By Edward Byrne

Back in January of 1982, Hank Williams Jr. released the song “A Country Boy Can Survive.” Of course, it applies to country girls, too, as the final words of the song make clear: “country folks can survive.”

In a year when rolling with the punches was not optional, rural Catholics found out they could indeed make it through the worst pandemic in over 100 years, with religious faith and spirituality a big part of the medicine needed.

Faith, family, friends, fields and forests all seemed to be in the mix once the COVID realities hit home a year ago.

For Fr. Michael Betley, pastor of three parishes with four churches in northern Calumet County, the challenge was a big one when churches had to shut down.

“It’s hard to imagine it’s a year already,” Fr. Betley said. “In some respects there was no game plan.”

The parishes of St. Mary of the Seven Dolors in Stockbridge, St. Mary Help of Christians in Hilbert, and St. John the Baptist/Sacred Heart of Sherwood and Saint John all shut their doors at first.

He gathered his staff together and they started brainstorming.

“The diocese was very helpful in giving us guidelines,” he said. But there was also movement up from the grassroots of the faith community.

“There were a lot of groups within the parishes that just took self-initiative,” he said. “We offered meals … People could drive through and get a free brat and hamburger, and all kinds of things like that. There were a lot of wonderful things that happened that way.”

Besides the corporal works, there was also a desire to keep the spiritual flames going.

The parish membership included a person with digital fluency, and so the churches produced a video prayer service.

“In the beginning, that’s what we did,” he said. “Then we started up with church, and we started up slowly.”

It began with two weekend Masses, where there had been five. But it was a beginning.

“Someone came up with the idea that we should have a transmitter so people could get the Mass on their radios in their cars,” Fr. Betley said. “People who were uncomfortable coming into the church could stay in the parking lot, listen to the Mass, and then we would go out there to bring them communion.”

That was done at three of the church sites, and it worked like a charm – often with more people attending Mass in the parking lot.

Some of the renewal may be rooted in the pandemic, too.

“When one experiences a sense of sacrifice – when things are taken away – I think that moves you into looking for purpose and meaning,” Fr. Betley said. “Spirituality can be a great assistance in that. There’s been a lot of darkness and a lot of people struggling in so many ways.”

Still, he said the church remains positive, hopeful and faithful, and the congregations have been generous in their support.

“We have fewer people giving, but the people who are giving are giving more,” he said.

He said asking worshippers to wear masks and distance physically turned out to be no problem.

“People knew about the pandemic, it was scary, but they knew we were trying to do the right thing,” he said. “We tried to explain that in a very positive way,” he said. “We took care of all those things and welcomed people.”

Family matters

“There were so many times throughout 2020 that I thanked God that we live in a small town,” said Kayla Knaack of Marion.

She and her husband, Nathan, own and operate the Pigeon River Brewery, which also includes a pub and restaurant.

“Like all restaurant owners in the state, we were shut down for a year,” she said. “But we didn’t give up.”

She said the family business has been able to survive by sticking together and adapting to the new normal.

“Family is the most important thing,” she said. “We have each other.”

Deacon Tim Stevenson serving communion to masked parishioners at St. John-Sacred Heart.
Catholic schools

At St. Anthony in Oconto Falls, the initial order to close schools was something no schools – public or religious - were really prepared for. Many urban schools had relied on computers as resources across the board, but St. Anthony Catholic School did not.

The teachers developed a system of “pick-up and drop-off” learning packets for their students and teachers stayed in contact with families through emails and phone calls.

Principal Sue Beschta said teacher creativity kicked in right away.

“Our kindergarten teacher did virtual show-and-tell, so they would read their clues and everyone would try to guess what it was,” she said.

“We had a virtual spirit week.”

The school auction went from in-person to virtual, and Fr. Joel Sember

Fr. Greg Parent getting his temperature checked at St. Anthony Catholic School.


While many schools in the state, from shutdown through the end of the school year, focused mainly on what students had already learned, St. Anthony Catholic School did more.

“We did our best to introduce new things and keep the kids ending [the school year] on a good note and learning and being successful,” Beschta said.

