day for the parish pastor.

Originating in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 2011, the Seven Sisters Apostolate made its way to the Willmar area in 2016, according to Zeug. “After daily Mass, a friend approached me regarding a booklet she picked up on the Seven Sisters Apostolate,” said Zeug.

Although the friend felt she was not prepared to organize the apostolate at the parish, she planned to ask someone who showed an interest in praying for the clergy.

Zeug believes it was her initial prayer request at Mass that led to the invitation and then her acceptance of the “ anchoress” or organizer position of the group in Willmar that prays for Fr. Steve Verhelst, pastor of Jesus Our Living Water Area Faith

Community including St. Mary in Willmar and Our Lady of the Lakes in Spicer.

As anchoress, Zeug invited six women to commit to a holy hour one day a week to pray specifically for Fr. Verhelst and his intentions, as well as for his deepening devotion to the Blessed Mother of Jesus. Ideally, the prayer takes place in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, either in an adoration chapel or in front of a tabernacle.

Longtime St. Mary parishioner Jean Masters joined the apostolate when it began in 2016 and looks forward to her one hour of prayer time in the chapel each week. “It isn’t only that I admire Fr. Steve and I am thankful for him, but also that we are so short of priests. I thought I could offer my help to keep him fortified (with prayer) and to support him,” said Masters. “We need the sacraments that come through the priests.”

Bishop John M. LeVoir of the New Ulm diocese is grateful for the Seven Sisters Apostolate and was introduced to it when he was pastor of St. Michael’s and St. Mary’s in Stillwater. “The women



Each member of the Seven Sisters Apostolate formed at the Jesus Our Living Water Area Faith Community (Willmar and Spicer) prays a Holy Hour for their parish priest on a different day each week. From left are, Linda Sjoberg, Linda Zeug, Karen Anderson, Jane Gahlon, and Jean Masters. Not pictured: Maria Soriano and Tomi Rios. (Photo by Mary Nordstrom)

of Stillwater from the Seven Sisters Apostolate started to pray for me when I was a pastor and they continue to do so now,” said Bishop LeVoir.

“Although I cannot prove it, I believe their prayer for me has helped me greatly as a priest and now as a bishop. I am very grateful for the Seven Sisters

Apostolate. I, in turn, pray for them and their families,” he said.

The Seven Sisters Apostolate was founded in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in 2010 by Janette Howe, a parishioner of the Cathedral of St. Paul. It was then that Howe sensed a nudge to pray more frequently and intentionally for her pastor and

rector of the Cathedral, Fr. Joseph Johnson.

According to Howe, by June 2011, the first seven groups made their first one-year commitment and now there are more than 300 groups throughout the United States and in other countries.

Howe shared that a priest from the Duluth diocese once told her that when one of the Seven Sisters is praying for him he is “inspired to be more generous in the time he spends in prayer” and he is “deeply grateful for the powerful intercession provided by these holy women.”

For some who participate in the apostolate, this is the first time they have ever prayed a holy hour. “Many come in thinking they are going to help their priest, but in God’s economy they benefit as well,” said Howe.

For further information regarding the Seven Sisters Apostolate or to find out about starting a group, visit <http://sevensistersapostolate.org/home/>.

St. Eloi parish in Ghent to build church addition and elevator

courtesy of
Marshall Independent

GHENT – The Church of St. Eloi in Ghent has a history that stretches back more than 100 years. And after all that time, there’s still new growth and life in the parish, said Fr. Craig Timmerman.

Fr. Timmerman and St. Eloi parishioners gathered outside the church on Sunday morning, March 18 for the groundbreaking and blessing of a new building addition. The project will build a new entryway and elevator for the church, and renovate the community gathering space in the church’s lower level. Renovation will also continue on the sanctuary.

“It will open up the church for everyone,” said Bernie DeCock, a member of the St. Eloi building committee and a trustee of the parish.



Fr. Craig Timmerman and St. Eloi parishioners gathered outside the church on the morning of Sunday, March 18 for the groundbreaking and blessing of a new church renovation project. Also pictured, Mass server Trevor VanKeulen and Sisters of Mary Morning Star. (photo courtesy of Marshall Independent)

In a short ceremony, parishioners prayed for the success and safety of the builders, and reflected on Jesus as the foundation of their faith.

The building project is one that has been a long time in the making. Fr. Timmerman told the crowd gathered that planning for the elevator started about 14

years ago. Fr. Timmerman and DeCock said parishioners raised more than \$800,000 to make the project a reality.

It was “very exciting” to see all that work come to fruition, DeCock said.

“The addition is about 1,400 square feet,” said architect Jeff Stromgren, of Rice-Stromgren Architects. The new entrance will be to one side of the original 1904 church building, and will include gathering space, as well as an elevator that will make the church more accessible. “This will probably be where most people enter the church,” Stromgren said of the new entryway.

Stromgren said a stage in the church’s lower level will also be removed and the multi-purpose room will be replaced. New restrooms will also be installed in the lower level.

The “groundbreaking” part of the day’s ceremony proved a little difficult, with the ground still somewhat hard. But with some work, members of the St. Eloi building committee were able to turn over the first few shovelfuls of dirt at the building site. Construction is planned to start this summer.

The addition is the biggest construction project at the church since the St. Eloi school was built 62 years ago, Fr. Timmerman told people gathered at the groundbreaking.

He said it was a sign of new life and growth at the parish, like the Sisters of Mary Morning Star moving into the former St. Eloi rectory, and the growth of youth programs in the parish. Having a more accessible entry to the church can help that new growth continue, he said.

