A tanker pulls off Hwy. 22 into the barn yard at Blaser Farms. The dairy herd of 600 Holsteins are milked three times a day.

Faith and agriculture go together on Oconto County dairy farm

By Bob Zyskowski

GILLETT — You might think Roger and Karen Blaser were describing the birth of one of their children when they talk about the birth of a calf.

“Assisting in a calving, it’s just amazing,” Roger, 67, said sitting at the dining room table in the Blaser farmhouse on State Hwy. 22 about halfway between Gillett and Oconto Falls.

“It comes out all wet, and then it’s shaking its head to dry off,” he said, emotion creeping into his voice.

“That’s the part about farm life Rog and I really like,” added Karen, 64, who still helps feeding and caring for calves. “Every day is something different, and that’s what’s cool about farming.”

The Blasers know a co-dependency exists between them and the herd of Holsteins in their barns. Cows are fed and kept healthy and comfortable, and the milk the cows provide supports their extended family and a small crew of employees, along with being nutritious food for many.

The Blasers know they are dependent upon God as well.

“When things are going really good, you can’t say enough times that you’re blessed,” Roger explained. “When things are challenging, you have to have faith that you can work through it. And you can’t do it alone.”

In the family since 1945

A striking red and white sign in the shape of a barn front identifies Blaser Farms along both sides of that flat stretch of Hwy. 22 in Oconto County.

The Blasers own 800 acres and farm another 1,000 they rent from neighbors.

They raise crops primarily for feed and silage. “Corn is our biggest crop,” Roger noted, planted on about half the land. They also grow alfalfa and grass.

“The rest is wheat and oats for the straw,” Roger said. “That’s for the bedding.”

“Rog and I really like that,” Karen said. “Every day is something different, and that’s what’s cool about farming.”

Roger’s father, Alten Blaser, bought the original acreage in 1945 and began farming and raising a family with his wife, Gloria, who is “96 and sharp as a tack,” Karen said.

Dairy is what they do.

What started as a herd of 125 when Roger and Karen took over the farm in 1984 when his dad passed away is now 600 head.

“When our boys came back to work on the farm we built the other barn,” Roger said. “When we had just 125 cows we were considered large; not now, when some of the operations milk thousands of cows.”

The Blasers’ cows are milked three times a day, and milking goes around the clock. Karen pointed out that the men and women who work 12-hour shifts and the high school students who help are important to the dairy operation’s success.

“You’ve got to give credit to our employees,” she said. “We’ve had this crew for quite a while. They all

BOB ZYSKOWSKI | FOR THE COMPASS

In Oconto County, Roger and Karen Blaser continue to operate the dairy farm Roger grew up on. Now in their 60s, the couple has watched their adult children grow into responsibilities for managing the farm, the herd and the crops they grow.

BOB ZYSKOWSKI | FOR THE COMPASS

March 10, 2023 | 1A

RURAL LIFE DAYS 2023

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Diocesan Mission

As friends and followers of Jesus, we are devoted to fostering households and communities of discipleship through the mission and ministry of the Catholic Church.

Rural Life Coordinator: Peter Weiss
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Rural Life Mission

We, the Green Bay Diocesan Rural Life Committee, rooted in the Gospel and realizing our interdependence with all creation, strive to bring this awareness to all people.
**FROM BLASERS PAGE 1A**

seem so happy, and they know our expectations.

Roger said, "We've had a lot of young people who worked for us who have gone into agriculture, too," which goes with the Blasers' hopes that family farming will be viable into the future. "As long as they love animals, it'll work," he said.

**'Cows want to be bored'**

Farm records show that the Blaser dairy was well-regarded even back in the day. "People from all over the world came to see the operation," Roger said. "There are signatures of people from England, Switzerland, France, Argentina, Brazil. We've always been pretty progressive." (Although the barns are more modern, the milking parlor needs an update, Karen acknowledged.)

