

WEST RIVER *Catholic*

Informing Catholics in Western South Dakota since May 1973



Slavery, Abolition and Civil War, 2



Hallstrom Retires, p. 7

June 2026

Diocese of Rapid City, South Dakota

Volume 54 Number 2 www.rapidcitydiocese.org



Rejoice with those called by God

"Help our parishes and families encourage vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and consecrated life."

— Diocesan Prayer for Vocations

On May 30, Bishop Scott Bullock ordained Josiah Hanson and Blane Schriock to the Transitional Diaconate. Mass was held at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City. The two new deacons will need to complete their final year at St. Paul Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., before being ordained priests.

Dcn. Blane Schriock Interview, p. 4

Dcn. Josiah Hanson Interview, p. 5

(Photo by Laurie Hallstrom — more photos, Mass, and Bishop Bullock's homily are on diocesan website rapidcitydiocese.org/hanson-schriock-diaconate/)

Bride of Christ

Like the wise virgins in Matthew 25, Carole Brown, Howes, carries a lamp ready to meet Christ. She was consecrated to a Life of Virginity for Women Living in the World by Bishop Scott Bullock on May 25 at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City. Her attendants were Sr. Maria Faulkner, Gospel of Life Disciples, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Marilyn Langness Williams, Portage, Michigan. (Photo by Laurie Hallstrom. See more photos and watch Mass at rapidcitydiocese.org/consecration-carole-brown/.)



Catholics and Slavery, Abolition, and the Civil War



Bishop Scott Bullock
Diocese of
Rapid City
Surgite Eamus
“Rise, let us be
on our way.”

As we continue our reflection on the place of American Catholicism in the 250-year history of our nation as we celebrate our Semiquincentennial, we now consider the middle of the 19th century, the movement towards the abolition of slavery and the American Civil War.

In 19th-century America, the Catholic Church occupied a complex position on slavery and abolition:

while official Church teaching increasingly condemned the slave trade, coercive enslavement, and violations of human dignity, many American Catholics and bishops were divided over immediate abolition, states' rights, and political strategy; during the Civil War, religious sisters emerged as prominent caregivers to soldiers, and a minority of Catholic bishops, most notably Archbishop John Baptist Purcell, aligned themselves with the abolitionist cause, helping shape the Church's eventual unequivocal rejection of slavery as a moral evil.

While in recent historical analysis the American Civil War is typically characterized as an economic and political struggle between the more industrial northern states and the agrarian southern states, it seems clear that, as the nation moved towards the mid 1850s, the reality of slavery became the central moral and political issue of antebellum America. The parallel situation of mass immigration into the United States, many from majority Catholic nations, pressed the larger issue of the dignity of workers, both free (the northern immigrants) and enslaved (the southern slaves) and provided a moral analysis applicable to both.

The Catholic tradition on the injustice of enslavement of persons and, specifically, the slave trade, was one that developed over many centuries. Many proponents of enforced slavery marshalled scriptural evidence in support of slavery, particularly



some writings of St. Paul and, in particular, his Letter to Philemon (though the letter itself is not a specific defense of slavery as it condoned the existence of slavery in the eponymous slave about whom the letter is written). Increasingly, papal teachings sought to limit the slave trade and, over time, to condemn it outright. In the years prior to the American Civil War and the nation's struggle with condoning slavery, the important voice of Pope Gregory XVI emerged through his encyclical *In Supremo Apostolatus* (1839), where he condemned the slave trade and the reduction of persons to slavery and instructed Catholics not to “dare unjustly to vex Indians, Blacks, or other such peoples, or to despoil them of their goods, or reduce them to slavery.” However, the political situation in the United States led to various interpretations of the pope's statement: some Southern Catholics read the document as targeting the international slave trade rather than domestic slavery, while abolitionist Catholics cited it against slavery more broadly.

As the nation was divided as perhaps never before or since, Catholics among the American population supported the spectrum of positions regarding slavery. Southern Catholic clergy and laity often accepted slavery as a legal and social reality and some dioceses and religious communities even owned enslaved people before emancipation. On the other hand, many Northern Catholics opposed slavery's expansion but distrusted radical abolitionism, fearing social upheaval, anti-Catholic nativism, or partisan entanglement. Furthermore, Irish immigrant

Catholics were not uniformly abolitionist; economic competition and Democratic Party loyalties complicated their politics. As with the larger populace, there were moral tensions among those who professed the Catholic faith. While the teaching of the church regarding the inherent dignity of the human person solidified, there was an uneven application and acceptance of this truth as regards enslaved persons. Some chose pastoral care of slaves rather than the immediate emancipation of these slaves.

Into this political and ecclesial conflict appeared the abolitionist figure of Archbishop John Baptist Purcell (1800-1883) of Cincinnati, whose see was situated on the front lines of a divided nation. He publicly opposed slavery and then became the first American Catholic bishop to support immediate emancipation. He argued that slavery violated the natural rights and dignity of the human person, drawing on Catholic moral principles rather than secular ideology alone. While other Catholic clergy shared his positions, others tended to emphasize union, order, or pastoral neutrality over abolitionist activism.

Meanwhile, in the midst of the bloody paroxysm of the war, thousands of Catholic sisters served in military hospitals, field hospitals, and transport facilities for both Union and Confederate forces. Religious communities providing pastoral care to the war-wounded included the Daughters of Charity, Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of the Holy Cross, and others. Among their responsibilities were nursing, pharmacy work, cooking, administration, and spiritual care.

