Violence fixes nothing; world needs politics of peace

BY CAROL GLATZ
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY — Calling for a new style of politics built on peace and nonviolence, Pope Francis also called for disarmament, the eradication of nuclear weapons and an end to domestic violence and abuse against women and children.

Violence is not the cure for our broken world, he said in his annual message for the World Day of Peace, Jan. 1. It is a challenge to build up society, communities and businesses by acting as peacemakers. It is to show mercy by refusing to discard people, harm the environment or seek to win at any cost, he added.

The message, released by the Vatican Dec. 12, said building a world of peace requires a willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it part of a new process of choosing solidarity and building friendships.

Active nonviolence is a way of showing that unity is truly more powerful and more fruitful than conflict, the pope said. While differences will sometimes lead to difficulties, let us face them constructively and non-violently, so that tension and opposition can turn into diversified and life-giving unity, preserving what is valid and useful on both sides.

His message, which the Vatican sends to heads of state around the world, invited everyone to banish violence from our hearts, words and deeds, and to become nonviolent people and to build nonviolent communities that care for our common home.

Building a new politics of nonviolence starts in the human heart and the home, he said.

It is in the family that people can learn how to communicate, be generous and caring, and resolve conflicts not by force but by dialogue, respect, concern for the good of the other, mercy and forgiveness.

From within the family, the joy of love spills out into the world and radiates to the whole of society, he said.

This ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence can never be based on the logic of fear, violence and closed-mindedness, but on responsibility, respect and sincere dialogue.

Hence, I plead for disarmament and for the prohibition and abolition of nuclear weapons: nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction are incapable of grounding such an ethics, he said. I plead with equal urgency for an end to domestic violence and to the abuse

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Praying for more priests

I am writing to share with you some important information and to seek your assistance. God has blessed this diocese with many wonderful and dedicated priests. I am proud of and deeply grateful for the priests who serve the people of God across the Diocese of Rapid City. They live as true witnesses of the love and mercy of the Lord, day in and day out. This is good news. Please be grateful for all they do for you and continue to pray for them daily.

But I also want to share with you some not-so-good news about the priests’ situation in the diocese, seeking your daily prayers for this situation as well.

The Diocese of Rapid City currently has seven men in seminary formation for the priesthood. This is good news. However, we had no ordinations this past year and the next ordination to the priesthood for our diocese is not scheduled until the summer of 2019, if the man currently in Theology II discerns this through to completion.

We also have priests who are moving into retirement. Fr. Bill Zandri retired last July, although he is still active in hospital and nursing home ministry. Another priest is due to retire in July 2017. Due to health issues of two of our active priests, we are already short on clergy personnel for this current year. Fr. Ed Vanorny has come out of retirement to cover a cluster of parishes in Harding and Perkins Counties.

In addition, Fr. Godfrey Muwanga and Fr. John Lule, who are on loan from Uganda, have been serving for almost ten years and their status in our diocese is year-to-year. Fr. Andrea Benso, who has been here on loan from Italy, will be returning home to his diocese next June. In addition, the two Jesuit priests serving at the Sioux Spiritual Center will also be taking new assignments, thus leaving a void in the ministry which they have been providing.

Also, Fr. Brian Christensen will complete his assignment in Rome and return to the diocese in July 2017. Taking all of this into consideration, there will be a shortage of at least one priest, and maybe more, if the Ugandan priests are called home.

So as you can see, the priest personnel situation leaves a challenging reality in covering our current places for ministry into the coming years. People may inquire, “Why don’t you get more priests from outside the diocese to come here?” This is much more difficult than one thinks. Obviously, in doing so, it would have to be the right person — one who would fit well into the culture of our local church.

St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Corinthians, “But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.”

Yes, we are one body of Christ in the Diocese of Rapid City. If one parish is affected, all parishes are affected. A shortage of two priests or even one priest has an impact across the whole diocese. Any adjustment to the number of parishes we can serve will impact more than just one parish. “Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.” We all must become concerned about these challenges in our diocese.

Therefore, while I wanted you to be aware of this situation, I am also asking each of you to take seriously the call to pray daily for vocations to the priesthood in our diocese. But I am also asking that each of you pray daily for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our diocese and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this endeavor to find more priests to serve here, so that there will not be a shortage in this coming year and the years to follow.

Be assured of my prayers for all of you and your families. May Christ’s peace and love be the source and meaning of your lives.

Why anew Prayer for Vocations?

Over the course of the past year, the diocese has worked hard in creating the Diocesan Priority Plan — a framework for ministry over the course of the next three to five years. There has been much discussion regarding the need to increase the number of seminarians in order to maintain or even increase our current level of priests serving the diocese.

In the Diocesan Priority Plan, Vocations is one of our foundational ministries and remains an important focus. An emphasis will be in promoting a culture of vocations, not only in the diocese as a whole, but in every parish and in every family. One of the core values in the Priority Plan is the family. Some of the behaviors under this value specifically address the truth that the seeds of a vocation to priesthood or consecrated life are grounded in family where couples are intentionally living their vocation to marriage.

To that end, it was felt that a new vocation prayer could assist in this endeavor. The new Prayer for Vocations reflects this focus in the Priority Plan and makes a connection to the mission statement of the diocese as well. Praying a new prayer gives us all the opportunity to pray these new words with a lively faith.

In time, they will be printed as prayer cards and made available in all parishes.

New Diocesan Prayer for Vocations

Invitation: We ask for God’s blessing on those discerning a vocation to priesthood, diaconate, marriage or consecrated life as we pray our Vocations Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
Inflame our hearts with the fire of your love.
Inspire our families to eagerly say “yes” to the Holy Spirit, as did Mary and Joseph.
Help our parishes become schools of prayer, forming intentional disciples of Jesus who desire to live for him.

Assist us in building a culture of vocations, creating an environment where all disciples will seek your will for their lives.

Teach married couples to live their vocation in the Spirit of Christ so that their families may become a “domestic Church,” reflecting the life of the Trinity.

Inspire young men and women to seek a living encounter with your Son so that they will courageously respond to your call to priesthood or consecrated life, giving themselves generously to the Church in service of the Gospel.

We ask Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother, to intercede for us.

Pour out anew upon our diocese your Holy Spirit and make us courageous witnesses of Christ’s love. May our lives “attract and form intentional disciples who joyfully, boldly and lovingly proclaim and live the mission of Jesus Christ, leading to eternal life.”

We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.
### Bishop's Calendar
**January 17-February 12, 2016**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>January 17, Tuesday</strong></td>
<td>8 a.m. Diocesan Staff Mass/Breakfast, Terra Sancta</td>
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<td>9:15 a.m. Diocesan Department Head Meeting, Terra Sancta</td>
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<td><strong>January 23, Monday</strong></td>
<td>5 p.m. Rapid City Catholic School System Board Meeting, Cathedral</td>
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<td><strong>January 24, Tuesday</strong></td>
<td>6:30 p.m. Catholic Social Services Board Meeting, CSS office</td>
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<td><strong>January 27, Friday</strong></td>
<td>10:30 a.m. Priest Retirement/Aid Association Board Meeting, Chancery</td>
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<td>1 p.m. Consultiors, Chancery</td>
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<td>5 p.m. Bishop’s Gathering for Priests, Bishop’s Residence</td>
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<td><strong>January 28, Saturday</strong></td>
<td>8 a.m. Social Justice Workshop, Terra Sancta</td>
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<td>10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Sioux Spiritual Center Board Meeting, Chancery</td>
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<td><strong>January 29, Sunday</strong></td>
<td>10 a.m. Mass and Parish Center Dedication, Holy Cross, Timber Lake</td>
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<td>3 p.m. BHSU Newman Fundraiser, Rapid City Newman Center</td>
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<td><strong>January 30, Monday</strong></td>
<td>9 a.m. National Catholic Schools Week All School Mass, Cathedral</td>
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<td>11 a.m. Presbyteral Council, Chancery</td>
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<td>5:30 p.m. “Men in Black” Basketball event, St. Thomas More High School</td>
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<td><strong>February 2, Thursday</strong></td>
<td>11:30 a.m. Western South Dakota Catholic Foundation Board, Chancery</td>
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<td><strong>February 3, Friday</strong></td>
<td>11:15 a.m. First Friday Mass/Lunch (with St. Blase Throat Blessing), Cathedral</td>
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<td><strong>February 4, Saturday</strong></td>
<td>1:15 p.m. Veritatis Splendor Institute, Terra Sancta</td>
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<td><strong>February 12, Sunday</strong></td>
<td>9 a.m. CT Pre-Confirmation Meeting, St. John, Ft. Pierre</td>
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<td>10 a.m. CT Confirmation Mass, St. John, Ft. Pierre</td>
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<td>6:30 p.m. Dinner with BHSU students, BHSU Newman Center, Spearfish</td>
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**Subject to change without notice**

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### A Note of Thanks...
Thank you all for the wonderful farewell gatherings, kind words, notes and gifts. It has been a blessing to be a part of the Diocese of Rapid City for so long and I will truly miss it. Thank you all for your support and assistance throughout the years.