Continuing to plan for our future

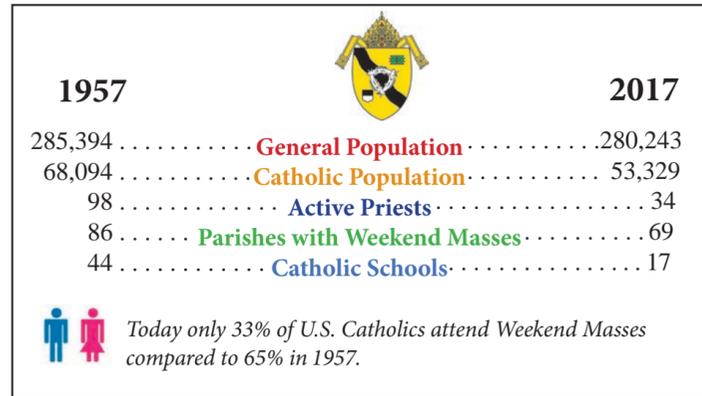
Implementing the Fourth Plan for Parishes 2020 and Beyond

by Bishop John M. LeVoir

Editor's note: The Diocese of New Ulm continues to implement the Fourth Plan for Parishes in union with priests, deacons, religious, parish and diocesan staff, and parishioners throughout the diocese. Following, Bishop John M. LeVoir talks about the continued implementation of the Fourth Plan for Parishes

the weekends and the decrease in active parishioners usually means a decrease in financial support for parish facilities, as well as fewer people to plan and work at parish activities.

Today the statistics look much different.



In implementing the Plan for Parishes over the last four years, I have been in consultation with the diocesan Committee on Parishes, the Priests' Council, the Priest Personnel Board, and many others. Tom Keaveny, the director of Pastoral Planning, and I have met with priests, parish leaders and staff, committees, and parishioners in every region of the diocese to address the necessity of parish mergers. Since I became bishop, four of our 77 parishes have been closed and four are considered merged with neighboring parishes as we continue to address parish population declines and fewer diocesan priests to celebrate weekend Masses.

Parish mergers - why they are necessary

Clearly, it is not feasible to continue operating with as many small parishes as we have in the past. The merging of our parishes and support for efforts to strengthen our area faith communities is a priority as we plan for our future.

It is significant to note that with just 17 fewer parishes with weekend Masses since the inception of the diocese, the number of priests has declined by 64, which means increased expectations for our priests. I observe the effects of this stress on our priests. With weekend schedules that include weddings, funerals, and three or more weekend Masses at multiple locations; we need to continue to merge our smaller parishes. Many of our weekend Masses have fewer than 100 participants and our smaller parishes have very few children, signaling major declines in parish populations. Many weekday Masses in our diocese have fewer than 15 participants.

Merging some of our small parishes is a necessity. In a merger, the assets of the merged parish – such as its church building, its cemetery (if it has one), and other financial resources – become the responsibility of the receiving parish. Parishioners are engaged in the receiving parish and they join where their families attend school or participate in other area faith community liturgies and activities. It is NOT true that the church building of a merged parish automatically shuts down once a merger takes place. Baptisms, funerals, weddings, special weekend Masses, and other forms of divine worship still occur. Weekday Masses are celebrated depending on the availability of our priests.

When the diocese was founded in 1957 there were 68,094 Catholics, 98 priests, 86 parishes, seven Catholic high schools, and 37 Catholic grade schools. Sixty-five percent of U.S. Catholics were attending Weekend Masses.

Projections show that the number of active priests serving in the diocese, age 70 and under, will decline in the next five years to a total as low as 27. In addition, due to deaths and smaller Catholic families, the diocese is losing over 1,000 parishioners per year. About 33 percent of registered Catholics in our parishes attend Mass on

are only part of the Plan. Parishioners are being asked to invite back home those who have left the church and to welcome those who are new to our communities. More parishes are working together with strategies for a New Evangelization as they plan for the future.

As I visit parishes, I see a new vibrancy already evident in area faith communities where weekend Mass schedules have been adjusted in light of attendance declines.

Due to fewer Masses, the number of people at each Mass has increased. The sense of community is stronger. The worshipping communities are more robust. The Mass participation and singing is more vigorous. Priests are less stressed. I believe these changes are positive. With prayer and proper planning, there can be stronger parishes and area faith communities, even though there is real pain and sadness involved as we leave some of the past behind, especially in our smaller merged parishes.

A prayerful and collaborative effort

A significant part of the Plan is to encourage young men to consider the priesthood and to pray that more young men answer God's call to be priests. Currently, the diocese has nine men in the seminary. Most still have many years of formation ahead. Please pray for their continued priestly formation and that more men will answer God's call.

As the bishop of the diocese, I need help as we continue to make decisions about pastoral planning. I value the input from everyone in the diocese: priests, deacons, parish and diocesan staff, parishioners, and so many who volunteer on committees and in their parishes.

Please share your ideas with your pastor, pastoral planning staff, and parish leadership. Be supportive of their efforts to address these issues. All of us are members of the diocese and all of us are called to work together. Prayer and honest dialogue will help me to discern what God's will is for us as a diocese.

