



IMMACULATE  
HEART OF MARY  
SEMINARY

# SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

Behold, how good and how pleasing it is for brothers to dwell as one.

Psalm 133:1

## Letter from the **Rector**

While it may not be the most popular of the parables, I often find myself drawn to consider Jesus likening the Kingdom of God to the seed that seemingly grows of its own accord, eventually producing valuable results: “First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear” *Mark 4:28b, NABRE*. As Jesus explicitly demarcates different stages of growth, he reminds us that maturation is a process, and at times, a laboriously slow one. It is not hard to see the application of this agricultural lesson to our own life of discipleship; transformation takes time. Few of us become saints in a day, but with the aid of grace, we can become more saintly with each day.

The year we have completed at IHMS has certainly provided us with many daily opportunities for such growth in sanctity. In addition to the elements that always mark seminary formation, including liturgical celebrations, personal prayer, community life, and studies, to name a few, the added facet of continuing to navigate the distinctive circumstances generated by the ongoing pandemic has provided further occasions for growth. We have been called to cultivate a keener attentiveness to others, a richer awareness of social realities, and a deeper spirit of perseverance in pursuing the good, even when it may seem like a rather tedious enterprise! The 2020-2021 formation year has provided an acute reminder that the Lord calls us to pursue holiness *hic et nunc* – “here and now” – in the concrete conditions of our lives, whatever they may be, rather than pine for some idealized setting that we think may be more conducive to flourishing.

Thankfully, our faith assures us that the Risen One stands beside us as we journey along this path, assuring us that the victory has been won and that glory does await all of those who are faithful to his summons. With trust in the Spirit who sustains us in all things, then, we continue on the path, step by step, as we see the fruits begin to emerge and as we await their full flowering in the Kingdom.



*...transformation takes time.  
Few of us become saints in a  
day, but with the aid of grace,  
we can become more saintly  
with each day.*

**Rev. Robert Horihan**  
**Rector**

# Alumni SPOTLIGHT

**Rev. Mark Stang** | Chaplain, St. Cloud Hospital, St. Cloud, MN



Rev. Mark Stang isn't busy. Saying he is would imply there's always something to do next, but the chaplain at St. Cloud Hospital is never thinking about his next task, his next visit, his next conversation. He's in the moment with whomever is in his presence. “The Holy Spirit has put me right here, and I want to give my 100 percent attention to this moment,” he said.

But that moment for Stang, who attended IHMS for 3.5 years in the mid 1980s, almost never happened. In a story detailed in a book he wrote entitled *Finding the Water*, Stang talks about the shocking cancer diagnosis he received just prior to his scheduled ordination to the priesthood. In fact, his ordination was moved up a year because he wasn't expected to live to see that day.

However that day came for him, and after his ordination, he recalls a conversation he had with then-Bishop Bernard Harrington of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester.

“He said, ‘Mark, you thought you were going to have it made. You get ordained, and poof, you're in Heaven, but God has some work for you to do yet,’” Stang said.

Not long after, the Mayo Clinic discovered that his cancer had disappeared. “I'm experiencing how God has some more work before I get to go to Heaven,” he said. Now, he visits on a daily basis with those facing their own mortality. After serving for several years as a priest in a five-parish and then a three-parish cluster in Central Minnesota, Stang – who during that period had worked part-time hours at the hospital – was granted a full-time position. That was eight years ago.

What's different about his role now, as opposed to parish ministry, is that, while he got to know parishioners over the course of years in a church community, now, he needs to get to know people over the course of minutes, and many times, in their most trying hour.

“You meet many, many people, but it's more of a short-term relationship,” said Stang, who calls himself a “simple farm boy” for having grown up on a farm in rural Minnesota. “The ministry is intense, but it's real heart-changing ministry when people are facing death or facing a crisis. Just beautiful confessions that I get to witness.

“I feel so blessed simply to be an instrument of God.”

And this past year, with hospitals and those who work in them overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Stang found himself not only ministering to those who are ill or dying, but also those charged with caring for them.