God bless you,
Suzie Lambert

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### Married Sweethearts Mass & Dinner-Dance
**Saturday, February 11, 2017**
Terra Sancta Retreat Center, Rapid City

- **Mass 5:30 p.m.**
  Holy Cross Chapel.
- **Dinner and dance to follow.**
- **Tickets** $65 per couple
- **Registration deadline** Tuesday, Jan. 31, 2017
- Sponsored by **Family Life Ministries**
  2101 City Springs Rd., Ste 200, Rapid City, SD 57702
- **Contact Amy Julian**
  Director of Family Life Ministries,
  605-712-5214 x236

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### FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT
**A CATHOLIC MEN’S CONFERENCE**
**APRIL 29, 2017**

[Website Link: WWW.JOURNEMENS.COM]
of women and children.

The church contributes by seeking to limit the use of force by applying moral norms, and many Christians contribute by drafting legislation.

To be true followers of Jesus today also includes embracing his teaching about nonviolence, he said, and following his practice of tackling evil with love and truth.

In fact, an important manual for peacemaking, he said, is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, where he presented the Beatitudes. Applying the Beatitudes, which outlines how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life.

When victims of violence resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peacemaking in the tradition of those who struggled actively and nonviolently for change such as St. Teresa of Kolkata, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and the thousands of women in Liberia who helped end their nation's civil war, Pope Francis wrote.

Many religious traditions contribute by promoting compassion and nonviolence and protecting victims of injustice, he said. For that reason, I emphatically reaffirm that 'no religion is terrorist' and the name of God can never be used to justify violence. Peace alone is holy. Peace alone is holy, not war!

In the most local and ordinary situations and in the international order, he wrote, may nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms.

Speaking with reporters at the Vatican, Cardinal Peter Turkson said the pope's message was meant to remind people that active nonviolence is not a utopian idea but is a truly feasible path.

“Diplomacy and the hope for peace negotiations must never be neglected because the diplomatic channel always gives us the possibility for dialogue where all sides can speak face-to-face,” said the cardinal, who is president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. He will serve as prefect of the new Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, which will consolidate the work of four pontifical councils.

He said the new dicastery will be conducting a deeper reflection on the appropriateness of how the traditional Catholic just-war theory is being used today.

While there are no plans for a papal encyclical on the subject, he said the dicastery will organize a number of seminars and events to bring in experts to discuss various points of view on the theory that some wars can be justified in order to analyze the findings and publish the conclusions.

“A deeper reflection is needed,” he told reporters, “because just-war criteria are not always used for their original intent of preventing or discouraging war. Now it is used for other different reasons,” he said.
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The gift of Christmas is now behind us. We give thanks for the presence of the newborn king in our lives.

The Annual Diocesan Appeal for 2017 is well underway and many of our faithful have sown seeds in this year’s appeal. The prayers and generous support of many have provided the seeds for abundant fruit in our diocese allowing us to continue the Lord’s work, building God’s kingdom. I am deeply grateful.

If we have not yet received your pledge of support for this year, I invite you to join the many Catholics across the diocese in supporting our mission. Please take time to reflect upon the many blessings the Lord has given you and your family, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal what the Lord is asking in light of supporting this year’s diocesan appeal. Your generous support sows the seeds necessary for a plentiful harvest in carrying forward Christ’s work in western South Dakota.

May we all come to experience more deeply the joy of making our return to the Lord for his many blessings. As this New Year begins, it is my hope and prayer that God’s grace and peace will be poured upon you and your families in abundance.

Sincerely in the peace and joy of Christ,

Most Rev. Robert D. Gruss
Bishop of Rapid City

Diocese of Rapid City Annual Diocesan Appeal 2017

☐ I will pray for the appeal and those it serves.

PLEASE PRINT:

NAME__________________________________________

SPOUSE________________________________________

PHONE #________________________________________

STREET__________________________________________

CITY____________________________________________

STATE__________________________ZIP________________

PARISH________________________________________

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERFUL SUPPORT
OF OUR DIOCESAN MINISTRIES

| Total Pledge | $ |
| Enclosed     | $ |
| Pledge Balance* | $ |

PLEASE, NO GIFT IS TOO SMALL.
Make check payable to:
Diocese of Rapid City Annual Appeal
Mail to: P.O. Box 678, Rapid City, SD 57709-0678

If interested in an automatic bank payment or credit card payment, please contact your parish office for a pledge envelope or call Elizabeth Siemieniak, 605-343-3541.

*Reminder statements are mailed quarterly.
For a complete listing of diocesan ministries, see the appeal brochure.
Catholics in Congress: one-third of House, one-quarter of Senate

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The religious makeup of the 115th Congress is significantly Christian — 91 percent — with Catholics comprising one-third of the House of Representatives and about a quarter of the Senate. Overall, there are six fewer Christians in the new Congress, at 485 members. But there are four more Catholics, who now total 168. The high percentage of Christians in Congress is similar to the 87th Congress in 1961, when such information was first collected. At the time, 95 percent of Congress members were Christian. The data on the religious makeup of the current senators and representatives was collected by Pew Research Center and announced Jan. 3. The Pew report notes that the large number of Christians in Congress has shifted in recent years with a decline in the number of Protestants. In 1961, Protestants made up 87 percent of Congress, compared with 56 percent today. Catholics, conversely, made up 19 percent of the 87th Congress, and now are 31 percent of the legislative body.

Federal judge blocks HHS transgender regulation

AUSTIN, Texas (CNS) — A federal judge in Texas Dec. 31 blocked a regulation by the Department of Health and Human Services requiring Catholic hospitals and health care providers to perform or provide gender transition services, saying it would place “substantial pressure” on the plaintiffs — a coalition of religious medical organizations who said the ruling was contrary to their religious beliefs. “Plaintiffs will be forced to either violate their religious beliefs or maintain their current policies, which seems to be in direct conflict with the rule and risk the severe consequences of enforcement,” U.S. District Judge Reed O’Connor wrote. The injunction comes four months after the same judge blocked a federal directive requiring public schools to let transgender students use bathrooms consistent with their gender identity. The regulation from the Department of Health and Human Services requires that Catholic hospitals and health care providers perform or provide gender transition services, hormonal treatments and counseling as well as a host of surgeries that would remove or transform the sexual organs of men or women transitioning to the other gender. The HHS regulation requires group health plans to cover these procedures and services.

Pro-life groups set for annual March for Life

WASHINGTON (CNS) — For 600 marchers affiliated with the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota, the march will be a culmination of successful organizing and youthful enthusiasm in addition to substantial outside donations. Pro-life groups and Catholic parishes have organized the bus journeys for most of the 44 years of the march, which marks the 1973 U.S. Supreme Court decision in Roe v. Wade that legalized abortion virtually on demand.
January 19, Thursday

- Beginning Experience, Separated, Divorced & Widowed Support Group — Coping with Life Alone: Nine-week, non-denominational group open to all Christian men and women who are hurting following a separation, divorce or death of a spouse. Begins at 7 p.m. at St. Therese the Little Flower Church, Rapid City. Registration fee: $30; scholarship available. (Amy at Family Life Ministries, 605-716-5214 x236 or ajulian@diorc.org.

January 20, Friday

- Refuel: For all religious educators, youth ministers, and anyone involved in evangelization and catechesis. Speaker Jessi Kary, AO, national director of the Pro Sanctity Movement in the U.S. The movement is dedicated to spreading the universal call to holiness through the formation of internal holiness. Registration $65. Ends January 21. (Refuel2017.

January 28, Saturday

- Natural Family Planning: Seminar for engaged couples or anyone wanting to learn more about natural family planning. To be held at St. Therese the Little Flower, Rapid City. Preregistration required. Next seminar, February 18, at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City. (Family Life Ministries, 605-716-5214 x236.

- Diocesan Social Justice Workshop, “Care for Creation”: Do you know what the Catholic Church teaches about our responsibility to care for creation? Begins at 8 a.m. (Amy at Family Life Ministries, 605-716-5214 x236 or ajulian@diorc.org.

January 30, Monday

- “Heal your Grief” Bereavement Support Group: Eight-week, non-denominational support group for Christian adults grieving the loss of a loved one. Begins at 7 p.m. at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City. (Janece Rieman, 605-343-5547 or Amy, 605-716-5214 x236.

- Men in Black Basketball: Held at St. Thomas More High School, 5-8:30 p.m. The evening includes dinner and basketball games featuring students vs. faculty and high school boys vs. the priests of the diocese.

February 3, Friday


- World Apostolate of Fatima: First Friday Mass at 5:30 p.m. with prayers and devotions. First Saturday, February 4, begins with prayers at 7:45 a.m. followed by 8 a.m. Mass and exposition. Both in Our Lady’s Chapel, Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Dr. Kopriva 605-343-6202.

February 4, Saturday

- NPM Winter Meeting: Held at Our Lady of the Black Hills, Piedmont. Featured speaker Father Michel Mullloy will talk about the new Marriage Rite. Afternoon session features parish choirs demonstrating wedding appropriate psalms.

- Prayerful Painting: Using a Lectio format, prayerfully paint with the theme “Care for Creation.” Held at St. Martin Monastery from 9:15 a.m.-2:30 p.m. $20 includes lunch. (Sister Marie 605-343-8011.

February 8, Wednesday

- Taize: Experience the sacred through song, silence, and scripture. Held at 7 p.m. in Holy Cross Chapel, Terra Sancta.