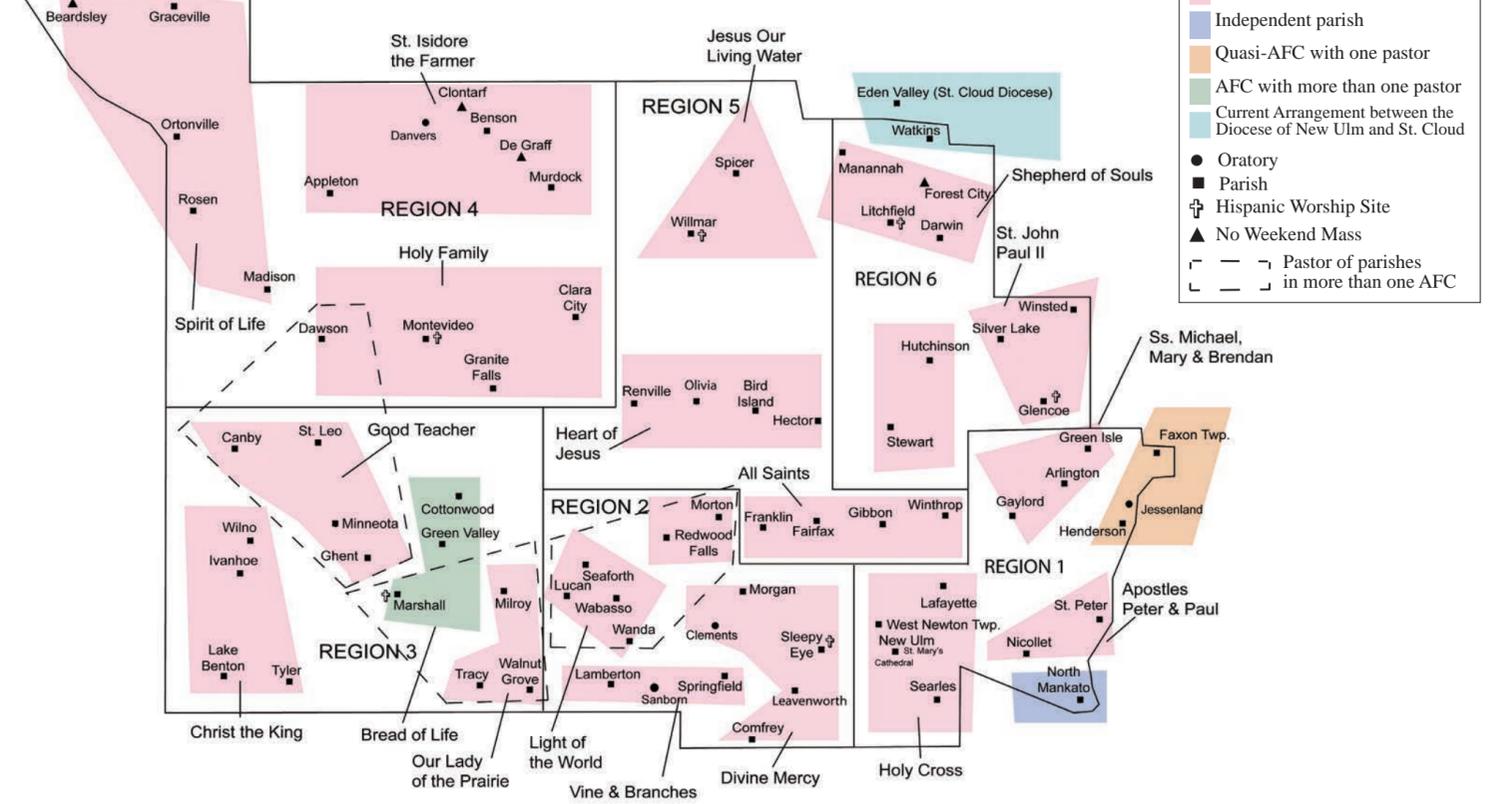
Please continue to support pastoral planning efforts to create realistic weekend Mass schedules, consolidate parish operations, and merge parishes when necessary. Through pastoral planning, we are not losing our history. Rather we are changing our structures and the way that we celebrate our faith based on an honest and prayerful look at what is happening in our parishes and in our diocese.

May Jesus Christ be our guiding light.

For a copy of the **Diocesan Plan for Parishes: From 2013 to 2020 and Beyond** visit www.dnu.org/fourthplan/ or call 507-233-5339.



Diocese of New Ulm Area Faith Communities



Pastoral planning efforts in the Diocese of New Ulm clearly call for more creativity and collaboration as the diocese's decline in priests and population continues to unfold. Bishop LeVoir has been clear: "The situation is critical and we have fewer options." Small parishes are being asked to work together, to share staff with a larger parish, to consider sharing alternative weekend Mass schedules, and to be open to merging with a larger neighboring parish. As parishioners we are especially reminded of the need to support our pastors and to reach out to those inactive or distanced as part of the New Evangelization effort.

Bishop LeVoir announces new pastoral assignments; two retirements

At the recommendation of the Priests Personnel Board, Bishop John M. LeVoir has made the following appointments:

Effective April 18, 2018

Dcn. Michael McKeown appointed to exercise the ministry of permanent deacon at the Church of St. Mary in Sleepy Eye and to assist in the Divine Mercy Area Faith Community under the direction of Msgr. Eugene Lozinski.

Effective June 26, 2018

Sr. JoAnne Backes, OSB, to retire from ministry as pastoral administrator and return to her Benedictine community in St. Joseph, Minn.

Fr. Anthony Hesse appointed pastor of the Church of St. John in Morton and the Church of St. Catherine in

Redwood Falls, in addition to his current duties as pastor of the Light of the World Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Lucan, the Church of St. Mary in Seaforth, the Church of St. Anne in Wabasso, and the Church of St. Mathias in Wanda.

Fr. Jeffrey Horejsi appointed pastor of the Shepherd of Souls Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. John in Darwin, the Church of St. Philip in Litchfield (including the Church of St. Gertrude in Forest City), and the Church of Our Lady in Manannah.

Fr. Dennis Labat appointed parochial vicar (senior associate pastor) of the Our Lady of the Prairie Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Michael in Milroy, the Church of St. Mary in Tracy, and the Church of St. Paul in Walnut

Grove, and the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Marshall in the Bread of Life Area Faith Community.

Msgr. Eugene Lozinski appointed pastor of the Church of St. Paul in Comfrey and the Church of the Japanese Martyrs in Leavenworth, in addition to his current duties as pastor of the other parishes in the Divine Mercy Area Faith Community, the Oratory of St. Joseph in Clements (canonical), the Church of St. Michael in Morgan, and the Church of St. Mary in Sleepy Eye, and chancellor of the Diocese of New Ulm.

Fr. Mark Mallak appointed parochial vicar (senior associate pastor) of the Church of St. Michael in Milroy and the Church of St. Mary in Tracy in the Our Lady of the Prairie Area Faith Community, and the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Marshall in the Bread of Life Area Faith Community, with

responsibilities for the Spanish Mass in Marshall and Hispanic ministry.

Fr. Gerald Meidl appointed parochial vicar (senior associate pastor) of the Holy Cross Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Gregory the Great in Lafayette, the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm, the Church of St. Mary in New Ulm, the Church of St. John the Baptist in Searles, and the Church of St. George in West Newton Township.