Walking through the barnyard, you'll see the small hill covered with a white tarp and old car tires that shelters silage feed for two. Manure ponds are out in the back of the property. They're kept up to date on regulations from the Department of Natural Resources, Karen noted, with Roger adding, "We don't mind the rules. The rules are there to protect us, too."

In the barn where some 250 Holsteins are feeding, Roger pointed out fans and a sprinkling system overhead throughout that keep the cows cool in summer's heat. The animals provide their own heating source, Roger stated. Holsteins produce best when the temperature in their environment is not too hot or too cold. "The animals are kept in the barns rather than allowed to graze in the fields," Roger said. "We used to let them out to pasture," Roger said. "When it was too hot, the cows all went in the barn for the shade. When it rained, the cows all went in the barn to get out of the rain. When it was cold, we kept them in anyway. What we found was that if you keep your cows fed, comfortable and healthy, they're better off in the barn. They're creatures of habit. They want to be together."

"Cows want to be bored. As soon as you mess up their routine you lose production."

The Blasers' animals are kept in the barns rather than allowed to graze in the fields.

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**Family pride**

"I was born and raised here," Roger said, "and I was probably 10, 12 years old when I started milking, and I did that right up through high school. I never really wanted to do anything else but farm. I really enjoyed it. My dad was that way. I never heard him say a cross word. He was always humming while he worked. I learned a lot from my parents because, from the time we were little on, they always kept us involved in what was happening on the farm. We've tried to continue that with our kids."

With obvious pride, Karen noted that three of their children work with them on the farm, and the fourth, Erik, is a herd manager in Colorado.

Karen didn't grow up on a farm, but after going out with Roger for five years before they were married she knew what to expect from being a farm wife.

"I worked for an electric co-op for a while, but I started doing all the calves, feeding them and whatever else needed to be done."

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**A Holstein is patiently milked in the Blaser Farms dairy operation that runs 24 hours, seven days a week.**

In Oconto County, Roger and Karen Blaser continue to operate the dairy farm Roger grew up on.

Karen said. Later, she worked on the operation's books. Today, as Karen and Roger ease back on day-to-day work, they're delighted that their children are taking over so many farm responsibilities. Son Josh has taken the reins as farm manager, making decisions on feed and the six full-time and three part-time employees. Daughter Trisha is the herd manager who handles the computerized record keeping on the cows, and they call son Andy "our mechanic" who also manages the crops.

"They each have their talents," Roger said. "What's really great to see is that they work so well together" – “to see how they interact,” Karen added.

**A tractor, gratitude comes easily**

The Blasers belong to St. Anthony Parish in Oconto Falls, five miles away. Roger attended St. Anthony School, noting, “I was in the last eighth-grade class to graduate from St. Anthony before it went down to six grades.”

In 1977, however, Karen and Roger were married at her church, Grace Lutheran, with a priest from St. Anthony offering a blessing. “When we started sending the kids to St. Anthony for school, that’s when I became Catholic,” Karen explained.

She was especially proud when, following a fire at St. Anthony School 10 years ago, Grace Lutheran offered space for St. Anthony’s students to finish out the school year.

The way Roger put it, he and Karen “have grown up with” St. Anthony’s parishioners. “People in the parish are like family,” he said. “We’ve a lot of friends at St. Anthony.” Karen added. They and their adult children always get involved in the annual school auction. She appreciated the understanding of the parish when a niece lost her life in a skiing accident. St. Anthony offered space for the family to host a blood drive in her honor, something Karen said made the effort one of healing for everyone close to the family.

When the Diocese of Green Bay hosts the annual Rural Life Day Thursday, March 23, at St. Anthony Parish, it will bring back memories for the Blasers.

“Mom and dad made a point of going every year to the Rural Life Mass,” Roger recalled. In past years, St. Anthony held a small, local version of that diocesan event, and Roger took seeds to be blessed. “One year, we took a cow, too,” he said.