Through their care of injured soldiers without exception, they earned respect from Protestant soldiers, military surgeons, and government officials and softened anti-Catholic prejudice in some degree. In the end, they demonstrated a practical Catholic commitment to corporal works of mercy amid national conflict and contributed to a greater acceptance of the Catholic religion in our nation.

With the end of the War, the Northern victory, and the Emancipation Proclamation, Catholic institutions gradually expanded to provide ministry among freed-persons, though progress was limited by segregation, racism, and financial constraints. Meanwhile, papal teaching regarding the inadmissibility of slavery across the world became absolute in the Papal encyclical *In Plurimis* (1888) on the Abolition of Slavery of Pope Leo XIII.

The position of the Catholic Church in 19th-century America was neither uniformly abolitionist nor uniformly pro-slavery. Official teaching increasingly condemned the slave trade, coercive enslavement, and violations of human dignity, while American Catholics remained divided over abolition and wartime politics. Religious sisters won admiration through sacrificial care for soldiers, and bishops such as Archbishop John Baptist Purcell provided a distinctly Catholic abolitionist witness. By century's end, papal teaching and Catholic moral theology had moved decisively toward the absolute judgment that slavery was incompatible with the dignity of the human person and the moral law. In the end, however, our Catholic ancestors engaged in both sides of this most controverted era of our nation's history and, in the end, contributed to the clarification of our nation's moral conscience regarding the inadmissibility of slavery, another step towards our nation's assertion that all men were, in principle and reality, created equal and endowed with a uniform human dignity.

(Note: with the changing publication format and schedule of West River Catholic, these monthly reflections on the place of Catholicism across the 250 years of our nation will be published through the website of the Diocese of Rapid City.)

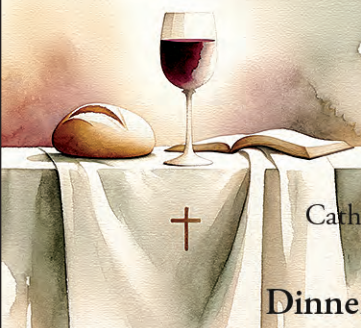
Ordination of
**DEACON TODD
 VANDERMAY**
 to the
PRIESTHOOD
June 19 ~ 5:30 p.m.

Holy Hour
June 18, 5:30 p.m

Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City
rapidcitydiocese.org/live or [Facebook.com/DioceseofRapidCity](https://www.facebook.com/DioceseofRapidCity)



SURGITE EAMUS
Dinner
Saturday, August 1



Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City
Mass with Bishop Bullock - 5:30 PM
Dinner & Program (St. Joseph Hall) - 6:30 PM



**Western South Dakota
 Catholic Foundation**

RSVP: 605-721-6843

Bishop's Calendar

June 18 - July 29, 2026

Subject to change without notice

June 18, Thursday

5:30 p.m. Ordination Vigil: Holy Hour with Evening Prayer, Cathedral

June 19, Friday

5:30 p.m. Ordination Mass, Cathedral

June 21, Sunday

6:30 p.m. Mass, S.D. National Guard Officer Candidate School, Fort Meade

June 24, Wednesday

5 p.m. Healing the Culture Annual Gala Fundraiser, Rapid City

June 25, Thursday

6:30 p.m. Bishop's Film Series, Cathedral (See p.7)

June 27, Saturday

10 a.m. Mass, Annual Black Elk Pilgrimage, Sylvan Lake

June 28, Sunday

4 p.m. Mass, S.D. National Guard, Fort Meade

July 12, Sunday

11 a.m. Mass, Dinner Celebration: St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Isaac Jogues, Rapid City

July 15, Wednesday

Totus Tuus Boys Hike and Mass, Custer State Park

July 18, Saturday

Day of Reflection and Catechesis, Cathedral

July 19, Sunday

11 a.m. CT Mass, Anniversary of Deacon Black Bear, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis (See p. 10)

July 28, Tuesday

11:30 a.m. Western SD Catholic Foundation Grant/Awards Luncheon, Terra Sancta

6 p.m. Catholic Social Services Board Meeting, Rapid City

July 29, Wednesday

Quo Vadis Vocations Hike, Black Hills

WEST RIVER CATHOLIC

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Road to Priesthood: The key is a relationship with the Lord

By Becky Berreth

Blane Schriock was ordained a transitional deacon on May 30. He recently spoke with the *West River Catholic* staff to discuss his journey thus far.

What is your home parish?

Deacon Schriock: My home parish is Saint Michael in Watauga. Right up on the border with North Dakota.

When did you first start thinking about the priesthood?

Deacon Schriock: The very first thought I ever had about it was altar serving as a little kid, second and third grade, but I never started consistently thinking about it until my freshman year of high school.

Who were the priests up there at that time?

Deacon Schriock: My very first pastor I remember while thinking about the priesthood was Fr. Ron Garry. Then Fr. John Lule, an African priest that we had, was very encouraging of me to discern. He was probably one of the first to notice and engaged with me. He really propelled me a lot. Not in the pushing kind of way but a very fatherly inviting way. A

lot of what prompted my vocation was from him.

What has your seminary experience been like?

Deacon Schriock: It's obviously a long process, for me what's really been the highlight is living under the same roof as the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. My bedroom is only about 30 steps from the chapel. Being able to have the Lord right there anytime, day or night, that's the thing I've clung on to the most from seminary. That's the key — the relationship with the Lord.

Were there any summer experiences that really touched you?