“I'm finding a need to be present to the staff, to the nurses and even the doctors, and to be that support for them because it is exhausting,” he said, citing a spike in November and December that saw him called in every night he was on call to administer last rites. “It's so hard to watch someone die of COVID; it's such an ugly death. It's so exhausting even when a patient is recovering, and it's twice as exhausting when the patient isn't.”

To level himself, Stang starts every morning in the hospital's chapel. The space is sacred, to be sure, but to Stang, in a way, the entire hospital is as well. That idea keeps him grounded in his ministry, a ministry that in its earliest days began with his time at IHMS. He remembers a moment of frustration when he grappled with the idea of leaving, that is, until he encountered a priest who introduced him to daily Eucharistic adoration. Stang took that time to ask God to show him His will.

“That has helped me so much,” he said, adding that spiritual direction was also instrumental in his formation. “My experience at IHMS was so life changing, and I am so grateful. “A big part of my heart is still in Winona.”

Ryan Henry, IHMS Communications



## IHMS Hosts Successful Bishops & Rector Virtual Event

The IHM Seminary community, despite having to cancel the Bishops & Rector Dinner in 2020, was pleased to bring back a modified form of the event in 2021. Though we were unable to have an in-person dinner as we normally would, we were still pleased to be joined by nearly 400 live viewers for an online event on April 16, 2021. The recipient of this year's Immaculate Heart of Mary Award was the Most Reverend Archbishop Christophe Pierre, the Apostolic Nuncio – the representative of the Holy See – to the United States.



Archbishop Pierre was ordained to the priesthood in France in 1970 and joined the Holy See's Diplomatic Corps in 1977. From there, His Excellency served with Pontifical Representation across the world, most especially with the Holy See's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

The IHMS community and the attendees of the virtual Bishops & Rector Event were blessed to receive remarks from Archbishop Pierre. In his address, he thanked the Seminary's formators for their efforts in forming men discerning the call to priesthood, a task which His Excellency called "vital for the Church today." His Excellency also



extended his thanks to all of IHM Seminary's benefactors for their own powerful impact in supporting the formation and growth of our community. Archbishop Pierre went on to encourage the community in its continued mission of forming men who discern a call to the priesthood as being formed from "uncut diamonds" into "compassionate hearts." Above all, Archbishop Pierre lauded the Seminary's continued mission and effort to form a missionary discipleship and impulse within its discerning men.

The event also included the performance of three musical selections by various seminarian ensembles. Those who still wish to view the event online can do so at:

-  [facebook.com/ihmseminary](https://facebook.com/ihmseminary)
-  [youtube.com/DiocesefWinona/](https://youtube.com/DiocesefWinona/)

And please mark your calendars to join us for the 17th annual Bishops & Rector Dinner on Friday, April 22, 2022.

*Collin van Waardenburg, Sophomore, Diocese of Gary*

# Congratulations Archbishop Christophe Pierre



Recipient of the 2021 Immaculate Heart of Mary Award!



From your friends in the  
**Diocese of Winona-Rochester**

# Fraternity

## the Goal at de Sales Basketball Tournament



"Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together as one" (Ps. 133:1). The first word that comes to mind as I reflect upon the St. Francis de Sales Basketball Invitational is unity. In one sense, I refer to our team, which practiced for several months leading up to the tournament with a common goal in mind: to build fraternity and grow in skill at basketball. Heading into the tournament, we knew we were underdogs; we were shorter than other teams, so we had to play quick defense in order to keep up. This worked pretty well, but our offense was never quite up to par with the other teams, and we finished the tournament with zero wins and three losses. This by no means took away from the joy of playing basketball and making new friends during that weekend, February 26-28.

In another sense of unity, I refer to the atmosphere at the Milwaukee seminary, where six seminaries from all over the Midwest were gathered together for fraternity, prayer, and healthy competition, building connections that remind us that our Church is one family. The campus of St. Francis de Sales Seminary is beautiful. It is one of the oldest seminaries in the United States, and some of the buildings there are original. They have a beautiful chapel in which it was wonderful to celebrate Mass with all our brother seminarians united as the Body of Christ.

