Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I write to you the Church has just begun to liturgically celebrate the First Week in Ordinary Time. Ordinary Time is the period of the Church calendar outside of other major seasons such as Advent, Christmas or Lent. In Latin, Tempus Per Annum or “time throughout the year”, is a prayerful celebration of the entirety of Christ’s person.

What a remarkable treasury of Faith we are given to break open and share through water and the Holy Spirit! It is a timely reminder that Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the One through whom we have come to be and in whom we will encounter eternity.

It is an opportunity to examine our life in Christ with heart and mind, soul and strength. What is so evocative in our relationship with him that generates a zeal for the Lord and rekindles the fire of God’s love in the temple of our souls? How do we understand our personal accountability for seeking to do what the Lord asks of us? How do we engage faithful stewardship of time, talent and resource, and how are they prioritized in our daily lives? How do we answer the Lord’s call in a holistic way and say that we have come to do his will?

The Liturgy is an indispensable way to answer these questions and to seek the Truth revealed in Christ. It is there that we encounter the living God as we petition, praise and adore. There we listen to the words of Sacred Scripture and receive the Body and Blood of the Lord with hearts, minds and souls contrite and humble. That being said, we should never underestimate the need for our active and prayerful presence and participation in this outpouring of mercy and love on the part of God, mercy and love that give hope for the unity and peace of the Church and for the world. How sad it is that our absence at Mass means that we forfeit so much of the inheritance of the victory of the Cross and the glory of the Resurrection!

And so, I extend an invitation to all the households of the diocesan family to seriously make ordinary your commitment to regular celebration of your Faith through Word and Sacrament. Please include in your prayer the needs of the entire Church, the challenges of the world of today and remember particularly to pray for the selection of our next bishop. May God’s help and protection be with us in all days and in all ways. Blessings in the Lord!

Msgr. Kevin O’Neill
Diocesan Administrator
Helena Rally for Life, Young Adult Witness

Briana Morgan is a Carroll College Student and member of Carroll’s Saints for Life club. She assists with Religious Education at the Cathedral of St. Helena and spoke at the Rally for Life on January 18th. Over 250 people gathered at the state Capitol where Catholics were well represented. Fr. David Severson lead the opening prayer and Fr. Christopher Lebsock addressed the crowd as well as Sen. Al Olzewski. The local Knights of Columbus provided hot beverages on the windy winter day and a group of students from St. Andrew School attended.

The following is taken from Ms. Morgan’s address at the rally.

Today I would like to share with you all why I am pro-life. I grew up in a small family. It was me, my brother and my mom and dad, who early in my life divorced. I grew up in Denver, Col., and attended public schools. Throughout my education and discussion with peers I would often hear that if a child were to grow up in a place where they are not loved or not cared for properly, that it is better for them to have not been born.

Well, I stand here today to tell you my friends, that the children they describe were me and my dearest brother. As a child who suffered from the neglect of an alcoholic parent, as a child who grew up in poverty after my parents’ divorce, and as a child who had to care for her disabled brother who to this day cannot care for himself, I lived the life that pro-abortion advocates say ought not to be. And I can tell you right now, my life is full, complete, and beautiful, and I thank God every day for my life! No amount of suffering would ever change that.

I’m here to tell you that despite what abortion proponents may say I was destined to, I am neither dependent on the state nor am I miserable or depressed. God has blessed me and preserved me and will care for me forever! And if anyone ever questions the value of the life of a person with disabilities, let me tell you this: There is nothing in my life that has taught me better to love, through thick and thin, or to serve without restraint and without reward. I know what it is to will the good of the other, as other, because of the life I have lived with my brother.

And I can look at each and every one of you here today and ask, what have you suffered through? I’m sure every person could give a unique and tragic account, and I would sigh with relief that I did not have to live through that. Every life, through whatever suffering we all may endure, is worth living! And that is what we are here to march for! For everyone to have that chance to live!

So, we are here. To fight for the rights of those who cannot speak and to elevate life in every stage. To every person who is listening, hear this; Your life is valuable, at every stage of your life you have so much dignity and worth! The disabled, the poor, the vulnerable, nothing will ever take away your value to this world!