February 10, Friday

- Heart to Heart Weekend for the Engaged: For engaged couples to deepen their relationship with each other and God by exploring the Catholic Church’s vision of marriage. Attendance is required for couples doing marriage prep in the diocese. Ends February 12. Register at (Terra Sancta.org/heart2heart/ or Amy 605-716-5214 x236.

- WorldWide Marriage Encounter: Renew the commitment, intimacy and passion in your marriage. Learn practical communication techniques and rediscover your hopes and dreams for your marriage. Held in Marvin. (www.sdwume.org or (John & Dawn, 605-359-1533 or applications@sdwume.org.

February 11, Saturday

- Ladies Afternoon Tea and Fashion Show: Enjoy an elegant event while learning the art of a perfect cup of tea with appetizers. Held at St. Therese the Little Flower Church, Rapid City, 2 p.m. $10 for those 12 and up, $6 for 6-12. Sponsord by Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Court St. Rita #916. RSVP with payment to Roxanne Stephens, 702 Odde Place, Rapid City, SD 57701. (605-787-3044.

- Married Sweethearts Mass & Dinner Dance: This year’s theme is “A Cord of Three Strands is not Easily Broken.” $65 per couple. Registration deadline January 31. See page 3.

February 18, Saturday

- Hills Area TEC: Three days of evangelization and initiation in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. For teens and young adults (17-25). Held at Terra Sancta. Applications available at www.rapidcitydiocese.org/recatecl/. Alan, HillsAreaTEC@gmail.com.

- Married Sweethearts Mass & Dinner Dance: This year’s theme is “A Cord of Three Strands is not Easily Broken.” $65 per couple. Registration deadline January 31. See page 3.

- Pastoral Ministry Days: This year’s theme is “Abide in Me” and will focus on Dedicated Discipleship: Creating Intentional Communities of Service to God and Neighbor. Keynote speakers are Father Michael White and Tom Corcoran, authors of “Rebuilt” and “Tools for Rebuilding.” $60 fee before March 15, $75 after. Held at Terra Sancta Retreat Center. Register online (TerraSancta.org/pmd2017/ or 605-716-0925. (Susan Safford, ssafford@diorc.org or Susan Thompson, sthompson@diorc.org for more information.

April 2, Sunday

- Commissioned Lay Ministers Meeting: For all Commissioned Lay Ministers in the Diocese of Rapid City. Held from 2-4 p.m. at Terra Sancta.

April 3, Monday

- Chrism Mass: The annual blessing of the holy oils for sacramental use in the coming year. Held at Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City, 7 p.m. Reception after Mass sponsored by the WSDCF.

Standing Events

- Shattered Hearts … A Grandparents Grief: For grandparents grieving the death of a grandchild. Meets the fourth Saturday from 9-10 a.m. at the Rapid City Public Library, Room B (upstairs). (Lynn 341-7663 or March Anne 342-9220.

- Centering Prayer: Held Wednesdays at 5 p.m. at Terra Sancta. Led by Sandi Ohlen. Please use south patio entrance and join the group in the Solarium at Terra Sancta.


- Prayer and Lector: Thursdays 6:30 p.m., St. Martin Monastery. (Sister Marmion Howe, OSB, 605-343-8011.

- Patriotic Rosary: Thursdays 6 p.m., Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City. (Ellen Robertson 605-718-9909.


- Family Rosary: Sundays, 7 p.m., St. Therese the Little Flower Church, Rapid City. (Mark Biggs 605-343-2467.

- Hope for New Life Jail Ministry: Third Monday, 7 p.m., Catholic Social Services. (Tony Galles 605-348-2301 or Mary Sperlich 605-342-9343.

- Vocation Discernment Retreats: (Sister Mary Wehger, OSB, 605-343-8011.

- Spiritual Direction: At St. Martin Monastery. (Sr. Margaret Hinker, OSB, Sr. Florence McManamen, OSB, or Sr. Edna Marie Stephenson, OSB, 605-343-8011.

- Divine Mercy Image: Would you like to host a traveling Divine Mercy Image in your home for up to 27 days to pray the Divine Chaplet/Novena? A rosary and information about the image are included. (Georgine 605-441-8140.

- Spanish Faith Study: Learn about the Catholic faith, from 5:45-7 p.m., at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City, room 107. Everyone welcome. (Aprendiendo nuestra Fe Catolica los Mieros de 5:45-7 p.m. Todos estan Bienvenidos, salon 107. Call Maria Munoz 605-791-3430.

- Tutors Volunteers Needed: Overcoming the language barrier ministry at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City, is looking for volunteers interested in helping adults with English reading, writing, and speaking skills. Participants will be introduced to the Lauback Way to Reading with an emphasis on English language learners. (Christine Leichtnarn 605-342-8598, cleichtna@rap.midco.net or Maria Munoz 605-791-3430.

Terra Sancta Retreat Center

Highlights

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Pope Francis called for a Jubilee Year of Mercy, December 8, 2015 through November 20, 2016 with the theme Misericordiae Vultus — Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. In Misericordiae Vultus, our Holy Father writes of mercy as being the very foundation of the church’s life. The very mission of the church, he noted, should be caught up in extending mercy through tender and compassionate love, not only to its own members, but also to all of God’s children. One of the great graces that sprung up in the Year of Mercy in a number of dioceses across the country, including our own, is “Mercy Night.” It is a candlelit evening of eucharistic adoration, prayerful music, healing prayers with the opportunity to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. Mercy Night is a call to rest in the heart of God’s mercy and to experience his peace. Mercy Night is open to people of faith from all denominations.

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help held the first Mercy Night in our diocese on Dec. 6. More than 500 hundred people participated in some way. There were 16 priests hearing confessions and most of them heard confessions for at least three hours. Four prayer teams prayed over people, asking the Lord for healing, for close connection with Christ and his church by making a pulpit announcement, putting a blurb in the bulletin, and then we call it good.

Yet, here is a parish that stood up and stepped out in faith, taking to heart the call to be part of the new evangelization. In 1990, Pope John Paul II wrote in Mission of the Redeemer: “I sense that the moment has come to commit all the Church’s energies to a new evangelization...No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.” The Mercy Night at the Cathedral embraced these words of St. John Paul II.

In Through Him, With Him and In Him: A Spiritual Guide to the Diocesan Priority Plan, Bishop Gruss writes, “If we are true to our mission statement and living the ‘mission of Jesus Christ, leading to eternal Gospel come to mind when I reflect upon my recent experiences of prayer ministry in the Diocese of Rapid City. On different occasions, I have prayed with others offering to intercede for them. “The reality that has struck me most during these prayer opportunities is the amount of suffering present in the world: sickness, loss, death, and disappointment. Yet, despite the pain many people carry, those that approached us made their requests for healing, reconciliation, and strength in great faith. Each individual that came forward suffered in some way and they brought their particular burden to the Lord to find rest.

“Maybe that rest was in the form of physical healing, tears, or laughter, but more often than not, I think people experienced rest in the peace they received as they entrusted their cares to the good Father, believing in faith that he would take care of them according to his will. Being able to stand privy to that dialogue of vulnerability has been a gift and has strengthened my own faith.”

While the Jubilee Year of Mercy is “officially” over, it continues to bear the fruit of many graces such as Mercy Night. If you, or someone you know, had a powerful encounter in the Year of Mercy, I would love to hear the story.

Father Mark McCormick
Director of Stewardship and Vocations
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New Year’s wishes for some Catholic brethren

2017 promises to be a challenging year for the Catholic Church. Thus some new year’s wishes:

I wish Catholic progressives a calmer 2017 than they managed in 2016. The last months of the year now facing into the rear-view mirror were marked by an extraordinary number of bilius attacks on those raising questions about Pope Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* from the party of dialogue, collegiality, and pluralism. The biliousness was, to be sure, replicated in spades on traditionalist websites; I’ll get to that momentarily. Still, the gang that regularly declares itself the cutting edge of a Catholicism that has “turned the page” and “moved on” displayed an astonishing amount of defensiveness (often couched in cheesey psychologizing) in 2016. That behavior hardly suggests people confident of their position and the future of their project.

I wish Catholic traditionalists a 2017 in which they take comfort from the fact that the living parts of the world church are those that have embraced all-in Catholicism, more formally known as the symphony of Catholic truth. The parallel fact, of course, is that Catholic Lite characterizes the dying parts of the church in Europe and elsewhere; but I hope no one, wherever they’re located on the Catholic map, takes any satisfaction from that meltdown. Facts are facts, though, and if the progressive “narrative” of a great contemporary Catholic renaissance under the banner of mercy is ill-supported by the data, so is the traditionalist lament that the end is at hand. Thirty-five years of building the church of the New Evangelization cannot be deconstructed in a relative blink of the eye. It just isn’t happening.

I wish for all those involved in the *Amoris Laetitia* debate in 2017 a serious wrestling with the bottom-line issue in this argument, which is the reality of revelation. Does Vatican II’s teaching that divine revelation judges history, including this historical moment and its sociological realities, still guide the church? Does the plain meaning of the words of Jesus and Paul on the character of marriage, and on worthy, life-giving reception of holy Communion, bind us as it has bound Christians for millennia? If not, why not? (And let’s discuss this without the red herring of “fundamentalism,” please.)

Might those committed to an interpretation of *Amoris Laetitia* that yields an “internal forum” solution to difficult marital situations explain how that approach will not lead to an Anglican-like unveling of doctrine? Might those who interpret *Amoris Laetitia* in light of the full teaching of St. John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* show us examples of how this approach has proven pastorally effective?

