

*“Teach them to carry out everything
I have commanded you.”*



A Pastoral Letter

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Preface

Recently, I read a very wonderful (at least for me) editorial in the September 2017 issue of Legatus, the magazine of the Catholic lay business organization by the same name. The managing editor, Christine Valentine-Owsik, offered a reflection on her beginning days in Catholic schools and it was very much like my own experience and I would venture to say like so many others of my age.

It didn't just bring back great and fond memories of all of those good religious sisters and parish priests who were so devoted to us and our Catholic education, but it highlighted for me the real and evident and enduring value of a Catholic education and one that was a necessary cooperative effort between families and Catholic parishes and schools.

In my case, I went to first grade (we had no kindergarten in 1955) before I celebrated my 6th birthday in November because my mom told my pastor that I could read and could go in September when classes began. I remember my mom inviting my pastor to our home; he brought a book with him and he asked me to read from it which I did. I was pleased that I didn't make any mistakes even though I read probably very slowly but, he gave his permission. So on the day after Labor Day, 1955, after 8:00 Mass, all of us new first graders lined up outside of St. Peter's School as our teacher, Sister Christella called us by name and we went in for our first day of "real school".

Our Catholic Parish school was four classrooms with two grades in each room and one religious sister teaching in each classroom. From the first day, we all learned how to print our letters and then to write them in cursive style. We all learned our "Times Tables", that is, we learned our arithmetic by reciting over and over addition, subtraction, multiplication and division in unison, as well as going to the blackboard to do the same. We all learned to read and read better every day and we had a spelling bee every Friday along with art every Friday afternoon. However, Monday through Friday, every school day began with 8:00 Mass and then the first class of each day was Religion, using our grade level *Baltimore Catechism*. Finally, when the school day was over at 3:30 in the afternoon, we took our books home because we had real homework to do that night and bring back to school the next morning.

I could go on and on but I think you get my point. My Catholic school education was the most important thing for me, my parents and for the good sisters. I learned a tremendous amount of information and gained an equal amount of knowledge. I also learned that obedience and respect were virtues and that what was good for me was not always what I wanted or what I did not want or expect. Also failure was not the end of my life or the world. All of this I had begun to learn at home and continued to do so but it was in my Catholic school that all of this began to make sense and where I did not forget these lessons.

If I have any certainty in my life the one thing I do know is that between my family and the Catholic school my vocation to the priesthood was fostered. In all of this, I simply want to convey to you young people, to you parents, to you my brother priests, deacons and seminarians, and to you, my dear religious sisters, it is in the truly Catholic environment of our Catholic schools where our good God's gift of faith to us is further developed, strengthened and solidified for life. There is simply no substitute nor alternative that better supports parents as they strive to teach and form their children in the ways of our faith than a Catholic school.

I repeat Christine Valentine-Owsik's final remarks, as she has said it better than I. "I look back on those fledgling Catholic school days with great gratitude. We got so much – solid girding of faith, durable work ethic, lessons in perseverance, obedience, and humility. *Pearls for a lifetime.*"

I would be remiss if I did not say that in the Diocese of Bismarck we have a long and glorious history of Catholic education. We have been given by those heroic Benedictine Sisters and then later the Benedictine Monks the priceless gift and inheritance of a Catholic education tradition, both in our schools and our parishes. What I write of here I do standing on the shoulders of these giants. They have kept the flame of faith alive and have passed this holy torch to us to do the same. My six predecessor Bishops of the Diocese of Bismarck relied on them, as do I, for their continued prayers, good works and wise counsel in our fulfillment of the Catholic Church's holy mission to teach and to form God's People in the ways of faith.

Introduction

Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words: “Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Mt. 28: 18-20)

I have chosen these final verses from the Gospel of Saint Matthew precisely because these are the words of Jesus Himself to His Church, not just at that moment in our human history, but to His Church in every age and most especially to us, His Church, the Diocese of Bismarck, in 2018. What Jesus not only reveals to us but commands us to do must be as compelling for us to hear, to understand and to do, as it was for His Apostles, gathered with Our Blessed Mother and that further group of holy and faithful first disciples.