There's one I remember, I was serving in a nursing home. I was visiting a woman who wasn't a Christian. She was Buddhist I believe, and she was dying. They sent me into her room, and other than the nurse, I was the last person to see her alive. I remember I felt pulled by the Lord to hold her hand and tell her how much the Lord loved her. I was telling her these things and what struck me was her name was Emerald. Her name kept flashing in my mind, and I told her I said, "Emerald, you do not know how precious you

are to the Lord. Emerald stones are extremely precious but there's only one emerald like you in the Lord's heart." She gripped my hand and started crying. It was the strongest grip I ever felt. I left that place in tears and then I got a call not even a couple hours later saying that she passed away. I will never forget that.

Are there also any experiences here in the diocese?

Deacon Schriock: Last summer, I did Native American ministry up in Eagle Butte. That was honestly impactful and close to home. I grew up around native people my whole life. My mom and my friends are natives, but I was able to learn how the Lord has a particular love for these people here in this diocese and part of that was realizing the day St. Kateri Tekakwitha died is my birthday. I'd been born hundreds of years after she died and I fell in love with her and with native culture and the native people of South Dakota.

This article was condensed from the original interview. To read the full text go to rapidcitydiocese.org/Schriock-interview/.



Bishop Scott Bullock lays hands on Blane Schriock as part of apostolic succession. He ordained him a Transitional Deacon — one who is working toward priesthood. At left is Deacon Todd VanderMay. His priestly ordination is scheduled for June 19. (WRC photo)

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***Jennifer Zettl, DNP, CNP, is a graduate of University of Mary family medicine NP program and is a natural women's health provider trained in FEMM (Fertility Education Medical Management) and knowledgeable in NFP methods.**

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The Road to Priesthood: You cannot discern a vocation in isolation

By Becky Berreth

Josiah Hanson was ordained a transitional deacon on May 30. He recently spoke with the *West River Catholic* staff to discuss his journey thus far.

When did you first start thinking about the priesthood?

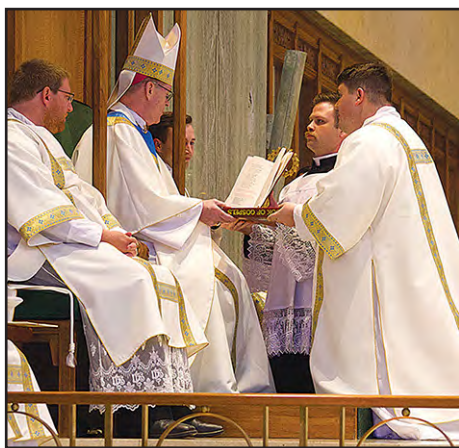
Deacon Hanson: I mean there are a lot of little moments that brought me here. First my parents were very intentional even from a young age, we were very involved in the church. I don't mean just going to Mass but having priests over for dinner pretty frequently.

My first *Totus Tuus* camp was as a little 6th grader — I was super nervous to be away from home and going to camp. I ended up walking away having this profound experience of a couple of things. One was the first times I encountered Liturgy of the Hours — praying lauds and vespers. My eyes were opened. This is part of the church. What do I have to do, to do this kind of thing?

What has your experience been at seminary?

Deacon Hanson: The real gift of minor seminary was that it provided me with a huge foundation of prayer. I'm so thankful for my spiritual director — a 93-year-old Trappist

Monk, Msgr. David Wechter, OSCO, who was living as a hermit ministering to six Carmelite hermits. By far the holiest man I have ever met in my life, many years of drawing not just on his priesthood but so many years of loving the



During the Transitional Deacon ordination Bishop Scott Bullock gives Josiah Hanson a Book of Gospels. It is a sign that he is being entrusted with the Church's diaconal ministry of proclaiming the Gospel. (WRC photo by Laurie Hallstrom)

Lord. To have him walk with me, especially going into my senior year, and asking that question, "I have been doing this thing for three-and-a-half years, and I need to make a decision. Are you calling me to Theology school? Are you calling me to major seminary? Are you calling me to commit to this?"

I remember my last meeting that I had with him just before Thanksgiving and sharing my anxieties and he laughed at me. He said, "Josiah, let me share with you the things that we've been talking about for the last years," and he brought this into a great light for me. This is the story of the Lord and how he has drawn himself towards you and how he's drawn you to himself. "Are you still confused?"

How would you describe your prayer life?

Deacon Hanson: The real gift of being able to envelope each day in Scripture to mark this as the day. Especially to pray with the Psalms, the great hymns to the Lord. Another beautiful piece of my spiritual life that has really flourished — I'm a musician and I've been able to spend a lot of time on it throughout my time in seminary. Especially getting myself into sacred music.

Was there a summer assignment that has stuck with you?

Deacon Hanson: Two summers ago I did my "Called Ministry of the Second Suffering" program which is our hospital assignment. That was at a hospital in Minneapolis, one of the largest hospitals in the Twin Cities area, so we had everything from patients who were finding out they were terminally ill to people who were on routine dialysis, to even spending some time in some of the psychological wards with people who are experiencing some mental health crises. The way that the Lord wants to love those who feel so down and so broken, and experience his love and know he wants to use me as a conduit to bring himself to them is humbling.

What advice would you have for someone considering the priesthood?

You will never have success discerning any vocation in a vacuum. You're never going to discern your vocation in isolation. Bring up what's in your prayer life to your priests, your parents, or someone in your life who you trust, and have a good spiritual life.

This article was condensed from the original interview. To read the full text go to rapidcitydiocese.org/hanson-interview/.

