

This column was originally printed in the June 2013 issue of New Earth, the newspaper for the Diocese of Fargo.

Words alone cannot express my thanks

For my first column as Bishop of Fargo, I share with you the message of gratitude I expressed at the end of my Mass of ordination and installation.

Bishop John Folda

Praised be Jesus Christ! Now and forever!

Your Excellency, Archbishop Nienstedt, Archbishop Aquila, Bishop Kagan, and dear brother bishops, dear brother priests, deacons, seminarians, consecrated religious, and dear friends in Christ:

I am overwhelmed by the many blessings that have come to me this day. I must first give thanks to God for the gift of faith and his loving invitation to share in his divine life. And not only did he see fit to bless me with this faith, but he also called me to the sacred priesthood, and now inexplicably to the office of Bishop. For such a gift, I can only bow in humble gratitude.

Archbishop Nienstedt, thank you for being with us today and celebrating this beautiful liturgy of ordination. Your words will always remain with me as I reflect on this day and on the awesome responsibility of being a successor of the apostles.

Archbishop Aquila, you served the Diocese of Fargo faithfully and zealously for over 10 years, and we are all thankful for the blessing of your time in Fargo. I am personally grateful for your kindness and support over these last weeks as I prepared to begin my own service as bishop here. And thank you in particular for your beautiful homily last night at the Vespers service. I am touched by your brotherly encouragement for a very new brother bishop!

Bishop Kagan, you have also served the Diocese of Fargo as administrator for the last 11 months, generously sharing your time after only recently becoming Bishop of Bismarck. Thank you for the care you have given this diocese and for the many ways you have assisted me in these last weeks.

And to all my new brother bishops who are here today, all the way from Pennsylvania to Alaska and New Mexico, and many points in between, thank you for being here and honoring us with your presence. Please keep me in your prayers.

I must offer a special word of thanks to Msgr. Jean Francois Lantheaume, the charge de affairs of the Apostolic Nunciature. Monsignor, we are honored to have you with us representing Archbishop Vigano, and by joining us today, you unite us in a special way with our Holy Father, Pope Francis. Thank you, and please convey our greetings and assurance of prayers to the Archbishop and to the Holy Father.

I cannot neglect to offer thanks for those who have joined us in such great numbers today from my own Diocese of Lincoln. It has been my privilege to serve as a priest for 24 years in the Diocese of Lincoln, and they have been wonderful years. To my brother priests, my religious sisters, my beloved seminarians, and to so many dear friends who are here, you have been a family to me. Thank you for all you have done for me through these years, and know that you will always have a special place in my heart. In particular I thank the bishops who have been our shepherds in Lincoln, Bishop Bruskewitz, who for 20 years was a wonderful bishop and teacher, and Bishop Conley, who for many years was a friend before he became my bishop last November. I will always owe a great debt to so many who have taught me how to be a priest, and who in some mysterious way have prepared me now to be a bishop.

And even more profoundly, I must also thank my own family, where I first received the gifts of life and faith. To my dear mother who is with us here today; my father, James, who has already gone to the Lord and for whom I pray in a special way today; my brother, Jim, and sister, Mary, and their families; and for my aunts, uncles, and cousins who made the trip to support me on this day, I thank you and I assure you of my love.

Words alone cannot express my thanks to the people of the Diocese of Fargo for their welcome and their loving embrace of me, their new bishop. From the first moment of my arrival, I was touched by your kindness, your promises of prayers – keep those up please – and for your deep faith. I am truly looking forward to our journey together, as we make our way through the joys and challenges of this still new century and millennium and strive to draw always closer to our Lord Jesus Christ. As I said on the day of my appointment, I am all yours, and I promise to give all that I have and all that I am in your service.

No one can know how many hours of work it takes to prepare and bring about an event like this, and I especially want to thank the many people – priests, deacons, seminarians, diocesan staff, Cathedral parishioners, musicians, servers, volunteers, and anyone at all who contributed to this beautiful occasion. You have truly given glory to God through your efforts and your love for the Church.

Perhaps you noticed the beautiful hymn sung by our choir today, “The Glory of the Father,” which is actually a musical setting of the Prologue from the Gospel of John, and it includes the words we know so well and which are part of my episcopal coat of arms: “The Word was made flesh and dwelled among us.” These words remind us of the simple truth: It’s all about Jesus Christ. He must be the center of our lives. All that we do and all that we are as Christians, as Catholics, must have its origin from him, and return to him.

On the day after his election, just a few short days before my own appointment here, Pope Francis addressed the Cardinals gathered at Mass, and I can do no better than to draw upon his wisdom. He said that we as disciples must walk with Christ, we must build with Christ, and we must proclaim Christ. We must walk with Christ in a relationship of love, accepting the cross, but also drawing from him the joy and the hope and the life that he came to share with us. He calls us to walk with him and to be his friends. We must build with Christ and never try to build apart from him, for without him, we can do nothing, and with him, all things are possible. And finally, we must proclaim Christ. In season and out of season, by

our words, whether vocal or written or blogged or tweeted or in any other medium available to us, we must share Christ with our brothers and sisters around us. And not only with our words, but with our actions, indeed by our very lives, we must be a living proclamation of the good news that Jesus is our Savior, he loves us, and he continues to dwell among us.

This I think is what the New Evangelization calls us to. The message is as ancient and as new as it has ever been, but we are each called, whatever our state in life might be, to live it more vividly in our own day, so that all might share in the treasure that we have, the treasure of Christ, who is the Word made flesh, dwelling among us.

As your bishop, I look forward to joining everyone here in walking with Christ, building with Christ, and proclaiming Christ to all. I cannot think of a more wonderful privilege, or a more joyful adventure. May the Lord be always among us, and may he bless us with his grace and his peace.