We do not march here today, and in D.C. tomorrow, for some small cause. We march for life and especially the lives of those who cannot speak, the littlest of God’s creation. These are the poorest and the most vulnerable. This cause for which we stand is not a mere difference of opinion. The right to be born, is a matter of life and death.
SEEK Conference Impacts Young Adults/Students

Fr. Kirby Longo
St. Anne Parish, Butte

This January, 18 college students from across our diocese joined well over 17,000 students and young adults in Indianapolis, Ind. for the SEEK conference hosted by Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS). Fr. Marc Lenneman and I were there and surprised to find many old friends among the 450 priests.

At this difficult time in the Church, it was powerful to see thousands of young people wanting nothing more than to give their lives completely to Christ and his Church. Mary Heaton, of St. Matthew Parish in Kalispell, put it beautifully saying “It felt as though we were a mighty church, but I came to the realization that it is not a feeling but rather the fact that we are a mighty church.”

The many graces of solidarity were not lost on the young people of our diocese.

Seminarian Profile: Deacon Nathan Scheidecker

Cody Tredik
Communications Staff

As he prepares to enter into his final semester of seminary, Deacon Nathan Scheidecker is polishing the final draft of his thesis on sacral vernacular and the benefits of our current English translation of the liturgy. He took some time out to reflect on his time at St. John Vianney Theological Seminary in Denver, and look ahead to his upcoming ministry in the Diocese of Helena.

“I’m extremely excited to finish up here, not only to complete my studies, but also to move into the ministry I’ve set out to do,” Scheidecker said.

Scheidecker grew up in Butte where he was active in parish youth ministry and diocesan youth events. He was a camper and then served as a counselor at Legendary Lodge, the diocese-run Catholic summer camp. Although his response came a bit later, Ned first heard the call to the priestly vocation sometime after his freshman year at Carroll College.

“Thinking back, I know that’s when the Lord began tugging on my heart, though honestly I wasn’t paying too much attention. It was in the year just after I graduated from Carroll that my discernment began in earnest, and saw all of the graces he had been working in my life thus far.”

Upon completing seminary studies, including written and oral comprehensive exams, Scheidecker will be on-track to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders this June and become a priest for the diocese. He is excited to begin the service and ministry that he has been preparing for.

“Everything I’ve been doing is for my eventual ministry, and though it’s a little daunting, I’m eager to get to work sharing the message of just how much the Lord loves us, and how much He desires us. Partly due to my thesis work, which is currently fresh on my mind, I’m also very passionate about the Mass and I can’t wait to help people get to know it better.”

Please keep Nathan, and the rest of our seminarians, in your prayers as they continue their studies and formation.
Your Catholic Voice at the Capitol, Montana’s Catholic Conference

Matthew Brower
Director, Montana Catholic Conference

On January 7th, Montana legislators convened in Helena for the beginning of the 66th regular legislative session. Throughout the session, the Montana Catholic Conference (MCC) will once again be deeply engaged at the Capitol striving to bring a Catholic voice to the legislative process. With bills addressing issues of criminal justice reform, religious freedom, poverty, human trafficking, abortion, child welfare, healthcare, the death penalty, immigration related matters and much more, the conference will work diligently urging lawmakers to craft public policies that protect human life and dignity and promote the common good.

Catholic Mother and RN Speaks in Support of Bill SB 100

On the morning of February 1st, Darbi Courtney, a registered nurse, wife and mother of two girls, gave testimony before the Montana Senate Judiciary Committee in support of Senate Bill 100 (SB 100).

SB 100 is sponsored by District 3 Republican, Sen. Keith Regier, and proposes that abortion providers give a pregnant woman the option to view an active ultrasound and hear the fetal heartbeat prior to an abortion.

After graduating from Carroll College’s Nursing Program, Darbi began work as the Nurse Manager at Options Clinic in Helena. Providing support for women with unplanned pregnancies fits her passion to protect life. She was deeply frustrated by the celebratory tone of lawmakers when New York State’s aggressive late-term abortion law recently passed. She was compelled to act, saying, “I gave testimony because I see that we need to fight for life, especially in a way that is productive.”

The text of Mrs. Courtney’s testimony on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference is below.