Summer was spent planning to reopen school in the fall.

One parent, an emergency room nurse by profession, helped the reopening team keep things in medical perspective.

“Our goal always was to be open all year long,” Beschta said. “We didn’t have a plan of being open just a couple of days a week, or being virtual some days. It was ‘How can we stay open five days a week?’ That was the goal.”

Sanitation, health and safety were integrated into everything the school has done this year.

There were small changes – like staggered lunches and staggered recess times – but St. Anthony was able to remain open five days a week.

Throughout the experience this school year, there has been a theme – always chosen at the beginning of the year.

“Our theme was ‘Depend on God,’” she said. “That carried us through. And this year, for Catholic Schools Week, we studied the parables.”

“We certainly know what it means to depend on God,” Beschta said.

The response of students to the pandemic accommodations has been heartening.

“I feel that children are way more flexible than adults,” she said.

“People wondered how kids are going to wear masks. They really have less of a problem with it than adults. They just put them on and away they go ... They know it’s to keep everyone healthy and safe.”

She said children are finding ways – other than the traditional hug – to show appreciation for others in their lives.

“If the families tell them it’s going to be OK, and their teachers tell them it’s going to be OK, they trust that,” Beschta said.

Family farm

Rural life in Wisconsin means agriculture or agribusiness, and south of Wausau, the Quantum Dairy farm looms large. It’s on a hill, and so the view is fantastic.

It was almost turned into a subdivision several years ago, but that didn’t happen because Richard Wagner made sure the rich farmland stayed in production agriculture.

“We are the ninth iteration or generation,” Wagner said.

In 1890, the Buchholtz family homesteaded the land and worked it for four generations. Then a developer bought it and planned to sell the cows, bulldoze the farm buildings, and turn it into a country subdivision.

Richard and Kathy Wagner lived across the road and valued its home for its rural setting.

They approached the developer and invited him to go into business, expanding the dairy farm instead of bulldozing it.

“He was up to 500 cows up to that point,” Wagner said.

The two families were 50-50 partners for six years before the Wagners bought the man out.

These days, the Quantum Dairy has 3,200 cows – including the dry cows.

Wagner is a member of SS. Peter and Paul Parish in Wausau, and finds spiritual life and rural life going...
A few weeks from now, people from around our Diocese will gather for our annual Rural Life Mass. The ongoing pandemic means that this year’s event will look different than it has in the past. For one thing, there will only be one Mass instead of the two that we normally have. Also, we will have to limit attendance and there will be no luncheon or speaker this year. While it is disappointing that our gathering won’t be what it has traditionally been, it’s a step forward from last year when the Masses were canceled altogether in the early days of the pandemic. Above all, we can be grateful for the opportunity to gather to thank God for his many blessings, especially the blessings of our farmers and our rural communities.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, one word that has been used more frequently is “essential.” The word essential means absolutely necessary or extremely important. More than that, when something is considered essential, it means that it is part of the essence or true nature of an object. In other words, if an object is missing something that is essential, the object is no longer complete or whole. It is this understanding of the word essential that comes to my mind when I think of the rural communities in our diocese.

Without them, the diocese as we know it would be incomplete. I think of the essential role that our rural parishes and schools play in our diocese. Not only do they support the spiritual needs of people in their communities, but they also provide physical, mental, emotional, and social support to the people of our diocese. Many of our rural parishes and schools have roots that go back as far as the towns and villages themselves and often the families that serve in those parishes and schools have been there since the beginning. Without the dedication of countless pastors, pastoral leaders, deacons and lay people, many people within our diocese would not know the love of Jesus. Our rural parishes and schools are essential to the Diocese of Green Bay. When I think essential, I also think of our farmers and the many people involved in the food production and distribution process. Most of us are very removed from the process of making and securing our food. With the pandemic and the rise in grocery pick-up and delivery services, we don’t even really have to pick out our food in a store anymore. Because of this, it has become so easy to take our food for granted. But throughout our diocese each day, farmers and their many helpers work tirelessly milking cows, growing crops and raising livestock. Truckers collect the raw materials from the farmers and bring them to production facilities where workers process our foods into bread, cheese and meat. Ultimately, it is this effort and work that ensures that we have food on our tables each day. Farmers and the entire agriculture industry are essential to the Diocese of Green Bay.