Last July, the Blasers hosted “Breakfast on the Farm,” organized each year by Oconto County Friends of Agriculture. Along with tours of the barns, operations and fields of Blaser Farms, the Blasers made sure that Mass was part of the day.

“Having Mass on the farm that day was very important for our family,” Karen said, “because faith and agriculture go together.” This time it was Roger finishing the thought for Karen: “You can’t have one without the other.”
Recognizing God’s love in rural life

By Bishop David Ricken

As I write this column, I am watching the snow fall outside, and I am struck by the beauty of the day. It is good for me to slow down sometimes and notice the world around me, when so often I find myself busy going from one thing to the next without fully paying attention. I think that many of us have this same struggle in our prayer lives. We get so busy that we forget to make time for prayer. Or we do make time, but we treat our prayers like another task to accomplish, rather than time to sit and be present with God. This is why I love Holy Hour because it is an opportunity to simply sit and be present with my best friend, Jesus.

When I can truly enter into the silence of prayer this way, I am always struck by the simple and profound love that God has for me. It reminds me of the words of St. Teresa of Kolkata, which I have shared often: “Jesus loves you tenderly, you are precious to him. Turn to Jesus with great trust and allow yourself to be loved by him.” This is what prayer is really all about, letting ourselves be loved by God.

Rural life provides many opportunities to recognize God’s love for us each and every day. One of the ways we can experience this love is through creation. We are blessed abundantly in our diocese with the beauty of creation, from the rolling hills to the peaceful lakes to the beautiful shorelines. Each of these was made by God and their simple beauty is a reminder that God is here and wants us to experience the majesty of his creation.

Another way that God’s love is shown for us in rural life is through the ways that God provides for us. Jesus reminds us of this in his Sermon on the Mount when he says, “Do not worry about life, what you will eat or drink … Look at the birds of the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more important than they? (Matthew 6:25-26)”

While we know the hard work that our farmers put into producing our food, they could do nothing if God didn’t provide the rain, the sun and the soil. Let us give thanks to God for the many ways he takes care of us and sustains us.

Lastly, I recognize the love God has for us in our rural communities, built and sustained by families who have been there for generations. A hallmark of these communities is the way people step up to help. When someone needs assistance, family and friends can be counted on to be there for each other. The love that people show for their neighbors is a reflection of the love that God has for each one of us.

Friends, rural life is a great opportunity to witness God’s love for us. I am so grateful to be in a diocese that has a strong tradition of rural living and taking time to celebrate God’s blessings on us.

I hope you will join me once again this Spring in celebrating our annual Rural Life Mass. The Mass will take place on Thursday, March 23, at St. Anthony Parish in Oconto Falls. You can find all the important information on this year’s celebration by going to gbdioc.org/rurallife.

Whether or not you can join us in person, I pray that each of you will be able to know and experience the love God has for you each and every day! God bless you!
How does rural life connect us to...

GRADE 1-2
By Cade Heim
1st Grade - St. Joseph Parish (Champion)

I live on a farm and my grandparents live on a farm, too. On your farm you have to take very good care of your animals. God created all of the farm animals. I think God made farmers to care for God’s animals.

GRADE 3-4
A Faithful Garden
By Julia Pielhop
4th Grade - Holy Family Catholic School (Brillion)

When I think of rural life I think of a garden. A garden is so amazing to me that sometimes I compare it to God. I like to think of it like how we grow and reach out to God for love and mercy. Just like a tree’s roots reaching out into the soil. Why I think of rural life like a garden is because when you plant a seed, you put your trust in God so that he can give all you need to grow a flower like rain, sun, and the wind. I like to compare him to all he has made like a tree or a flower, but the Devil is like weeds. While you are trying to grow with God, the Devil comes into our hearts and tempts you to do sin just as a weed chokes the roots on a new growing flower. That is why God is always here to save us from sin and temptation. No matter how hard it is for a message to come or just a little seed to grow. Remember that God will be here from the beginning to the end.