Jesus reveals the same three essential marks of true discipleship to us in those verses as He did to His first disciples. Because of their transforming experience of Him they believed wholly and entirely in Him and His life; and thus, they had to go to others and share this experience in their words and deeds and allow Jesus to draw others into His life as they had been drawn into it. This belief in Jesus then was forever consummated by and through Baptism and the reception of the gift of faith so that all were literally transformed into living icons of Jesus. Finally, having heard of and experienced Jesus, having been incorporated into His life through Baptism, all had to learn what it meant to be and live in Christ as members of His Body, His Church. This could only come through teaching others all that is to be believed and why it is believed, but just as importantly all needed to be taught how to live what is believed.

Thus, it is the Lord Jesus Himself Who reveals to us the very nature and purpose of Catholic education. It does not exist in a vacuum apart from Catholic life and practice; Catholic education is the *modus operandi* or the blueprint for being a faithful, virtuous Catholic person. To put this another

way, the two sides of the one priceless coin of faith are knowing the faith through being taught and teaching others, and living the faith through the sacramental, spiritual and charitable life of the Church.

In this Pastoral Letter on Catholic education I would like to share with all of you not only the absolute necessity of our Catholic education as a life-long mission and responsibility, and the crucial place it has in the Church itself, but what is the proven way that the Catholic Church has always pursued and accomplished this mission in its daily life.

Historically, Catholic education or catechesis in the faith has been the second necessary apostolate of the Church; second only to the sacramental and spiritual life and practice of the Church. In fact, if our Catholic Church did nothing else but pursue and fulfill these two apostolates, it would be doing what Jesus has taught us to do as His disciples. The fruitful celebration of the sacramental and spiritual life of the Church depends on the right teaching of our faith and the right teaching of our faith is made whole and compellingly beautiful by the reverent celebration of the sacramental and spiritual life of the Church.

In this pastoral letter I will discuss three similar but not identical expressions of Catholic education. While the subject matter is the same, the Catholic faith, they have taken on different methods of teaching depending on the particular circumstances of the life of the Catholic Church in a given period of time. I would like to address each of these three expressions or forms of Catholic education as they still exist today in our Diocese of Bismarck. In so doing, I will highlight what I see are their strengths and weaknesses but I hope to offer a way forward for them. As we look at each of the three expressions of Catholic education it will be necessary to go back to Our Lord's revealing teaching and His command to His Church, to us, in order that we know, understand and make our own His mission to announce the Good News of salvation to others, allow Him through us to draw them into His life in the Church, and then to teach them what it means to have faith in Him in His Church.

Finally, by way of a conclusion, I will present to you my plan for Catholic education in our Diocese of Bismarck.

Part One: Catholic ‘Home Schooling’

In our present times it seems we make a mistake in thinking that ‘home schooling’ is a recent and even new phenomenon. This method of Catholic education is as ancient as the Church itself and, at the same time, what it did in the time of the Apostles, it has continued to do in every age of the Church down to our own times. Catholic education by parents in the home is at the heart of real and true Catholic education.

The reason the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council repeated the constant teaching and Holy Tradition of the Church by calling the family the “domestic Church”, is because that is where all Catholic education begins and grows to maturity. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says it best, and to understand this is to understand Catholic education. “Christ chose to be born and grow up in the bosom of the holy family of Joseph and Mary. The Church is nothing other than ‘the family of God’. From the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers ‘together with all [their] household’. When they were converted, they desired that ‘their whole household’ should also be saved. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world . . . In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are ‘by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith to their children.’” (CCC, 1655-1656)

It is a fact for those of us blessed to be raised in the faith that we began our Catholic education by being ‘home schooled’. Any good history of Catholic education can easily and clearly trace this fact from the Church’s earliest days to the present but that is not my intent here. Suffice it to say that this is as much a part of the life of the Catholic Church as the family itself.

Looking at our own times in the Diocese of Bismarck, Catholic ‘home schooling’ as a comprehensive approach to educating one’s children exclusively in the home became better known and practiced in those decades following the Second Vatican Council. Let me be clear on a crucial point: the misinterpretation, misrepresentation and misapplication of the Council’s teachings by some clergy and religious led some Catholic parents to the decision to enter into ‘home schooling’ so that they could be certain that the Catholic education of

their children was taught in full and complete union with and conformity to the Church's authoritative Magisterium. In this process these parents also took upon themselves the instruction of their children in all of the other needed subjects and courses. This was and is heroic since this is a commitment of one's daily life to the full education and formation of children so that they will be prepared to live a virtuous life as adults in whatever vocation the Good Lord calls them to live and in which they are to save their souls.