One other essential aspect of our rural communities is the land and the beauty they offer. During the course of the pandemic, when gathering in person indoors has meant greater risk, the nearby opportunities for us to be close to nature has been good for our souls. Whether we have explored the waterfalls of Marinette County, spent time fishing or hunting in the countryside, or taken a drive along the shorelines in Door, Kewaunee or Manitowoc counties, our rural communities provide abundant space to breathe freely and drink in the majesty of God’s creation. The beauty of our rural communities is essential to the Diocese of Green Bay.

Friends, we are blessed to live in the Diocese of Green Bay and without the rural communities that make up this diocese, life would not be the same. To show our gratitude for this blessing, consider joining us for this year’s Rural Life Mass which will take place on Saturday, April 10, at St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Waupaca. If you can’t join in person, consider joining via livestream. To get more information, to RSVP your attendance, or to find the link for the livestream, go to gbdioc.org/rurallife.

Whether or not you are able to participate this year, I hope that you will join me in giving thanks to God for the blessings he has provided us in our many rural parishes, schools and communities. May our God’s abundance continue to pour out his blessing on our rural communities and the many people they serve each day!

Three families own Quantum Dairy in Weyauwega.

Workers at Quantum Dairy cleaning and sanitizing milking equipment.

“Number of members have stayed away the whole time, but we have a group of people who have come back,” Wagner said. Distancing and mask-wearing have simply not been a problem for them.

Wagner is on the Weyauwega-Fremont Board of Education and said the public schools have done a good job of staying open to in-person instruction.

Coming back

The future is not fully in focus, but Fr. Betley said the pandemic experience has taken a toll on our faith life. “Church is social. We’re communal, and so this has greatly affected us in the sense of not being able to come together, not being able to touch one another,” he said. “That really has had great bearing on us, even to the point that we’re not singing.”

While some people are quick to say that we will never go back to life before COVID-19, Fr. Betley doesn’t sound that pessimistic. “These are going to be some interesting things that we move back into as a church,” he said. “It’s going to take some time. But I’m hopeful.”

That’s pretty much the story of rural life. You plant some seeds, then hope and pray. Amen. Alleluia.
Farmers and rural communities help their neighbors during the Coronavirus pandemic by donating food and drinks from their farms like milk, carrots, tomatoes and many other types of crops. Another way the farmers can help is to donate milk to the factories so they can make things like butter and cheese for people who are having a hard time finding it in their local grocery stores. In my opinion, the farmers are being very helpful even though we have a pandemic happening. The way a rural community can help is to go to the stores and use some money to get some food and drinks from a grocery store and give it to a homeless shelter or a food pantry. In my opinion, I think that the people that get the food from their farmers are very happy to get it, but food is not the only thing farmers give. They sometimes give the hide of their animals so they can become things like blankets, coats and sometimes gloves. Now that is a lot of things that farmers give. And that is how farmers can help communities around them.

Farmers and Rural Communities

Cecilia Dreifuerst – 3rd Grade
Saint Thomas Aquinas Academy, Peshtigo

Farmers and rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic so they can be healthy, strong and can visit their families. Farmers are the most important people during this pandemic because without them we would be starving, not healthy, thirsty and worst we would probably not survive. In my opinion, we should thank them a lot. Also, thank God for his creation because then farmers would have nothing to give us. Also, farmer and rural communities help neighbors by donating food, furniture and other stuff. They also help by cheering up the people who are sad and also making people that are mad during this pandemic calm down. During this pandemic we can all help by when they’re lonely, cheer them up, when they’re hungry, give them food, when they give us something, thank them, and when they hurt, send them get well soon cards! We can also follow God by doing what God tells you during COVID-19 and do not forget to pray for others. So that’s how they help during this pandemic.