Thomas S. Kollasch, Junior, Diocese of Sioux City



**Congratulations  
Archbishop  
Christophe Pierre**  
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# Strings of Praise

## Seminarian composes song to honor Our Lady

John Paul Bickerstaff grew up in a home surrounded by music. His dad, an “artsy guy,” listened to a lot of music, and at just four years old, his older brother began playing the violin, which then encouraged his other brother to take up the instrument as well. So it’s no surprise that John Paul was drawn to the stringed instruments – if not exactly the violin.

“As the little kid, I usually got carried every week to their orchestra practice,” he said. “Eventually, when I was seven, I thought, ‘My older brothers were doing this, I want to do it, too, but I want to do something a little different, so how about the cello.’”

Since then, he’s been hooked. Bickerstaff, a freshman seminarian from the Diocese of Winona-Rochester, grew up in Georgia and began playing with an ensemble at Valdosta State University near his home, eventually working his way into the school’s youth symphony orchestra. Then his family made its way north to Minnesota, settling in Winona and becoming members at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart. After playing a little on his own at first, Bickerstaff eventually joined the string chamber orchestra at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota – as a seventh grader. He also caught on with a string trio with other university students during his junior year of high school. “(That) was a lot more intense and sort of at a higher level,” said Bickerstaff, who also plays piano, dabbles in guitar, and is learning organ.

Suffice it to say, Bickerstaff is adept at reading music, but the idea of writing music also came naturally, and this year, that idea became reality when he composed an original composition entitled *Hymn to Our Lady of Mount Carmel*, which was performed and recorded originally for a campus ministry project at Saint Mary’s and most recently for April’s Bishops & Rector Virtual Event, a major fundraiser for Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary. Bickerstaff began writing music on piano because, he said, that’s the easiest instrument in which to do so. Then a couple years later – the year he moved to Minnesota – he discovered music notation software, which was a game changer.

“That was kind of the really big epiphany for me,” he said. “At that point, there was a lot of playing around and experimenting with what I can do, and it really took off there. There was a lot of composing that went on in my teenage years.”

Fast forward to his first year of seminary, and enter a group of musically inclined seminarians who were looking to write a song for a campus ministry project. After a few Zoom meetings organized by seminarian Josiah Hanson, Ethan Wilcox, another seminarian, presented the group with a prayer to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which became the basis around which a song would be created.



**John Paul Bickerstaff**  
Freshman  
Diocese of Winona-Rochester

“We all really liked it, so I said, ‘Hey, I can work on setting it to music,’” Bickerstaff said. “It was really helpful to have words; it’s kind of like the skeleton of a piece of music. If you just say that prayer, it’s poetic in a way, too.”

Bickerstaff said the process of composing the song was intuitive, and as a lover of choral music, setting the song to incorporate a variety of instruments wasn’t particularly difficult. Using Wilcox’s voice as the lead with supporting vocalists surrounding him made for the effect Bickerstaff envisioned. “I’ve heard a few pieces for a capella choir and cello, and I really like that combination,” he said.

Although the piece has already been recorded once, Bickerstaff said there are things about it he would tweak, so when asked how long it took from concept to creation, it’s hard to quantify. His best estimate is three to four months. “We had a very limited amount of time to get something written” for the campus ministry event, he said. “It wasn’t very premeditated. ... But it wasn’t so rushed that it wasn’t given adequate time just to let it sit. “If it was simply on my timeline, first of all, it probably wouldn’t have ever gotten finished,” he added with a chuckle. And despite Bickerstaff’s desire to continue perfecting *Our Lady*, he knows he’d like to continue composing other pieces in the future. He enjoys the creative process of it.

“Any work of art requires some trial, but it was really nice to be composing for a concrete purpose,” he said. “I’m especially grateful to have been able to compose this because it just kind of re-inspired me and made me realize there are a lot of musical ideas in my head that I want to share with people.” And it’s possible he’ll get to do just that. Though Bickerstaff is only beginning his journey of formation, should he complete the process and enter the priesthood, he knows his musical ability will be incorporated into his ministry, even if he isn’t yet certain how. “That’s something I have thought long and hard about,” he said. “God’s plan for me is still a mystery, but as far as I can see, there’s something there, as far as being a priest and being a cellist.”

