

THE CATHOLIC MIRROR

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We Sow God's Spirit by Cultivating Connections in Christ.

Oils blessed, consecrated for pastoral care



Photos by Anne Marie Cox

St. Patrick Church in Council Bluffs was filled with the faithful on April 11 for Chrism Mass. Above, Bishop William Joensen and Father Trevor Chicoine, diocesan director of Divine Worship, pause just before the consecration of Sacred Chrism. At right (top) Father Christopher Reising, pastor of All Saints Parish in Des Moines, escorts volunteers carrying oil to the sanctuary to be blessed; (middle image) Bishop Joensen gently blows on the Sacred Chrism, symbolizing the Holy Spirit's presence and consecration; (bottom images) Lois O'Gara pours blessed oil into small bottles for parishes, and bottles of Sacred Chrism are ready to go to parishes.

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

The annual diocesan celebration of Chrism Mass, at which oils are consecrated and blessed for pastoral care throughout the Diocese, was at St. Patrick Parish in Council Bluffs on April 11.

The church was filled with priests, deacons, a choir, Knights of Columbus, volunteers, and the faithful.

"Jesus, in the debut of his public ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth, stirs hope in the hearts of those who were on the brink

of despair," said Bishop William Joensen in his homily. "We celebrate this Chrism Mass in the midst of a Jubilee year when we are exhorted to be ever more pilgrims of hope."

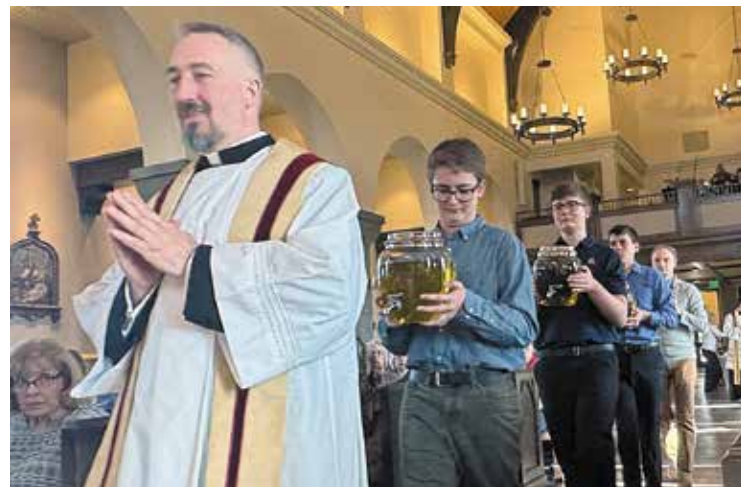
Three oils were brought in large jars to the sanctuary, where the oil was blessed and consecrated, then taken to a group of volunteers who put the oils in small bottles for distribution to the priests for their ministries.

Oil of the Sick will be used in pastoral care of those who are ill or infirm from illness of mind or body, accidents, or advanced age.

Those entering the Catholic

Church who have never been baptized, as well as infants, will be anointed with the Oil of Catechumens just before their baptism.

The Bishop and all priests invoke the Holy Spirit's consecration of the Chrism, that all who are anointed with it share in Christ's royal, prophetic, and priestly identity. All those to be baptized, confirmed, or ordained as priests or bishops will be anointed with this oil. The Chrism, named for Christ the Anointed One, will also be used to anoint new church buildings and altars that serve the holy and anointed people of God.



Priest assignments effective in July

Bishop William Joensen has made the following appointments. All assignments are effective July 10 unless otherwise noted.

Father Michael Acquah is going from parochial administrator at St. Mary in Red Oak and St. Patrick in Imogene to pastor of St. Claire in Clarinda, Sacred Heart in Bedford, and St. Joseph in Villisca for a six-year term.

Born in 1973, he was educated in his home country of Ghana and ordained there in 2004 by Cardinal Peter Turkson.

Since coming to the Des Moines Diocese in 2023, he has

served at St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines, St. Mary in Red Oak, and St. Patrick in Imogene.

Father Daniel Adjei is going from parochial vicar at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale to a one-year assignment as parish administrator at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Des Moines.

Born in 1983 and educated in Ghana, he was ordained in 2012. He did postgraduate work at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

Since coming to the Des Moines Diocese in 2023, Father Adjei has served at St. Francis of



Father Michael Acquah

Assisi, St. Joseph and St. Theresa in Des Moines, and most recently at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale.

Father John Owusu-Agyemang is moving from Des



Father Daniel Adjei

Moines metro chaplaincy to parochial vicar at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale for a two-year term.

He was born in 1986, educated in Ghana, and ordained in



Father John Owusu-Agyemang

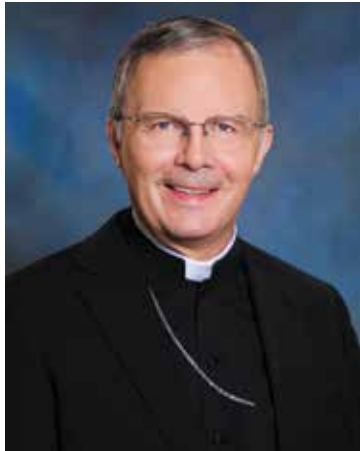
2015.

He came to the Des Moines Diocese in 2020 to serve as chaplain at UnityPoint Hospital. Last



Father John Brobbey

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Bishop William Joensen

During Lent, I’ve relied on a couple of reflection guides by various authors that are tied to the daily Mass readings. They’ve inspired my personal prayer and helped prime the pump for some homilies. But I admit that I was left with a sour taste in my mouth on Wednesday of the Fourth Week of Lent when one author, reflecting on Isaiah 49:13a, “Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, earth, break forth into song, you mountains,” then encouraged us in the “Do” section that followed the reflection: “Every day: go for a walk, hug a tree, listen to bird-song, smell a flower, sing a song.”

Uggh. Now, most of those actions seem worthy to me and are consistent with a sort of contemplative, Franciscan-flavored spirituality, EXCEPT hugging a tree. Maybe it’s just my personal baggage growing up as a kid in the ‘60s and ‘70s, but tree-hugging resonates too much with a “groovy,” hippie-cultured, and maybe drug-induced mindset. Oh, I’ve got a cousin in Oregon who is a passionate environmentalist, and I respect his zeal and agree with him on many counts that we need to protect creation, but I can’t say that God figures

prominently in the equation for him. He’s sort of a naturalistic John the Baptist, whose anger is quick to flare and then subside as he goes for a walk in the forest. In my mind, he’s the consummate tree-hugger.

As Lent yields to the sacred three days before Easter, there is one tree that stirs and silences us, before which priests are to take off their shoes in reverence and all of us are invited to humble ourselves and adore: the tree of Christ’s Cross. On Good Friday, one of the proposed antiphons we might chant exclaims, “We adore your Cross, O Lord, we praise and glorify your holy Resurrection, for behold, because of the wood of a tree joy has come to the whole world.”

Whether we touch, kiss, prostrate ourselves, or hug the Cross, we expose our hearts and acknowledge the Savior who does not cling to his own divine glory, but empties himself into our humanity. Jesus allows sin to suffocate him, his hands and limbs placed under restraints as the wood of the cross becomes a pallet of suffering bearing the load of the world’s callous and cruel indifference to the giver of all gifts, the one in whom all things are created.

To behold and embrace this Cross with the Savior who is lifted up before us is not for the faint of heart. We are convicted of our own personal sin that perpetrates such pain on another, but we are not to be paralyzed by shame. We are moved beyond self-reproach that could become a black hole of anger and contempt at self and even despair. Jesus looks to his Father for our sake to beg for-

giveness and then fixes his tender gaze on all whose faith prompts them to remain present to him throughout his Passion.

And, if we are habitually, mystically inclined to linger before the Crucifix on a daily basis, it is not a stretch to sense that Jesus bends down to embrace us as he does St. Bernard in the tear-inducing image by Francisco Ribalta that hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid. (See page 14 for the image.)

But Jesus is crucified once and for all time; he is no longer in the tomb but is risen from the dead on Easter morning. In his rich reflection on Christ’s love that I’ve taken up before in this column, Pope Francis acknowledges, “We may also question how we can pray to the Lord of life, risen from the dead and reigning in glory, while at the same time comforting him in the midst of his sufferings.” He advises, “Here we need to realize this his risen heart preserves its wound as a constant memory, and that the working of grace makes possible an experience that is not restricted to a single moment of the past” (Dilexit nos, “He loved us,” n. 155). Grace-filled faith expressed by a heart who loves goes beyond our mind’s natural grasp.

Mysteriously, this is one of the few instances in life where we can have it both ways: suffering and joy mingle as space and time yield to the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection. Pope Francis: “The temporal distinctions that our minds employ appear incapable of embracing the fullness of this experience of faith, which is

the basis both of our union with Christ in his suffering and of the strength, consolation and friendship that we enjoy with him in his risen life” (DN n. 156).

This year, Easter Tuesday, April 22, coincides with the 55th edition of Earth Day, whose theme is, “Our Power, Our Planet,” focused on enhancing reliance on renewable energy. The stated occasion for celebration:

“We celebrate a transformative reality: we already possess the solutions needed to create clean, inexpensive, and unlimited energy for the entire planet through renewable solar, wind and other technologies.” Certainly, as Iowans, we sense the pervasiveness of wind-generated potential coursing across the prairie, as

Continued on page 14

Abrazando Árboles

Durante la Cuaresma, me he basado en un par de guías de reflexión de varios autores conectados con las lecturas diarias de

la Misa. Ellos han inspirado mi oración personal y me han ayudado a inspirar algunas de mis homilías. Pero debo admitir que me quedó un sabor amargo el Miércoles de la Cuarta Semana cuando un autor, al reflexionar sobre Isaías 49:13a, “¡Cielos, griten de alegría! ¡Tierra, alégrate! Cerros, salten y canten de gozo,” que nos motivaba en la sección de “Hacer” que seguía de la reflexión: “Todos los días: sal a caminar, abraza un árbol, escucha el canto de los pájaros, huele una flor, canta una canción.”

Agh. La mayoría de estas actividades me parecen valiosas y son consistentes con un tipo de espiritualidad contemplativa con sabor franciscano, EXCEPTO el abrazar un árbol. Probablemente sea demasiado equipaje personal por haber crecido como un muchacho en los sesentas y los setentas, ya que el abrazar árboles me recuerda mucho con una cultura hippy “buena onda,” o incluso un estado mental causado por las drogas. Ah, tengo un primo en Oregon que es un ambientalista apasionado y respeto su fervor y estoy de acuerdo con él en muchas cosas que tenemos que hacer para proteger

la creación, pero no puedo decir que Dios juega una parte importante en su ecuación. Él es un tipo de Juan Bautista naturalista, cuyo enojo se despierta pronto y luego se tranquiliza cuando sale a caminar al bosque. En mi mente, él es el abrazador de árboles consumado.