I wish for all 2017 *Amoris Laetitia* debaters a recognition that the confusions of “the faithful” about pastoral care for the divorced and remarried have less to do with sacramental discipline, the doctrine of grace, or the reality of revelation than with the nature of marriage itself. Contemporary western culture has dumbed marriage down to a mere contract of mutual convenience, perhaps marked by some measure of affection. That debasement is one facet of a general crisis caused by our culture’s defective idea of the human person: we’re all just twitching bundles of desires, and actualizing those desires through willfulness is the full meaning of freedom. What do all of us involved in the *Amoris Laetitia* debate have to say to that? What is each of us doing to heal the brokenness that inevitably results from freedom’s decay into license?

I wish for Pope Francis the tenacity and courage in 2017 to finish the job of Vatican financial reform he was elected to effect, without fear or favor, without calculation or temporizing. I wish the church a new year in which the New Evangelization is no longer impaired or threatened by Italianate corruption, a year in which norms of honesty and transparency are hard-wired into the Roman Curia — a year in which the people of the church are reassured that their gifts are directed to the evangelical purposes for which they’re intended.

Finally, I wish for all Catholics an effective solidarity with the persecuted church throughout the world. These are our brothers and sisters, and we owe them.
**Spirituality to biography: My favorite books of 2016**

So much of life, particularly today, constitutes an unconscious conspiracy against reading. Lack of time, the pressure of our jobs, and electronic technology, among other things, are more and more putting books out of reach and out of mind. There is never enough time to read. The upside of this is that when I do find time to pick up a book this becomes a precious, cherished time.

And so I try to pick books that I read carefully: I read reviews, listen to colleagues, and keep track of my favorite authors. I also try to make sure that my reading diet, each year, includes some spiritual books (including at least one historical classic), some biographies, some novels, and some essays.

Among the books that I read this year, these are the ones that touched me. I can’t promise that they will touch you, but each of them left me with something.

**Among books in spirituality:**

Gil Bailie, “God’s Gamble, The Gravitational Power of Crucified Love.” Bailie again takes up Rene Girard’s anthropology to shed some new light on how the cross of Christ is the most monumental moral and religious event in history. The text is very dense and (truly) a tough read, but its insights are exceptional.

Heather King, “Shirt of Flame, A Year with Saint Therese of Lisieux.” This book will make for a very good, private retreat for anyone struggling with an addiction or obsession, or just with mediocrity in his or her spiritual life.

Christophe Lebreton, “Born From the Gaze of God, The Tibhirine Journal of Martyr Monk, 1993-1996.” This is the diary of one of the Trappist monks who was murdered in Algeria in 1996. It is the intimate journal of a young man which chronicles how he moves from paralyzing fear to the strength for martyrdom.

Kathleen Dowling Singh, two books: “The Grace in Dying” and “The Grace in Aging.” According to Singh, the process of aging and dying is exquisitely calibrated to bring us into the realm of spirit. In these two remarkable books, she traces this out with the depth that, outside of the great classical mystics, I have not seen.

Christine M. Bochen, Editor, “The Way of Mercy.” This is a series of remarkable essays on mercy, including some by Pope Francis and Walter Kasper.

Anonymous, “The Cloud of Unknowing.” I finally had the chance to study this classic in some depth and it is, no doubt, the signature book on contemplation and centering prayer.

**Among biographies and essays:**

Marilynne Robinson, “The Givenness of Things, Essays.” These essays are dense, deep, robustly sane, and are Marilynne Robinson, the gifted novelist, at her religious best.

Michael N. McGregor, “Pure Act, The Uncommon Life of Robert Lax.” This is the biography of the man who was Thomas Merton’s closest soul-friend, lived out his life as a secular monk, and who carried his solitude at a very high and noble level. It will help re-awaken your idealism.

Fernando Cardenal, “Faith and Joy, Memoirs of a Revolutionary Priest” This is a great read about an exceptional man, a Christian prophet, and this is an excellent selection of his writings.

**Three novels that I recommend:**

Paul Hawkins, “The Girl on the Train.” This didn’t make for a great movie, but the book is a page-turner.

Ian McEwan, Nutshell and Edna O’Brien, “The Little Red Chairs.” The pedigree of these authors alone is enough of a recommendation, but neither will disappoint you here.

A wildcard, Kenneth Rolheiser, “Dreamland and Soulscapes, A Prairie Love Story.” Full disclosure, Kenneth is my brother and I lived through many of the stories he shares, so there is admittedly a huge bias here. But the book delivers on its title and will give you a more realistic sense of what it was like to grow up in a Little House on the Prairie.

Happy reading!
Catholic-Muslim dialogue opens to support Islamic American communities

BY JAMES MARTONE
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — An emerging Catholic dialogue with Muslims aims to show public support for Islamic American communities.

The dialogue stems from concerns expressed by U.S. bishops in the wake of “a serious uptick in violence against American Muslims ... to make sure that they are sensitive to what is going on in the (Muslim) communities,” said Anthony Cirelli, associate director of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The dialogue, underway since last February, will build on three already existing regional Catholic-Muslim dialogues, also overseen by the secretariat. Those gatherings helped establish “wider ties and religious leaders and have focused largely on academic discussions and comparisons of their respective religious texts, Cirelli said.

“While our meetings will still have as a central component the all-important theological conversation, right now there is an urgency to engage more in a kind of advocacy and policy in support of the Muslim community,” Cirelli told Catholic News Service.

Cirelli cited statistics documenting a higher number of anti-Muslim activities nationwide as well as a recent study by The Bridge Initiative, a Georgetown University research project on Islamophobia, showing that Catholics who regularly obtained information from Catholic media were more likely to unfavorably view Muslims than those who did not. The creation of the dialogue was motivated by the call of Nostra Aetate, the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on the relations with non-Christian religions.

“As the national conversation around Islam grows increasingly fraught, coarse and driven by fear and often willful misinformation, the Catholic Church must help to model real dialogue and goodwill,” Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski of Springfield, Massachusetts, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, said at the time the dialogue started in February.

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago was designated as the dialogue’s Catholic chairman and assumed the position Jan. 1, 2017, Cirelli said.

Cardinal Cupich explained that the regional dialogues helped establish “wider ties of friendship, collaboration on projects of mutual interest and greater theological understanding” facilitated by scholars in each group. The successes of the regional dialogues over the past 20 years made a national dialogue possible, he said.

Beyond building relationships, the national dialogue will “strive to contribute tangible fruits ... that benefit not only those who pray and worship in our churches and mosques but also the American public and the international community of Christians and Muslims as each tries to replace narratives of hate and distrust with love and affection,” Cardinal Cupich said.

The next dialogue is set for March 7-9 in Chicago. On March 8, Bishop McElroy will discuss the common good tradition in the Catholic Church. An Islamic scholar will address hospitality in the Quran.

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BY TERESA SPIESS

At the First Friday Luncheon on December 2, Bishop Robert Gruss talked to participants about the Strategic Plan that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has approved for 2017-2022 www.usccb.org/about/strategic-plan.cfm.

The December West River Catholic carried a brief story about the USCCB strategic plan on page 6: “U. S. Bishops’ strategic plan similar to diocesan priority plan.” What Bishop Gruss pointed out was the many connections between this plan, which he received at the USCCB meeting on November 15, and our own Diocesan Pastoral Priority Plan, which he published in his pastoral letter, Through Him, With Him and In Him.

The USCCB plan is a reminder that the church is universal. We are connected by the mission of Jesus Christ with Catholics across our country. The common themes in the USCCB Strategic Plan and the Priority Plan of the Diocese of Rapid City are a source of hope and reassurance for our local church. We are in step with the wider church in America. Following our Priority Plan will help us to move forward in union with the church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, through the love of our Lord.

Structurally, the documents are a bit different. The USCCB plan has five strategic priorities, which are filled out with emphasis areas. The plan is backed up by operational plans for 34 committees, subcommittees and departments. The operational plans contain objectives and activities for fulfilling the priorities.

Our plan has six core values, three pastoral priorities and five foundational ministries. The core values are defined and behaviors to enforce the values are described. The pastoral priorities and foundational ministries have supporting goals.

The first strategic priority for the USCCB plan is evangelization. It was described as:

**EVANGELIZATION**

Open wide the doors to Christ through missionary discipleship and personal encounter.

The USCCB emphasis areas for evangelization are:

- **Go into all communities** with the message of eternal salvation to awaken all God’s people through a personal encounter and relationship with Jesus. This call to discipleship should be addressed particularly to the marginalized and those most in need of Christ’s merciful love.
- **Inspire youth and young adults** to enter into the joy of a sacramental relationship with Christ.
- **Rekindle the fire** of Christ’s mercy, reconciliation, and healing among those who no longer attend or have left the Church.
- **Foster personal commitment** among Catholics to faithful weekly participation in the celebration of the source and summit of our faith, the holy Eucharist.

Although organized differently, these ideas sound very familiar to those who have read the Priority Plan of the Diocese of Rapid City.

**CORE VALUES OF THE DIOCESE OF RAPID CITY**

Our core value of Prayer includes a call to daily prayer to renew a personal encounter with Christ and an encouragement for everyone to actively participate in Sunday Eucharist and celebration of sacraments.