For now, though, Bickerstaff hopes that when people hear this song, it conveys to them the power of *Our Lady* and elicits a sense of awe of Her place in Heaven, while still remaining close to Her children. “The prayer really highlights the power that our Lord has given to His Queen,” he said. “And at the same time, She’s such a dear and intimate mother to us. When people listen to the piece, my hope is that it will inspire in them a greater love and devotion for the Blessed Virgin Mary.”



Ryan Henry, IHMS Communications



We honor  
**HIS EXCELLENCY  
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 CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
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**Archbishop Christophe Pierre**  
 on your 2021 Immaculate  
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"Bring joy and peace  
 to hearts of all..." Pope Francis

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# Insight into the Seminary Graduation



The past two academic years brought many challenges and uncertainties to the community at Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary. Last spring, the semester was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2020 senior class was unable to celebrate their academic success with an in-person commencement. This year, there was a lot of uncertainty, as well. However, throughout the academic year, Saint Mary's University spent countless hours planning and reviewing the options for the 2021 commencement, and the student body felt immense joy when the university announced that commencement would occur with an in-person ceremony.

Over the past few years, the IHMS seniors have grown in maturity in their personal lives and their relationship with Christ, the High Priest. The men fostered their growth through the community at IHMS, and they worked with the formators and academic professors. But most importantly, the seniors walked with one another. As Psalm 133 states, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" For the past few years, daily life as a community allowed the seniors to strive for the same goal: a deeper relationship with Christ. Our time at IHMS was filled with friendships, fun, intellectual conversations, and personal encounters with Christ. The experience at IHMS was life changing and formed memories that will last a lifetime.

As final exams, papers, and projects were completed, the men reflected upon their Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary journey. With sincere and heartfelt gratitude, we were blessed to have had the opportunity to journey toward developing a more profound desire to receive the love of Christ in order to go out into the world and share His love with others. We thank the faculty, staff, and professors for walking with us and being a part of that growth. We were also very grateful to those who have supported IHMS, allowing all the grace to come to fruition. We received many graces, and as we prepare for the next steps in our journey to holiness, we are looking forward to the many more fruits that will come.

*Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us!*

Ivan Alatorre, Senior, Diocese of Gary



# Senior Spotlight

Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary truly is a place where brothers dwell in unity. The unity found in a house of men striving for holiness and discovering God's will has been a unique blessing for me. As I look back on my four years of formation at IHM Seminary, I am filled with immense gratitude. I am struck by the personal quality of formation here at IHMS. I am so grateful to the formators, who have shown me great fatherly care and attention; to my fellow seminarians who have journeyed with me, helped me in so many ways, mentored me, and listened to me; to the staff, who takes care of so many things I never even think about; to the many generous benefactors who pray for me and provide for the financial needs of the seminary; and ultimately to God, who called me here and gives us every gift in and through Jesus Christ. Looking back, my time at IHMS seems short in some ways. Yet, when I think of how much I've grown and what a different person I am now, it seems like I must have been here for awhile.

"Thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you" (2 Cor 8:16). This passage from the second letter to the Corinthians is one I have reflected on during my last semester at IHMS. During my years of formation at IHMS, God has put into my heart a deeper trust and love for Him, a great desire for His will, and a desire for His glory and the salvation of souls though the vocation of priesthood. And now I pray that what God has begun in me, He will bring to fulfillment. I pray that God continues to form the heart of the Good Shepherd in me. I plead to the Heart of Jesus, "place on my heart the same concern that you have for your people!"

*Dear friends of IHM Seminary, thank you!  
Pray for seminarians! Pray for priests!*



**Ryan Ruhle**  
Senior  
Diocese of Madison

# Pool Table Restoration

## Antique Pool Table Becomes COVID Project

In response to the COVID-19 protocols put in place at the beginning of 2020, the seminary community had to sacrifice a number of activities that we had once participated in, adapting to the realities of a worldwide pandemic. As a result, many aspects of seminary life were affected, including one of the more important ones: recreation.