Rural Life Connects Us to God’s Creation
By Calvin Hanson
4th Grade - Holy Family Catholic School (Brillion)

Rural life connects us to our family and faith by letting us be closer to God’s creation and giving us the opportunity to help each other more. My family has many traditions like night prayers before we go to bed and reading a Bible story on Christmas Eve. My mom grew up on a farm and was Catholic all her life. My dad’s side of the family lived in Milwaukee but had a cabin up north where they went hunting, fishing, and swimming. The Catholic faith has been passed down in my family for many years. My Great Grandpa started a landscaping business. They take off on Sundays, go to Mass, and start late on Thursdays to go to our school’s Mass. Rural life has less people to litter in nature and lets us have traditions with our family and good moments together.

GRADE 5-6
Faithful Roots
By Sage Dvorachek
5th Grade - Holy Family Catholic School (Brillion)

My rural life connects to my heritage because my dad is a farmer who came from a family of farmers. My grandpa is a farmer and my great grandpa was a farmer also. The land keeps getting passed down by generations. Farming is a lot of hard work, however out in the country there are many moments of peaceful quiet which allows for time to reflect and pray. God, farming, and family all work together perfectly. On my mom’s side of the family, both of her grandpas owned businesses in construction and had hobbies with woodworking. That reminds me of Joseph, Jesus’s earthly father, who was also a carpenter. He did as the Lord told him and provided for his family through carpentry, just as my mom’s grandparents did for her parents. My faith has been an important part of my life and it has been an important part of my heritage as well.

Hunters
By Henry Micksch
5th Grade - Holy Family Catholic School (Brillion)

Bang! In a rural community, like Brillion, hunting is taken very seriously especially on...
my mom’s side of the family. They have a tradition of getting a blessed Saint Hubert medal. That way they know God will protect them. The weekend before the hunting season begins my mom’s side of the family goes to Mass to get a blessed Saint Hubert medal. The reason why we bring these Saint Hubert medals while we hunt is because one Sunday, Saint Hubert skipped Mass to hunt. When he was out in the woods, he saw a buck and was about to throw the spear when he saw a crucifix in between the antlers. That is why we do this. When my mom’s side of the family goes hunting they are guarded by God, to keep them safe and to remind them that God is always there. There are many traditions that my mom’s side of the family does but this is my favorite. This is my family’s tradition when they go hunting.

GRADE 7-8
By Sam Bergelin
7th Grade – All Saints Catholic School (Denmark)

Living in the rural area is really nice to live in. My dad’s side of the family is all Lutheran but my mom’s side of the family is mostly Catholic. My whole family goes to church every Sunday and we are all Christian. My dad’s side of the family is German and my dad said his grandpa’s parents could talk in German. I am also very German and my family knows a couple German words.

I am a mix of different types of languages. My dad’s side of the family are all mostly country music fans. Most of my dad’s family live out in the country living a rural lifestyle. Most of my mom’s family lives in the city or in a small town not living a rural lifestyle. My mom and my dad’s family both always pray and stay religious.

My dad’s family’s homestead is very close to our house. This is where the Bergelin family started out. We even know where Michael Bergelin (a founder of the Bergelin family) was buried and we still visit the burial ground where he was buried. The burial ground with Michael Bergelin is not even a mile away. He is buried just by the stop sign on the road we live nearest to. We sometimes even go to the burial ground that Michael Bergelin is buried at and clean up the sticks and cut down branches.

My mom’s family had a property with Native Americans buried. I saw rocks piled up into shapes of animals. Supposedly there are Native Americans buried under the piles of rocks. My mom and dad’s family both have found arrowheads on their family’s property. I have also found painted rocks.

By Dana Bradley
8th Grade – All Saints Catholic School (Denmark)

Our family’s heritage is connected with rural life from our ancestors that have loved being and working on the farm and having a lot of land. My great grandfather and great grandmother loved working on the farm and then, my great grandma passed away seven years ago. Then a little bit later, my great grandfather had problems with his heart and started having problems keeping up with the farm. He had to go to eldercare, and he missed his house very much, but it was better for him.