Our core value of Stewardship is described as living a life of generous hospitality, lively faith and dedicated discipleship. Evangelization through invitation is the first behavior described for this value, which really touches on all of the emphasis areas in the USCCB priority.

Solidarity is the third value in our plan, and the behaviors described for Solidarity include reaching out to others, particularly those who are marginalized.

Our values of Mercy and Charity include the mercy, reconciliation and healing that the USCCB plan points to in “Rekindle the fire.”

In our value of Family we include the call for families to educate and form youth in the faith.

**OUR FOUNDATIONAL MINISTRIES**

The USCCB priority of Evangelization is also directly or indirectly supported by each of our Foundational Ministries: Sacraments & Worship, Education & Formation, Governance & Finance, Social Services & Outreach, and Vocations & Evangelization. The quote from Matthew 28 which is listed under Vocations & Evangelization in our plan is a reminder to us that we are an evangelical people, called to share the Gospel with others. “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

May Jesus, who has promised to be with us, bless these plans of the USCCB and of the Diocese of Rapid City, and plant his Spirit deep in us so that we may use these plans to build up his kingdom in the world around us and to live out our Sacred Mission: We, the Diocese of Rapid City, through the power of the Holy Spirit, are called to attract and form intentional disciples who joyfully, boldly and lovingly proclaim and live the mission of Jesus Christ, leading to eternal life.

(Note: Copies of Bishop Gruss’s Pastoral Letter, Through Him, With Him and In Him, as well as copies of the Priority Plan for the Diocese of Rapid City are available at parish and diocesan offices.)

**Comparing the priority plans**

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**Five Foundational Ministries:**

- Sacraments & Worship
- Education & Formation
- Governance & Finance
- Social Services & Outreach
- Vocations & Evangelization
Infant safe after being abandoned at Minnesota cathedral

Nathan Leonhardt, a custodian at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Minn., poses near the spot where he found an abandoned newborn baby after evening Mass Jan. 4. (CNS photo/Dave Hrbacek, The Catholic Spirit)

Infant safe after being abandoned at Minnesota cathedral

BY MARIA WIERIN
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

ST. PAUL, Minn. (CNS) — A newborn child found on the doorstep of the Cathedral of St. Paul is in good health and being cared for by local children’s services officials.

Nathan Leonhardt, a custodian at the cathedral, discovered the child Jan. 4 as he was locking the building about 6 p.m. following evening Mass. The baby was left in a plastic laundry basket between the exterior and interior doors of a church entrance.

Leonhardt and Father John Ubel, cathedral rector, cared for the infant boy in the church sacristy until emergency responders arrived. The priest said he baptized the child while waiting for police and an ambulance to arrive.

Father Ubel said he hopes the boy, whom he christened Nathan John, will be adopted by a Catholic family. He finds it significant that the baby was left at a Catholic parish. The baby was placed in the care of Ramsey County Child Protective Services.

The intention behind the event is to reduce the acrimony around the country during and after the presidential election. The title and format had been used before during an event in Cleveland tied to the opening of the Republican National Convention there in July 2016. And it must have worked, she said, because Cleveland did not experience the violence many had feared during the convention.

“We had been expecting riots and nothing happened,” she said.

But she couldn’t just sit without doing anything about it and decided to find a way to counter all those bad feelings she was seeing and hearing.

Sister Petruziello, a member of the Sisters of the Congregation St. Joseph in Cleveland, put together Circle the City with Love, an event that sought to gather people across cities in the United States on Jan. 15 at 3 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, have them join hands in their respective cities and, in silence, meditate together as a means to foster peace.

The intention behind the event is to reduce the acrimony around the country during and after the presidential election. The title and format had been used before during an event in Cleveland tied to the opening of the Republican National Convention there in July 2016. And it must have worked, she said, because Cleveland did not experience the violence many had feared during the convention.

“We had been expecting riots and nothing happened,” she said.

So now she wants to apply the concept nationally and has asked people around the country to organize local events that will result in harmony, not more rancor, prior to the inauguration of Donald J. Trump as the country’s 45th president on Jan. 20.

More than 40 groups in 17 cities, as well as a group in Australia, whose participants gathered at 4 a.m. local time, agreed to participate. More continued signing up in early January at www.circlecitywithlove.com, Sister Petruziello said.

Karen Clifton, of Catholic Mobilizing Network in Washington, said her group participated, “to stand in solidarity with our sisters and brothers across the country, and world, praying for peace, mercy, and justice as we begin this new chapter in history.”

“In the aftermath of a very divisive political season, it is vital that we move forward with mercy and compassion toward each other,” Clifton said in an email interview with CNS. “This event provides the perfect opportunity for each of us to stand united in the work to bring mercy and justice to our world.”

What she and her organization seeks most is to bring people together in the hope of peace and healing, she said.

“Catholic Mobilizing Network hopes that this event can serve as an example of nonviolence throughout our country and promote a peaceful transition of administrations,” she said.

While registering online, organizers asked participants to pledge to a nonviolent and nonpartisan half hour of silence “in the spirit of love around the inauguration of the president-elect and all the demonstrations being held throughout the week.”

Sister Petruziello said her event was not “religious,” nor partisan, and was open to anyone who “wants to bring that peace and love into the universe, because we need it.”

Police are not pursuing the case as a criminal matter, said Sgt. Mike Ernster, St. Paul police spokesman. Minnesota law allows a mother to leave a newborn in a safe place within seven days of birth, such as a hospital or urgent care clinic without having to answer any questions. However, a church is not classified as one of those safe places.

Father Ubel believes, however, that the baby was left at the cathedral because the mother knew her son would be safe and cared for with the parish’s help.

When he first saw the basket with a blanket on top, Leonhardt thought someone had left laundry on the steps to the church foyer. He then heard a noise from the basket and thought it might be a puppy. When he removed the blanket, he saw the baby’s face.

“I was speechless,” he said. “I froze for what seemed to be 10 seconds, but it was probably more.”

He said the infant appeared to be recently born because he was still covered in blood and mucus and had not been washed. The umbilical cord was cut and clamped with a binder clip.

Father Ubel visited the hospital later in the evening but was unable to see the child. Police informed him that the baby was likely born slightly premature, weighed about 5 pounds, and is in good health.

The priest said he is grateful that the mother chose not to abort the baby. He is also proud of Leonhardt’s quick actions.

“The fact that this child was left off at a Catholic church is not an insignificant detail to me,” Father Ubel said. “Absent any other information forthcoming, I think it’s important that this child be given up for adoption, and there would be many willing Catholic couples who would welcome this child into their home.”

Like Father Ubel, Leonhardt also hopes the baby can go to a good home.

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January 23, Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children

The over 56 million abortions since the 1973 decisions of Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton reflect with heartbreaking magnitude of what Pope Francis means by a “throw-away culture.” However, we have great trust in God’s providence. We are reminded time and again in Scripture to seek the Lord’s help, and as people of faith. We believe that our prayers are heard.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 373, designates January 22 as a particular day of prayer and penance, called the “Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children”: “In all the Dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when January 22 falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life and of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion.”

As individuals, we are called to observe this day through the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and/or giving alms. Another way to take part is through participating in special events to observe the anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

(See http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/resources/january-22-day-of-prayer.cfm for resources, prayers, and to participate in “9 Days for Life,” January 21-29.)

Rachel’s Vineyard Retreat

Each spring a Rachel’s Vineyard retreat weekend is offered in the diocese for healing from an abortion experience. Participants (married couples, mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings of aborted children, as well as past abortion workers) are able to identify ways this loss impacts their lives, past and present. Help in acknowledging unresolved feelings, emotional numbness, conflicting emotions, and post-abortion trauma is offered in a confidential and supportive setting.

Dates for this year’s retreat are April 21–23 in the Rapid City area. For more information, see http://www.rachelsvineyard.org or call or contact Carol at 605-431-5486 or ckling@sdplains.com.

Human Dignity

As Catholics, we recognize the inherent dignity of every person in every circumstance and at every stage of life — from conception to death. Yet we continue to see many threats to life and violence against it. We cannot look the other way. As Pope Francis noted during his visit to the United States, our “care for one another is care for Jesus himself.”

(U.S.C.C.B. “9 Days for Life: Frequently asked questions”)

SJC Workshop — Care for Creation — January 28

3rd annual SJC Workshop, Terra Sancta Cafeteria, register on line at TerraSancta.org

Care for Creation, one of the pillars of Social Justice, a longstanding priority of the Church, brought into the spotlight by Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si. Care for Creation impacts all South Dakotans, whether living and working in Rapid City or ranching on the prairie. Speakers include:

Pat Guptill, recipient of the 2013 S.D. Leopold Conservation award, rancher speaking on “mob grazing” as a modern range management tool, preserving and improving the land. Patrick Schmadeke, speaking on the church’s teaching on Care for Creation, both the history of this teaching and it’s expression in Laudato Si.