Conforme la Cuaresma llega a su fin frente a los tres días sagrados previos a la Pascua, hay un árbol que nos sacude y nos silencia, ante el cual los sacerdotes deben quitarse los zapatos en reverencia y ante el cual todos estamos invitados a postrarnos y a adorar: el árbol de la Cruz de Cristo. El Viernes Santo, una de las antífonas que se sugiere que cantemos dice, “Adoramos tu Cruz, Señor, alabamos y glorificamos tu santa Resurrección, porque he aquí que por el madero de un árbol ha llegado la alegría al mundo entero.”

Ya sea que toquemos, bese-mos, nos postremos o abracemos la Cruz, exponemos nuestros corazones y reconocemos al Salvador que no se aferra a su propia gloria divina, pero se vacía a sí mismo en nuestra humanidad. Jesús permite que el pecado lo

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Official

Bishop William Joensen made the following appointments.

- Rev. Michael Acquah** from parochial administrator, St. Mary, Red Oak, and St. Patrick, Imogene, to pastor of St. Claire in Clarinda, Sacred Heart in Bedford, and St. Joseph in Villisca, for a six-year term effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Daniel Adjei** from parochial vicar at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale to one-year assignment as parish administrator at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Des Moines, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. John Owusu-Agyemang** from Des Moines metro chaplaincy to parochial vicar at St. Pius X Parish in Urbandale, for a two-year term effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. John Brobbey** from parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi to chaplain of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, beginning in August 2025.
- Rev. Jason Catania**, with the Anglican (Catholic) Ordinariate, while continuing as MercyOne Hospital chaplain, to be in residence and offering sacramental assistance at St. Augustin in Des Moines, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Ly Chu** from pastor at St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community in Des Moines to retirement.
- Rev. Lazarus Kirigia** returns from sabbatical on July 10, 2025. He will continue to serve as pastor of St. Mary in Red Oak and St. Patrick in Imogene under his current tenure, which ends in July 2029.
- Rev. Ambrose Ladu** from parochial vicar at St. Ambrose Cathedral in Des Moines to parochial vicar at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny and part-time Ministry with Migrant Community via St. Ambrose Cathedral, for a two-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Rodrigo Landeros** from parochial vicar at St. Anthony Parish in Des Moines to parochial vicar at Christ the King in Des Moines, for a one-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Jason Lee** from parochial vicar at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart in Ankeny to pastor of St. Mary in Shenandoah and St. Mary in Hamburg, for a six-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Tinh Nguyen, SVD**, priest from the Divine Word Missionaries, to parish administrator of St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community in Des Moines, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Sylvester Okoh** from pastor at St. Claire in Clarinda, Sacred Heart in Bedford, and St. Joseph in Villisca to Des Moines metro chaplaincy, for a two-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Protas Okwalo** from pastor at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Des Moines to parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines, for a two-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Nick Smith** from parochial vicar at Christ the King in Des Moines to pastor at St. Patrick in Perry, for a six-year term, effective July 10, 2025.
- Rev. Nick Stark**, while remaining pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Carlisle, will offer sacramental and pastoral care to the Hispanic communities at St. Patrick in Lenox until January 1, 2026.
- Rev. Litto Thomas** from pastor at St. Patrick in Perry to parochial vicar at St. Anthony in Des Moines, for a two-year term, effective July 10, 2025.

- Priests Extending Tenure in 2025
- Rev. Chinnappan Devaraj** granted a six-year extension of tenure as Pastor at St. Boniface Parish in Waukee.
 - Rev. Ken Halbur** granted a six-year extension of tenure as pastor at St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Ankeny.
 - Rev. Dan Siepker**, having completed 12 years of tenure, will remain as pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Glenwood.

Deacon Assignment

- Rev. Mr. Michael Knipp**, to St. Theresa Parish, Des Moines, from April 7, 2025 to August 30, 2026.

William Joensen

Faithfully in Christ,
Most Rev. William Joensen, Ph.D.
Bishop

Jason Kurth

Jason Kurth
Chancellor

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Parishes remain strong one year after devastating tornadoes

By Ryan Johnson
Contributing Writer

In 2024, the National Weather Service recorded 124 tornadoes in Iowa breaking a state record. Two communities in the Diocese of Des Moines were significantly impacted by tornadoes in spring 2024. In late April, the town of Minden was damaged by a tornado. The town is home to parishioners who belong to St. Patrick Catholic Church in Neola, which is just a few miles from Minden. Nearly a month later, the town of Greenfield was hit hard by a powerful EF4 tornado that knocked out power to the entire city and killed four residents. Wind speeds were estimated at nearly 185 mph when the tornado went through the area. Catholic priests in both communities had never experienced anything like a tornado in their homelands. It wasn't so much the power and devastation of the tornadoes that surprised them — it was the positive response afterward within the communities, the Diocese of Des Moines, and across the state.

Minden Community Rallies After Tornado

Father Julius Itamid is the administrator at St. Patrick Parish in Neola. A tornado outbreak occurred on Friday, April 26, 2024, resulting in numerous tornadoes throughout southwest Iowa. As the EF3 tornado approached Neola and Minden, parishioners called Father Itamid and encouraged him to take shelter, knowing he likely had never experienced a storm of this magnitude. The day after the tornado, the priest made his way to Minden to check on his parishioners. What he saw when he got to Minden was heartbreaking. “Words cannot describe what I saw there and how I felt,” said Father Itamid. “Minden was empty, in the sense that houses were destroyed, roofs blown off, debris was everywhere, and fallen trees were on homes. I was shocked. I

don't pray to see another tornado in my lifetime.” Father visited with parishioners in Minden and offered them encouragement in the midst of the storm's damage. People from surrounding towns like Neola and Underwood came to Minden to help with the cleanup efforts. “When our brothers and sisters are affected in this way, people get out of their comfort zone to offer help,” said Father Itamid. “I loved the spirit of the people who came to help.”

Greenfield Parish Provides Relief

Like Father Itamid, Father Philip Bempong was unaware of just how devastating a tornado could be. Pastor of St. John Catholic Church in Greenfield, he experienced a similar situation to Father Itamid, when a tornado went through Greenfield on May 21. Once the tornado passed and the all clear was given, parishioners called Father Bempong and asked if he would open the church as a place of refuge for the entire community. The church and parish hall were spared any damage from the storm. Father Bempong immediately went to work, opening the church for people to come and take shelter. City officials made it a priority to restore power to the church. That was a godsend for everyone. “We spread a message that the Catholic Church is open if anyone needs help,” said Father Bempong. “We encouraged people to come to the church to get something to eat and something to drink. Residents came with their cell phones to charge them and communicate with other people; to let them know they were okay.” For days after the tornado, the parish served breakfast, lunch,

and supper, with the support of food donations from local businesses, including Hy-Vee and Fareway. It wasn't long before donations were pouring into the church. People were bringing water and food, among other things. Within three days, the pastor had to stop the donations because there was no more room in the parish hall or the church. “St. John Catholic Church in Greenfield became the face, so to speak, of tornado relief,” said Father Bempong. “We collaborated with organizations like FEMA to continue taking care of people in Greenfield after the tornado. Seeing how the parishioners and the community came together, it was the Holy Spirit at work.”

Diocesan Response

After both severe storms impacted towns in the Diocese of Des Moines, Bishop Joensen contacted the pastors to check on their safety and the parishioners. Priests who previously served the Greenfield parish contacted Father Bempong and offered their prayers. “Bishop Joensen came to our parish on Saturday after the tornado and concelebrated Mass, and quite a few people from the community joined us,” said Father. “Bishop Joensen's presence was fulfilling and touching. We saw our good shepherd who came to the rescue of his sheep who were in danger.” See more about the new diocesan Pastoral Response Team in the story to the right. Father Itamid and Father Bempong hope and pray this year won't be as active for severe weather as 2024. When the storms come, and they likely will, both priests are ready to respond to their parishioners and provide spiritual guidance and support af-

Pastoral Response Team created

In the wake of recent natural disasters and community tragedies, Bishop William Joensen has taken a significant step to enhance pastoral care. Over the last few years, the Diocese's communities have endured devastating floods along the Missouri River, a tragic school shooting in Perry, and severe tornadoes impacting Winterset, Greenfield, and Minden.



Deacon Tom Bradley

Recognizing the need for a more robust response, Bishop Joensen brought his concerns to the Diocesan Pastoral Council last year. Deacon Tom Bradley, newly appointed to the council and tasked with special projects, took on the challenge of creating an emergency pastoral response team. After extensive research and consultations with affected communities, Deacon Bradley developed a comprehensive plan in collaboration with Deacons Rob Stark and Eric Pugh, Iowa County Emergency Management officials, and diocesan leaders. This May, Bishop Joensen will launch the Catholic Pastoral Response Team composed of four priests and seven deacons. Many of the deacons bring valuable experience from military service, with several members, including Deacons Stark and Pugh, having led disaster relief efforts as part of the Iowa Army National Guard. The team has undergone training and stands ready to respond to disasters within diocesan boundaries. “Our mission is to be a ministry of presence and hope in times of severe loss and grief,” said Deacon Bradley. With a commitment to serving all, regardless of faith, the team strives to offer immediate and compassionate support to communities in need. The team's presence during times of immense grief and loss transforms faith into tangible hope, reminding others that they are not alone. This initiative is more than an emergency service; it's a beacon of spiritual strength, resilience, and compassion that reminds people of God's enduring love during life's trials.



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Victim Assistance Advocate

The diocese's Victim Assistance Advocate, Sam Porter, is a staff member at Polk County Victim Services.

He helps people who are or were minors when they were victims of abuse by the clergy through a complaint process. He also helps them seek support and counseling services.

Porter can be reached at 515-286-2024 or Sam.Porter@polkcountyia.gov.



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Mark Masters - St. Boniface	Larry Zahm - St. Joseph



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Successful faith program expands

Cultivating connections through accompaniment



Photos supplied by Kirby Jepson
Men’s and women’s groups meet through a faith-sharing group called Ut Fidem at Dowling Catholic High School.



By Jennifer Willems
Contributing Writer

An academic understanding of theology is important, but living a life of faith is dependent on having a relationship with Jesus. This becomes vital as young people travel though high school and make the transition to college and beyond.

For eight years, Dowling Catholic High School has been helping students deepen that relationship through a program called Ut Fidem. Taken from 2 Timothy 4:7, it means “keep the faith”

Over the years, the program has grown to become a separate foundation based in West Des Moines and has expanded to include eight other Catholic high schools. If all goes according to plan, it will be piloted in three parishes in the greater Des Moines area this fall.

The larger ministry is now called Serva Fidem, which is considered a more faithful translation of the Scripture verse it is based on.

“We are so grateful to Dowling for its role in creating this community, and for the gift that Dowling has given to the American Church,” said Nathan Beacom, executive director. “While the Serva Fidem foundation undergoes this development with our name, Dowling continues to operate under the name Ut Fidem, but within full harmony with our network of schools.”

Following example of Jesus

Addie Croegaert now serves as Serva Fidem Director of Schools, but in 2017 she was the original coordinator for Ut Fidem at Dowling Catholic.

She said it is based on the model of discipleship seen in Scripture, where Jesus called his apostles, who then shared the faith with their followers, and so on. “This model multiplies out – it doesn’t stay within a few,” Croegaert explained.