(Continued on page 8)

Sr. JoAnne Backes to retire; leaves a legacy of pastoral ministry

by Christine Clancy
The Prairie Catholic

It was in 1984 when Sr. JoAnne Backes answered the call to serve in the Diocese of New Ulm as pastoral administrator “intern” in the small rural parishes of St. Joseph in Henderson and St. Thomas in Jessenland located in the far east corner of the diocese.

At that same time, Sr. JoAnne was completing her master’s degree in pastoral studies at St. Mary’s College in Winona, adding to her bachelor of arts degree in elementary education from the College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minn.

The following year, Bishop Raymond A. Lucker, second bishop of New Ulm, gave Sr. JoAnne the official assignment of pastoral administrator of both the parishes. She continued to serve in this capacity until 1995 when she was assigned as pastoral administrator of the Church of St. John in Morton.

In 2005 Sr. JoAnne began serving as pastoral administrator of the Church of St. Paul in Comfrey. In 2008 she also began serving as pastoral administrator at the Church of the Japanese Martyrs

in Leavenworth, in addition to her assignment in Comfrey.

Now, thirty-four years later, Sr. JoAnne will retire from parish ministry in June and return to her Benedictine community in St. Joseph. Her retirement marks the end of an era of pastoral administrators in the diocese, with as many as 23 parishes being served by pastoral administrators in the mid-1990s.

Sr. JoAnne entered the St. Benedict’s Monastery in 1959 and she made her final profession on July 11, 1964. She spent the first 22 years of religious life working as an elementary school teacher in a number of Catholic schools. “I loved teaching, but felt the parish position offered a way to reach more people in all age groups,” she said.

Reflecting on her time in the diocese, Sr. JoAnne thinks that the pastoral administrator position helped to preserve a pastoral presence in the small parishes in the diocese, emphasizing the importance of the community connectedness.

Whether it be to plan a funeral or to prepare catechumens to enter into full communion in



Sr. JoAnne Backes’ retirement in June will mark an end of an era of pastoral administrators in the diocese. Her ministry dates back 34 years when she first answered the call to serve in the parishes of Jessenland and Henderson.

(photo by Christine Clancy)

the Church, these journeys of faith with parishioners and their families have been especially meaningful for her.

Fr. Dennis Labat, supervisor of pastoral administrators since 1991, remembers that many of the pastoral administrators’ collaborative efforts to work together with the pastors in their neighboring parishes were the foundations for the formation of area faith communities that are working well together today.

He also recalls how committed pastoral administrators were to working with priests; assisting them as much as possible in their role as sacramental minister and working together to serve the parishes they shared.

A native of Farming, Minn., Sr. JoAnne believes that being raised in a rural setting played a major role in her relationship with the people she ministered to in the small rural parishes she served. “I am a strong believer that people

are the parish and they need to be involved,” Sr. JoAnne said. “I was here to serve as a guide and leader.”

Two celebrations to be held

In recognition of Sr. JoAnne’s many years of parish ministry in the diocese, on Sunday, June 17 the Church of the Japanese Martyrs in Leavenworth will host a noon lunch followed by a 1 p.m. program at the parish.

On Sunday, June 24 there will be a 10:30 a.m. Mass of Thanksgiving celebrated by Bishop John M. LeVoor at the Church of St. Paul in Comfrey followed by a reception from 1–4 p.m. that will include a light lunch. There will be a program at 3 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Editor’s note: In 1991, Sr. JoAnne received the Diocesan Distinguished Service Award in recognition of her “life-giving leadership in rural parish ministry; her support of parish planning through her involvement in committee work and in implementing the Plan for Parishes; and her generous presence and cooperation with people of all faiths in the communities she serves.”

TRAVEL to the Holy Land & Jordan with Bishop John M. LeVoor

September 9-20, 2018

Overview

Magi Travel has been bringing groups to the Holy Land for over 35 years. This opportunity offers an excellent customized Holy Land pilgrimage, including visits to the most important Christian shrines and holy places.

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Pastoral assignments *(Continued from page 7)*

Fr. Robert Mraz appointed parochial vicar (senior associate pastor) of the Light of the World Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of Our Lady of Victory in Lucan, the Church of St. Mary in Seaforth, the Church of St. Anne in Wabasso, and the Church of St. Mathias in Wanda, and the Church of St. John in Morton and the Church of St. Catherine in Redwood Falls.

Fr. Bruno Santiago, OSB, appointed parochial administrator of the All Saints Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Andrew in Fairfax, the Church of the Sacred Heart in Franklin, the Church of St. Willibrord in Gibbon, and the Church of St. Francis de Sales in Winthrop.

Fr. Paul Schumacher to retire from full-time active ministry and stay living in the rectory at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Winsted, while providing limited pastoral assistance as needed.

Fr. Mark Steffl appointed pastor of the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Marshall in the Bread of Life Area Faith Community, and the Our Lady of the Prairie Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Michael in Milroy, the Church of St. Mary in Tracy, and the Church of St. Paul in Walnut Grove.

Fr. Joseph Steinbeisser appointed pastor of the Heart of Jesus Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Mary in Bird Island, the Church of St. John in Hector, the Church of St. Aloysius in

Olivia, and the Church of the Holy Redeemer in Renville.

Fr. Craig Timmerman appointed pastor of the Church of St. James in Dawson, in addition to his current duties as pastor of the other parishes in the Good Teacher Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Peter in Canby, the Church of St. Eloi in Ghent, the Church of St. Edward in Minneota, and the Church of St. Leo in St. Leo, and assistant director of the diocesan Office of Vocations.

Fr. Paul Wolf appointed pastor of the Church of St. Anastasia in Hutchinson and the Church of St. Boniface in Stewart, with responsibilities in the St. John Paul II Area Faith Community, which includes the Church of St. Pius X in Glencoe, the Church of the Holy Family in Silver Lake, and the Church of the Holy Trinity in Winsted.