Adrienne Day – 2nd Grade
Our Lady of Lourdes School, De Pere

Hi, I am Adrienne and this is what I think farmers do during the pandemic. I think that the farmers are still doing their job while being safe. They are maybe sending baskets of food to their neighbors. And delivering food to the stores and markets. They wear gloves when they feed the animals so the animals are still healthy. So that is what I think farmers are doing during the pandemic.

Farmers Still Work

Ivy Strauss – 4th Grade
St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, Peshtigo

Farmers and rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic by always getting up and still doing their work and God has always been there to help them when they are struggling. During this pandemic, it has been a hard year because factories have been closed, and not taking their milk, cheese, fruit, vegetables and other crops. Farmers still got up every morning to provide food for people. God was still with them every morning they got up and worked. Because of COVID-19, farmers had to throw out their crops and they did not get money this year because no one would take their crops and produce to stores. God has been with farmers this whole pandemic and helped them a lot. Some farmers started fundraisers and did get money, but not as much as they did when they worked and gave their crops to factories. But they still have provided food for us every day.

Farmers Support Neighbors

Paul Nowak – 4th Grade
Holy Family Catholic School, Brilliant

How do you think farmers and their communities support their neighbors during COVID-19? One of the ways they do this is by giving the crops they grow to their neighbors who are in need. Farmers can give items such as corn, milk, and beef. Communities can give donations, clothing, and food. It is nice how people support one another in smaller, rural communities.

When you live in a small town, people know each other and look out for one another. They see the needs of their neighbors. Farmers do the amazing work of growing corps and raising animals for food. When they see a neighbor in need, they generously give extra food to them to help them in their time of need. This is beneficial to the farmer, also, so they won’t have to waste any extra food. It goes to someone who can use it and needs it.

Farmers work very hard to give to the communities, especially during this time of pandemic. I am very thankful for all they do to provide food and help to those all around them.
How Farmers Impact Rural Communities
Conrad Pakala – 5th Grade
Holy Family Catholic School, Brillion
Farmers do a lot for their communities, but do you think how kind and generous they are? Farmers help us every day by putting food on the tables of the people in their community.

Farmers provide their community with food and milk to help keep everyone healthy in these hard times. During these tough times farmers grow crops and ship them out to people who need them the most. This establishment is called Feeding America. Farmers grow vegetables and sell them at the farmers market during the pandemic. They also sell their animals to be butchered like pigs, cows, and chickens. They also milk cows to make milk, butter, and cheese. Farmers are the most caring and generous people that I know. They do their part to help support small communities.

Farmers do a lot to help support our communities. They are caring, kind, and generous, especially in these tough times.

GRADE 6-8 ESSAY WINNERS
Isabelle Bolle – 8th Grade
Holy Family Catholic School, Brillion
Farmers do immeasurably more for us than we can imagine, and their jobs got even more difficult with the extra weight of these hard times resting on their shoulders. When the pandemic struck the farmers needed to adapt to the issue to find the solution. They did their best to reach as many families as possible in a short amount of time. Some farmers drop food off at homes while others had online Farmers Markets to sell their produce. They’ve also had to increase their amount of crops so they can reach more individuals. In doing so they had to rush out to their fields to plant an additional amount of crops. Working longer hours became the new normal with grocery stores rapidly running out of products. The farmers had to try and hasten up production to get more food into the stores. Farmers are some of the hardest working people in our country and we owe them our thanks in many remarkable ways. The next time you see a farmer remember to thank them for all the wonderful things that they do for us.

How do Farmers and Rural Communities Support their Neighbors During a Pandemic?
Olive Kolmorgen – 6th Grade
Holy Rosary School, Kewaunee
Doing things that you used to do, like go shopping, eat at restaurants and going in public in general is very challenging when there is a virus spreading everywhere around you. Here is how farmers and rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic. Farmers spend all of their days planting crops, milking cows, collecting eggs, and working to provide us with food, because of how hard it is for some people to go out and shop for food during this time. There are even different kinds of farmers that help us, for example cotton farmers. They provide us with clothes, and some farmers keep our environment clean. Farmers help give businesses money by giving them food to sell.

Rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic by keeping the area safe. For example, people that work for the city can keep people safe by plowing snow off the roads, for people that may be traveling. Rural communities may have activities for people to do for entertainment. Doctors, nurses, and police officers keep people safe during this time. That is how farmers and rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic.

How do farmers and rural communities support their neighbors during a pandemic? Logan Schmidt – 8th Grade
Holy Family Parish, Brillion
Farmers and rural communities supported their neighbors during the pandemic through a variety of different ways. One such way was to hand out food donations. For example, our farm had a local community group use our farm’s driveway to host a drive-thru cheese hand out of a variety of cheeses and additional information about other community support groups. Also, the FFA chapter that I belong to did an Artisan Grilled Cheese meal kit give away to local community groups. Also, the FFA chapter that I belong to did an Artisan Grilled Cheese meal kit give away to 120 families. Then a couple months later, they also gave away 130 gallons of chocolate milk and 120 pounds of fresh cheese curds. All of these items were donated by local agricultural organizations and businesses. Another way that the community was helped out was by the state donating the money to allow the school to give free lunches. Since this happened, many kids got a lunch and breakfast for free. These are a few of the many things that happened in the Brillion community. Without the support of farmers, organizations, state leaders, and local businesses, none of these events could have happened to have supported their neighbors during the pandemic.
Hello, my name is Zach Olson, one of the recipients of the 2020 Rural Life Scholarship. My home parish is Holy Name of Mary, Maplewood. I am extremely grateful to the committee for awarding me the scholarship but also to the people who donated money at the annual Rural Life Mass to fund the scholarship. I am a freshman at the University of Wisconsin majoring in Dairy Science. Since I started college I have become a member of the Badger Dairy Club and the Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity. The AGR Fraternity is a social and professional organization whose members are mostly majoring in an agriculture career. Our fraternity also volunteers throughout the Madison area at nonprofit events. This has helped me grow as a person, realizing that what I want to do because this will be the best of both worlds for me. I also have a love for numbers and studying money. This is how I concluded my plans pretty much figured out. After college, I plan on getting a job at an accounting firm, agricultural banking, or something along those lines, to gain knowledge. After years of learning as much as I can, I want to open up my own firm to specifically help farmers out. I want to know what farmers should do with their money to make the most out of it. My dad is a beef farmer, so I have grown up in the farming world and fell in love with agriculture at a young age. I also have a love for numbers and studying money. This is how I concluded what I want to do because this will be the best of both worlds for me.

Even though I am four hours away from home and church, I know that God is with me on this new journey. I have found a parish that is within walking distance of campus and I attend Mass weekly there. It has been difficult to leave the parish I am so comfortable in and join a new one, but I know that God is by my side. God Bless.

By Zach Olson

This scholarship has meant a lot more than just receiving money. I have been very involved in my parish, Saint Louis in Dyckesville, especially throughout the past few years. I know that receiving this scholarship has made many parishioners proud of the things that I have accomplished. While being involved I have met so many new people and built so many relationships in my parish. The number of people that reached out after hearing I received this scholarship was truly a blessing. I would not have received this scholarship if it wasn’t for my Pastoral Leader, Pat Ratjaczek. Pat sent this scholarship along to me last year as well as putting a great letter of recommendation for me.

Although I still have a while before graduating college, I already have my plans pretty much figured out. After college, I plan on getting a job at an accounting firm, agricultural banking, or something along those lines, to gain knowledge. After years of learning as much as I can, I want to open up my own firm to specifically help farmers out. I want to know what farmers should do with their money to make the most out of it. My dad is a beef farmer, so I have grown up in the farming world and fell in love with agriculture at a young age. I also have a love for numbers and studying money. This is how I concluded what I want to do because this will be the best of both worlds for me.