At Dowling Catholic, this

happens with small groups of five or six students, same gender and grade, meeting with a mentor for an hour each week. A handful of the mentors are on the faculty or staff, but the majority are adults who come from various walks of life within the Catholic community.

There were many good things already happening at Dowling Catholic in terms of religion, theology classes, and retreats, Croegaert said, but Ut Fidem took it to the next level.

“We needed something to help them engage in their faith daily. We needed something that would help teach them how to pray, give them a place where they could ask questions about the beliefs and decide for themselves whether or not they were worth accepting fully,” she said. “And if they did accept them, what would that mean on a very practical level?”

For example, if communion is truly Jesus’ body and blood, then we’re not going to miss Mass on Sunday and will probably desire to go throughout the week, Croegaert said, adding, “There are ramifications for accepting these beliefs.”

Saw “undeniable joy” others had

There are now two Ut Fidem coordinators at Dowling, with Kirby Gepson working with the female groups and Ryland Jones walking with the male groups.

While Ut Fidem started with four small groups at the end of 2017 and had 17 the following May, today there are 63 small groups at the school – 40 with female students and 23 with male students, according to Gepson. She added that there are 23 groups of seniors, 20 groups of juniors, 18 groups of sophomores, and two groups of freshmen, who are still finding their way at Dowling.

In all, 350 students are involved, which is about one-quarter of the student body. It is the largest student activity at Dowling, she said.

A Dowling grad herself, Gepson said she was part of an Ut

Fidem group from April 2018 until she left to study strategic communications at the University of Missouri that August. Even that short time made a difference, she said.

“I could see these people in my life who had this undeniable joy in their faith lives,” she recalled. “I had always heard about having a relationship with God, but I didn’t know how to get what they had.”

“I knew I wanted to be Catholic, but I didn’t know where to begin. I think that’s the case for a lot of high schoolers I see,” Gepson said. “They want to have a life committed to God, but they don’t know how to get there or how to begin.”

Ut Fidem – and now Serva Fidem – works so well because it leads to an authentic relationship with someone who is a little older and living their own discipleship with Jesus. “That overflows,” she said.

Even if the students don’t have it all figured out by the time they leave high school, they know where they can go to continue to foster that relationship with God, she explained.

And it’s working, Beacom said.

Working with a research firm to study the ministry’s impact, Serva Fidem leaders found that students who participate in a group are more than twice as likely to remain engaged in their faith and attend Mass, as opposed to students who haven’t been part of a Serva Fidem group.

The seeds planted at Dowling Catholic continue to grow.

Serva Fidem has been picked up by Holy Family High School in Bloomfield, Colorado.; Bishop Kelley High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Father Gabriel Richard High School in Ann Arbor, and Lansing Catholic High School in Lansing, both in Michigan; Regis Catholic High School in Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Wahlert Catholic High School in Dubuque, and Newman Catholic School in Mason City, both in Iowa.

Serva Fidem applies model for youth program to parishes

With a growing number of intentional disciples being formed through Ut Fidem at Dowling Catholic High School – and then as Serva Fidem at eight other Catholic high schools in the Midwest – the organization’s leaders are taking the next step.

They met with Bishop William Joensen and John Gaffney, director of Evangelization and Mission for the Diocese of Des Moines, to discuss a partnership that would take the youth ministry initiative to the parishes.

“It seemed like something we not only wanted to do, but it was an idea of what we were hoping for when we established the Parish Mission Renewal Fund through the Ignite! capital campaign a few years back,” Gaffney said.

What makes it so attractive is that it would allow parishes to work together in a way they hadn’t done before, and give them financial assistance to make it possible.



John Gaffney

In this case, the Serva Fidem proposal includes Ss. John and Paul in Altoona as the lead parish, where Father Mark McGeary is pastor. The other two parishes in the pilot program are St. Luke the Evangelist in Ankeny, (Father Ken Halibur, pastor), and St. Joseph in Des Moines (Father Chris Fontanini, pastor).

There will be one coordinator, whom they hope to have in place in May, and mentors will be recruited this summer.

Gaffney said they anticipate launching Serva Fidem for high school students in the parishes this fall. The pilot program will take place over the next three years.

“I think the thing that we don’t ever want to change is the discipleship model that has been successful at Dowling Catholic and a number of other Catholic high schools across the country,” he said. “That art of accompaniment is at the very core and I think that is the thing that is really impactful for the young people, as well as the mentors that are walking alongside them.”

Gaffney is excited by how the Diocese, through its strategic plan, is already starting to experience this kind of innovation. Having Serva Fidem leaders bringing that innovation to diocesan leaders and asking for partnership is also exciting for him.

He said he appreciates the generosity of people who contributed to the Ignite! capital campaign, which makes it possible for these kinds of collaboration.

Gaffney is also looking forward to seeing how the pastors and parishioners – from young adults to grandparents – who are working with the program experience what it takes for youth evangelization to happen.



Girls at a Serva Fidem picnic.
Photo supplied by Noah Beacom

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Education contest winners




Recently Catholic Daughters of America, Court St. Katherine #266 of Earling, held an education contest for students and members of the court. Awards were given for first second or third place to fourth and fifth graders from Shelby County Catholic Schools. Pictured above are those winners and contest chair women. Front row left to right are Sam Erlbacher, Brayden Kenkel, Paxton Schwarte, Sophia Kelly, Cash Reinig back row Marilea Bruck and Maribeth Zimmerman, CDA contest chairwomen.

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Around the Diocese

April 20 Sunday Rosary Rally

DES MOINES – Pray a monthly rosary the 3rd Sunday of every month at 1:30 p.m. (rain or shine) at the Iowa State Capitol – west side steps, 1007 E. Grand Ave. For more information contact Diana Balmaceda, 515-974-7691 or Jeff Pierick, 515-778-6087.

April 23 Wednesday Forge Event

WEST DES MOINES – Hear Michael Foley, Ph.D. talk about the reason behind the Church’s teaching on sobriety, and how to communicate with your kids on these topics. Meet at 7 p.m., talk starts at 8 p.m. at The Hall on 11th Street. Cost is \$15/person, pay at the door. For men only.

April 25 Friday Celebration of Life Dinner

COUNCIL BLUFFS – Gabriel’s Corner Pregnancy Center is celebrating its 19th anniversary with a Celebration of Life dinner at Corpus Christi Parish Hall with keynote speaker George Dennehy, a self-taught musician who plays guitar, bass, cello, and piano with his feet. Wine and cheese social begins at 5:30 p.m. with dinner by Staley’s Chicken served at 6:30 p.m. For more information contact Gabriel’s Corner at gabrielscornercpc@gmail.com.

April 27 Sunday Tap Into Faith

ANKENY – Hear Joe Stevens, the CEO & founder of Joppa, share stories of homeless people trying to survive, find housing, and rebuild their lives. social starts at 7 p.m., speaker starts at 730 p.m. at King’s Head event room in Magee’s Irish Pub.

April 29 Tuesday Nazareth Sisters

DES MOINES – Come meet the Nazareth Sisters of the Annunciation, living and working in our community to raise funds to assist the work of the 200+ Nazareth sisters living in Kenya as they serve the poorest of the poor. Open house at St. Augustin at 7 p.m.

May 2 Friday An Evening of Glory

WAUKEE – Enjoy Catholic musicians from six parishes performing a dynamic mix of glorious music ranging from classical, jazz, praise, and choral. Concert starts at 6 p.m., tickets are \$20/adults, free for children and students. Proceeds support Pulse Life Advocates student scholarship fund.

May 2-4 Friday-Sunday Icon Workshop

DES MOINES – Drazen Dupor is an iconographer from Wisconsin who will be putting on an icon workshop at St. Augustin School Friday-Sunday. Learn to paint the Holy Face of Jesus. The workshop cost is \$270. Interested? Contact Sharon Gleich, sgleich@comcast.net, and make checks payable to Sharon Gleich, Icon Workshop, 2715 NW 167th Court, Clive, IA 50325

May 3 Saturday Craft and Vendor Fair

DES MOINES – St. Joseph Parish Rosary Society will hold its Spring Craft and Vendor Fair from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in the school gyms. Table spots available on a first-come, first-serve basis for \$45, or \$60. Table rental is \$10 more. Electricity available in some areas. Contact Carol Iske at 515-554-2292 or carolone85@gmail.com to obtain your contract.

May 10 Saturday Mary’s Meals Race to Feed Kids

DES MOINES – The 12th annual

Race to Feed Kids is at 9 a.m. in Des Moines in support of international school feeding charity, Mary’s Meals. Each 5K race/walk registration will provide a child with meals for an entire school year. It costs Mary’s Meals just \$25.20 to feed a child for an entire school year.

May 12 Monday Nourish for Caregivers

DES MOINES – Nourish for Caregivers is an ongoing ministry that gathers monthly to support the practical, emotional, and spiritual needs of family caregivers. Meet at 6 p.m. at Holy Trinity Church. Questions? Contact Deacon Troy at troyt@holytrinitydm.org or Deacon Jim Houston at pastoralcare@saintpiuschurch.org.

May 13 Tuesday Stewards of the Earth

INDIANOLA – Catholic Charities and Diocesan Director of Social Justice, John Huynh, D.Min., is hosting a monthly speaking series on Catholic Social Teaching. This month, he will be discussing what it means to care for creation as Catholics with the St. Thomas Care of Creation Team at St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Indianola at 7 p.m.

May 15 Saturday St. Dymphna Retreat

DES MOINES – Join those involved in mental health ministry for a mini-retreat from 1-5 p.m. at the Catholic Pastoral Center. Bishop William Joensen will celebrate Mass at 5:30 p.m. at St. Ambrose Cathedral. Questions? Contact Patty Origer at poriger@dmdio cese.org or by calling 515-237-5073.

May 16 Sunday Byzantine Catholic Divine Liturgy

ALTOONA – There will be a Byzantine Catholic Divine Liturgy at 4 p.m. at Ss. John and Paul Church. The congregation has been meeting once a month at that location. If you have any questions, call Father Bruce Riebe at 440-227-5037.

May 30 Friday Don’t Just do Something; Sit There

DES MOINES – Inspiring singer/songwriter/recording artist/speaker Lorraine Hess will be at St. Ambrose Cathedral, from 7-9 p.m. The event for women is free but please register at www.sjeciowa.org/lorraine Hess.

May 31 Saturday Gold That’s Tested in Fire

URBANDALE – This inspiring event for women led by singer/songwriter/recording artist/speaker, Lorraine Hess at St. Pius X Church from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. The suggested donation is \$20; lunch will be provided. Please register at www.sjeciowa.org/lorraine Hess.

June 6, Friday Msgr. Bognanno anniversary

DES MOINES – Celebrate Msgr. Frank Bognanno’s 60th anniversary as a priest. Everyone is welcome to attend Mass at noon at St. Augustin in Des Moines with a reception immediately following in the parish center.

June 13-14 Friday-Saturday Jubilee Pilgrimage

HARLAN – Join St. Michael Parish on a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin, with stops at the Grotto of the Redemption in West Bend, and Mary of the Angels Chapel in La Crosse. Cost is \$200/4-person hotel room, adn includes two lunches. for more information or to register, contact Angela Buman at 712-755-5366 or dre@stmichaelparish.com.