CCW keep members informed of Gospel values; needs of the Church and society



by Ronda Mathiowetz
DCCW president

As a member of the Church of the Japanese Martyrs in Leavenworth, one of the smaller parishes in the Diocese of New Ulm, I find it at times difficult to imagine how I tie in as a member of the larger Church.

However, in reference to the Council of Catholic Women, I see it like this; the parish is connected to the region, the region is connected to the diocese, the diocese is connected to the province, the province is connected to the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW), and NCCW is

connected to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organization (WUCWO). I am connected to them all!

Each of these circles of the Council of Catholic Women holds meetings, gatherings, and conventions to keep their members informed of Gospel values and the needs of the Church and society.

The Province of St. Paul and Minneapolis Council of Catholic Women's 20th Biennial Conference will be on June 25-26, 2018, at St. John Vianney Catholic Church, 901 S. Prairie Ave. in Fairmont, Minn.

On the first day of the conference, the National Council of Catholic Women Leadership Training Development (LTD) Team will conduct a lively session. They will be available to assist those who might be seeking training, looking for new ways to recruit members, wondering how to gain the local council's spiritual advisor's support, or wanting to update the local CCW parish image.

On Tuesday, registration will

begin at 8 a.m., which will include booths and silent auction opportunities. Assembly and welcoming will begin at 8:45 a.m. followed by the morning keynote, Sheila Hopkins, who has been involved with the Council of Catholic Women for 41 years. Hopkins served as the president of the National Council of Catholic Women from 2015-2017 and currently sits on the NCCW Executive Committee as immediate past president.

At 11 a.m. Mass will be celebrated followed by lunch. The afternoon keynote will be Kathy Bonnor, an international motivational speaker who brings to the conference a myriad of expertise with a diverse leadership background. Her experience also includes the production of a brochure on a domestic violence, "Women Healing the Wounds," and a book on mentoring, "Mentors of the Past . . . Models for the Future." The day will close with prayer at 3:00 p.m.

Additional information is available at <http://accwarchspm.org>.

Diocese of Winona renamed with addition of Rochester co-cathedral

WINONA – The Congregation for Bishops has decreed that the Diocese of Winona will now be called the Diocese of Winona-Rochester and that St. John the Evangelist Church of Rochester will be designated as a co-cathedral.

"This is a significant moment in our diocese's history," said Bishop John M. Quinn of the Vatican's announcement. "My heart is lifted by this news as I know that the presence of a co-cathedral in Rochester will provide unique ways to share the gospel in our diocese's fastest growing city."

The word "cathedral" is derived from the Latin word *cathedra*, meaning "chair." The chair is an ancient symbol of apostolic authority. The Cathedral is generally located in the major metropolis of a diocese. At the time the Diocese of Winona was established, Winona was a key location, by the railroad and along the Mississippi River.

Now, 128 years later, populations have shifted. Rochester has become the third largest city in Minnesota, and three-quarters of the diocese's population resides in the region between Rochester and Mankato.

In 2015, an initial inquiry was sent to the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, asking for the designation of a co-cathedral in Rochester. Subsequently the diocese sent requirements for the process and directed the establishment of a diocesan planning committee. This committee determined that St. John the Evangelist Church should be elevated to the status of a co-cathedral. The co-cathedral committee, and other groups involved, considered the size of the church building, location, architecture and overall ability to function as a co-cathedral. Other factors included its proximity to the Mayo Clinic, the arts, culture, media, and industry, which provide an opportunity for further evangelization by the local

Church. In addition, St. John the Evangelist Church is the "mother church" of Rochester, being the oldest parish in the city.

The Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Winona will not change in status. It will continue to be the seat of the diocese and will host diocesan celebrations and Masses, and ordinations.

A liturgical ceremony is scheduled for June 24, 2018, at which the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Pope Francis' delegate to the United States, will formally designate St. John the Evangelist Church as the co-cathedral. During this ceremony, a new cathedra, or bishop's chair, will be blessed. Details of this ceremony will be forthcoming at <https://dow.org/>.

The new title, "Diocese of Winona-Rochester" throughout the parishes, schools and diocesan institutions should be completed by July 1, 2018.

The Easter Vigil: Let the Light of Christ fill the world

by Fr. Aaron Johanneck

Editor's note: Each month through this column, Fr. Johanneck will continue to focus on some aspect of the Church's liturgy to aid readers to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the liturgy, as well as their full, conscious, and active participation. For previous columns, visit the Diocese of New Ulm website, www.dnu.org (Worship office).



Some of you probably attended the celebration of the Easter Vigil in your parish or area faith community this year. While this liturgy can be a bit late and long for some, it really is the most beautiful liturgy of the Church's year. The reason for both the lateness and the length is this liturgy's character as a vigil.

Those who keep vigil stay up late with great expectation. Likewise, those who participate in the Easter Vigil do so because they cannot wait for the Lord's Resurrection. They want to be the first ones to approach the empty tomb and to encounter the risen Lord!

For many of the faithful the first of the four parts of this holy vigil is their favorite. Who can resist a candlelight anything! The church begins in darkness. The Easter fire is blessed. The Paschal Candle is also blessed and then lit from the fire. The procession begins. At first it is the Paschal Candle alone that provides light for the church. Then the priest's candle is lit from the Paschal Candle. The candles of the faithful follow. As the flame is passed from candle to candle the church is slowly illuminated more and more until the point when the Paschal Candle is placed in the stand and the lights throughout the church are turned on. Now the whole building is filled with light.

This ritual is beautiful in and of itself. However, to understand its meaning only adds to the beauty. The dark church represents the darkness of the world before the coming of Christ. The Paschal Candle represents him who is the Light of the World. This

is why we sing the Light of Christ as the candle moves in procession through the church. His light breaks the darkness. The candles of the faithful are lit from the Paschal Candle just as our baptismal candles are. This represents the light that we receive at Baptism when we are "plunged" or "immersed" into the Paschal Mystery: that is, the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our candles are lit from his candle because

whatever light we possess is from him. The more we are faithful to him, the more we surrender ourselves to his will for our lives, the more we pray and fruitfully participate in the sacraments, the more we are drawn into deeper union with him, and the more his light shines through us.