Beth-Anne Ferley, Sustainability Coordinator, Rapid City Solid Waste Division, on recycling efforts in Rapid City. Carrie Donovon with St. Vincent de Paul Society on their ministry and it’s impact on care for creation, as well as the impact their clients. $25 pre-registration, $15 for students, scholarships available, door prizes will be offered. $35 registration at the door.
Thinking through the temptation of cohabitation

Men and women clearly need each other and naturally gravitate towards arrangements of mutual support and lives of shared intimacy. Because women are frequently the immediate guardians of the next generation, they have a particular need to ascertain if there will be steady support from a man prior to giving themselves sexually to him. The bond of marriage is ordered towards securing this critical element of ongoing commitment and support. Cohabitation, where a man and woman decide to live together and engage in sexual relations without marriage, raises a host of issues and concerns. Sex, of course, has a certain power all its own, and both sides may be tempted to play with it in ways that are potentially damaging, all the more so when they decide to cohabit.

One concern is that cohabitation can often become a rehearsal for various selfish patterns of behavior. It perpetuates an arrangement of convenience, popularly phrased as, “Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?” Even as many women try to tell themselves they are “preparing” for marriage by cohabiting with their partner, they may sense the trap of the “never ending audition” to be his wife, and become intuitively aware of how they are being used. Cohabitation also invites the woman to focus on lesser concerns like saving on rent or garnering transient emotional attention from her partner by moving in with him and becoming sexually available.

Even as a woman becomes attuned to the power of sex from an early age, she can eventually fall prey to an easy mistake. Aware that sexual intimacy is also about bonding, she may suppose that by surrendering this deeply personal part of herself through cohabitation, she now has a “hook” into a man and his heart. While such an arrangement can trigger various platitudes, (that he “cares for her,” “loves her”, etc.), experience shows it doesn’t typically help him reach the commitment reflected in those all-important words, “Will you marry me?”

Cohabitation, in fact, is a relationship that is defined by a holding back of commitment. The notion that it somehow allows both parties to “try out” a marriage beforehand is conveniently make-believe, a kind of “playing house,” mostly because it’s impossible to try out something permanent and irrevocable through something temporary and revocable. As Jennifer Roback Morse has described it, “Cohabiting couples are likely to have one foot out the door, throughout the relationship. The members of a cohabiting couple practice holding back on one another. They rehearse not trusting.” They don’t develop the elements crucial to a successful marriage, but instead keep their options open so they can always beat a hasty retreat to the exit. Or as Chuck Colson has put it: “Cohabitation — it’s training for divorce.” Many studies confirm that the divorce rate among those who cohabit prior to marriage is nearly double the rate of those who marry without prior cohabitation.

Some researchers believe that individuals who cohabit are more unconventional to begin with, being less committed to the institution of marriage overall and more open to the possibility of divorce. Others suspect something more insidious — that living together slowly erodes people’s ability to make a commitment by setting them up into patterns of behavior that work against succeeding in a long-term relationship. Both may actually be true.

Various risks correlate strongly with cohabitation. Compared with a married woman, a cohabiting woman is roughly three times as likely to experience physical abuse, and about nine times more likely to be murdered. Children also tend to fare poorly when it comes to these live-in arrangements. Rates of serious child abuse have been found to be lowest in intact families; six times higher in step families; 20 times higher in cohabiting biological-parent families; and 33 times higher when the mother is cohabiting with a boyfriend who is not the biological father. Cohabiting homes see significantly more drug and alcohol abuse, and bring in less income than their married peers. Cohabitation is clearly bad for men, worse for women, and terrible for children.

“Marriage,” as Glenn Stanton notes, “is actually a very pro-woman institution. People don’t fully realize what a raw deal for women cohabitation is. Women tend to bring more goods to the relationship — more work, more effort in tending to the relationship — but they get less satisfaction in terms of relational commitment and security.” While marriage doesn’t automatically solve every problem, it clearly offers a different and vastly better set of dynamics than cohabitation for all the parties involved.
Tammy Schnittgrund has been named National Chair of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) Cantor Steering Committee; she assumed responsibilities January 1. The mission statement for the committee is as follows: The purpose of the Cantor Interest Section is to assist cantors to grow in the spiritual qualities, the liturgical knowledge, and the musical skills needed to fulfill their specific role as ministers of music serving the liturgical prayer of the assembly. The committee serves the needs of approximately 2,400 cantors across the nation and abroad.

For the past eight years, Schnittgrund has served on the committee. Her work has included collaborating with other members to revamp the Basic Cantor Certificate, the creation of both the Intermediate and Cantor Collegiate Certificates, as well as implementing live adjudication of the certificates at the annual national convention. She currently serves as national administrator of the ICC. In conjunction with her new appointment, she will also be a member of the NPM Council which advises the governing board of directors.

Schnittgrund is a graduate of Northern State University and the University of Montana. She has taught elementary and middle school orchestra in the Rapid City Area Schools for twenty-one years and is the Director of Strings at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City. In addition to her work with orchestras, Schnittgrund has been a member of and occasional director for “Chorus Angelorum” at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City.

Local Awards and Recognition
Last fall, National Pastoral Musician members met at the Terra Sancta Retreat Center, Rapid City. About 40 people participated in a retreat directed by Sandi Ohlen, MS, LPC, and Sr. Lorane Coffin, OSB. In the morning segment of the retreat, Ohlen spoke about “Rhythm, Rest, and Wonder.” In the afternoon segment, Sr. Lorane talked about “Breaking Bread” in which she discussed how the songs we sing at Communion can tie our personal experiences to scriptural images and may help us ponder the rich theology of the Eucharist. During the luncheon, attendees learned who had received various NPM awards. Recognized for years of liturgical music service were Jessica Hicks — 25 years, Christine Leichtnam — 40 years, Terry Schroeder and Valerie Hawkins — 50 years. Carman Timmerman received the Peggy Langenfeld Award that recognizes one lay person and one clergy member for exceptional contributions to liturgy and music. Terry Schroeder and Christy Leichtnam received the St. Cecilia Award for lay. Fr. Matt Fallgren received the St. Cecilia Award for clergy. The St. Cecilia Award recognizes a person or organization who has promoted NPM and chapter activities in an extraordinary way. The next NPM event is Saturday, February 4, at Our Lady of the Black Hills Church, Piedmont. At that meeting, Fr. Michel Mulloy will talk about the new marriage rite and his experience with wedding psalms. There will be an opportunity to share keyboard and organist resources.

Catholic Heritage Society 2017 Mass Schedule
Monthly Masses are offered each year across western South Dakota, for all deceased members of the Catholic Heritage Society. Please consider becoming a member by making a deferred gift to the Western South Dakota Catholic Foundation. For more information contact Tim Henderson at WSDCF, PO Box 678, Rapid City, SD 57709, 605-343-3541 or thenderson@diorc.org.

- Feb. 1, St. John the Evangelist, Ft. Pierre, 7 a.m., Fr. Ron Garry
- Mar. TBD, St. Mary, Lemmon, Fr. Tony Grossenbush
- Apr. 6, Our Lady of the Black Hills, Piedmont, 8 a.m., Fr. Andrzej Wyrodek
- Jun. 4, St. Patrick, Wall, Noon, Fr. Tim Hoag
- Jul. 1, St. Ambrose, Deadwood, 6 p.m., Fr. Leo Hausmann
- Aug. 13, St. Anthony of Padua, Hot Springs, 10:30 a.m., Fr. Grant Gerlach
- Sept. 16, St. Martin of Tours, Murdo, 6 p.m., Fr. John Heusinger
- Oct. TBD, Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Martin, Fr. Tyler Dennis
- Nov. 12, St. Francis of Assisi, Sturgis, 9 a.m., Fr. Timothy Castor

National Pastoral Musicians news

Technology, Rapid City. In addition to her work with orchestras, Schnittgrund has been a graduate of Northern State University and the University of Montana. She has taught elementary and middle school orchestra in the Rapid City Area Schools for twenty-one years and is the Director of Strings at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City. In addition to her work with orchestras, Schnittgrund has been a member of and occasional director for “Chorus Angelorum” at Blessed Sacrament Church, Rapid City.

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Diocesan Seminarian Burses (as of 12/31/16)
Only income from these donations is used to support diocesan seminarian education.

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Only income from these donations is used to support retired priests.

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PRAA Memorial Burses
For information on donating to PRAA Memorial Burse, contact Finance Manager Rick Soulek, 343-3541.
Since 2014 program UP has assisted 34 low-income single parents

MARY GARRIGAN
CATHOLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

She arrived in Rapid City holding her 3-year-old son by one hand and a plastic garbage bag filled with everything she owned in the other.

The 28-year-old woman was an immigrant escaping domestic violence. Kiko (not her real name) came to South Dakota to earn an accounting degree at Black Hills State University, but found herself living in an isolated rural community, trapped in an abusive marriage, for four years.

About to give birth to her second child, Kiko found safety at a domestic violence shelter in Rapid City, where she was referred to the Uplifting Parents Program (Program UP) at Catholic Social Services. “I had literally nothing when I started this. Now I have a job, a career that I’ve always wanted and I can provide for my children’s needs. Program UP helped me achieve my goal. I’m now a CPA” she said.

Since it began in 2014, Program UP has assisted 34 low-income single parents and their young children achieve financial stability by helping them earn an education, skill or trade through a two-generation approach that includes scholarship funding, short-term financial stipends and intensive case management. So far, 12 single mothers have earned nursing degrees, medical technology certifications, a social work degree and emergency medical technician training, among other degrees. Several more will complete degrees this semester. There are currently 17 active participants enrolled.