Priest remembered for humor, love of Mass, and rural ministry

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

Father Michael Berner, who spent most of his years of service caring for the faithful in rural parishes, died April 11.

Born in 1960, he attended St. Albert Catholic High School, Creighton University in Omaha, and earned his master’s in divinity at Moreau Seminary at Notre Dame University.

Friends since they were six years old, Matt O’Neill described Father Berner as “one of a kind.”

Father Berner was a lot of fun, and “did a lot of good that people don’t even realize,” O’Neill said. “He was under the radar.”

Asked why he was drawn to the priesthood, O’Neill said his friend was influenced by the late Msgr. Thomas Costin, former pastor of St. Francis Xavier Parish in Council Bluffs and Msgr. Stephen Orr, when he served at St. Albert School.

Father Berner was ordained in 1986.

Father Berner will be remembered as a kind of unofficial historian of the Diocese known for sharing humorous stories.

“He was always sharing those stories and it added a dimension to our time together as seminarians,” said Father Tom Dooley, pastor of St Joseph Parish in Winterset. “It was fun. Now, maybe he’ll be considered one of the characters of our Diocese.”

He’ll also be remembered for his loyalty, both to his alma ma-

ter, his parishioners, and to God.

“One thing was his love for all things Notre Dame, from his license plate to the color of his vehicles,” said Father Dooley. “I think also, as a priest, he dedicated himself to Christ and he dedicated himself to the people he served.”

“He loved the Catholic Church,” O’Neill said. “He loved the daily Mass in the morning.”

Father Berner will also be remembered for his sarcasm and for being down to earth.

“The people who knew him, from his classmates and high school, know he was very witty, sarcastic, and as common as an old shoe,” O’Neill said. “What you saw is what you got. He told you what he felt.”

Father Berner would buy things for his nieces and nephews from Publishers Clearing House. One day in 1998, he called O’Neill and said he’d won the \$1 million sweepstakes.

“Prove it,” O’Neill said, and Father Berner put celebrity Joan Lunden on the phone. She was there at St. Joseph Parish in Earling when TV cameras were rolling and he was given the news.

Father Berner took the newly ordained Father Trevor Chicoine under his wing, leaving Father Chicoine grateful.



“Father was very kind to me as a young priest and new pastor and always was ready with a word of advice,” said Father Chicoine. “He enjoyed a good filet with fellow priests while regaling his younger brothers with the stories of our forebearers in the diocesan presbyterate to much hilarity. I suppose now he transitions from the source of our stories to the subject of them for the next generation. May God be good to him.”

Most of Father Berner’s years of ordained ministry were in rural communities.

Father Berner served at the following parishes: Holy Spirit in Creston, St. Edward in Afton, St. Patrick in Lenox, St. Anthony in Des Moines, Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart in Ankeny, St. Patrick in Audubon, Holy Trinity in Exira, St. Joseph in Earling, St. Peter in Defiance, St. Anne in Logan, Holy Family in Mondamin, St. Patrick in Missouri Valley, Corpus Christi in Council Bluffs, Ss. Peter & Paul in Atlantic, St. Mary in Anita, Our Lady of Grace in Griswold, and St. Timothy in Reno/Cumberland.

He retired in 2023.

A prayer service will April 22 at 6 p.m. followed by visitation until 8 p.m. at St. Patrick Church in Council Bluffs. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated April 23 at 11 a.m., also at St. Patrick Church. Father Berner will be buried near his parents at St. Joseph Cemetery in Council Bluffs.

Deacon remembered for bringing Catholic radio to Iowa, devotion to prayer

There’s a Scripture passage that was pivotal in Deacon Charles “Chuck” Putbrese’s life: “For such a time as this,” from Esther, 4:14.

It was that Scripture passage that encouraged him to play a foundational role in bringing Catholic radio to Des Moines, he told *The Catholic Mirror* in 2007.

The former international expert in security and espionage, who had been Lutheran, Catholic, and evangelical Protestant before settling back home in the Catholic faith, died March 18 at the age of 93.

Born in Auburn, Iowa, he graduated from Drake University, married Ella Mae (Kay) Putbrese in 1953 and served in the U.S. Air Force and in the Office of Special Investigations during the Cold War. He retired from the Air Force, having become Lt. Colonel, to begin a security business with a friend.

“Chuck, Kay and I were in Virginia (in the mid-1970s). I was giving a talk there,” said Msgr. Frank Bognanno, a close friend. “He was trying to make a decision about whether he should stay in business there, or go to Des Moines, where there was a country radio station. He asked: ‘Should I buy it and turn it to Christian station?’”

They did it and it became K W K Y C a t h o - l i c radio, said Msgr. Bognanno.

Born Lutheran, his wife, Kay, was a devout Catholic. Deacon Putbrese became Catholic, but said later this faith was more in his head than his heart. KWKY offered Protestant radio programming, and over time, he became involved in evangelical Protestantism.

A friend sent Deacon Putbrese and Kay some tapes of professor Scott Hahn sharing the faith. Hahn had been a Protestant minister before converting to the Catholic faith.

“I came back and became a Catholic, not with head knowledge, but with heart knowledge,” he had said.

A friend had been praying for him with the Bible passage “For such a time as this.” He learned Hahn had also been praying for him with that passage running through his head.

Deacon Putbrese was convinced prayer works, said Msgr. Bognanno.



Shortly after returning to the Church, Deacon Putbrese felt called to the diaconate ministry. He was ordained in the Diocese’s 10th group of candidates in 1997.

He was calm, easygoing, quiet individual, remembered diaconate classmate Deacon Fred Pins.

Deacon Putbrese was helpful to everyone.

“He was always welcoming to help anybody. I had car trouble one time. I was only 25 miles from the monastery (for diaconate formation) and the car broke down,” said Deacon Pins. “He came out to get me. He was there to help anybody and everybody. He was a friend to all.”

In 2005, he and his son John formed Iowa Catholic Radio, transitioning the Christian radio station to all Catholic programming. They sold the station to St. Gabriel Communications, which has grown in its mission to become a statewide Catholic radio network.

Deacon Putbrese served the Basilica of St. John Parish and Christ the King Parish, both in Des Moines, until his retirement in 2018.

His Mass of Christian Burial was March 25 at Christ the King Church. He was buried at the Iowa Veterans Cemetery with full military honors on March 26.

Leto led effort to feed the hungry

By Kendall Begnoche
Contributing Writer



Tom Leto supported and later led Catholic Charities’ efforts to feed the hungry in our community for several years.

His leadership helped grow the Catholic Charities Food Pantry to be better equipped to serve record-breaking numbers of individuals month after month.

He passed away in March of 2025, serving the hungry until his last breath. With a heart for service and a generous soul, Leto touched the lives of many of our clients, volunteers and members of the Catholic Charities Board of Directors and team.

He first came to the Catholic Charities Food Pantry as a volunteer after talking with his priest. He shared in a podcast interview with Bishop William M. Joensen that volunteering at the food pantry was a very eye-opening experience. He felt called to stay at the food pantry and served as a team member before becoming the Catholic Charities Food Pantry Program Manager in 2022.

As program manager, he fostered a great time of growth at the food pantry to better assist those in our community dealing with food insecurity. He had strong relationships with the Des Moines Area Religious Council, the Food Bank of Iowa, Iowa Gardening for Good, and many other community partners to help feed our clients. He also started a community garden and went out of his way to uplift all who came to the food pantry in need of help.

Leto worked hard to create a vibrant and fun atmosphere at the Catholic Charities Food Pantry. It was clear he took great joy in his work. He made sure everyone felt welcomed and greatly enjoyed getting to know the clients we serve and the volunteers who generously give their time to help operate the food pantry. Leto had immense gratitude for the dedicated team of volunteers he was grateful to work alongside every day. He strived to make sure our volunteers knew how much they were appreciated and valued each one of them. The friendships and relationships he created will not be forgotten.

In this Year of Jubilee, we are invited to renew ourselves as “Pilgrims of Hope.” Leto was a true pilgrim of hope, instilling this virtue in those he served. Over the last few years as food insecurity continued to rise in our community, he looked for new ways to serve this ever-growing number of clients. A connection he would often make is that the food pantry was like the feeding of the 5,000 in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 14:13-21). Even though more and more people were coming in need of food, we were able to make sure all were fed. Leto’s faith, determination and example inspires us to join in this year of reconciliation and pilgrimage to serve our neighbors in need by becoming pilgrims of hope ourselves.

Leto has left his mark at Catholic Charities and his legacy will continue to shape the work we do. Shortly after his death, the food pantry experienced another tragedy. A car accident at the food pantry, which caused significant structural damage, has temporarily halted part of our operations. During this time of re-growth, we follow in the example Leto left behind and continue to feed the hungry with what we have. As we rebuild, we look forward to honoring his vision of serving more of God’s people at the Catholic Charities Food Pantry.

For information on how you can help support the Catholic Charities Food Pantry or to make a gift in honor of Tom Leto, please contact Catholic Charities Director of Development and Marketing, Bobbi Jo Smith at 515-237-5064 or bsmith@catholiccharitiesdm.org.



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Take advantage of trails with the Way of St. Laurence

In the heart of Iowa’s rolling landscapes, a sacred journey awaits.

The Camino de San Lorenzo, or Way of St. Lawrence, offers a chance to step away from the everyday and walk toward deeper faith and connection.

Spanning three days and 13 miles each day, this pilgrimage is more than a physical path—it’s a spiritual voyage that nourishes the soul, strengthens community, and draws participants closer to Christ.

Join Deacon Tom Bradley and other pilgrims this May as they embrace prayer, reflection, and the beauty of nature.

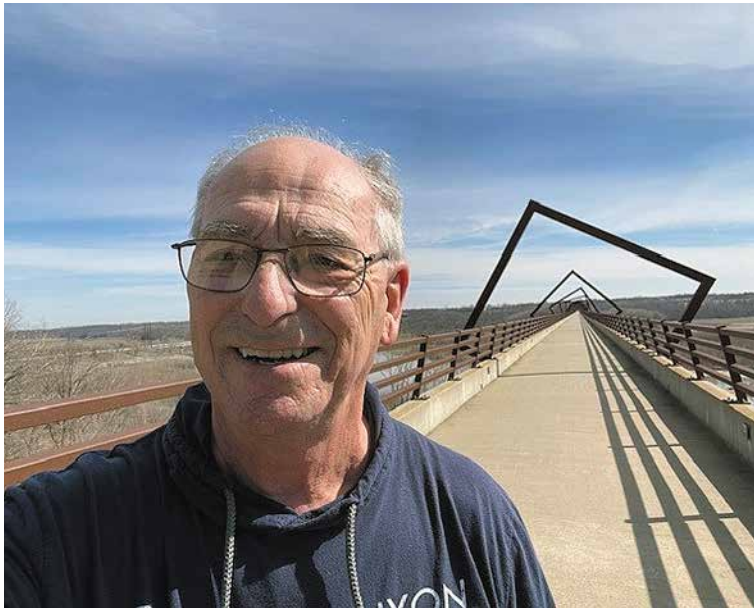
The inaugural Camino de San Lorenzo follows central Iowa’s scenic recreational trails. This meaningful experience, inspired by the tradition of the Camino de Santiago in Spain, will take place on May 30-June 1.