For most of the fall semester, many of the usual leisurely activities, such as board games, table tennis, most outdoor group sports, billiards, foosball, and others, were put on hold for the greater safety of the surrounding communities. Therefore, we all had to band together to find ways to ease our minds during moments of heightened stress. Many of us found comfort in indoor activities such as video games, cooking, listening and playing music, a group reading of G.K. Chesterton's *Orthodoxy*, and much more.

As the year progressed, however, protocols continued to ease due to the community's diligence in adhering to those standards. This opened opportunities to play games that already provided a good amount of distance between players, such as chess and billiards. This is where Craig Mulholland, maintenance director at IHMS, thought of the idea to refurbish the old pool table in our recreation room.

For those of us on yard crew, this was a difficult task, given the age of the pool table, which was built sometime in the 1940s. Because of the table's antique status, many of the replacement parts had to be custom made. Nevertheless, with our experience in varied fields of work, the yard crew was up for the endeavor.

After nearly half of spring semester of 2021, the final product was completed. Given all of the uncertainty during the process, as well as some missteps along the way, we were very pleased with the result and are happy to have provided such a service to our brothers who have worked so hard during this difficult year. We hope that it will continue to be used for years to come and be a reminder that moments of peace will continue to live on even during periods of difficulty.

Will O'Donnell, Junior, Diocese of Gary

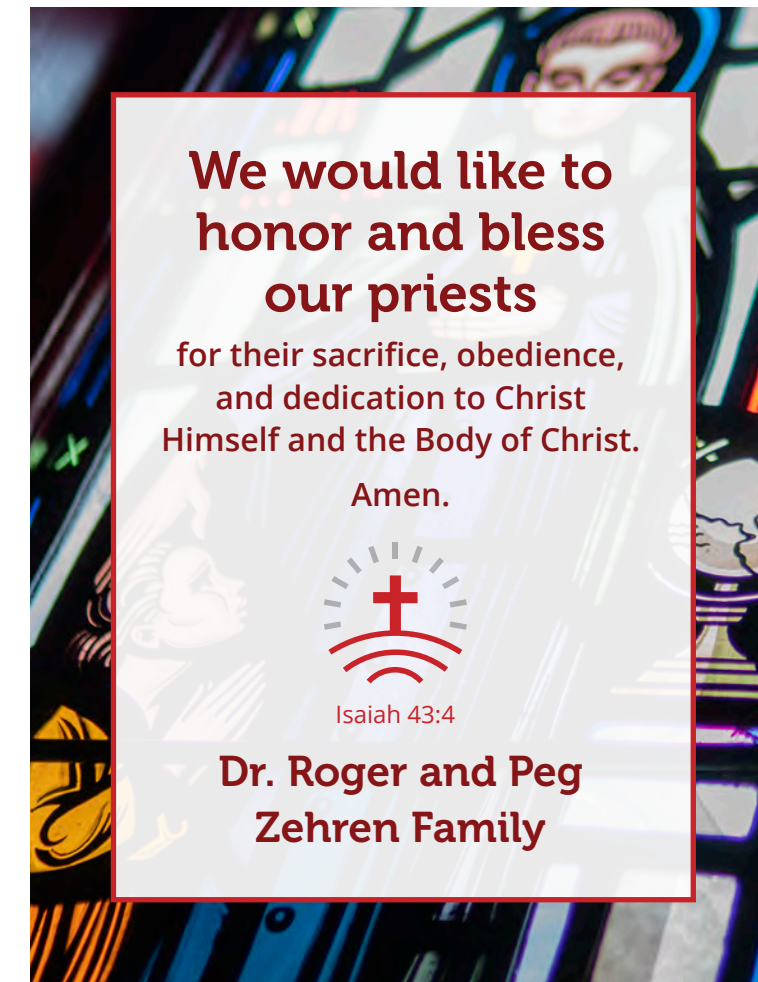


## Congratulations

### Archbishop Pierre

Immaculate Heart of Mary Award,  
2021 Recipient

From St. Joseph, Owatonna



## We would like to honor and bless our priests

for their sacrifice, obedience, and dedication to Christ Himself and the Body of Christ.