The gradual illuminating of the church from total darkness to fully lit offers an image of what happens when Christians—baptized men and women—submit their lives to Christ: the world is gradually set ablaze with the light and the glory of Christ. This is a beautiful image. It is also a challenge to each one of us. Jesus has chosen to use us, the members of his Body which is the Church, as his instruments. He calls us to be the light of the world: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Our task is to give our lives to God and to pursue his will in all things. It is to enter deeply into the Sacred Liturgy, offering our lives in union with the offering of Christ made present there. In this way, Christ transforms us into himself, and his light shines forth through the Church to illuminate all the ends of the earth.

Editor's note: Fr. Aaron Johanneck is director of the Office of Worship for the Diocese of New Ulm.

Overcoming gun absolutism



FAITH IN THE
PUBLIC ARENA

by Jason Adkins

Five years ago, just after the Sandy Hook massacre, I wrote a highly criticized column on gun control.

The causes of gun violence, I noted in that column, run deeper than easy access to guns, and include a media culture filled with violence, and consumer choices supporting it.

But I denied that we are powerless as a matter of public policy to decrease gun violence. I also reiterated long-held positions of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, namely, support for improved background check systems and bans on certain semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.

Multiple mass killings have transpired since Sandy Hook, most recently in Parkland, Florida, and the wisdom of the bishops' consistent stance remains clear.

It is past time to put aside gun ideology and come together to protect the right to life.

The limits of gun regulation

Most gun regulations proposed in the wake of these tragedies will not significantly decrease gun deaths overall – most of which are suicides, followed secondly by homicides in urban areas. Similarly, mass shootings are not primarily about guns. These tragic events, shaped by our violent culture, are often born out of despair. Hurt people hurt people.

If we limit access to guns, in some instances those same persons will find other ways to kill. The needed policy changes and moral renewal are more comprehensive than simply changing gun laws.

Yet, gun policy matters. Common-sense regulations to prevent the most egregious acts of gun violence come with very little cost and may save hundreds of lives per year.

Getting beyond absolutism, fear, and ideology

To move forward, the ideologies of gun absolutism need to be abandoned.

Gun opponents need to recognize that outright gun abolition is unlikely any time soon. The use of effective force in self-defense is a natural right, and the U.S. Constitution protects the use of a gun to do so.

If the policy goal is protection of human life, then the policy strategy should aim to build common ground and enact, incrementally, sensible laws. A policy strategy motivated instead by an ideological hatred of guns rather than the defense of persons is a political dead end.

Similarly, gun-rights advocates must recognize that they can either be part of the solution or remain part of the problem. Much like abortion proponents, the rhetoric of gun-rights advocates often implies that any sensible and humane regulation is an illicit imposition on one's choice – in this case, choice of weapon.

Hunters and farmers may prefer the use of AR-15s with bump stocks for recreation or defending livestock. But one must weigh a desire for a faster tool to shoot prairie dogs against the protection of the common good and others' right to life.

Others claim military-style weapons are necessary to protect against a tyrannical government, the true meaning of the Second Amendment. The likelihood of a "well-regulated," Minnesota citizen-militia being called up to fight the federal government is essentially zero, and the likelihood that an unsanctioned and unregulated militia effectively doing so is even smaller.

These arguments against background checks and banning bump stocks are a distraction from real, common-sense reform.

Becoming people of peace

Gun-rights absolutism often

stems from fear and false worldly wisdom that counsels protection while nurturing a culture of death. According to the Center for Injury Research and Prevention, there are approximately 350 million guns in circulation in the United States; 113 guns for every 100 persons. Almost two million children live with unlocked, loaded guns in their home, and one out of three homes with kids has a gun. In 2014, 2,549 children (age 0 to 19 years) died by gunshots and an additional 13,576 were injured.

At what cost does our obsession with guns achieve the "protection" we demand? There is a reason Our Lord said that those who live by the sword, die by the sword.

Though pacifism is a legitimate and noble strain of our Christian tradition, Catholic social teaching is not opposed to gun ownership for hunting or self-defense. In our society, it is a right and should be exercised responsibly.

But we must ask ourselves as Christians whether an absolutist position in support of gun rights – borne more in fear than faith – is what we want to convey to others. Are we promoting a culture of life and of peace? Are we working to turn swords into plowshares? Are we offering a credible witness to our faith as people of peace?

As disciples of the Prince of Peace we must renounce the trafficking, sale, or stockpiling of weapons that have no serious civilian uses, and promote policies ensuring gun ownership promotes public safety and defends life, instead of hastening its destruction.

Editor's note: Jason Adkins is Executive Director of the Minnesota Catholic Conference.

Catholic Advocacy Network ACTION ALERT! Work to End Poverty

Many Minnesotans continue to struggle with poverty, food insecurity, obtaining a quality education, and securing affordable housing. Review "Poverty in Minnesota: A Progress Report" at www.jrlc.org.

Consult your elected officials about what they are proposing to combat poverty and economic insecurity. You can find your legislators at mncatholic.org or by visiting leg.state.mn.us and clicking on the tab "Who represents me?"

Safe environment efforts continue in diocese

by Karla Cross

We are living in an age of information that is available at our fingertips. Never before could we hold in one hand the latest news of the day, our favorite music, the day's weather report, or instantly chat freely with individuals across distant locations. This is the world our youth need to navigate to reach maturity. As adults, it is our responsibility to be informed, attentive, and engaged in the lives of our youth and the challenges they face.

The Diocese of New Ulm's safe environment educational program component, known as VIRTUS, educates children and adults on the fast changing technologies as well as grooming behaviors used by predators to lure their victims. Over the eleven years the diocese has been using VIRTUS, 8,463 adults have received safe environment training. In the reporting year ending June 30, 2017, the diocese delivered VIRTUS training to 6,750 diocesan youth, providing them important information to help protect themselves and each other from harmful situations.