The pilgrimage begins on Friday, May 30, with Mass at St. Patrick Church in Perry.

Pilgrims will then set off on their journey along the High Trestle Trail, concluding the day in Woodward with Evening Prayer.

On Saturday, the path continues from Woodward to Slater, crossing the High Trestle Bridge and including Mass in Madrid.

The final leg, on Sunday,



Deacon Tom Bradley hikes along the High Trestle Bridge, where the Camino de San Lorenzo, or Way of St. Laurence, will pass May 30-June 1.

June 1, leads participants from Slater to St. Luke Catholic Church in Ankeny, culminating Mass and presentation of certificates and commemorative camino coins.

“Every step of the 13 daily miles is a step forward in our journey towards Christ,” said Deacon Bradley, the visionary behind this pilgrimage.

He highlighted the unique opportunity this camino offers, saying, “I have spoken to so many

people who desired to walk the Camino de Santiago in Spain, but it wasn’t possible. This ‘Way of St. Lawrence’ provides an opportunity to experience a spiritual path in Iowa.”

Aided by Deacon David La Mar of the Diocese of Sioux City, plans are being finalized.

All are encouraged to register, whether for the full three days or just one. Learn more at www.dm-diocese.org/events.

Pledge grain or livestock to help families fund Catholic education

As spring arrives and planting begins, the Catholic Tuition Organization is reminding farmers of their ability to pledge to make a grain or livestock gift before the end of the calendar year to benefit students attending any of the 16 Catholic schools in the Diocese.

Just like all donations to CTO, farm donations qualify for a 75% Iowa state income tax credit on their 2025 taxes.

Unlike other donations, farm donations also qualify the donor/farmers to avoid counting the donation as income and paying associated self-employment tax, and with pre-planning, production costs may also be deductible.

The 25% of the gift that doesn’t qualify for the Iowa tax credit, may qualify for a federal tax deduction for those who itemize on their federal return for 2025.

A poster created by CTO with more information on donating gifts of grain or livestock are being mailed to parishes in April to catch the eye of farm owners.

CTO donors making a gift during calendar year 2025 will be helping needy families to better plan for the 2026-27 school year; those families will know that donor/farmers want to help their children get an exceptional education in a Catholic school. Farmers clearly understand the importance of planning for the future, something these families often have limited experience with.

CTO tuition grants are the first dollars applied to tuition expenses at Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines.

CTO tuition award applications are still being accepted for the first two weeks of April to assist families earning up to 400% of the 2025 federal poverty guidelines. The guidelines are specific to family size as reported on federal tax returns.

Farmers who are interested in making a gift of grain or livestock can visit the CTO website at www.ctoiowa.org/grain-live stock to learn more and download a Grain/Livestock Ownership Transfer Donation form to start the process of donating. Donations for 2025 must be received by Dec. 31.

Families can apply for a CTO tuition grant online by visiting the link fairapp.com. In order to complete the application, families will need to have their 2024 federal taxes completed.

Families needing assistance to apply can contact their local Catholic school for more information about this important source of tuition assistance. Applications for tuition grants must be received by April 15.

Making It Personal With Bishop Joensen

Tune in to Bishop William Joensen’s podcast to hear where he’s been and what he’s working on.

iowacatholicradio.com/making-it-personal



Consejero Sobre Asistencia de Víctimas

El Consejero sobre Asistencia de Víctimas es un empleado de Polk County Victim Services. Ella ayuda a víctimas de abuso sexual por parte del clero durante el proceso de la queja y buscando servicios de apoyo y consejería. Pueden comunicarse al 515-286-2028 o en advocate@dm-diocese.org.

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We are Sowing God’s Spirit

Join us in supporting the mission of the Catholic Church in southwest Iowa with a gift to the Annual Diocesan Appeal. Your gift will help support ministries like those below.



Marriage & Family Life Ministry

Candy and Tom Chambers, St. Patrick Parish, Audubon

“The Annual Diocesan Appeal means a lot to us because we love being part of the larger Church, and we feel very fortunate that the Des Moines Diocese has always reached out to our rural area and helped us with our needs.”

“We’ve done pre-marriage workshops for several years. (The diocesan staff) have helped us with that when we have questions about individuals who need assistance.”



Parish Services

RaeShelle Jensen, business manager for St. Patrick, Neola, and St. Columbanus, Weston

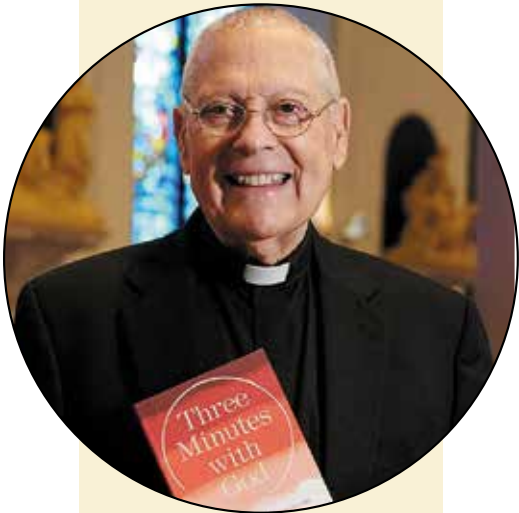
“The ADA is very important to all the parishes in the Diocese because of the support it gives us as parish employees with accounting, faith formation programs, keeping our facilities going and in good condition, and more. We would highly recommend or encourage everyone to please donate to the Annual Diocesan Appeal.”



Faith Formation & Ministries

Father Jason Lee, of Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish, Ankeny

“God has blessed us with so many good resources. The Lord, who has given us so much, especially his Son, calls us to give back to him and glorify him through our talents and resources in any way we can support the mission of the Church. “



Retired Priests’ Healthcare

Monsignor Frank Bognanno, retired priest

“I want to thank you for giving to the Annual Diocesan Appeal. It helps us retired priests, especially with medical expenses. I had cataract surgery a couple of years ago. All the expenses were covered by the Annual Diocesan Appeal. Thank you and be generous again this year.”

Please make a donation by scanning the QR code or visit dm-diocese.org/giving



Schools announce honorees for the year

By Jake Shama
Contributing Writer

The diocesan Catholic Schools Office announced winners of the Teacher, Administrator, and Volunteer of the Year awards to be presented at the Bishop’s Celebration of Catholic Schools this fall.

Cindy Schwery Named Teacher of the Year

Cindy Schwery of Shelby County Catholic Schools has been named the 2025 Teacher of the Year. Schwery is known for keeping God front and center in her music classroom. She is active in her parish, creative, empathetic, and beloved by her students.

“Cindy is such a cheerleader and positive force when it comes to our Catholic school,” said one

of her nominators. “She’s a blessing and a gift to Shelby County Catholic School,” commented another.

Schwery shares her musical talents at Mass and school programs, and she incorporates various subjects, including math and social studies, into her music curriculum. She also shares her faith through action, including caring for her 93-year-old father and volunteering as a freshman confirmation teacher and with the community Easter Egg Hunt.

Erica Arnold Honored as Administrator of the Year

Erica Arnold of Dowling Catholic High School has been selected as the 2025 Administrator of the Year. Arnold has spent 27 years in Catholic education, with the past 13 years as an administrator at Dowling Catholic. She is known for her dedication to ensuring students are placed in

the proper courses and for her data-driven decision-making.

“Erica works diligently to ensure that the students coming into DCHS are placed in the proper courses to best enhance and further the gifts they have been given by God,” one commenter stated.

Known by some as “the spreadsheet queen,” Arnold uses her gifts to identify the best academic path for each Dowling student.

Tomas Munoz Recognized as Volunteer of the Year

Tomas Munoz of Holy Trinity Catholic School has been named the 2025 Volunteer of the Year.



Cindy Schwery



Erica Arnold



Tomas Munoz

Munoz has been sharing his time and talent at Holy Trinity since 2021. He is known for his positive attitude, kindness, and strong faith.

“Tomas is a consistent model of faith around the building,” said one person who nominated him. “He is always sharing his faith and experiences with students and staff and is the best example of kindness to all he meets.”

Munoz is beloved by students

and staff alike and often brings treats and gifts to the school. He loves being around the staff and is willing to help in any way, including subbing, teaching religious education, and covering recess duty.

“We are incredibly blessed to have such dedicated and passionate individuals in our Catholic schools,” said Donna Bishop, superintendent of Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools. “Cindy, Erica, and Tomas exemplify the values of faith, excellence, and community that we strive for in Catholic education. Their contributions make a lasting impact on the lives of our students and our school communities. We are grateful for their commitment and congratulate them on this well-deserved honor.”

Schwery, Arnold, and Munoz will be honored at the Bishop’s Celebration of Catholic Schools on Sept. 13 in Krause Hall at the Catholic Pastoral Center in Des Moines.

The Diocese of Des Moines has 16 schools in 23 counties in central and southwest Iowa.

Catholic schools in the Des Moines Diocese build Christ-centered, collaborative, inclusive partnerships with parents, students, and parishes to provide students with innovative academic excellence and inspirational faith formation.


Gabriel’s Corner

Save the date for Gabriel’s Corner Pregnancy Center’s annual Celebration of Life dinner in Council Bluffs!

The theme this year is music and will include a keynote speaker by George Dennehy, “that armless guy” who plays musical instruments with his feet.

- Entertainment by Friends of Gabriel’s Corner
- Master of Ceremonies is Jen Brown
- Wine & Cheese Social begins at 5:30 p.m.
- Dinner by Staley’s Chicken served at 6:30 p.m.
- Assorted cupcakes by Debbie Fleming
- Speaker at 7:30 p.m.


Get more information at 402-690-1561 or gabrielscornerpc@gmail.com.




HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Rev. James Ahenkora – April 4
Very Rev. Michael Amadeo – April 6
Rev. Kenneth Gross – April 7
Rev. Antony Mathew – April 12
Rev. George Boachie-Nyarko – April 14
Rev. Christopher Fontanini – April 19
Rev. Emmanuel Bassey – April 20
Rev. Mark Neal – April 22
Rev. Sylvester Okoh – April 24
Rev. Paul Monahan – April 29

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Family sees beauty in churches during pilgrimage



Jan Paul, Mary Therese, and Joaquin Banaag, completed the five-church Jubilee of Hope pilgrimage in the Diocese of Des Moines in one weekend. Here they are pictured with their pastor, Father Luis Mejia.

By Anne Marie Cox
Staff Writer

The Banaag family – mom Mary Therese, dad Jan Paul, and little Joaquin Isaac – rose at 4 a.m. on a Saturday morning and hit the road on a faith journey.

The Banaags took a Saturday off from work as nurses and made their first trip to Des Moines from Council Bluffs to make a day of the Jubilee Year of Hope pilgrimage in the Diocese of Des Moines.

“It was such a beautiful journey for us,” Mary Therese said. “We wanted that day to be all for Jesus, our offering for Lent, and to give thanks for all the blessings we have received as a family.”