Our family’s heritage is connected with rural life with my grandma and grandpa’s parents. They had a big farm and then, they passed away. I never got to see them, but I heard they loved the farm so much. Sometimes, they care much more about the farm than about their kids being in sports. The farm always came first for them.

My family’s faith is incredible. My grandma and her family loved and still loves going to church every Sunday. My grandpa’s family wasn’t strong with faith, but since they met, my grandpa loves going to church. He goes to church more than one time a week. My grandma and grandpa love going to church with each other and they participate in church by reading, helping clean, or just singing.

My family’s faith is remarkable. My grandma and grandpa loved faith from the beginning. Their faith is so strong because they have each other and all of us. We go to church together and they sing in a choir. It is truly amazing what our church provides. We have such an amazing family. I am so grateful for every one of them.

How does rural life connect us to our family heritage and our faith?
**Rural Life Scholarship Updates**

**By Abby Haanen**

Hello! My name is Abby Haanen and I was one of the recipients of the 2022 Rural Life Scholarship. I am a member of St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Green Bay. I am currently finishing my last semester at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls and will graduate in May with a major in animal science with a management emphasis in meat and companion animals.

I chose River Falls because they have two farms (one horse barn and a dairy farm) not far from campus where some classes have labs. UW-River Falls also has one of the biggest animal science programs in Wisconsin. I am so glad I came here because I met some amazing friends, all the professors I had are great, and the classes I took were a lot of fun and I learned so much about the agriculture industry.

One class I took last semester that I enjoyed and learned a lot from is called “physiology of reproduction.” This class took place at the dairy farm where we would work with both the dairy cows and the beef cows. It was very hands-on as I was taught how to do ultrasound and artificial insemination and palpate the animal to see if she is pregnant or not.

Another highlight of college is going to the Newman Center on the first few days of being on campus my freshman year. The BBQ lunch was my first-ever encounter there and that is where I met the new campus minister, Mallory, and the other community members. From there, I became an active member and even got a position on the board as social media coordinator, and later I became president. The best part of Falcon Catholic, though, was the close-knit community and being able to keep up with my faith while being in school.

I am still not sure what I plan to do after graduation, but I know for sure that I want to work with animals. I recently looked into the program called WWOOF – which stands for “World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms” – and saw it was something I would want to do. It would help me gain more experience working on a farm while helping out the family who owns the farm. Also, I would be traveling, too! (Traveling is on my bucket list.)

As I begin a new chapter in my life this coming summer and close out an old one, I just want to thank everyone who donated to make this scholarship possible.

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**By Ryann Wagner**

Hi, I am Ryann Wagner and I was one of the winners of the 2022 Rural Life Scholarship! I am a member of St. Michael Parish in Suring. Currently, I am attending school at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire (UWEC) and majoring in rehabilitation science with a coaching minor.

My hope is to become a physical therapist in the future. UWEC has many great opportunities that have allowed me to become prepared for my future. I am involved in Athletes in Action, a club that allows athletes to work together through Christ and grow in their faith together. I am also involved in a Bible study through my cross country team, where, as a team, we are able to learn through our faith. In relation to my major, I am involved in Kins (Kinesiology Club). This club allows me to get experience in different events in relation to my major! In Eau Claire, I am also part of Renew Church, where I am able to praise God every week for all that he has done in my life. I am very grateful for all of the opportunities that I have been given to prepare me for my future and allow me to grow in my faith.

I was very lucky to have a great rural community that surrounded me throughout high school and even here in college. In the summer of 2021, I tore my ACL which changed my overall lifestyle for quite a while. This unfortunate event helped me to see the impact that my rural community had played in my life. God had a plan for me and I am very thankful for this. This unfortunate event helped me to become more involved in my community in new ways. This occurred especially through FFA (Future Farmers of America). I hope to continue my involvement in FFA as an alumnus once I graduate from college. I am also planning on minoring in coaching here at UWEC because I want to have an impact on the lives of youth like my coaches had on me.