Amen.



Isaiah 43:4

**Dr. Roger and Peg  
Zehren Family**

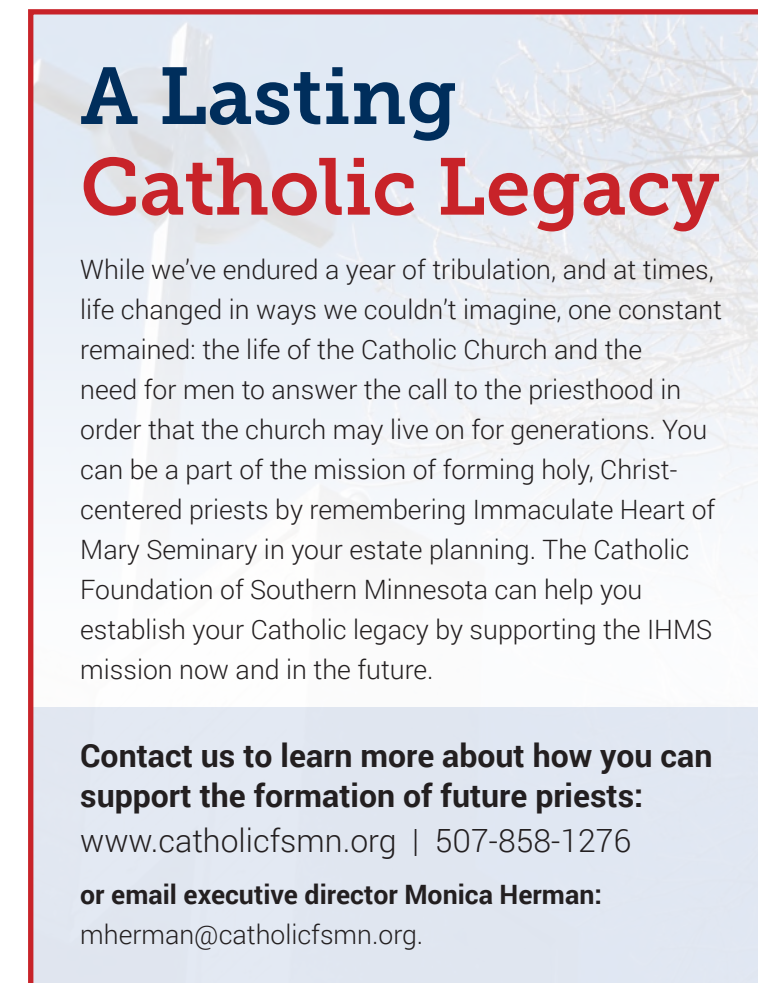


## Congratulations

### Archbishop Pierre

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## A Lasting Catholic Legacy

While we've endured a year of tribulation, and at times, life changed in ways we couldn't imagine, one constant remained: the life of the Catholic Church and the need for men to answer the call to the priesthood in order that the church may live on for generations. You can be a part of the mission of forming holy, Christ-centered priests by remembering Immaculate Heart of Mary Seminary in your estate planning. The Catholic Foundation of Southern Minnesota can help you establish your Catholic legacy by supporting the IHMS mission now and in the future.