There were several reasons to do the pilgrimage. Mary Therese and Jan Paul wanted their son to grow closer to God, for them to grow closer as a family, for their

son to learn about a plenary indulgence, and to see the beauty of various churches throughout the Diocese.

It also seemed timely because Joaquin is preparing for his First Communion.

“My favorite part was visiting the churches with my family and teaching my son to have faith in God,” said Jan Paul. “That’s all you can share with him: how to be faithful, how to pray to God, and enjoy the beautiful churches.”

They arrived in time for morning Mass at St. Ambrose Cathedral, then stopped by the Basilica of St. John for prayer.

“The basilica was still closed when we got there, but the parish priest was there for a baptism or something. We were able to come in and pray and get the stamps” on their jubilee passport postcards, said Mary Therese.

The family went to Christ the King Church, too. On that sunny spring day they took in some sightseeing like the state capital, the Des Moines Art Center, and the sculpture garden downtown.

They stopped at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Atlantic in time for the 5:30 p.m. Mass on the way home.

“We got home around 9 o’clock,” said Mary Therese. It was a long day. Joaquin fell asleep in the backseat on the way home.

The family attended Mass at their home parish of Corpus Christi the next day, thereby having visited all five pilgrimage churches in the Des Moines Diocese in one weekend.

Mary Therese said: “It was such a beautiful day, with beautiful weather, to really experience the journey.”

On Prayer

By Monica Pugh



Silence is golden

The sign spanning the interstate flashed the message, “Today is the National Day of Quiet!” There is a national day for everything. So, no surprise really. What did surprise me is this particular sign popping into my view as I pondered what to include in this column. A quick internet search confirmed the day of silence happens every year. Mentioning silence to people sometimes elicits anxiety but also wonderment. Some people enjoy quiet and some people do not like it at all. Silence allows us to hear our own thoughts. But, more importantly, silence allows time for contemplation in prayer to hear God speaking to us.

My first experience with extended silence in prayer was in 2023 during my first 8-day silent retreat. I was asked by many people how I would survive eight days of silence without my phone or computer. I did not know how I would endure nor if I would like only speaking once a day to my spiritual director. Do I really want to be alone with my own thoughts? I surrendered and became fearless with the opportunity because I had everything to gain as I learned to pray. A wise insight of Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest and theologian, says, “It is not easy to enter into the silence and reach beyond the many boisterous and demanding voices of our world and to discover there the small intimate voice saying: ‘You are my Beloved Child, on you my favor rests’.” Settling into the silence was difficult. But I surrendered as I turned off my phone, computer, and voice.

Ironically, my silence became loud, engaging, interactive, emotional and intimate with God. As I contemplated Scripture provided by my spiritual director, the silence became a classroom with me as a disciple entering into a deeper relationship with our infinite and mysterious God. I knew when I was tossing around my own thoughts or when I heard God’s words. His words dropped into my mind and provided deep, warm, solace for my soul.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, CCC 2710, says, “One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter.” I was saving silence for the very last column of this Jubilee year of prayer. But when I saw the interstate sign God changed my mind. I realized it is the next step in learning how to pray and I needed to write about it now. Prayer is not only surrendering the time but making time. Time for prayer in silence must be chosen. In silence, we can bring our rosaries, devotions, and all the prayers we know while settling into contemplation with our Lord. Does deep contemplation happen every time in prayer? No. But there is hope it can happen when we choose to surrender to the silence. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still and know that I am God.” Surrender to a few minutes of silence each day and hear God call you his own.

Monica Pugh is the Faith Formation director at St. John the Apostle Parish in Norwalk.

St. Dymphna mini-retreat


This afternoon mini-retreat on May 15 is for those who minister in the realm of mental health, or those who wish to begin, to encounter Christ in a deeper way. Contact Patty Origer at poriger@dmdiocese.org or call 515-237-5073.

Des Moines Catholic Worker House Fund

Do you have an upcoming Required Minimum Distribution from your IRA? Do you have a donor advised fund? The Des Moines Catholic Worker House Fund is a 501c(3) non-profit. Your donations would be used to support the hospitality ministry of the Des Moines Catholic Worker House by providing food and other necessities to the homeless population of Des Moines.

Donations can be sent to:
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P.O. Box 1386 Ankeny, Iowa 50021

Or go to our website to give online at:
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Riding the winds of change

This is the story of a tree. An Eastern Cottonwood soaring 108 feet high, stretching its arms across three yards and anchoring the entire street. It was a defining feature of its St. Paul, Minnesota neighborhood near Nativity of Our Lord Catholic Church.

“Oh, you’re the people with the tree!” locals would say when they met John and Dia Boyle and determined which house is theirs.

Sixty-something empty nesters, John is a professor of Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, and Dia is a writer. She recently published a book titled “The Thoughtful Home.”

The cottonwood had been part of that equation, one reason she loved her little home. She’d write at the table and admire the tree. “We liked the shade and the beautiful craggy bark and the squirrels and nuthatches scurrying up and down and how it filled the view from our library window,” Dia said.

Everyone loved the tree.

But it had to go.

Last June a branch fell, knocking out their electrical box, gouging the siding, shattering a window and shredding a corner of the neighbor’s roof.

The tree posed an unmistakable danger.

So the Boyles hired a tree-removal crew and set a date, a Tuesday in mid-

Twenty Something

By Christina
Capecci



September. The Sunday before, the couple hosted a goodwill party in their backyard so neighbors could toast to the cottonwood. Dia served champagne, beer, cookies and nuts. It was a chance to do a little PR, expressing their regret and reviewing logistics (the street would soon be blocked off and cars must be moved).

Removal of the cottonwood was the topic of conversation all week. Come Tuesday, spectators gathered for the main event, bringing coffee mugs and lawn chairs. People would walk by and stop to watch the crane and chat. Folks from the other side of the alley were observing from their elevated decks and upper floors. A neighbor invited the Boyles to come watch from his deck. They had never been in his yard before. It was the most they’d ever socialized with their neighbors.

“What I had seen as potentially upsetting to neighbors turned out to be a really good bridge to better connections,”

Dia said.

After three days of work, the cottonwood was gone.

Suddenly, Dia could see the sky. Comings and goings of neighbors. Birds fluttering around their feeders. Sunshine. The cottonwood left room to expand Dia’s garden, and this spring, for the first time, she’s planting vegetables that need sun.

The change she had dreaded, it turned out, made her happy.

The tree has become a metaphor. Dia references it when friends face upheaval – a change of mind, of address, of heart. She counsels them lovingly.

When the winds of change blow, look up and lean in to the Creator of all. Trust that he is guiding you, protecting you, loving you. Trust in the good being done beneath the surface.

Take stock in our identity as Catholics: We are Eucharistic people. In the midst of uncertainty, we are fed and fortified by the body of Christ. As the word Eucharist suggests – its meaning, a guidepost – we offer our thanksgiving. “In all circumstances, give thanks,” St. Paul urges (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Be gentle with yourself. Make peace with the peculiar reality of change: that two good things aren’t mutually exclusive. Dia had loved the tree – and she loved its absence. You can love your old house and



John and Dia Boyle stand where their tree once existed.

your new one; you can love your single life and married life – in different ways, for unique reasons.

Allow room in your heart to be surprised. It could work out like the cottonwood. The change you’ve feared just might broaden your view, letting you see more birds and beauty, giving you more space and sunshine, making your garden grow.

Christina Capecci is a freelance writer from Inver Grove Heights, Minnesota.

Update on the Iowa legislature

Gov. Kim Reynolds has decided not to seek re-election next year.

She said it was time to be more present to her family.

The most recent Iowa gubernatorial election without an incumbent candidate occurred in 2006.

Tax credit for adoptive parents

The Iowa Catholic Conference spoke in support of HF 965 during a subcommittee hearing. The bill would substantially increase the tax credit available to adoptive parents. The bill was advanced by the subcommittee to the House Ways and Means Committee.

Capitol Comments

By Tom Chapman



Conitutional amendment

The ICC is again opposing a proposed constitutional amendment, SJR 11, that would require a two-thirds majority of the legislature to approve a tax increase. The bill passed the legislature last year, and if it passes both chambers this year, it will go to

a vote of the people of Iowa.

During the subcommittee hearing, we said that locking a two-thirds requirement into the Constitution would allow a relatively small minority to stop what might be needed legislation. Proposals such as the “heartbeat” abortion ban or starting Education Savings Accounts would not have been approved, for example.

In addition, the government’s obligation to protect the common good also necessarily entails funding essential services like education, healthcare, infrastructure, and social safety nets. SJR 11 passed the subcommittee and goes to the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

Public school funding

In other news, the legislature wrapped up work on public school funding, which received a 2% increase, or about \$127 million. Public schools will receive more than \$4.2 billion in state general fund aid next year, not counting local property taxes or federal funding. About \$314 million has been allocated for Education Savings Accounts.

Education Savings Accounts

All parents with children in an accredited nonpublic school were eligible to apply for an ESA starting April 16.

Tom Chapman is the executive director of the Iowa Catholic Conference.

The Chosen

I am sure many of you are familiar with the TV series about the life of Jesus called The Chosen. It was launched in 2019, has been in theaters and on streaming platforms since, and now has more than 200 million viewers. It has been translated into 50 languages and has 13 million social media followers, with about 30 percent of its audience being non-Christian.

It was created and produced by Dallas Jenkins, an Evangelical Christian with wide ecumenical and interfaith sympathies. Jonathan Roumie, a devout Roman Catholic, plays the role of Jesus, and the Jesus he portrays in The Chosen comes through as somewhat different from, and more relatable to, than the Jesus we have generally seen in other movies and portrayals of him. And this has had an interesting impact.

What’s the impact? Joe Hoover, a Jesuit priest writing in a recent issue of America magazine, makes this comment: “I have been a baptized Christian for 53 years, attended a Catholic Christian grade school and for more than two decades have been a member of a religious order that bears the name of Jesus.... and ‘The Chosen’ television series had done things for my understanding and engagement with the life of Christ and his disciples that nothing else has. No sermon, no theological exhortation, no master’s degree, no class on John



By Father Ron
Rolheiser

or Mark or Luke, no spirituality workshop, no 30-day biblically based retreat has brought the Gospels home and made Christ and his people real and relatable to me in quite the way ‘The Chosen’ has.”

That speaks for me as well. The Chosen has had a similar effect on me. Like Joe Hoover, I was baptized as an infant, raised a Roman Catholic, am a member of a religious order, have degrees in theology, have been to every kind of spirituality workshop, and have studied the Gospels under the guidance of some world class scholars, and yet this TV series has given a face to Jesus that I didn’t quite receive in all that past learning and has helped me in my prayer and my relationship to Christ.

In essence, this is what The Chosen has done for me. It has presented a Jesus whom I actually want to be with. Shouldn’t we always want to be with Jesus? Yes, but the Jesus who is often presented to us is not someone, if we are honest with ourselves,

we would want to spend a lot of one-on-one time with, with whom we could be at ease and comfortable without affectations.

For instance, the Jesus who has often been presented to us in movies is generally lacking in human warmth, is distant, stern, other-worldly, over pious, and whose very gaze makes you feel guilty because your sin caused his crucifixion. That Jesus is also humorless, doesn’t ever seem to bring God’s smile to the world, and never brings any lightness into a room. He is not a Jesus with whom you are at ease.