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VSI graduates reflect on faith, formation, and transformation

FROM THE OFFICE OF FAITH FORMATION

As the 2025-26 class of the *Veritatis Splendor* Institute is completed, students from across western South Dakota are reflecting on how the catechetical formation program has deepened their faith, strengthened their families, and equipped them for service in the Church.

For many participants, *VSI* began with a simple desire to learn more about the Catholic faith. For others, it was a response to a persistent call from God.

Tanya Cooper admits she initially resisted joining the program, reluctant to give up her Saturdays and uncertain about the commitment. Encouraged by a friend who felt called to *VSI* during adoration, Cooper eventually enrolled. Looking back, she sees God's hand guiding her throughout the journey.

"What started as a willingness to try something new became an encounter with Christ," Cooper said. "The assignments often felt more like prayer than work."

Through courses on theology, the sacraments, and the Mass, Cooper gained a deeper understanding of her faith and developed confidence in sharing it with others. She also credits her formation group with helping her establish a stronger prayer life and recognize God's voice more clearly.

For Mary Vareberg, *VSI* has transformed family life. As a mother of teenagers and middle school students, she initially sought tools to better explain her Catholic beliefs. Instead, she found herself growing alongside her children.

"The deeper understanding I've gained has opened meaningful conversations with my kids," Vareberg said. "God continues to show our family his grace."

For YoLanda Martian of Reva, *VSI* fulfilled a lifelong desire to learn more about the Church. Growing up in a rural parish with limited access to formal catechesis, she dreamed of deepening her faith but never found the opportunity until *VSI*.

"Now I know so much more about prayer, Scripture, and the teachings of the Church," Martian said. "I'm grateful for the opportunity and the confidence it has given me."

Meria Sperle echoed the importance of community. Traveling monthly from Buffalo with fellow parishioners, she has found both spiritual growth and lasting friendships.

"The prayer group has become a faith family," Sperle said. "Even with the early mornings and long drive, it's something I look forward to every month."

John Talcott, who attended *VSI* alongside his wife during diaconate formation, said the program strengthened not only his faith but also his family life.

"*VSI* helped us grow roots in our faith," Talcott said. "The sacrifices were real, but the fruits have been immeasurable."

Together, these testimonies reveal a common theme: *VSI* is more than an educational program. For its students, it has become a pathway to deeper discipleship, stronger families, vibrant community, and a renewed commitment to sharing Christ with others.

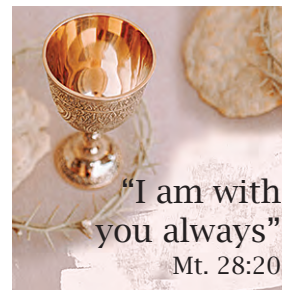
The Catechist Certification Program will provide diocesan certification for catechists: a one-year Basic Certification Program and a two-year Master Certification Program, through instruction in the content of the faith and formation as disciples of Christ. The program will include doctrinal and liturgical education, instruction in evangelistic and catechetical methodology, formation in the moral life, discipleship, spiritual life and prayer, community life and mission, Catholic worldview, and more. The program will include courses of study and an annual retreat. We will provide formation advisors to assist in the work of the study and discipleship formation. We invite you to see the diocesan website rapidcitydiocese.org/vsi/ for more information and to sign up.



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A new chapter for retiring WRC newspaper editor

By Becky Berreth

When did you start and what were some of your first duties?

I started on June 30, 1986, as assistant editor, staff writer and circulation manager. In those days the circulation addresses were typed on the back of used punch cards then a list of changes was sent to the printers to add to their list for labeling.

How has the process of producing the paper changed over the years? A lot. At first, we typed stories on the back of Catholic News Service stories (we did not use fresh paper) and sent them to a person who used a typesetter at the printers. They retyped the story on one machine and set the headlines on a different machine. Everything came out on skinny strips of waxable paper. Our photos were sized and sent to a darkroom manager who reprinted the photos with a dot pattern the press could reproduce.

During “paper week” we assembled the paper in the basement of the now defunct *Rapid City Guide*. All text, photos, borders, and ads were put together by hand on a flat (grid sheet.) We cut items with a box knife, hot waxed them, and rolled them down. When the *Guide* was put out of business by an out-of-state buyer we drove to Sturgis during paper week to work at the *Tri-State Livestock News* followed by the *Meade Country Times-Tribune*.

An early development in publishing was sending text by modem so it did not need to be retyped. In the early 1990s desktop publishing software was being developed and we lost the assistance of typesetters and darkroom personnel — two layers of people who could help spot errors were gone. The paper was sent to Sturgis on flats. It was still cut with box knives and attached with hot wax. Eventually everything morphed into digital sending. For the past several years the staff of the *Rapid City Journal* have been very helpful getting the paper printed and mailed.

What was it like changing from Assistant Editor to Editor? It was an adjustment. I took over from Eileen Sullivan Rotert. I discovered several small details I did not know were part of the job. I think

they were so routine she didn’t mention them.

What has been your favorite part of the job?

Traveling and meeting people. I have met hundreds of people in the last 40 years. In addition to driving around the diocese I was a member of the Catholic Press Association and the South Dakota Press Women. Through those organizations I went to many conferences where I could learn from professional speakers and journalism colleagues. I always tried to implement the suggestions I was given.

What was your first project?

My first story appeared in the July 1986 edition. It was based on a homily by Fr. Kerry Prendiville summarizing the history of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help icon. At that time he was Assistant Pastor at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rapid City. Part of the story was about a family from Eritrea (on the border of Ethiopia) who had been sponsored in the United States by a Lutheran Church. The parents were concerned the pastor did not say Mass “right.” After seeing the icon in the cathedral, they were excited — the parish they came from was named Our Lady of Perpetual Help and it had the same icon. I believe, Catholic families took over helping the family adapt to their new country.