By the same token, I must take great care not to make such a generalization that you who read this pastoral letter think that every priest and religious, and every one of our Catholic schools and parishes were abandoning the right Catholic education of our children and young people. However, this does not mean that our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs were not negatively impacted because they were. Another negative occurrence that happened in so many places and in our diocese was the decline in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. That left more of our schools and parishes without the presence and teaching ministry of priests and sisters. Here I must state that so many of our good, holy and generous Catholic lay women and men stepped up and into Catholic religious education, often without adequate preparation so that in our Diocese, our schools and parishes did not collapse. To these women and men, past and present, I offer my profound gratitude, and daily I offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for them and their great and continued sacrifices.

Today's 'home schooling' follows a Church approved curriculum for religious education and in our state an approved curriculum for all of the required courses our children will need in high school and beyond. When the Church speaks of the family as the "domestic Church" it always does so clearly indicating the essential relationship between the individual family and the family of believers in the Church; the family contributes to the greater well-being of the larger Church, and the larger Church family offers that necessary support to the family and gives it the direct connection to what we call the communion of faith and life in Christ Jesus. This is why the Council stated: "Hence, the family is the first school of the virtues that every society needs . . . Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people" (*GE*, 3).

The introduction of children into the ways of our Catholic faith cannot be done better than within their families where fathers and mothers show them how much they love and respect each other and where fathers and

mothers show them how much they are loved and respected. There is no better place for children to learn their first prayers and why Catholics make prayer such a priority; there is no better place for children to learn the importance of weekly Sunday Mass and why it is to be the most important moment of that day. I could go on but I think these examples illustrate the strengths of 'home schooling'; there are more to be sure but I will confine myself to the religious strengths. I do see, however, some weaknesses in this method. First, given the excellence of our own Catholic schools the real necessity for Catholic families to home school in my judgment is not as necessary as it may have been years ago. Second, there is a real advantage for children at an early age to see and learn from other Catholic adults and children their own age what they have already seen and learned from their parents. They experience this from their teachers and their fellow pupils on a consistent basis every day in our Catholic schools. Being 'home schooled' as an only child or with one's siblings is fine but it does not provide from an earlier age that wider experience of other Catholic adults and children learning the same things in the larger context of the Church community.

This really is the true institutional genius of our Catholic Church's schools at every level of Catholic education. Our parents and families learn immediately that not only do they care for and nurture their children but so do our Catholic schools and therefore, our Church.

That essential relationship of the family, the domestic Church, to the larger Church community of believers is made even stronger when Catholic families participate in Catholic school education. It is a fact of my own experience as a Pastor and a Bishop that the more Catholic families desire that faithful and robust Catholic education for their children and make use of our Catholic schools, the stronger the Catholic culture of our schools and parishes become. This benefits the entire Catholic community.

A final weakness in my judgment is one of perception. Often enough I have heard from other Catholic parents and even some priests that families who home school do so because they think our Catholic schools are not Catholic enough when it comes to the teaching of religion and the overall religious formation our children receive in our Catholic schools. I do not know how widespread this perception may be but it does not serve well those who have chosen home schooling for their children.

Part Two: Catholic Parish Religious Education

This is the second expression of Catholic education to which I referred at the beginning of this pastoral letter. All of us I think know what this method is and what is involved in making it available to our children and young people. In the past it was referred to most often as weekly CCD or weekly catechism and was taught by either the parish priests or some dedicated lay people. It was offered to those children and young people who did not attend a Catholic school either by the choice of their parents or because there was no Catholic school reasonably close to their homes and parishes. Thus, they attended a public school and then religious education was added to it usually outside of regular school hours, or sometimes on what has been called a “release time” schedule during the school day.

In our diocese this method is still the most prevalent method of Catholic education due to our local geography in Western North Dakota and the placement of the majority of our parishes, as well as the numbers of Catholic parents with a Catholic school available who choose not to avail themselves and their children of its excellent education. As a complement to the weekly religious education instruction, in years past, religious sisters would come to towns and areas without Catholic schools in the summer to conduct two or three weeks of what was commonly called ‘Sisters’ schools’. In fact, it did happen that this was the only formal Catholic instruction some children received outside of their families in any given year.