To: Montana Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Darbi Courtney, RN, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of SB 100

Not surprisingly, effectively weaving principles of Catholic social teaching into the lawmaking process can be challenging. However, simply being present to lawmakers through conversations and sharing of testimony during committee hearings offers an opportunity for the Catholic Conference to share the Catholic perspective on issues and the rich tradition of social teaching we’re blessed to be able to draw upon. It serves as a good reminder that the work of the conference really is the work of evangelization and it’s a work to which all Catholics, by virtue of baptism, are called to passionately engage.

Throughout this session, MCC will again be utilizing an electronic advocacy alert network to facilitate political engagement by Catholics around the state. This sophisticated grassroots advocacy tool allows Montana Catholics to join their voices with those of our bishops in promoting policies that aim to safeguard the vulnerable and reflect authentic justice. You can sign up to receive network emails by visiting www.montanacc.org/takeaction.

The Montana Catholic Conference is meant to serve as a resource on matters of public policy. If you have questions about specific legislation, advocating on specific bills or issues, or questions about the legislative process, please don’t hesitate to contact MCC.

Most importantly, please keep our lawmakers, government officials and the work of the Montana Catholic Conference in your prayers.

For more information about MCC or to join the conference’s Advocacy Alert Network, contact MCC Executive Director, Matt Brower at (406) 442-5761 or director@montanacc.org.

Some of these women leave that experience believing abortion is not the right choice for them and are grateful for having had the opportunity to witness firsthand what was going on within their body at that very moment.

In any number of other medical procedures, women are offered the opportunity to see their sonogram and mammogram images, chest and bone x-rays, etc. Abortion providers should routinely do the same. This bill helps to ensure that ultrasound information, which can help to inform clinical decision-making, is made readily available to every patient. When making such a significant and irreversible medical decision, it is not unreasonable to ensure that a woman has the opportunity to rely on her own mental and sensory perception, without outside bias or interference. Providing pregnant women the option of viewing an ultrasound says that we respect women and their dignity by trusting them with their own medical information. Women deserve nothing less.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation. Senate Bill 100 helps empower women to make fully informed decisions. What good is having a choice if it is not a fully informed choice?

Madam Vice-Chair and members of the committee, I strongly urge a “do pass” and thank you for your time.
Women’s Conference Coming in April

Cody Tredik
Communications Staff

The fourth annual Catholic Women’s Conference “Spa Day for the Soul” is coming up on April 27th and will be held at the Delta Hotels Colonial by Marriott in Helena. The event invites all women from around the diocese and beyond to a day of prayer, speakers, music, fellowship, and more. This year’s theme is The Family, God’s Masterpiece.

“We’re very excited to come together again this year. It is all about encountering Christ together as women, and the community and unity of the conference is truly powerful,” Roxy Nistler, a conference’s leaders and co-founder, said.

Nistler has been working alongside Velma Burnett of Living Water Parish in Seeley Lake for the last four years to put on the conference.

“We’re happy this year to have the Sister’s of Life from New York joining us, as well as a talk geared towards our young women, and young at heart, which will focus on the centrality of women in the family. Amy [Eickhert] and Caitlyn [Van Horsen] presented at last year’s conference, and this talk will be a wonderful one as well.”

Another exciting new addition this year is a special Mass on the eve of the conference. At 6:00pm on Friday, April 26th at the Cathedral of St. Helena, all women, men, and children are welcome to join in this special family liturgy. Fr. David Severson will preside, and will offer the Mass for the strengthening and celebration of families. The Sister’s of Life will also be there to lead the Rosary.

Nistler, a Cathedral of St. Helena Parishioner, wants Mass for the event to be inclusive. “It’s so important to know that this Mass is open to all! We want to pack that Cathedral on Friday night to honor and pray for families across the world.”

For more information on the upcoming conference, and to register, go to www.helenacwc.com. Registration is $45 before March 15th, and $55 afterward. Registration closes April 15th.
Prayer for Vocations

Father, you call each one of us by name and ask us to follow you.

Bless your church by raising up dedicated and generous leaders from our families and friends who will serve your people as Sisters, Priests, Brothers, Deacons, and Lay Ministers.

Inspire us as we grow to know you, and open our hearts to hear your call.

We ask this in Jesus’ name
Amen.