Worst project? Nothing stands out, but when I make a mistake, I have 12,000 copies printed and mailed out to half the state.

What project was the most fun? In August 1993 I was sent to cover World Youth Day in Denver. First, we had a Hub City gathering in Spearfish with then-Bishop Charles Chaput, at least one archbishop, as well as bishops and priests from several dioceses. At the old Passion Play amphitheater, 8,000 pilgrims crowded in for Mass. They came from S.D., N.D., Minn., and Canada.

The Diocesan Youth Director at that time, David Lesmeister, let me pick any bus to ride. I traveled with the folks from Philip, who kept me going that week — walking for miles with water bottles, backpacks and duffle bags; lining up for

crowded McDonald’s food tents; and trying not to get trampled by the enormous crowds. I carried a big Canon camera that became an essential tool for news coverage. I loved sitting in the Mile High Stadium with dark clouds circling, guessing which of the four circling helicopters was carrying the pope. I still have a t-shirt with Pope John Paul II standing on stage with storm clouds gathering behind him. When I got home we printed three large tabloid pages of photos featuring people from every part of our diocese.

Best photo? There have been many photos I loved, but it always amazes me I can shoot in the dark, without a flash, and get great photos of the Easter Vigil fires. Peoples’ faces are just glowing.

Do you have a parting message for the people of the diocese? Thank you for helping me connect with people and stories over the years. I am in awe of the many times I had a front row seat to witness something wonderful. I will always be

grateful to the late Msgr. William O’Connell — he was the founder and guiding spirit for the *West River Catholic*. Best wishes to you (Becky Berreth) and future diocesan story tellers.



LAURIE HALLSTROM

UPCOMING:
BABETTE'S FEAST

CINEMA with the *Shepherd*

JUNE 25 | 6:30PM | ST. JOSEPH HALL, OLPH

Parish priests inspirations in vocations

BY FR. MARK MCCORMICK
DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS

This past spring, when Bishop Scott Bullock asked if I would be willing to become the pastor of St. Therese the Little Flower in Rapid City and remain the chaplain of St. Carlo Acutis Catholic Student Center, striving to have a Marian heart, I said yes to Bishop Bullock.

One of my initial thoughts was: How many priestly vocations have come from St. Therese the Little Flower parish? Which led me to consider the next question: what are the other parishes that have fostered priestly vocations? Right away I thought about Fr. Dan Juelfs and Fr. Kerry Prendiville, who both came from the small rural parish of St. Isidore, in Ralph. I also know there have been other parishes in our diocese that have cultivated several priestly vocations as well. St. Francis of Assisi in Sturgis, Immaculate Conception in Winner, St. Therese the Little Flower in Rapid City and the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Rapid City.

At our priest convocation this May, I recall a conversation with Fr. John Paul Trask from All Saints in Eagle Butte. While I do not remember his exact words, I do remember the excitement he felt simply at the thought of a priest coming from the All Saints parish community.

In the spirit, this is what Fr. John Paul was saying. It would be incredible and awesome, plus it would give the people a sense of pride. It would be amazing for the faith life of the parish community to be able to claim a priest as one of their own sons.

The parishes of the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Martin, St. Michael in Watatunga, and the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help will be able to boast of four of their parish sons who will become priests of Jesus Christ: Deacon Todd VanderMay this June 19 and Deacon Blane Schriock, Deacon Josiah Hanson, and Dillon Johnson next June. Thank you, Jesus and Mother Mary. What a gift these four men, soon to be priests, will be for these parishes and the diocese.

As we celebrate these ordinations, it gives us a chance to assess and to pray about how we are doing as parish communities, as clergy, as family, and as parishioners when it comes to cultivating a culture of vocations

in our parishes and diocese.

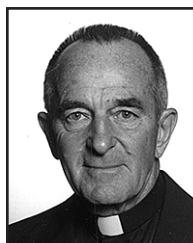
The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University can give us some helpful insights into the survey of the 2026 Ordinand Class to the Priesthood. See the following from Pew Research:

Nine in ten responding ordinands (92%) reported being encouraged to consider the priesthood by someone in their life (most frequently by a parish priest (70%), friend (49%), mother (46%), father (37%) and parishioner (44%).

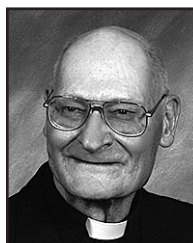
Recently, I surveyed the priests in the Diocese of Rapid City and out of the 20-plus, who responded, they listed several priests, mostly their pastors, who made a big impact in their lives growing up to pray and discern God's call to the priesthood.

Fr. Brian Lane spoke of Fr. Jerry Scherer, who was his pastor, at the Cathedral of Perpetual Help when he was growing up. "Fr. Scherer was this super chill pastor in high school. He was amazing in his calm and peaceful manner at Mass. Nothing ever seemed to distract from the celebration of the Mass."