Then as now I realize as the Bishop of our diocese that Catholic parish religious education is a necessity, especially for the many parishes of our Diocese where a Catholic school is not available. What has changed twice in my lifetime is the substance and completeness of this expression of Catholic education. While growing up I attended only Catholic schools. Some of my friends did not, but we all received our religious education from the sisters who taught in the parish school as well as those weekly CCD classes using the very same texts for both.

The first change that took place occurred when I was already in the seminary and thus it did not impact my continued Catholic education. The change was simply going from a solid and complete teaching of our religion and practice to what I can most charitably call the “romper room” method. Young children especially, experienced religious education as coloring pictures and singing songs but not much of anything was taught or learned about what

we as Catholics believe and why we believe it. If there was anything offered to teenagers it was mostly social things where there may have been some discussion about current events but again, nothing much of the substance of our Catholic faith was taught and learned. This happened at a time of moral and social upheaval in our society and it certainly has left scars that are very slow to heal. There were always exceptions but in my experience as a newly ordained priest this was much more the norm than the exception.

The second change that took place which continues today for which I am most grateful, began with the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1992. Catholic education in general improved in every way, especially in our Catholic schools and for those who 'home school'. Parish religious education has also improved but seemingly more slowly, but it is improving. I see several reasons for this improvement in our parish programs, not the least of which is that our good and generous laity who volunteer to assist in these programs have real and ready access to the *Catechism* and excellent resources entirely based on the *Catechism* not just for actual teaching but for the good preparation of their classes.

As I said, this is a real and beneficial change for this expression of Catholic education but this expression probably suffered more from what took place after the Council than even our Catholic schools. This will take time to remedy but our parish priests and dedicated lay women and men are determined to assist our children and young people and their parents learn, understand and live our Catholic faith as all of us are called to do.

In its present and improving form, I see two strengths for parish religious education. The first is its availability to all who do not attend a Catholic school and the good priests and laity who organize and teach in the programs. The second strength is that the materials used in the parish programs are all based on and referenced to the *Catechism*. The glaring weakness of this expression is time. Most if not all parish religious education is taught one day during the week for about one hour, and these programs usually start after our Catholic schools have begun and they usually end before our Catholic schools end their year. While parish religious education is truly essential, perforce of circumstances it is insufficient in time to fully teach our faith to our children and young people. Another weakness is the minimal involvement of most parents in the religious education of their own children. They drop off their children for religious education and pick them up afterwards but so many are not directly involved in what their children have been learning.

Part Three: Catholic School Education

What the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught in union with the Church's Holy Tradition regarding Catholic education is found in the *Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum Educationis*. They said: "Since, therefore, the Catholic school can be such an aid to the fulfillment of the mission of the people of God and to the fostering of the dialogue between the Church and mankind, to the benefit of both, it retains even in our present circumstances the utmost importance" (GE, 6). It is no secret that I am a staunch believer in and supporter of a Catholic school education for every Catholic child, young person and young adult. I have been blessed in my life to have had the great privilege and opportunity to attend only Catholic schools and I do thank God for this great gift. However, I do realize that not every Catholic has had this opportunity. What I refuse to accept as reasons for not attending a Catholic school are the costs, the lack of sufficient courses and extra-curricular activities, and that another private or public school offers a better quality education. In my life as a priest and bishop I have had Catholics give me one or all of those reasons why they did not go to a Catholic school or why they do not send their children to a Catholic school.

To my mind and in my experience, a Catholic education is more valuable to parents and children than a secular or public school education because we can freely speak and live our faith in and outside of the classroom, during school hours and after school hours in each and every academic and extra-curricular activity. That is why the Catholic Church continues to invest its time, talent and considerable treasure in Catholic education because it is just that important to our families, to our community of faith and to our civic communities.