Unfortunately, that is often the Jesus who has been presented to us in our preaching, catechesis, Sunday schools, theological classes, and in popular spirituality. The Jesus we meet there, for all the truth and revelation he brings into the world, is generally still too divine and overly pious for us to be at ease with humanly. He is a Jesus we admire, perhaps even adore, and whom we trust enough to commit our lives to (no small thing). But he is also a Jesus with whom we are not much at ease, whom we wouldn’t pick to sit next to at table, with whom we wouldn’t pick to go on vacation, and who is so distant and distinct from us that it is easier for us to have him as an admired teacher than as an intimate friend, let alone as a lover to whom we want to bear our soul.

This is not a plea to humanize Jesus (as is sometimes in fashion today) by making him just a nice man who preaches love but doesn’t at the same time radiate God’s non-negotiable truth. This is not what The Chosen does. Far from it.

The Chosen presents us with a Jesus whose divinity you never doubt, even as he appears as warm and attractive, with a humanity that puts you at ease in his presence; indeed, it lures you into his presence. Watching The Chosen, one never doubts for an instant that Jesus is specially and inextricably linked to his Father and that he brings us God’s truth and revelation without compromise. But this Jesus also brings God’s smile, God’s warmth, and God’s blessing upon our lives which too often suffer from a lack of these.

The great mystic Julian of Norwich once described God in this way: God sits in heaven, completely relaxed, his face looking like a marvelous symphony.

Among other things, The Chosen shows us this relaxed face of God, which to our own detriment we too seldom see.

Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser is a theologian, teacher, and award-winning author.

Priest assignments announced



Father Jason Catania



Father Ly Chu



Father Lazarus Kirigia



Father Ambrose Ladu



Father Rodrigo Landeros



Father Jason Lee



Father Sylvester Okoh

Continued from page 1

year, he began serving as parochial vicar at Ss. John and Paul Parish in Altoona.

Father John Brobbey is transitioning from parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi to chaplain of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, beginning in August 2025.

He was born in 1976, educated in Ghana with post-graduate work in Rome, and ordained in Ghana in 2003. He began serving at St. Francis of Assisi Parish in West Des Moines in 2021.

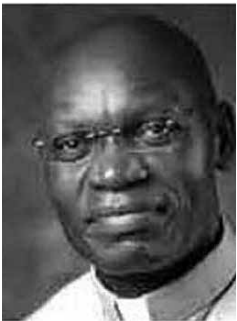
Father Jason Catania, who is with the Anglican (Catholic) Ordinariate, will be in residence and offering sacramental assistance at St. Augustin in Des Moines while continuing as MercyOne Des Moines Medical Center’s chaplain.

Father Ly Chu is going to retire after serving as pastor at St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community in Des Moines.

He was born in 1955 in Vietnam, attended college and an underground seminary in Vietnam, and then attended Kenrick-Glenon Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Father Chu was ordained in 2002.

He has served at St. Ambrose Cathedral and St. Mary of Nazareth, both in Des Moines. He began serving at St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community in 2008.

Father Lazarus Kirigia returns from sabbatical on July 10. He will continue to serve as pastor of St. Mary in Red Oak and St. Patrick in Imogene under his current tenure, which ends in July 2029.



Father Protas Okwalo

Father Kirigia was born in 1970 in Kenya, educated in Kenya and at Mundelein Seminary, and ordained in Des Moines in 2007.

Father Ambrose Ladu is moving from parochial vicar at St. Ambrose Cathedral in Des Moines to parochial vicar at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny with part-time ministry with migrant community via St. Ambrose Cathedral, for a two-year term.

Father Rodrigo Landeros is going from parochial vicar at St. Anthony Parish in Des Moines to be a parochial vicar at Christ the King in Des Moines, for a one-year term.

He was born in Mexico in 1996, educated in Mexico and St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and ordained in the Des Moines Diocese in 2022. Since his ordination, Father Landeros has been serving at St. Anthony Parish in Des Moines.

Father Jason Lee is transitioning from parochial vicar at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart in Ankeny to becoming pastor of St. Mary in Shenandoah and St. Mary in Hamburg, for a six-year term.

He was born in 1995, attended Waukee High School, St. John Vianney College Seminary and St. Paul Seminary, both in St. Paul, Minnesota, and was ordained in 2023.

Since his ordination, Father Lee has been serving at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny.



Father Nick Smith

Divine Word Father Thinh Nguyen will become the parish administrator of St. Peter Vietnamese Catholic Community in Des Moines. (A photo is not available.)

Father Sylvester Okoh is moving from serving as pastor at St. Claire in Clarinda, Sacred Heart in Bedford, and St. Joseph in Villisca to Des Moines metro chaplaincy, for a two-year term.

He was born in 1981, educated in Nigeria and Rome, and was ordained in Nigeria in 2008. Father Okoh came to the Des Moines Diocese in 2020. He has served as chaplain at CHI Health – Mercy in Council Bluffs, and at the following parishes St. Patrick in Neola, St. Columbanus in Weston, St. Clare in Clarinda, Sacred Heart in Bedford, St. Joseph in Villisca, and as administrator for St. Mary in Shenandoah and St. Mary in Hamburg.

Father Protas Okwalo is moving from pastor at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Des Moines to parochial vicar at St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines, for a two-year term.

Father was born in 1960 in Kenya and ordained by Cardinal Wilton Gregory in Chicago in 1995. He came to the Diocese as a Jesuit from the Eastern African Province and was incardinated in the Des Moines Diocese in 2024.

Father Nick Smith is going from parochial vicar at Christ the King in Des Moines to pastor at St. Patrick in Perry, for a six-year term.

He was born in 1996 in Des Moines, attended Dowling Cath-



Father Nick Stark

olic High School, St. John Vianney College Seminary and St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He was ordained in 2022. After ordination, Father Smith served as parochial vicar at Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart Parish in Ankeny and Christ the King Parish in Des Moines.

Father Nick Stark, while remaining pastor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Carlisle, will offer sacramental and pastoral care to the Hispanic communities at St. Patrick in Lenox until Jan. 1, 2026.

He was born in 1995, attended Dowling Catholic High School, St. Pius X Seminary at Loras College, and St. Paul Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Father Stark was ordained in 2021.

After ordination, he served as parochial vicar at Christ the King Parish in Des Moines. In 2023, he began serving St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Carlisle.

Father Litto Thomas will move from pastor at St. Patrick in Perry to parochial vicar at St. Anthony in Des Moines for a two-year term.

Born in 1987 and educated in India and Rome, he was ordained in 2014. Father Thomas came to the Des Moines Diocese in 2019 and began serving at Corpus Christi Parish in Council Bluffs. He served as canonical administrator at St. Patrick in Corning and St. Patrick in Lenox, then as parochial vicar at Sacred Heart in West Des Moines. He has been serving at St. Patrick Parish in Perry since 2023.

PRIESTS EXTENDING TENURE IN 2025

Father Chinnappan Devaraj was granted a six-year extension of his tenure as pastor at St. Boniface Parish in Waukee.

Born in 1967, he was ordained in 1994. He was a member of the Order of Friars Minor in India before incardinating in the Diocese of Des Moines in 2018.

Since coming to the Diocese in 2017, Father has served at the following parishes: Ss. Peter and Paul in Atlantic; St. Mary in Anita; and St. Boniface Parish in Waukee.



Father Ken Halbur was granted a six-year extension of tenure as pastor at St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Ankeny.

Born in 1970, educated at Des Moines Area Community College in Ankeny, Conception Seminary College in Conception, Missouri, and Mundelein Seminary in Mundelein, Illinois, he was ordained in 2009.

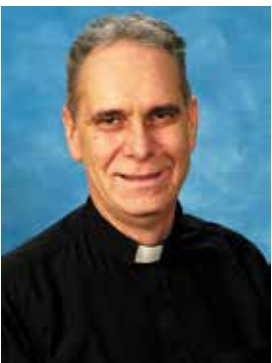
Since ordination, Father Halbur has served at the following parishes: St. Francis of Assisi in West Des Moines; St. Albert School and Corpus Christi Parish, both in Council Bluffs; Holy Spirit in Creston, St. Edward in Afton, and St. Luke the Evangelist in Ankeny.



Father Dan Siepker, having completed 12 years, will remain as pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Parish in Glenwood.

Born in 1958, he was educated at St. Lawrence Seminary in Wisconsin, Conception Seminary College in Conception, Missouri, Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, Sacred Heart School of Theology in Wisconsin, and did post graduate studies at the University of Notre Dame. Father Siepker was ordained in 1993.

He has served at the following parishes: Our Lady’s Immaculate Heart in Ankeny, St. Patrick in Corning, St. Patrick in Lenox, Ss. Peter and Paul in Atlantic, St. Mary in Anita, Sacred Heart in West Des Moines, and became pastor of Our Lady of the Rosary in Glenwood in 2013.



DEACON ASSIGNMENT

Deacon Michael Knipp will serve at St. Theresa Parish in Des Moines from April 7, 2025 to Aug. 30, 2026.

Find out what’s happening in the Catholic community by going to dmdiocese.org/events.

Tree hugging

Continued from page 2

long as it is moderated and not violently unleashed in the manner of last year’s tornadoes that top-pled even wind turbines.

Versus a naturalistic mindset where God is optional or even represents a noxious interloper, committed Christians endowed with the Spirit of the Risen Christ who transforms human persons and, indeed, the whole cosmos into a new creation, are not cranky or sullen but perpetually on the brink of Easter joy set free. Antiqua et Nova, “Old and New,” a note regarding Artificial Intelligence from the Vatican’s Dicasteries for the Doctrine of the Faith and for Culture and Education, I submit, effectively recasts Earth Day in a more comprehensive, Easter-bathed light.

The note maintains, “In a proper relationship with creation, humans, on the one hand, use their intelligence and skill to cooperate with God in guiding creation to-

ward the purpose to which he has called it. On the other hand, creation itself, as Saint Bonaventure observes, helps the human mind to ‘ascend gradually, to the supreme Principle, who is God.’ ”

Human intelligence exceeds AI in the capacity of whole persons to engage reality in the “full scope of one’s being: spiritual, cognitive, embodied, and relational.” (AN nn, 25, 26).

The prospect of personally experiencing truth, goodness, unity and beauty transcends any binomial distribution calculator. This is preeminently the case in the event of Christ’s Resurrection which prophets and Jesus himself foretold but even when confronted with evidence, skeptical Pharisees, priests, and scribes dismissed. And this is sad, for to deny or ignore Easter is to reduce or even reject our hope of lasting joy. For the truth that Jesus lives, never more to die, is the access code interpreting all reality, drawing all of our experiences into the

environment of God’s enduring, saving love.

“Intelligence is nothing with delight,” contends the French poet Paul Claudel (AN n. 28). To make the act of Easter faith in a Risen Lord who remains among us in the sacramentality of all creation, in Spirit-led persons, in the Church, is the highest act of which our intellects are capable. It is a prelude to the same delight familiar to the disciples who met Jesus alive after his death.