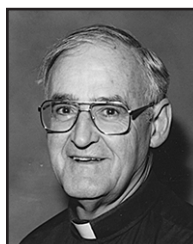
Fr. Kerry Prendiville shared that "Fr. Andy Morvay was an example of someone who, leaving his family and native Brooklyn, came to South Dakota to take many small parishes in Harding County. He prayed with great devotion and taught me to serve at the altar and be in awe of God in the sacraments. He lived gospel poverty and was generous with anything he possessed. Fr. Morvay gave a great example of missionary priesthood. When I was in high school, my cousin, Dan Juelfs, was ordained a priest. His



FR. JERRY SCHERER



FR. ANDY MORVAY



FR. JOE ZELLER

A list of living priests by parish of origin ordained for the Diocese of Rapid City



Fr. Grant Gerlach Cathedral OLPH

Fr. Brian Lane
Cathedral OLPH

Fr. Tony Grossenburg Immaculate Conception, Winner

Fr. Janusz Korban
Our Lady of Częstochowa — Dębska Wola, Poland

Fr. Mark Horn Sacred Heart Parish, Burke

Fr. Brian Christensen
St. Francis of Assisi, Greenlawn, NY
(Adopted: Cathedral OLPH)

Fr. Gary Oreshoski

St. Anne's Parish, Menominee, MI
Fr. Tyler Dennis

St. Anthony, Red Owl (Other parish:
St. Patrick, Wall)

Fr. Bryan Sorensen

St. Francis of Assisi, Sturgis
Fr. Arnie Kari

St. James, Drew

Fr. Andrzej Wyrostek

St. Margaret, Virgin and Martyr,
Izdebnik, Poland

Fr. John Paul Trask

St. Margaret, Lakeside

Fr. Zane Pekron

St. Mary, Milesville

Fr. Jim Hoerter

St. Pius X Catholic Parish in Mission, KS

Msgr. Michael Woster

St. Mary in Reliance and St. James in
Chamberlain

Fr. Timothy Castor
Sacred Heart, Hilltown, PA

Fr. Richard Novotny Immaculate Conception, Winner

Fr. Ed Vanorny
Immaculate Conception, Winner

Fr. John Heying Immaculate Conception, Winner

Fr. Kevin Achbach
St. Therese, Rapid City

Fr. Joshua Lee St. Therese, Rapid City

Fr. Adam Hofer
Cathedral OLPH

Fr. Robert Kinyon Cathedral OLPH

Fr. Mark McCormick
Blessed Sacrament, Rapid City

Fr. Max Vetch Blessed Sacrament, Rapid City

Fr. Matt Fallgren
St. Francis, Sturgis

Fr. Kerry Prendiville St. Isidore, Ralph

Fr. Tim Hoag
Sacred Heart, Philip

Fr. Ron Garry St. Joseph, Gregory

Fr. Jonathan Dillon
St. John, Custer

Fr. Leo Hausmann Immaculate Conception, Bonesteel

enthusiasm and joy in his ministry radiated! I began to pray and even hope for a vocation to the priesthood. I owe these men and others, Fr. Joe Zeller, and my cousin Fr. Eugene Prendiville, an OMI Missionary to Japan when I was a child, an outpouring of gratitude."

Francis Chidi Nwakile, FJS, "The simple lifestyle and availability of the then-Archbishop of Onitsha Archdiocese, the late Archbishop Stephen Nweke Ezeanya, who gave us children, a sense of belonging, by making the time to celebrate children's Mass for primary school pupils at least once every month in the cathedral (now basilica) when I was in primary school, he was among the major factors that influenced my desire of wanting to be a priest."

As you can see, these priests were highly influential, and their witness was powerful in the lives of Fathers Lane, Prendiville and Nwakile in their own call to the priesthood. Pew Research Survey also highlights the

importance of adoration and being an altar server in the lives of the 2026 Ordinand Class to Priesthood. Four in five responding ordinands participated in Eucharistic Adoration (81%) on a regular basis before entering the seminary. Ordinands who served as an altar server constituted (79%) of all respondents.

I am including the link to the 2026 Ordinand Class to the Priesthood for your own prayer. I hope it encourages you to take a more active role in cultivating vocations in your families and parish communities. Visit uscbb.org/resources/class-2026-survey-ordinands-priesthood.

My last challenge to you, as the Vocations Director for the Diocese of Rapid City, is this: take your parish priest out for coffee or dinner, or invite him into your home, and ask him to share his story — how he learned to pray, to discern, and to say yes to the voice of Jesus calling him in his heart to become his priest.

Seton fifth graders finish in the top five at Presidential AI challenge

BY BECKY BERRETH

A team of 5th-grade students from the Excel program at Saint Elizabeth Seton Elementary, Rapid City, spent the week-end in Washington D.C. after winning the state and regional competition in the AI Presidential Challenge with the project “Minimizing Cafeteria Food Waste through AI Analysis.” The project earned them a top five finish at the national competition.

First, the challenge — to come up with an idea for the project that would help solve a real-world problem in their school community. “We started listing ideas that we could use, but we eventually came up with the idea of cafeteria food because it’s just not that good,” explained Hunter McCroden.

During the 2025-2026 school year, the students noticed a significant amount of food being discarded daily. They set out to use AI as a tool for change, focusing on three core goals:

- 1) Using AI to identify the root causes of food waste.
- 2) Analyzing the nutritional impact of uneaten meals.

3) Develop a data-driven solution to improve school menus.

The team used Gemini (Google AI) to build a custom food tracker. They monitored waste across four different lunch periods for an entire week, collecting raw data on what was being thrown away.

“We looked on the share table, and we looked into the trash cans to see what was wasted the most,” said Alex Mikhn. “It was mostly veggies.”

Once they were finished with their observations, they entered the data back into AI to calculate the nutritional loss of the wasted foods.