Allow me to be very specific about all of the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bismarck, our own Diocesan schools as well as the University of Mary with which the Diocese collaborates on several important levels. There are three guiding principles which undergird Catholic education at every level. The Catholic schools in our Diocese know, understand and respect these principles as evidenced by their obvious Catholic identity. These principles are: parents are the first and best educators of their children; their family is the first school of every virtue, the place where children first learn to whom they are related

and how to relate to each other but also, they learn from Whom they have received their lives; and finally, a Catholic school by its very nature never can nor should try to take the place of the parents and their primary responsibility for the Catholic education of their children. It exists to give that indispensable help to parents in the continuing religious, intellectual and human education and formation of their children. Our Catholic schools do this every day because our Catholic schools live within the heart of our Church.

Our Catholic schools provide a daily antidote to the real deceptions of our culture with which our children, young people and young adults are bombarded. Our Catholic schools at every level reinforce what you, their parents, continue to teach your children about what is true, beautiful and good.

Again, remembering what the Lord Jesus taught and commanded us to do in His name and with His authority, He gave not just a command but the assurance that He will be with us until the end of time. What a great consolation for the Church in every age that no matter the evils arrayed against it if we faithfully persevere He sees to it that our faith and works bear good fruit for the present and the future. What is another fact of the life of our Church is that the Church herself will survive and continue to flourish and she must have schools that are recognizably Catholic that assist in the fulfillment of her mission.

As I said, our Catholic schools exist first and always to assist our parents in their teaching the Catholic faith to their children by their words and actions. The authentically Catholic school possesses and gives to students and staff alike the desire to know, love and serve God because every part of the life of the school is shaped by this desire. Every part of the life of the school focuses on the unique human dignity of every person and the desire to be grateful to God for this singular gift is taught, talked about and fostered by the words and actions of all every class day, be it at regular Masses, daily prayers before, during and at the end of classes, being involved in works of physical and spiritual charity to better understand and live the Great Commandment, and opportunities to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. My dear people, the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Bismarck do this and strive always to do this better with the help of God's grace through the excellent teachers, administrators and support staff who are devoted to Catholic education as a way of life for themselves, and for you and your children.

The Catholic schools in our Diocese including the University of Mary daily fulfill the privileged mission of our Church because we help our parents continue to teach their children even as young adults why it is such a joy to love God and to belong to Him in His Church, and why a virtuous life is always the best way to live and why it is the only reliable measure of their success in this world.

I have mentioned some of the strengths of all of our Catholic schools in the Diocese but there is one which I judge to be above all the others: our Priest-Chaplains, Priest-teachers and Priest-Administrators. Only our Catholic schools afford our children, young people and young adults the daily opportunity not only to listen to them as teachers and counselors, but to get to know them as friends for a lifetime. One excellent result of this for our entire Diocese is that our Catholic schools have become the principal source of vocations for both young men and women.

Their frequent and daily presence in our Catholic schools proves that our identity is Catholic and that Catholic school education is indispensable for the life of the Church because it is indispensable for the life of our students and their families. I have said in more than one gathering that our priests who serve in our Catholic schools are not there because I have told them to be there. They are there because they love the Church and its mission. While I could go on about the strengths of our Catholic schools, I must also look at some of the weaknesses.

By my observation, I see three weaknesses we must continue to remedy but we are making good progress. The first is a less than concerted effort to get the word out to all of our parents who do not enroll their children in our schools that we invite them to see what we accomplish in a Catholic school education and consider it as a much better alternative for them as a family. This will be successful only if all of our parish priests and parishioners give their full support to our schools which give back to our parishes so much. The second is on a different level, and that is what we can afford to pay our excellent teachers, administrators and staffs. That is not so much your problem as it is mine and I promise to continue to strive to do better in this area.

The third weakness is better annual fund raising, especially for tuition assistance for those Catholic families who have a demonstrated need for

financial help in sending their children to our Catholic schools. As you may know, it is the particular law for the Diocese of Bismarck that no child is to be deprived of a Catholic education for financial reasons. Our tuitions are not unreasonable but our Catholic schools are not unreasonable in working with our families who have real financial needs.

Finally, what I am about to say must be said to every parent because every parent has been entrusted by God Himself with the awesome and weighty privilege and responsibility of cooperating with Him in the creation of the new human life of their children, as well as cooperating with Him through His Church in educating in the ways of our faith His children and yours. Before you do anything else as His chosen parents, you simply must live and practice your faith each day for your own sakes and that of your precious children. You cannot enroll your children in our Catholic schools and parish religious education classes or educate them at home and then not fulfill your obligations to God and the Church. Soon enough your children will see this contradiction and they will be confused.