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**or email executive director Monica Herman:**

[mherman@catholicfsmn.org](mailto:mherman@catholicfsmn.org)

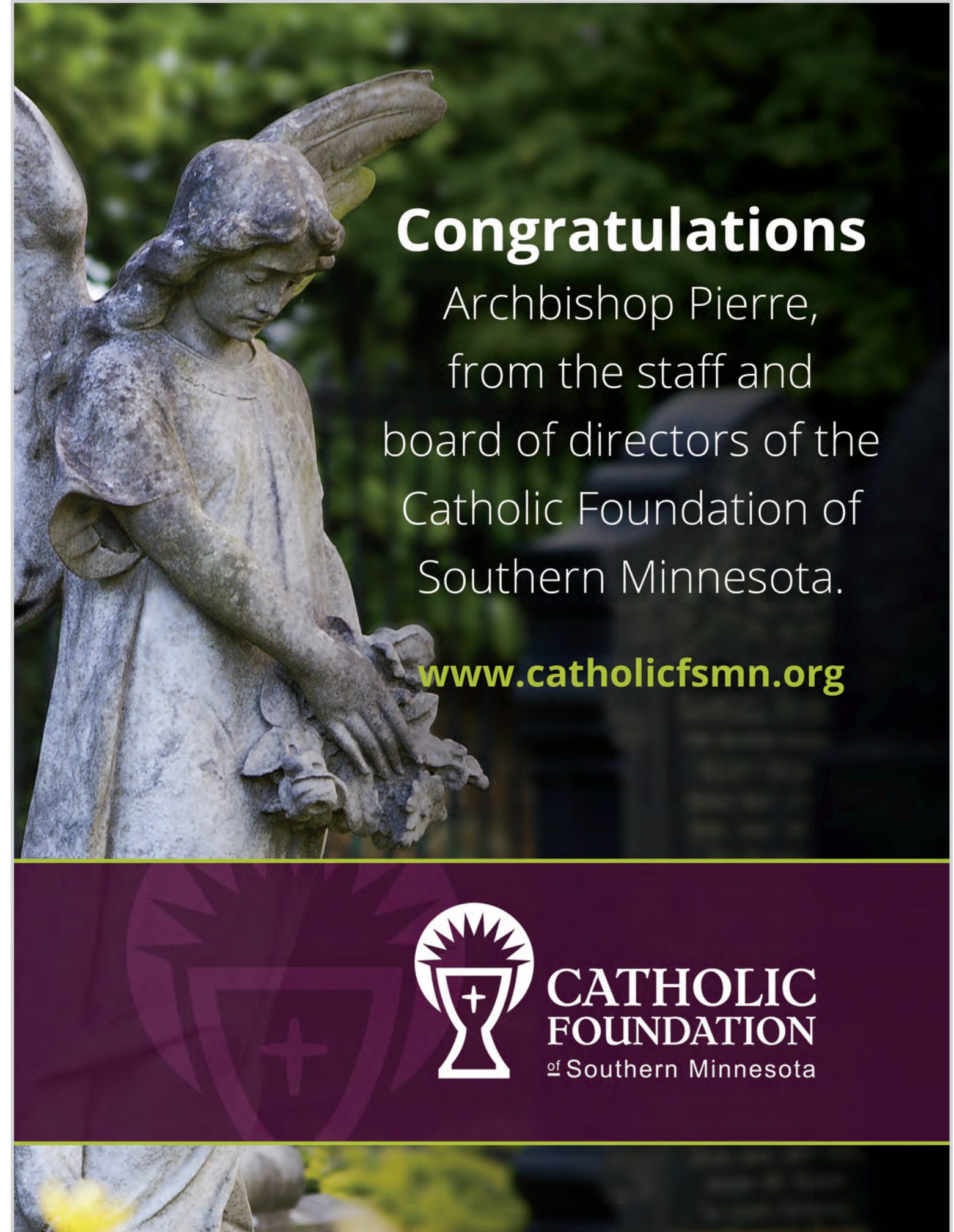




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**BEHOLD,**  
how good and  
how pleasing it is  
**FOR BROTHERS**  
**TO DWELL AS ONE.**  
Psalm 133:1



## UPCOMING EVENTS 2021

**May 9—August 29**  
Summer Recess

**June 4—12**  
Totus Tuus training, IHMS

**June 11**  
Ordination of IHMS alum Michael Churchill, Order of Deacon, Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Winona, MN