According to teacher Mercedes Knapp, the students discovered that skipping common items, like salad, fruit, and milk, resulted in a loss of 607 calories per student. “A deficit that contributes to afternoon ‘brain fog’ and decreased academic focus,” she said.

The students then took that information to classrooms and to the people who work in the cafeteria. “We split into groups and we’d go into a room and share a presentation with one of the classes and tell them what’s wasted the most and what



“This project shows that AI isn’t just for adults or tech companies,” teacher Mercedes Knapp said, “Our students proved that when you combine 5th-grade creativity with powerful technology, you can find solutions to problems that affect the whole community.” (Courtesy photo)

they are missing,” explained Grayson Gibbens. “We used AI to see how much protein we’d be losing if we’re not eating that so that we can replace it with something that would be the same amount.”

One of the features of the program was students had to learn to work with AI instead of letting AI do all the work. “It was definitely challenging because you had to create a prompt that AI could easily turn it into,” said Clara Sage. “You couldn’t be vague. Sometimes we would put in explanations, and it would mess it up.”

“When you tell the AI something you have to get every single detail that you need to get into the program for it to accurately make what you’re trying to get it to make,” agreed McCroden.

The final task was to set up a calendar of what the ideal menu for the school

would look like. They used the AI generator to put in foods that had all the required nutrients but skipped the veggies and other items that were being discarded. “We used AI to see how much protein we’d be losing if we’re not eating a food so that we can replace it with something that would be the same amount,” Gibbens said.

After securing first-place honors at both the State and Regional levels, the Saint Elizabeth Seton team represented the National AI Presidential Challenge in early-June.

“This project shows that AI isn’t just for adults or tech companies,” Knapp added. “Our students proved that when you combine 5th-grade creativity with powerful technology, you can find solutions to problems that affect the whole community.”



St. Elizabeth Seton 5th graders used AI to track cafeteria food waste. (WRC photo)

Congratulations
on your ordinations

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for you as you begin
your new ministries

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Deacon
Josiah
Hanson



Deacon
Blane
Schriock



Father
Todd
VanderMay



Deacon Ben Black Bear, Jr.
is Celebrating 50 Years of
Faithful Service as a
Deacon to the Church and
the People.

50th Jubilee Celebration



Sunday, July 19
11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Charles Borromeo Church
St. Francis, S.D.
Dinner to follow in Icimani Building
All are welcome to attend

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 Victim Assistance Coordinator Irene Lee. To ensure confidentiality in our outreach to victims, she can be contacted privately at 605-209-3418 (cell). 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, young people, and vulnerable adults by 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.



**Chancery
Office
closed
Thursday,
July 3.**

In Your Prayers

In Your Prayers is designed to help us remember the birthdays, ordination and death anniversaries of the clergy who serve us. Every effort has been made to have a complete list.

JULY

Birthdays: July 9, Dcn. G.W. Ekroth, July 13, Dcn. Greg Palmer; July 23, Dcn. Calvin Clifford; July 28, Fr. John Paul Trask and Dcn. Steve McLaughlin; July 30, Dcn. Harold Condon and Dcn. Don Moore; July 31, Fr. Matthew Fallgren.

Ordinations: July 2, 2015, Fr. Mark Horn and Fr. John Paul Trask; July 3, 2003, Fr. Kevin Achbach; July 7, 1999, Fr. Tony Grossenburg and Fr. Brian Christensen; July 11, 1993, Dcn. Patrick Coy; July 13, 2002, Fr. Collins Igwilo; July 17, 1993, Fr. Leonard Ssenyonjo; July 18, 2009, Fr. Francis Nsubuga.

Necrology: July 2, 1947, John McGowan; July 2, 1961, Patrick Quilligan; July 2, 1972, Edward Balfe; July 3, 1966, Clarence Biever; July 4, 1966, Joseph Vorman; July 4, 2002, Christopher Scadron; July 7, 1992, Francis Berning; July 12, 1936, Aloysius Keel, SJ; July 12, 1957, Michael Brogan; July 13, 1957, Thomas Coleman, OCD; July 17, 1957, Tarcisius Keller; July 18, 1968, Henry Dunn; July 19, 1890, William Mahoney; July 24, 1968, Joseph Golden; July 26, 1913, Robert Demeyer, SJ; July 26, 1965, William Leahy; July 30, 1917, Martin Kenel, OSB; July 30, 1965, Martin Wittman; July 31, 1939, Henry McRory.

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Happy Anniversary

At the Deacon Convocation held at Terra Sancta Retreat Center, Rapid City, three deacons were recognized for their long standing service to the Church in western South Dakota. (L-R) From Our Lady of the Black Hills, Piedmont — Deacon Walt Wilson, 45 years; Bishop Scott Bullock; from St. Francis Mission, St. Francis — Deacon Ben Black Bear, 50 years; from Our Lady of the Black Hills, Piedmont — Deacon John Osnes, 25 years. (Courtesy photo)

(Deacon Ben Black Bear celebration invitation on page 10.)

pioneer Promenade

SAT., JULY 11, 2026 | HAY CAMP BREWERY | 6:30PM

Join us for an evening full of joy, music, companionship, and merriment as we meet the man, GK Chesterton, and learn more about the new trail Chesterton Academy is blazing in the Black Hills. The evening includes a BBQ dinner by Bashful Bison, music, dancing, and more!