The Church does and will continue to do everything it can to help you live your life in Christ to the full but you must see this as your way to heaven and if you do so your children will understand that it is their way to heaven also by imitating your faith. As Jesus sent the Twelve ahead of Him He charged them to remember that the gift they had received they were to give as a gift (Cf. Mt. 10: 8b) Parents, that gift is your faith and the faith of your children. Catholic education in each of its expressions will only be as effective and fruitful for you and your children as you allow it to be.

Conclusion

In our Diocese of Bismarck I am confident in saying that Catholic education, Catholic faith formation, is very much alive and doing good things but in each of the three expressions of it we can continue to do better and we shall. Clearly, Catholic education as essential to the mission of the Church is not an end in itself. As I said at the beginning of this pastoral letter, as a complement to the Sacramental and Spiritual life of our Church, Catholic education or Catholic faith formation is the means to the end of every Catholic saving her or his soul by cultivating and living our Baptismal vocation to holiness of life.

For all of us to be able to know, understand and live what Jesus teaches and commands us to do (Mt. 28: 18-20) we must understand that as the gift of faith itself is our life, so our Catholic education, our Catholic faith formation continues throughout the course of our life. None of us ever comes to a point when we can or should say I know all that there is to believe and to know about God.

In 1998 I was privileged to accompany my Bishop to Rome for his *ad limina* visit and to be present for the group meeting of the Bishops of Region VII with Pope Saint John Paul II. In that meeting the Holy Father directed his remarks to the assembled bishops with regard to the value and legacy of Catholic education in the United States. It was a magnificent statement by this great Saint about what I have found to be true in our own Diocese and I will cite just one remark. He said: “The greatest challenge to Catholic education in the United States today, and the greatest contribution that authentically Catholic education can make to American culture, is to *restore to that culture the conviction that human beings can grasp the truth of things, and in grasping that truth can know their duties to God, to themselves and their neighbors*. The contemporary world urgently needs the service of educational institutions which uphold and teach that *truth is ‘that fundamental value without which freedom, justice and human dignity are extinguished’.*” (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 4)

What Saint John Paul II extols as that great and ongoing contribution which Catholic education makes to our American culture is precisely what we in the Diocese of Bismarck bring to it, namely, the ‘Catholic culture’ born and nurtured in our Catholic families and then taught and lived with others in our Catholic schools and parishes, all the while inviting others to our experience of Jesus and to come to know, love and serve God.

It is my fondest desire that through our excellent Catholic education and Catholic faith formation we will faithfully do what Jesus teaches and expects of us in our Diocese. To assist us now and looking to the future, I have decided to establish according to the norms of Church law what is called a **Public Association of the Christian Faithful**. Its charism is two-fold: its members will be properly educated so as to be placed in all of our diocesan schools to be teachers of Religion, cooperating with our Priest-Chaplains and all other teachers. Its other and equally important dimension will be the public, active apostolate of Catholic apologetics with the purpose of inviting back to the Church and the full, active practice of the faith those Catholics who for whatever reason have either left the Church or simply lapsed in the active practice of the Catholic faith.

This Public Association will be Diocesan in its nature and purpose, meaning that the Diocesan Bishop is its moderator, its members will serve in our own Diocese, and to begin with, it will be open to any practicing Catholic single women who have completed or are in the process of completing a College degree. They will make annual public promises to live the Evangelical Counsels in community and they will wear a distinctive habit which will be one outward sign of their commitment. In the coming months much more will be published in our Diocesan Newspaper about this new Catholic Association. However, my intent and hope for it is that this will provide once again our Diocese with religious women to continue to provide Catholic education and Catholic faith formation in our schools, parishes and families for years to come, and to assist those who need not have ever abandoned our Faith and Church to return to their true home.

Let us pray for each other by invoking the most powerful intercessions of Our Blessed Mother and Holy Saint Joseph that we will continue to do all we can to be faithful to their Divine Son, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+1 David D. Kagan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan
Bishop of Bismarck

Given at the Chancery
The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
8th day of January A.D. 2018