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By Mackayla DeBaker

Note: Each year the Rural Life Committee awards scholarships to students pursuing post-secondary education that results in serving the agricultural community in their chosen profession. Recipients must be active members in their parish community, exhibit leadership qualities, and receive a recommendation from their parish staff. The funds for the scholarship come from the collections at the annual Rural Life Masses. If you would like to contribute to this fund but are unable to attend the Mass this year, please contact Peter Weiss, Rural Life Coordinator, at pwess@gbdioc.org or (920) 272-8321. Thank you to all who have made these scholarships possible.

- Watch a livestream of the Mass at: LIVESTREAM
- Masks are required for all people attending the Mass.
- St. Mary Magdalene, N2845 Shadow Rd., Waupaca
- April 10, 2021, at 10 a.m.
- Mass will begin at 10 a.m., followed by the blessing of soil, seeds, animals, and machinery.
- To allow for social distancing, those interested in attending should contact the parish to reserve a spot.
- Masks are required for all people attending the Mass.
- QUESTIONS & MORE INFO
  St. Mary Magdalene Parish
  (715) 258-2088
  jeri@smm-waupaca.org
  smm-waupaca.org
  Diocese of Green Bay
  Office of Living Justice
  (920) 272-8321 or 1-877-500-3580 ext. 8321.

Mac and Cheese

2 1/2 cups elbow macaroni (10 oz)
4 tbsp butter unsalted
4 tbsp all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp pepper
3 cups milk lukewarm
2 cups cheese of taste (cheddar)
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
1/2 tsp smoked paprika

Preheat oven to 350 F degrees. Use 9x13” pan – butter sides, butter, flour, salt, pepper and milk. Slowly add cheese of choice, over medium-high heat until sauce thickens and bubbles. Scrape sauce: Cook minutes. Turn off the heat. Add prepared macaroni. Sprinkle with Crushed top option - 1 cup panko, 3 tbsp butter and 1/4 tsp salt.

Insert text: The Compass

RURAL LIFE DAYS 2021
SATURDAY, APRIL 10:
- MASS WITH BISHOP RICKEN
- THE BLESSING OF SOIL, SEEDS, ANIMALS, AND MACHINERY

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LIVESTREAM - Watch a livestream of the Mass at: facebook.com/stmarymagdalenewaupaca. The recording will be posted on the parish website the next week.

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Pastoring amidst the pastures

By Fr. Tim Shillcox, O.Praem

“All politics is local,” observed former Speaker of the House, Thomas “Tip” O’Neill. So is all Christian community.

Rooted in the Trinity of God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — our life with God, in Jesus inescapably brings us into relationship with others who also seek, pray, serve, care and confess.

For the church, the “parish family” is the local expression and basic cell of those interdependent Christian relationships; even in huge “factory” parishes, “base communities” and neighborhood clusters cultivate closeness — “communia,” as Norbertines would say.

But both in size and setting, there is something beautiful, direct, down-to-earth, relentless and glorious about Christian life in rural parishes. Jesus Himself seems to have anticipated this, using earthy parables, various agricultural images and farming references frequently in His teaching. One of the “titles” He ever claimed for Himself — twice — is “Good Shepherd” (John 10) — “pastor” in Latin.

Having dreamed of being a “country pastor” since I was a college kid, I’m deeply grateful for two such “pastoral” assignments here in the diocese — Holy Cross, Bay Settlement (1992-2003), and since 2016, St. Rose, Clintonville/St. Mary’s, Bear Creek. Pastoring in these settings has cultivated a deep awareness of the connections between the land, seasons and rhythms of rest, planting, growth, harvest and thanksgiving … against the backdrop of hope and hard work.

On his pastoral visit to Holy Cross while I was there, in 1994, Bishop Robert Morneau helped Cross while I was there, in 1994, against the backdrop of hope and growth, harvest and thanksgiving … seasons and rhythms of rest, planting, farming references frequently anticipated this, using earthy about Christian life in rural parishes.