This is a mystery worth contemplating, but eventually we need to get up and do something—maybe even go for a walk, behold and smell the Spring flowers, or sing a song. Even better, offer a word or gesture of love to someone for whom suffering presently prevails over joy. For starters, today and every day of the Easter Season, I’m going to begin by embracing a tree—the tree of Christ’s Cross.

Happy Easter, alleluia, alleluia!



Bishop William Joensen reflects, if we “linger before the Crucifix on a daily basis, it is not a stretch to sense that Jesus bends down to embrace us as he does St. Bernard in the tear-inducing image by Francesco Ribalta that hangs in the Prado Museum in Madrid.”

Abrazando Árboles

Continued from page 2

sofoque, que ate sus manos y sus extremidades cuando la madera de la cruz se convierte en una tarima de sufrimiento que carga con el peso de la indiferencia cruel y callosa del mundo ante quien concede todos los dones, ante aquel por quien se han creado todas las cosas.

El admirar y abrazar esta Cruz con el Salvador quien se eleva ante nosotros, no es algo para los faltos de valor. Estamos comprometidos por nuestros propios pecados personales que causan dolor a los demás, pero no debemos paralizarnos por la vergüenza. Debemos motivarnos más allá de nuestros propios reproches que nos convierten en un agujero negro de enojo, auto contemplación e incluso desesperación. Jesús volte a ver a su Padre por nuestro bien suplicando su per-

dón y luego fija su tierna mirada con todos aquellos cuya fe los llama a permanecer presentes en él durante su Pasión.

Y si estamos habitual y místicamente inclinados a contemplar el Crucifijo diariamente, nos es una exageración el sentir que Jesús se inclina para abrazarnos como lo hace con San Bernardo en la conmovedora imagen de Francisco Ribalta que cuelga del Museo del Prado en Madrid: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/christ-embracing-saint-bernard/f878e05f-b1b9-4cb0-b182-152e611bcec5>.

Pero Jesús fue crucificado una sola vez y para siempre; él ya no está en la tumba, sino que ha resucitado de entre los muertos en la mañana de Pascua. En la rica reflexión sobre el amor de Cristo en la que me he inspirado para esta columna, el Papa Fran-

cisco reconoce, “nos preguntamos cómo es posible relacionarnos con el Cristo vivo, resucitado, plenamente feliz, y al mismo tiempo consolarlo en la pasión.” Él nos aconseja, “Consideremos el hecho de que el Corazón resucitado conserva su herida como memoria constante, y que la acción de la gracia provoca una experiencia que no se contiene enteramente en el instante cronológico” (Dilexit nos, “Nos amó,” n. 155). La fe llena de Gracia que se expresa por un corazón que ama más allá del entendimiento natural de nuestra mente.

Misteriosamente, esta es una de las pocas situaciones de vida en donde podemos combinar dos aspectos contrarios, el sufrimiento y el gozo se juntan cuando el tiempo y el espacio se rinden ante el Misterio Pascual de la Pasión, la Muerte y la Resurrección de Cristo. El Papa Francisco continúa: “Las separaciones temporales que nuestra mente utiliza no parecen contener la verdad de esta experiencia creyente donde se funden la unión con Cristo sufriente y a la vez la potencia, el consuelo y la amistad que gozamos con el Resucitado” (DN n. 156).

Este año, el Martes de Cuaresma, el 22 de abril, coincide con la 55ª edición del Día de la Tierra, cuyo tema es. “Nuestro Poder, Nuestro Planeta,” enfocándose en aumentar la dependencia en energía renovable. Tal ocasión busca celebrar: “Celebramos esta realidad transformadora: que ya contamos con las soluciones necesarias para crear energías limpias, barata e ilimitadas para todo el planeta por medio de tecnologías renovables solares,

eólicas y otras.” Ciertamente, como habitantes de Iowa, sentimos el dominante potencial de la energía eólica extenderse por la pradera, siempre y cuando puedan moderarse y que no se afecten violentamente como lo fue por los tornados del año pasado que derrumbaron varias torres de aire.

Enfrentados a una mentalidad naturalista en donde Dios es opcional o que incluso representa a un molesto intruso, los cristianos dedicados y comprometidos con el Espíritu de Cristo Resucitado que transforma a las personas humanas y, ciertamente, a todo el cosmos en una nueva creación, nos son personas irritables o gruñonas, sino que están permanentemente esperando que se libere el gozo de la Cuaresma. Antiqua et Nova, “Viejo y Nuevo,” una nota respecto a la Inteligencia Artificial por parte de los Dicasterios para la Doctrina de la Fe y para la Cultura y la Educación del Vaticano, considero, reproducen efectivamente el Día de la Tierra en una Tierra bañada en luz más comprensiva.

La nota sostiene que, “En una relación adecuada con la creación, por un lado, los seres humanos emplean su inteligencia y habilidad para cooperar con Dios en guiar la creación hacia el propósito al que Él la ha llamado, mientras que, por otra parte, el mismo mundo, como observa san Buenaventura, ayuda a la mente humana a «ascender gradualmente, como por los distintos escalones de una escalera, hasta el sumo principio que es Dios.” La inteligencia humana supera la IA en la capacidad de las personas plenas se involucran en la realidad en la “totalidad del ser: espiritual, cognitivo, corporal y relacional.” (AN nos., 25, 26).

El prospecto de vivir personalmente la verdad, la bondad, la unidad y la belleza que trasciende cualquier calculadora de distribución binomial. Este es preeminentemente el caso en el evento de la Resurrección de Cristo que los profetas y Jesús mismo anunciaban pero que cuando se confrontaba con evidencia, la ignoraban los fariseos, sacerdotes y escribas en su escepticismo. Y esto es algo triste, porque el negar o ignorar la Pascua es rebajar o incluso rechazar nuestra esperanza del gozo eterno. Porque la verdad de que Jesús vive, para no morir nunca más, es la clave de acceso que interpreta toda la realidad, atrayendo todas nuestras experiencias hacia el ambiente del amor duradero y salvador de Dios.

“La inteligencia es nada sin deleite” afirma el poeta Paul Claudel (AN núm. 28). El hacer el acto de la fe Pascual en el Señor Resucitado que permanece entre nosotros en el sacramento de toda la creación, en personas guiadas por el Espíritu, en la Iglesia, es el mayor acto que pueden entender nuestros intelectos. Son el preludio al mismo gozo familiar de los discípulos que encontraron a Jesús vivo luego de su muerte.

Este es un misterio que vale la pena contemplar, pero que eventualmente necesitaremos levantarnos y hacer algo – tal vez salir a caminar, admirar y oler las flores primaverales, o cantar una canción. Más aún, ofrecer una frase o un gesto de amor a alguien cuyo sufrimiento reprime su gozo. Para empezar, hoy y todos los días de la temporada Pascual, voy a comenzar abrazando un árbol – el árbol de la Cruz de Cristo.

¡Felices Pascuas, aleluya, aleluya!

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Changes in refugee ministry

By Bobbi Jo Smith
Contributing Writer

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops made the announcement on April 7 that it would end its agreements with the federal government related to children’s services and refugee support, citing the government’s decision to stop welcoming refugees.

On Jan. 20, President Donald Trump issued an executive order banning refugees from coming to the United States. Refugees are people fleeing their homeland because of violence, war, or persecution, and who are vetted and cleared by the U.S. government to seek refuge in the United States.

The federal government contracted with the USCCB to help resettle refugees. Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Des Moines empowered individuals and strengthened refugee families by helping them secure housing, learn how to use public transportation, enroll children in school, find jobs, and more.

Catholic Charities had planned to resettle 425 refugees this fiscal year. They resettled 121 between October and Jan. 20, when the flow of incoming refugees ended.

With no new refugees coming, and the federal government still owing Catholic Charities for work already accomplished, The Des Moines diocesan agency had to eliminate eight staff positions of those who directly served newly arriving refugee clients in late February.

Earlier this month, the USCCB notified Catholic Charities that it will also be terminating its relationship with the Office of Refugee Resettlement, effectively eliminating the future of post-resettlement work with refugee clients via any partnership with the federal government. The remaining six staff positions of those who served clients in a

more long-term way have now also been eliminated from the local agency.

Moving forward, Catholic Charities remains focused on providing the most robust care possible for the vulnerable communities that they serve, including our refugee neighbors, through new programming. A Community Resource Coordinator will help the marginalized among us navigate their way to the support they need and deserve within their community.

“While this marks a painful end to a life-sustaining partnership with our government that has spanned decades across administrations of both political parties, it offers every Catholic an opportunity to search our hearts for new ways to assist,” said Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the USCCB.

He called the decision heartbreaking.

“For half a century, we have been willing partners in implementing the government’s refugee resettlement program. The Gospel’s call to do what we can for the least among us remains our guide,” he said. “We ask you to join us in praying for God’s grace in finding new ways to bring hope where it is most needed.”

“While our direct support for the refugee community is changing, our love and care for them will never cease,” said Mike Sheehy, executive director of the local Catholic Charities agency.

“Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Des Moines has existed to serve the less fortunate among us for more than 100 years and we remain committed to being Christ’s hands and feet here in central and southwest Iowa. Our mission to empower individuals and strengthen families has never felt more important than when we ourselves are also faced with adversity,” he said.



Shalom Lule, of Catholic Charities, is pictured above helping a refugee learn how to ride public transportation in Des Moines. At right, he helps a refugee learn about the United States.



2025 St. Katherine Drexel Route

As the three-year National Eucharistic Revival in the United States draws to a close on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage is excited to launch the **St. Katharine Drexel Route** from Indianapolis to Los Angeles.

The 2025 Drexel Route opens with a Mass of Thanksgiving in Indianapolis on Sunday, May 18th. The St. Katharine Drexel Route will be stopping in Des Moines on **May 27th** for a Holy Hour with Eucharistic Adoration followed by Mass at St. Ambrose Cathedral.

May 27, 2025

St. Ambrose Cathedral, Des Moines, IA 50309

Eucharistic Adoration

11:00 AM - 12:10 PM

You are invited to join the Perpetual Pilgrims for Exposition and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in downtown Des Moines at the St. Ambrose Cathedral.

Mass

12:10 PM - 12:50 PM

Following Benediction you are invited to stay for the celebration of the Holy Mass.



Scan the QR code to learn more and register.
dmdiocese.org/2025NEP

Full time Music and Liturgy Coordinator

St. John’s Catholic Church in Adel is hiring a full time Music and Liturgy Coordinator. The Coordinator facilitates the worship and sacramental life of the parish community through music and liturgical planning, preparation, and coordination. The qualified candidate will be a practicing Catholic with knowledge of scripture, liturgy and liturgical music and be proficient in at least one performance area, keyboard, choral, voice, etc. Personal or professional experience in music leadership preferred. Please send your resume, cover letter and references to Rev. Michael Hutchison, office@stjohnsadel.org

Director of Faith Formation

Our Lady of Holy Rosary Parish in Glenwood is hiring a full time Director of Faith Formation for preschool through High School. This includes sacramental preparation, family and youth activities, and forming catechists.

For more information contact Father Dan Siepker at 712-527-5211. To apply for the position, send a resume with references to holyrosarych@msn.com.

Wishing you and your family a Blessed Easter



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