Participants spend up to two years in the program. A CSS-led coalition of 20 agencies provides help with school, employment, housing, transportation and childcare while they juggle a demanding schedule of work, school and parenting, explained Natalie Lecy, Family Services Department director.

“We always say that UP is a community program, because it is an entire community coming together to support young families to find stability and ultimately success,” Lecy said. “I once had an UP participant tell me, “I didn’t know what it felt like to have a family until I became part of the UP Program. UP has provided me with the support that I never had from my family.”

Program UP provided Kiko with $1,500 for CPA study materials and $1,000 in testing fees. “I was never going to be able to afford that on my own,” she said. Emotional support was equally important. “When I was studying and felt really overwhelmed, my mentor Caitlin was the one I could talk to,” Kiko said.

Today, Kiko has a great job as an accountant for an international automotive firm. Her sons, age 2 and 5, are doing well. “Thank you so, so, so much for choosing me as a participant in this awesome program. I could not have done it without Program UP.”

Or without Jesus Christ, she said. “I became a Christian soon after I left my ex-husband. I could not have accomplished any of this without Jesus, who called me and saved my life from an abusive relationship. He continuously blessed me with friends, shelters and, of course, the UP Program. I am so grateful for the people whom I have never even met who listened to His calling and were faithful to fund this program.”

‘Dedicated to forming the whole person from infancy to the golden years’

BY SR. FLORENCE MCMANAMEN, OSB

The Advent and Christmas Liturgies and practices as well as private prayer are meaningful to the sisters. As a result, our Benedictine Community can seem a little bit “counter cultural.” We are absorbed with the waiting, hope and expectancy of Advent. We decorate for Christmas only a few days prior to this great celebration. We enjoy our decorations and atmosphere of celebration until the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the “official” end of the Christmas season.

During this joyful season, our community has experienced the presence and thoughtfulness of others in many ways. We appreciate the busy priests who come to celebrate daily Mass. The Seton Singers from the nearby St. Elizabeth Seton school gave us the gift of singing Christmas carols in our chapel. The words of the carols and the enthusiasm of the director and students were an inspiration. Many guests were daytime visitors while others stayed with us for a period of time. Among these are Father John Lule, Father John’s sister, Sister Rose Michael, who is studying at Loyola University in Chicago, and Sister Catherine, a Carmelite Sister. Among the gifts of the sisters to others is the serving of a dinner to all of our employees and their spouses in early January. One of the highlights of this special season is the afternoon spent as guests of Bishop Robert Gruss.

The month of January began with the feasts of St. Elizabeth Seton and St. John Newman, both of whom were dedicated to forming the whole person from infancy to the golden years. The month concludes with the national celebration of Catholic Schools Week and the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. The church strongly encourages and diligently provides for the Christian formation of people, especially the young. The privilege and responsibility of the formation of the young lies chiefly within the family. Within the family atmosphere, the children learn the basic concepts of love which lead to the experience of the love of God for each person. Forgiveness and mercy are also learned in everyday family living. Other guides of our faith become a part of daily living and are passed on to the next generation—true evangelization.

Formal education is handled in many different ways always with the guidance of the parents and family. There are many good home schooling curriculums. With the limitations of the religious aspects of the public school curriculum, families need to be extra solicitous in providing religious formation and in listening to and discussing topics that might cause conflicts with faith issues in the young person’s experiences. Parental involvement is needed even if the child attends a Catholic school where family life is extended with the daily environment of the school. High school students need a strong family support system.

Hopefully, with the many formative years, the young persons will grow in their faith in college. Catholic colleges offer the opportunities of good relationships, Newman Centers, daily Mass, and frequent confession. Aurora Griffin has written a book, “How I Stayed Catholic at Harvard: 40 tips for Faithful College Students.” (Ignatius Press) that might be helpful.
New Year’s Resolutions — sobriety

BY DEACON MARLON LENEAGH
DIRECTOR OF NATIVE MINISTRIES

If any of you watch television you have seen the commercials associated with weight loss and quitting smoking. For any who have vowed to lose weight or quit smoking, I wish you success. There are so many things to give up or quit and the New Year seems to be the right time to give up bad habits or try new things. These are known as New Year’s Resolutions.

What is a resolution? According to Webster’s Dictionary a resolution is a formal statement of opinion, which we are determined to carry out and have set our minds on doing. We are making a self-commitment that we will be successful in our resolutions.

The website: Lifescript.com actually lists the top ten New Year’s Resolutions. They are in no particular order but are the ones that are heard from year to year:

- go back to school
- get a better job
- lose weight
- make a difference
- travel
- quit smoking
- save money
- get organized
- find someone special
- focus on an important relationship.

New Year’s reminds me of my dad and his struggle with alcoholism. My dad would resolve to quit drinking year after year, but his commitment would last only a couple weeks or a month. He knew his demon, and I think he really wanted to quit but couldn’t. I know he wanted to be a better person, a better dad and a better husband, but the addiction was just too strong. His buddies would often come around with drinks and he would tell them, “Just one and I have to stop”. But all it took was the first one and he was started. The first one was only the beginning and he would get out of control and continue to drink for days. He never learned that the first drink was the greatest enemy.

Over the years, I’ve made my share of resolutions and wasn’t successful in keeping my commitment. I tried for a number of years to quit drinking myself but couldn’t do it. I didn’t like what alcohol was doing to me and my family. I was out of control and wondered if I was going to follow in my father’s footsteps. Over time when you can’t succeed the resolution loses its meaning and just becomes another failure or shortcoming.

Finally through the Grace of God and Onsight* I was able to quit drinking and turn my life around for the better. I have been sober for twenty years and know the struggles that my dad faced every day. I learned that without God, I was relying on my own efforts to quit drinking that’s why I had so many failed attempts. Once I admitted my powerlessness to alcohol and turned to my Higher Power I was able find my freedom.

* A program no longer available in S. D.
Sr. Ann Fasbender, OSB, 86, died Dec. 15, 2016. Gertrude Ann was born Nov. 6, 1930 at Hendricks, Minn., to Ben and Florence (Davis) Fasbender. Sr. Ann entered Sacred Heart Monastery August 1948 and became a novice June 23, 1949. She made first vows on June 24, 1950, and on June 29, 1953, she made her final profession to monastic life.

In 1966, she graduated from Mount Marty College, Yankton and earned a masters degree from the University of South Dakota, Vermillion, in 1969. In 1973, she studied in the Religious Education Graduate Program at Mundelein College in Chicago, Ill.

She began her elementary education ministry at Sacred Heart School, Yankton, in 1950. She also taught at Ipswich, Aberdeen, and Sioux Falls. While in Vermillion, she was the principal as well as a teacher. In 1974, she became the supervisor of the Mount Marty College Day Care Center and she continued this work until May 1995. Her next eight years were spent in ministry to the Native Americans in Yankton, and in 2002 and subsequent years she was a pastoral minister in Trenton, N.D., and McLaughlin.

A wake service was held Dec.18, and the funeral Mass was celebrated on Dec.19, both in Bishop Marty Memorial Chapel. Burial was in the monastery cemetery.

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**Obituary:**
Sr. Ann Fasbender, OSB, 86, served in McLaughlin

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Christmas Cast
The Youth Christmas Program at St. John the Evangelist Parish, New Underwood, was held December 18, 2016. (Courtesy photo)

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Christmas Projects
STURGIS — On a cold December 10, the St. Francis of Assisi Youth Group participated in the VFW annual wreath placing event at Black Hills National Cemetery. (Back row) Steve Fischer, Josh West, and Jacob West (Middle row) Jaedra Woldt, Mairen McGrath, Ansley Sabers, Emily Pi, Alexa Delbridge, Molly Buchholz, Tegon Thompson, and Blane Breth (Front row) Tayhgen McGrath, Kenzie Kreil and Reegin Hehn. At right, the CCD program had an Angel Tree this year. Children had a weekend collection to help make Christmas merry for families in need. They were able to help three families. (Courtesy photos)
100th Birthday

Mary McCance celebrated her 100th birthday, Dec. 28. Mass held at St. Joseph Church, Gregory, that morning in Mary’s honor, with an open house held at Mary Vale Hall in the afternoon.

Mary was born south of Burke, along Ponca Creek. She was the fourth of eight children. Mary’s mother passed away when she was eight years old. At the time her oldest brother was around 14 and her youngest was 11 months.

She met her husband Sheldon McCance while working at the sale barn lunchroom. They were married in 1939. To this union two children were born, Jerry and Judy. Mary has four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. She is pictured with Fr. Godfrey Muwanga, parish pastor. (Courtesy photo)

Snow Removal

Fr. Janusz Korban in a parishioner’s skidsteer loader in the parking lot of St. Rose of Lima Church in Hill City. According to Rollie Noem, St. Rose Parish Council, “He had a good instructor and operated it for a short time following one of the recent snowfalls. He was a good sport and a quick learner.” (Courtesy photo)

Seminarian News


On December 22, Bishop Rober Gruss celebrated Mass and hosted dinner for seminarians and their parents. (Courtesy Photo)

A Safe Environment for Children and Young People

The Catholic Diocese of Rapid City is firmly committed to creating and maintaining the safest possible environment for our children and young people. To report allegations of sexual abuse by church personnel, contact the Victim Assistance coordinator, Barbara Scherr. To ensure confidentiality in her outreach to victims, she can be contacted privately at 1-605-209-3418 (cell). Her phone has caller ID and messaging features. All information will be treated confidentially. Alleged victims are advised of their right to report alleged abuse to civil authorities.