**GUEST: Dr. John Walker
(as GK Chesterton)**



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by July 6



First Deacon Convocation: Deacons Ablaze

BY DEACON GREG SASS

DIRECTOR OFFICE OF PERMANENT DIACONATE

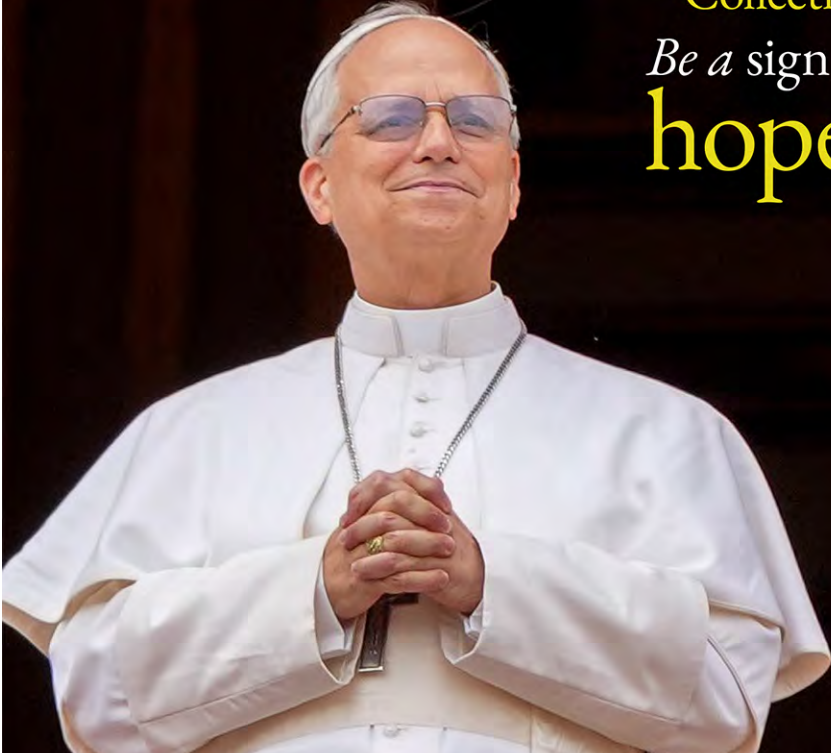
The first Deacon Convocation, “Deacons Ablaze: Fueling Lifelong Learning for Service,” aimed at inspiring deacons to deepen their identity in service through ongoing formation, was held May 1–2, at Terra Sancta Retreat Center. It brought together deacons and their wives for prayer, formation, and fellowship. The event began Friday evening at Holy Cross Chapel with Evening Prayer, followed by Bishop Bullock’s presentation on the importance of ongoing formation, urging a renewed commitment to lifelong growth in ministry. The evening continued with a dinner and jubilant celebration recognizing significant ordination anniversaries: Deacon Ben Black Bear (50 years), Deacon Walt Wilson (45 years), and Deacon John Osnes (25 years).

Saturday’s program focused on practical and spiritual formation opportunities, including presentations on continuing education resources, such as Franciscan University’s Catechetical Institute, a Josephinum Diaconate Institute’s Josephinum Connect, and emerging topics such as artificial intelligence in ministry. The day also included Mass, shared meals, and time for community building among deacons and their spouses. The convocation concluded with a session on grief and loss, equipping participants for compassionate pastoral care, and sending them forth inspired to continue their lifelong service.

Organizers plan to make the convocation an annual event.

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West River Catholic changes

BY BISHOP SCOTT BULLOCK

Ever since I received the joyful news of being appointed as Bishop of Rapid City, I have been prayerfully considering that which is at the very heart of the ministry of bishop: to communicate the message of the Gospel to all those entrusted to my care, which include those baptized as Catholics and, equally, all those who live and visit our beautiful diocese in western South Dakota. With this wide responsibility, I continue to reflect upon the best use of the resources entrusted to our diocese for this sacred mission.

For 53 years, the publication of *West River Catholic* has taken a prominent place in this mission. It is my hope that it will continue to do so for many years, though in a different format and publication frequency.

While we thank God for the fruit born by our publication of *West River Catholic*, we are also obliged to consider continually how our efforts at this time and in this day contribute to the heart of our ministry —

to share the Gospel that saves! What is apparent is that while our newspaper has maintained its high quality, now as a monthly publication, the reading preferences of the general reader have changed, even while the avenues for communication have multiplied dramatically, particularly through digital media. To respond to this changing context into which we seek to communicate the Gospel, and to exercise good stewardship of the resources entrusted to me for this mission (especially as we would expect publication costs to rise significantly if we continued on our current publication format and schedule during this next year), I have decided that, following the publication of the June 2026 edition of *West River Catholic* in its current monthly newspaper format, we will be modifying the layout of *West River Catholic* to a “magazine” format and will publish it seasonally, likely twice a year (with the option of special editions when it seems fitting). I look forward to a new chapter in the



MAILING LABEL

WRC June 2026

West River Catholic

Page 12

publication of *West River Catholic* as part of our efforts to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

I would expect that this newly-formatted *West River Catholic* magazine will continue to be sent to all our households (though not monthly). With this modification of format and new publication schedule, I recognize that there are some folks who will miss a monthly printed newspaper as their preferred format. We will still employ the printed word as part of our communication efforts, even while the changing context is asking us to reallocate some of

our limited resources as reading habits of our large audience have changed. Jesus himself commanded us to be “wise as serpents and gentle as doves” (Mt. 10:16) as we seek to advance his kingdom. Come, Holy Spirit, and give us the wisdom we need to effectively communicate your message that is salvation and life to every human heart, especially to all in your vineyard that is West River!

To sign up for weekly news emails got to:
rapidcitydiocese.org/wrcenews/



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