**June 18—20**  
Power of Spiritual Friendship retreat, IHMS

**August 18, 20, 21**  
Seminarians return

**August 30**  
Fall semester begins

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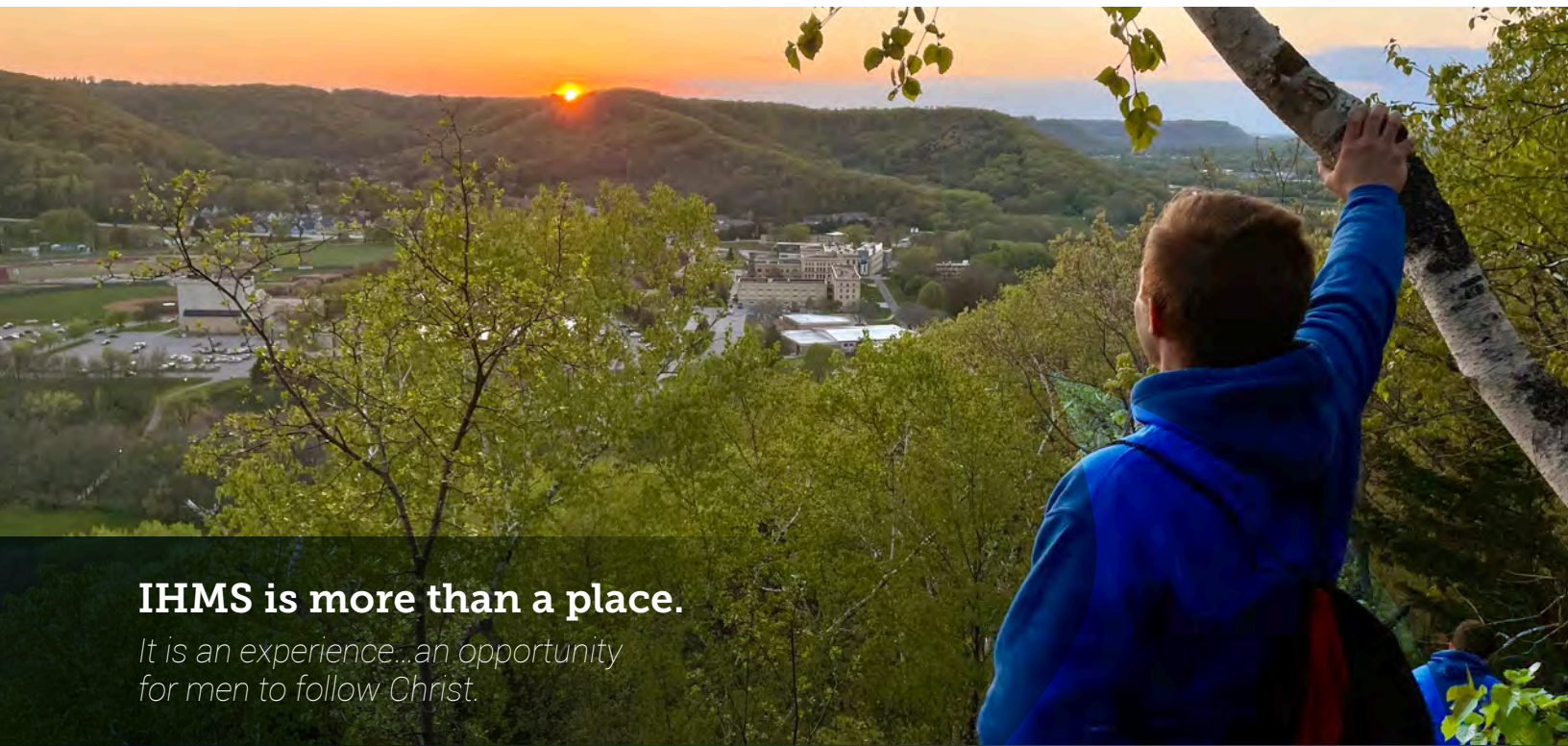
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Please let us know if you are an alumnus of IHM. We are always looking for alumni spotlight stories, please share yours!



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*It is an experience...an opportunity  
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Diocese of Gary, Diocese of Green Bay, Diocese of Madison,  
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