I hope to run a physical therapy practice somewhere close to my hometown, Gillett. I would love to run a more rural practice, especially in the aspect of convenience for patients. I would also like to play a role in a small community, as many businesses had in my small community.

I am very grateful to be awarded this scholarship as it will help me to afford college. I will need seven to eight years of school in order to become a physical therapist and this scholarship has helped to make my future more affordable. This support is truly amazing and I cannot be more thankful. I hope to one day help students in their future endeavors.

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**ABOUT THE RURAL LIFE COMMITTEE**

The Rural Life Committee is made up of Catholics from rural communities across the Diocese of Green Bay (see roster below). The committee includes members from parishes that have or will be hosting a Rural Life Mass, along with at-large members.

The committee meets a few times each year to plan activities and events related to Rural Life, including our annual Rural Life Masses, an essay and drawing contest for students in grades one to eight, and a college scholarship competition.

The committee also brainstorms ways to work with parishes to support the needs of people in our rural communities. If you are interested in being a part of our Rural Life Committee, please contact Peter Weiss at pweiss@gbdioc.org or (920) 272-8321.

We are also always looking for parishes who would be interested in hosting our annual Rural Life Mass. If you would like to learn more about this opportunity, please contact Peter Weiss.

Thank you to all current and past Rural Life Committee members for your ongoing service to Rural Life Ministry in our diocese!

Committee Roster:
- Deacon Ken Kabat – St. Clare (Greenleaf)
- David Englebert – St. Louis (Dyckesville)
- Dale Birenbaum – St. Thomas the Apostle (Newton)
- Zach Birenbaum – St. Thomas the Apostle (Newton)
- Ken Harter – St. Anthony (Oconto Falls)
- Alinida Albizu – St. Anthony (Oconto Falls)
- Linda DeGrave – Prince of Peace (Green Bay)

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Sweet Corn
By Fr. Walter Stumpf

Back in the 1970s, my brothers and sisters and I had a goal to sell enough sweet corn to buy a trailer motorcycle. Our neighbor, Jerome Kuepper, was our Pioneer seed corn dealer and he helped us figure out how much we would need to plant to reach our goal.

We prepared the field and planted the seeds and prayed for the best. We hoed the rows and pulled weeds and finally picked the ripened ears. Dad helped set up our stand at the corner of State Park Road and Highway 114, right by the Shady Rest tavern in Menasha, WI. Depending on the competition, we could get 60 to 75 cents per dozen. We would also sell some tomatoes, cucumbers and other garden produce, but sweet corn was by far our main source of revenue. By the end of the season, we were ripping through the corn stubble on a Honda Trail 70.

Going forward from that successful season, we engaged in 4-H projects: beef and dairy animals, vegetables, grains, etc. When I got to high school, I enrolled in vocational agriculture and learned according to the FFA (Future Farmers of America) motto: “Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.” FFA led me to a farmwork experience in Switzerland. My appreciation for rural life was expanding and deepening.

After college, while working for Foremost Farms, a dairy manufacturing cooperative, I felt the call to serve God and his church as a priest. Now, 17 years after being ordained a priest for the Diocese of Green Bay, I am blessed to be the pastor of St. Patrick Parish in Stiles and St. Anthony Parish in Oconto Falls. I am looking forward to hosting the Rural Life Day at St. Anthony on Thursday, March 23.

We have a lot to learn from each other and we need to support each other in rural life... and in the Christian life. Let’s examine how we discover God’s peace to you and Happy Trails!

Catholic Charities impacts rural communities through new Office of Social Ministry and Community Outreach
By Lori Paul

Since July 2019, Catholic Charities has been executing on a vision of reaching more people through an intentional shift in service delivery model. Part of that shift included the initial analysis and feasibility study for the formation of a Social Ministry Office with the express need of reaching rural communities.