In accordance with diocesan policy, all allegations of sexual misconduct involving children or young people and priests, deacons, lay employees, or volunteers serving the Diocese of Rapid City will be investigated.

The diocesan sexual misconduct policy and the code of conduct are posted on the diocesan website at www.rapidcitydiocese.org.

**World Day for consecrated life Feb. 2**

WASHINGTON — In 1997, Saint John Paul II instituted a day of prayer for women and men in consecrated life. This celebration is attached to the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on February 2. Therefore, the World Day for Consecrated Life will be celebrated in the church on Thursday, February 2, and in parishes on the weekend of February 4-5.

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, of New Jersey and Chair of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations states, “Our Holy Father Francis has given the church this special opportunity to pray for all those women and men in consecrated life who have given their lives in love to God. This prayer may prompt each of us to ask, ‘How is God calling me to give of myself this day, that I might know the deeper joy of service to God and others?’”

**Prayer for Consecrated Persons**

GOD OUR FATHER, we thank you for calling men and women to serve in your Son’s Kingdom as sisters, brothers, religious priests, consecrated virgins, and hermits, as well as members of Secular Institutes. Renew their knowledge and love of you, and send your Holy Spirit to help them respond generously and courageously to your will. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
Preparing for a sacrament: Day-long retreat inspires confirmation candidates

On a frigid morning in December, Red Cloud parishioners from across the reservation gathered in the warmth of Christ the King Church, in the small community of Porcupine. They came together for a day-long retreat designed to support a group of both young people and adults nearing the time of their confirmation — the initiation rite when a Catholic is sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Surrounded by their parents and other loved ones, the candidates spent the day preparing for this powerful rite of passage — and reflecting on their own spiritual path toward confirmation.

“This retreat day was a true blessing by the Holy Spirit,” said Sr. Connie Schmidt, SSND, Red Cloud’s assistant for evangelization and formation, who coordinates the confirmation program on the Pine Ridge Reservation. “Our candidates took part in a number of activities aimed at knowing more about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. There was so much good energy among all who attended. As they prepare for confirmation, it was wonderful to see our candidates gather encouragement from one another as they move through this important journey.”

Providing sound religious education and guidance is a central part of the work of Red Cloud’s parish and, in her role, Sister Connie focuses on ensuring that each candidate is prepared for confirmation, both intellectually and spiritually. In order to provide this preparation, each candidate takes part in a weekly class at their church and works with a catechist to understand more fully what it means to be confirmed. They also take part in more intensive retreats organized by Sr. Connie, Pastoral Coordinator Veronica Valandra, and parish catechists.

According to Sr. Connie, retreats like this one provide an opportunity for more focused reflection, as well as some fun. To spark their energy at the outset of the day, the candidates played a game of “Confirmation Jeopardy” to test how much they have learned about the sacrament through their preparation so far. Carol LaDeaux, religious education coordinator at Sacred Heart Church, Pine Ridge, created the game for the retreat, and said she was thrilled to see how much the candidates already knew.

Beyond preparing candidates themselves, the retreat was also meant to help parents and relatives understand their role in helping their loved ones ready themselves for confirmation. Parents, grandparents and others in attendance took part in their own session, and learned how they can encourage preparation activities at home and support their loved ones as they work toward confirmation.

Each group of confirmation candidates is truly unique. This cohort includes 16 students who attend schools across the reservation and range from 7th graders to seniors in high school, as well as two adults preparing for the sacrament. But regardless of their differences, Sister Connie says the group bonded in important ways and honored each other’s successes during the retreat. Toward the end of the day, the group prayed together during a special Mass for confirmation candidates and their families. And finally, they celebrated the end of the retreat by enjoying a meal together — sharing stories and reflections over warm bowls of chicken noodle soup.

(Article courtesy Red Cloud Indian School. To read the full article visit www.redcloudschool.org.)

Rapid City Catholic Schools
2017-2018 Registration
Returning Family Registration
Jan 30-Feb 10, 2017
New Family Registration begins Feb. 13th
Preschool & Kindergarten Open House January 26th 4-6pm
Current Preschool Family Meeting January 26th 6:30pm
St. Elizabeth Seton School - 2101 City Springs Rd.
Call Marcia Werner at (605) 343-8484 x 1203 mwerner@rccss.org ~ www.RCCSS.org

My Catholic education is a GIFT, allowing me to GROW both scholarly and spiritually. RCCSS has taught me to WORK HARD for what I want. It has given me a work ethic and taught me to be the BEST VERSION OF MYSELF every single day.
~ Audrey Cope, STM Senior

Class Sizes are Limited - Enroll Today!

Story of Jesus
The children of St. John the Evangelist Church, Ft. Pierre, presented a Christmas pageant in December. (Courtesy photos)

Terra Sancta Retreat Center Highlights — February 2017

Feb 3-5: OLBH Confirmation Retreat
Feb 11: Married Sweethearts
Feb 17-19: Black Hills Area TEC
Feb 24-26: VSI Combined Retreat

For the past three years, STM has held their Jr./Sr. Business Interview and Etiquette Day at Terra Sancta. Reeny and the Terra Sancta staff have welcomed us with open arms and are so accommodating to our needs. Approximately 150 people participate in this half-day event. Terra Sancta is able to accommodate our specific needs by providing three large meeting rooms for guest presentations which include built in sound systems as well as small meeting rooms to accommodate one-on-one interviews for our students and guest interviewers. We conclude our morning with a business luncheon in the Emmaus Dining Room for our seniors and guest interviewers. The staff is amazing, the food is delicious and the seating works perfectly due to the design of the room.

Lynn Eckrich, STM Business Interview/Etiquette Committee
“RCCSS school community has made us feel like members of their family! The kids keep us young and it is a blessing to start and end our day in prayer.”
Jim & Mary Ellen Newman, Custodians

“The thing I enjoy most about RCCSS is the support system I have found. From friends and peers to faculty and staff, everyone is unbelievably supportive and willing to help guide me towards personal and academic excellence.”
STM Senior Ellie Bernard

“STM has impacted my life in more ways than I ever thought it could have. It has blessed me with an education that I believe is the best in the state, and a faith life that will only continue to grow throughout my life.”
STM Senior Preston Arity

“I have experienced Christ just about everywhere at STM, from Geometry class to school retreats.”
STM Junior Abigail Julian

Come Celebrate with us: January 29 — February 4, 2017
All System Mass — Monday, Jan 30th 9:00am at Cathedral OLPH
Men In Black Basketball game — Monday, Jan 30th at STM High School
Dinner at 5:00 pm, Priest vs. STM 7:00 pm
TWENTY SOMETHING
The pursuit of happiness in the new year

Don Currey was a 30-year-old graduate student when he cut down the world’s oldest tree.

A brown-eyed, sun-tanned geography student at the University of North Carolina, Don was striking in his looks and his ambitions: to better understand Ice-Age glaciology by examining bristlecone trees. And so he found himself in Nevada in the summer of 1964 amid a grove of bristlecones on Wheeler Peak Mountain when his tree core got stuck in a tree.

Since it would not come out, a park ranger helped him remove his instrument by cutting down the tree. Don began to count its rings and eventually realized, much to his dismay, that he had felled a tree that was 4,844 years old — what was then considered the oldest tree on the planet.

The tragic mistake advanced geographers’ understanding of longevity, which had been correlated with size of tree, like the Redwoods of California. Ice-burnished bristlecone pines, with their storybook swirls on gnarled limbs — trees that peak at just 20 feet — are, it turns out, some of the oldest trees in the world.

They’re able to live so long because, even if a large portion of a bristlecone is damaged by erosion or fire, small strips of living bark, which one researcher dubbed “life lines,” can function and keep the tree alive. A strip of bark that might be only two inches wide can support all of the tree’s foliage.

Adversity begets longevity, analysis suggested: The severe conditions the bristlecone endured over time actually helped extend its lifespan.

As I look ahead to 2017 and that which has never been, I’ve been thinking of all the history that has come before me — both as a Catholic and a member of my family. The communion of saints feels more alive to me than ever before — almost hauntingly so, yet comforting — the canonized ones and my ancestors, stories of resilience and grace and the life lines that sustained.

I’m resolving to study them this year and glean their stories and songs. I want to capture oral histories of those still living — the kind where I get out of the way and let them talk — and to read up on those no longer here.

Young adulthood may bring a sense of invincibility, troubling with novelty and thrill, but lately, I’m feeling blessed and strengthened by my history. I want to dig deeper.

To begin, I’m reading Robert Ellsberg’s book “The Saints’ Guide To Happiness,” which frames that secular pursuit, an unalienable American right, in spiritual terms, showing how the saints’ capacity for goodness and love, ultimately, made them happy.

My biggest takeaway is the book’s message about learning to see and learning to love. “Our whole business in this life,” St. Augustine wrote, “is to restore to health the eyes of the heart, whereby God may be seen.”

That’s what happened to Thomas Merton, Ellsberg recounts, when he was on an errand in the shopping district of Louisville, Ky., at the corner of Fourth and Walnut. “I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs …,” Merton wrote. “It was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts, where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes.”

I tear up when I read this passage. What more could we hope for in the new year than to share in that vision?