The diocese recognizes ensuring a safe environment as our responsibility, not as a one-time obligation or as a set of requirements to meet, but rather as a commitment to answer the call to protect all God's children and firmly establish a safe environment throughout Church ministry. Three policy requirements are essential. The initial background check provides assurance that the individual does not have any criminal activity that knowingly could bring harm to a community. The initial training in VIRTUS provides information so all may be a part of the solution in protecting our youth and our most vulnerable from harm. The acknowledgment of receipt of the diocesan codes of conduct reminds employees and volunteers how they are to behave as they carry out their assigned responsibilities.

New initiatives in place

In keeping to its commitment to protect our youth, the diocese has added new programming initiatives as a way to

keep moving forward in meeting protocols for being a "high reliability" organization in the area of providing for safe environments.

These initiatives include background check re-processing every seven years for employees and volunteers. During this first year of this initiative, all employees that are educators within the Catholic schools had updated background checks processed. In this next year, all parish and non-educator Catholic school employees will need to meet this new requirement. The completion of volunteer background check reprocessing will be required by March 2021.

Another new initiative is the performance of parish audits by the diocesan safe environment coordinator. Parish audits are performed every five years on a rotational basis. The audit not only ensures program informational posters and brochures are made available to parishioners and visitors, but also helps to identify areas within the facility that are a potential concern and where appropriate monitoring may be necessary.

The diocesan parish onsite audit includes review of the payroll roster documents and religious education program rosters in an attempt to ensure the parish is providing the required training and following the diocesan policies as it relates to all employees and all volunteers that work with youth.

Many people who have attended the VIRTUS training session, due to their employment or volunteer responsibilities, believe every adult should receive this training. The next time a training takes place in your area faith community you may want to consider attending - simply sign in as a guest. Come and be a part of helping make our environments safe for all youth!



Karla Cross is the Safe Environment Coordinator for the Diocese of New Ulm.

Annual Quinceañera retreat held in Glencoe



The Quinceañera retreat is designed to assist young women in the preparation of the Quinceañera celebration. The ritual emphasizes her passage from childhood to adulthood. Pictured, Fr. Anthony Stubeda presents to retreat participants in both Spanish and English. *(photo by Christine Clancy)*

GLENCOE – On Saturday, March 3, 2018, the diocesan Quinceañera retreat was held at St. Pius X School in Glencoe. Fifteen young women, accompanied by their mothers and a special female friend or relative, attended the three-hour gathering.

Fr. Anthony Stubeda of St. Pius X parish led the presentations; Elvia Peña, a regional coordinator of Hispanic ministry and Karla Cross, diocesan Hispanic coordinator, assisted with the event.

The diocesan Quinceañera retreat is offered once a year and is mandatory for those families who want to have a Quinceañera Mass celebration in the church.

It is typical in dioceses throughout the United States for Hispanic Catholics to request a Quinceañera or quince años (fifteen years) celebration when a young woman reaches the age of fifteen. It is custom to include a Mass of Thanksgiving for this special celebration.

The Quinceañera retreat is designed to help the girls and their parents prepare spiritually for the celebration and to design their liturgy. The retreat also serves as a learning experience as the presentations include a history of the Quinceañera in Hispanic culture and the meaning of the symbols presented as gifts during the celebration.

Anyone who has suffered sexual abuse or exploitation by a cleric of the Diocese of New Ulm should immediately report such misconduct to local law enforcement. They are encouraged to contact the Victim Assistance Coordinator or the Bishop's Delegate in Matters Pertaining to Sexual Misconduct, 1421 6th Street North, New Ulm, MN 56073, phone: 507-233-5313, for counseling or assistance, if that is desired.



Toda persona que haya sido víctima de abuso o explotación sexual por parte de un clero en la Diócesis de New Ulm debe reportar dicha mala conducta a las autoridades policiales inmediatamente. Se les anima ponerse en contacto con el Coordinador de Asistencia para víctimas o el Delegado del Obispo en cuestiones sobre el mal comportamiento sexual, 1421 6th Street North, New Ulm, MN 56073, teléfono: 507-233-5313, hay consejería o asistencia disponible si así lo desea.

Energy, evangelization at the heart of regional V Encuentro held in April

ALEXANDRIA – Over 200 people gathered for the regional V Encuentro held April 13-14 in Alexandria. The event included people from across the U.S. Catholic Church's Region 8, which covers all of Minnesota and North and South Dakota.

V Encuentro ("Fifth Encounter") process is an initiative of the U.S. bishops. The main goal is to discern ways in which the Church in the United States can better respond to the Hispanic/Latino presence and to strengthen the ways in which Hispanics/Latinos respond to the call to the New Evangelization as missionary disciples serving the entire Church.

The regional V Encuentro was the next step in the process, following on the heels of the diocesan V Encuentro, held last Sept. 23, and is a precursor to the national V Encuentro planned for September 2018 in Grapevine, Texas. Bishop John M. LeVoir has appointed a six-member delegation to attend the national event. Selected delegates have participated at the parish, diocesan, and regional levels.

Identifying priorities
Participants at the regional Encuentro discussed seven areas of pastoral concern: leadership development and pastoral training; families; youth and young adults; evangelization and mission; faith formation and catechesis; liturgy and spirituality; and immigration.

"We want to focus on several things based on our own diocesan Encuentro," said Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and the lead bishop from Region 8 for the V Encuentro. "One is strengthening families. We are really trying to develop programs in our parishes where, once people come back to the Church, we can strengthen their marriages, and in turn, families.

"The second is our young people," he said. "A lot of times the adults don't know how the culture is affecting the young people. They are living in two different cultures because the parents are living in the Hispanic/Latino culture and the young people are living in our American culture. It can affect their faith in dramatic ways. So



Bishops and diocesan directors of Hispanic/Latino ministry from Region 8 gathered for a picture beside diocesan Encuentros documents and various Church documents on Hispanic ministry written since I Encuentro of 1972 during the regional V Encuentro held in April. The regional processional cross of the V Encuentro is displayed in the background. Regional bishops in attendance were, left, Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens (St. Paul), Bishop Robert D. Gruss (Rapid City, SD), Bishop Donald J. Kettler (St. Cloud). Pictured from the Diocese of New Ulm is Karla Cross, (back, second from left), diocesan Hispanic Ministry coordinator.