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On his pastoral visit to Holy Cross while I was there, in 1994, Bishop Robert Morneau helped our schoolchildren to recognize and cherish the view from their classrooms, overlooking barnyards, cow pastures, farm fields and the bay. We were able to have a lamb for “Good Shepherd Sunday” (they do remember the shepherd’s voice); hatch chicks, in place of Easter flowers (a good vocal supplement to the choir) and even employ a donkey to lead Palm Sunday processions.

Besides the closeness to nature, sensitivity to seasons and an awareness of our dependence on the Earth, pastoring in a rural setting teaches about Faith:

• Like the sprouting of seeds, the hatching of an egg, the calving of a cow, life — all life — is mysterious, miraculous and of God.

• Like the organic, obvious patterns of the farm (and the example of Jesus), it’s very good to keep things “simple” and “down-to-earth.”

• Like the farmer must trust, in order to plant, Christians risk letting the “good seeds” of Word and Eucharist be planted to grow within us.

• Like the manure which fertilizes the land (and stings our nostrils), confession of our sins is a kind of “fertilizer,” a powerful moment of healing and growth in mercy and virtue — “O happy fault!”

• Like daily chores in the barn, our prayer must be continuous, even relentless… “at all times.”

• Like seed planted in hope of germination, growth, fruitful harvest and harvest, we bury the bodies of our loved ones who’ve died in the earth, a “stone’s throw” from the cathedral (or “cathedral)"

• Like “Century Farms,” passing within families “from one generation to the next,” we seek to pass on our Faith and parish life forward to beloved children and grandchildren.

There are characteristics of God’s People in rural areas that reflect powerfully:

• A diligent work ethic, even among teenagers — happy, faithful, content.

• Among the young, our confirmation candidates, the wisdom of “old souls”: perceptible, thoughtful, reverent of tradition, observing life, with deep roots in Faith, Family and Nature.

• A toughness and resilience, even in the face of tragedy, coupled with a baseline of trust in God’s Care and Providence.

• An appreciation for the community and a delight in simple pleasures, like the Sauerkerfestival every summer at St. Mary’s. A few surprises pastoring in the rural areas:

• I’m as busy as I’ve ever been, with a wide variety of tasks — pastoral, sacramental, pragmatic (like “bleeding” the school boiler); the variety is “balancing” for me. No sleepy, pre-retirement past.

• Traveling seven miles between parishes, or into the “cities” for hospital calls, provides peace, transition, “change of scenery” and prayer time, which I hadn’t anticipated…

• The smaller scale of things is a blessing — keeping things personal, more focused in the experience, the people, and less on playing the “numbers game.”

• It’s been amazing to learn of the number of vocations to priesthood and religious life who have come from St. Rose/St. Mary’s — Holy Cross, too! Our sons include several Norbertines, which makes me grateful; our “favorite son” of St. Mary’s, Bishop Morneau, makes us very proud.

Often I visit the grave of Auxiliary Bishop John Grellinger, St. Mary’s pastor from 1965-1974; he implemented Vatican II, whose four sessions he attended! He did so much to “grow” both parish and village! He chose to be buried here, and his simple tombstone reflects the local and universal nature of our church: “Bishop Grellinger — Council Father of Vatican II.”

“Eternal Rome” and a village of 450 are connected; St. Peter’s Square and cabbage fields of Outagamie County are linked; the bustle of Vatican City and the buzz of the “Kraut Factory” are yoked; frantic Italian streets and Christmas tree farms are united. “Urban” and “Rural” — inseparably connected!

Bay Settlement Sr. Mary Samuel Brunner is helping me to hatch chicks again this year for Easter. Along with these tiny creatures, “busted out of their eggshell tombs” to declare Christ’s Resurrection, she has shared a few lines from e. cummings poem about how it is, “out here”;

“i am a little church (no great cathedral) far from the splendor and squallor of hurrying cities my life is the life of the reaper and the sower prayers are prayers of earth’s own clumsily striving (finding and losing and laughing and crying) children whose any sadness or joy is my grief or my gladness around me surges a miracle of unceasing birth and glory and death and resurrection over my sleeping self float flaming symbols of hope, and i woke to a perfect patience of mountains.”
Enlarged image of the page with the following content:

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