In June 2022, the Office of Social Ministry and Community Outreach was formed. The office’s main goal is to connect Catholic Charities with parishes and community organizations in the 16 counties of northeast Wisconsin.

One of the first initiatives of this new office was to create Crisis Response Teams to be available to assist parishes and communities when a crisis takes place. However, many counties have now established VOADs (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters), which have similar goals to the Crisis Response Teams. Catholic Charities is now an active member in VOADs for Brown, Calumet, Marinette and Oconto counties.

This past fall, when the Pulaski community was impacted by an explosion at a bonfire, Catholic Charities was there to assist. Working with Assumption BVM Parish, Catholic Charities obtained a $10,000 grant from Catholic Charities USA to help the families of those injured.

The office also now administers the Farm Crisis Grant. Grants are available for up to $1,000 for individual farmers and farm families. Grants are approved on a one-time basis for critical needs, such as broken equipment, seed loss, fuel expense, disruption of farm income, sick livestock, building repair, family expense or storm damage.

Another focus of the Office of Social Ministry and Community Outreach is on expanding access to mental health and other services that Catholic Charities offers.

Recently, Catholic Charities and Lakes Country Public Library held an open house to announce that teleservices would now be available to those living in the Lakewood area. Many individuals that live in the area do not have internet service strong enough to support video calling.

The partnership with Lakes Country Public Library allows an individual to have a private room and counseling session at the library, via videoconferencing, with a counselor from Catholic Charities. Counseling sessions include mental health and financial stability. In addition, staff are also available to support immigration questions and help with the adoption process.

The newly formed office has also provided four mental health first-aid classes in rural areas since June 2022 and participated in multiple community social and health events.

As the Office of Social Ministry and Community Outreach continues to evolve, one key initiative over the next year is to develop a more robust volunteer program. Volunteers are key to the success of many social organizations, such as the Catholic Charities’ volunteers who were instrumental in the success of the Afghan refugee resettlement. A focus of growing the program for 2023 is planned.

Editor’s Note: Lori Paul is manager of Social Ministry and Community Outreach. To learn more about Catholic Charities and the services it provides, visit catholiccharitiesgb.org.

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For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me.

Matthew 25:35

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**RURAL LIFE DAY 2023**

**THURS., MAR. 23, 2023**

**MASS WITH BISHOP RICKEN**

+ **THE BLESSING OF SOIL, SEEDS, ANIMALS, AND MACHINERY**

**EVENT DETAILS**

St. Anthony Parish
253 N. Franklin St., Oconto Falls

- 10:00 a.m. - Mass and blessing of soil, seeds, animals, & machinery
- 11:30 a.m. - Lunch and after-lunch speaker, Sr. Marla Clercx

**Lunch Ticket Information:**
Meal tickets ($15 each) must be purchased seven days in advance of the event by mailing, calling, or emailing the host parish.

**QUESTIONS & MORE INFO**

St. Anthony Parish
920-846-2276 | holy3.org
secretary@holy3.org

Diocesan Office of Living Justice
920-272-8321

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Sr. Marla Clercx, ANG, was born and raised in Jasper, a small rural community in southwestern Minnesota. She has many memories of playing in hay mounds, weeding bean fields, and picking corn. Her love of the land is seen in her gardening and food preservation. Her love of animals led her to earn a degree as a veterinary technician, working with livestock as well as pets. She also raised chickens while serving in Gillett and Suring. Most importantly, the tight-knit community of Jasper taught her the importance of looking out for one another and responding to the needs of others whether by providing food, helping with harvesting, or child care. It’s her connection to rural life that shapes her connection to God as Creator and her commitment to caring for the earth. Sr. Marla currently serves as the pastoral leader of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish in Green Bay. Prior to that assignment, she served as pastoral leader of St. John, Gillett; St. Michael, Suring; and the Chapel at Chute Pond.

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