(photo by Dianne Towalski/The Visitor)

really finding ways to strengthen families so that we can strengthen our young people is an important goal for us."

"The third is evangelization," he added. "The Encuentro process has taught us the beauty of what happens when people go out. Everyone who was part of the process was invited to go out and evangelize. That strengthens their faith and then strengthens the faith of others. So our goal is to keep finding ways to encourage this process of evangelization." Attendees at the regional gathering heard from bishops and other representatives who presented plenary sessions, as well as testimonies from leaders.

Karla Cross, coordinator of the Diocese of New Ulm Office of Hispanic Ministry, was part of a 17-member team of those who attended the V Encuentro from the diocese. She said, "It is a joy for me to accompany my Hispanic/Latino brothers and sisters in this movement. The personal stories of participants going out and encountering Christ in the peripheries gives witness to the difference each of us can make in the call of the New Evangelization. I am grateful to be a part of this process including the opportunity of listening and consultation as we strive to understand the needs of the growing diversity in our diocese and throughout our

country."

Bishop LeVoir of the New Ulm diocese had planned on attending the regional gathering but due to inclement weather and scheduled weekend Confirmation commitments, was unable. Three additional regional bishops also were not in attendance due to winter-weather conditions.

Area parishes involved in the V Encuentro process are St. Andrew in Fairfax, St. Pius X in Glencoe, St. Joseph in Montevideo, and St. Mary in Willmar.

"This is not the end," Bishop Cozzens said. "We are still just beginning. Let us all be thinking about what God is telling us so that we can reach the goal of being true missionary disciples."

(Story excerpts courtesy of St. Cloud Visitor.)

THE DRAIRIE CATHOLIC

Pastoral news from across the Diocese of New Ulm

Minnesota's Most Rural Diocese Diocese of New Ulm Vol. 32 No. 6 April/May 2018



(Photo by Dianne Towalski/The Visitor)

Hispanic Catholics gather in April for regional V Encuentro

ALEXANDRIA – Over 200 spirit-filled people gathered in Alexandria on April 13 and 14 for the regional V Encuentro (Fifth Encounter), an initiative of the U.S. bishops, calling Catholic leaders to “listen with profound attention to the needs, challenges, and aspirations that the growing Hispanic/Latino population faces in daily life.” The April gathering included people from the U.S. Church’s region 8 which covers Minnesota and North and South Dakota. It was the next step in the process following the New Ulm diocesan V Encuentro last September and a precursor to the national V Encuentro planned for September 2018 in Grapevine, Texas.

(Read more about the Region 8 V Encuentro on page 11.)

catholic trends

CINCINNATI, OHIO (CNA/EWTN News) – An Ohio law which blocked federal taxpayer funding to Planned Parenthood clinics in the state was struck down by a federal appeals court on April 19.

The law, which was signed by Gov. John Kasich in 2016, prohibited federal taxpayer money from going to clinics that perform abortions in the state of Ohio. That money, about \$1.5 million, would be reallocated to organizations that do not perform abortions.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit unanimously overturned the Ohio law on April 18, saying

that it overstepped Planned Parenthood’s “due process rights,” since Planned Parenthood would allegedly be using funds from six federal health programs for preventative health measures that are unrelated to abortion.

One of the panel judges, U.S. Circuit Judge Helene White, said that Planned Parenthood was simply claiming the “right not to be penalized in the administration of government programs based on protected activity outside the programs,” according to Reuters. White was joined by two other judges: Eugene E. Siler Jr. and Eric Clay.

However, the state of Ohio argues that Planned Parenthood

is seeking “a constitutional guarantee to public funding – a guarantee that forces Ohio, against its own judgment, to give public money to large abortion providers. The Constitution contains no such guarantee.”

Last year, U.S. President Donald Trump signed a regulation allowing states to choose whether to give federal funding to health clinics that perform abortions. Shortly before leaving office, former President Barack Obama’s HHS Department had issued a rule prohibiting states from denying funding on the grounds of a facility performing abortions.

The Ohio law was originally passed in February 2016 after a series of undercover videos were released the previous year, appearing to show Planned Parenthood engaging in misconduct, including the illegal sale of aborted baby tissue.

ST. PAUL – Msgr. Thomas Richter, who since January has been preparing to transition to the role of rector at the St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, has been recalled to his home Diocese of Bismarck, ND, Archbishop Bernard Hebda announced April 4.

Archbishop Hebda tapped Msgr. Richter for the post last

fall to succeed Msgr. Aloysius Callaghan. Bishop David Kagan has appointed Msgr. Richter to fulfill a pastor role at Queen of Peace in Dickinson, ND.

By responding to Bishop Kagan’s request, Archbishop Hebda noted how Msgr. Richter “gives us that powerful example of priestly obedience, collaborating with our bishops.”

Msgr. Richter will continue to serve as vice rector until June 15. Archbishop Hebda said that the seminary’s executive board will select a search committee for the next rector.

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNA/EWTN News) – A strong majority of the 430 men who are about to be ordained to the Catholic priesthood in the United States come from families where both parents were Catholic, and

had several friends encouraging them in their vocation. The findings were from the annual survey of new ordinands by CARA, the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate out of Georgetown University.

According to the survey, nearly nine in ten responding ordinands (86 percent) reported being encouraged to consider the priesthood by someone in their life - usually by a parish priest, friend, or another parishioner. On average, respondents said about four different people in their lives encouraged them to consider a vocation to the priesthood.

The findings of the annual CARA survey are sent to the USCCB’s Secretariat for Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations. Visit <http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-067.cfm> to access the full report.

Diocesan Celebration of Consecrated Life

All are invited to the 6 p.m. Mass at the Church of St. Pius X in Glencoe

Celebrate the gift of consecrated life in our diocese!

For more information contact the Office of Worship, 507-233-5356.