

Relationship with GOD

More than Just SUNDAY



“SOLD” echoed the words from the mouth of the auctioneer. A signal of both an unfortunate end as well a beginning. That is the situation for a record number of farmers in our state. To date, Wisconsin has lost almost 700 dairy farms in 2018, and 7,785 herds of dairy cows since December 2003, a loss of 49.8% in 16 years. Too often we dismiss statistics because they are just numbers. However, each of those 7,785 herds were owned by people, most often a family who operated the farm for generations.

One of those families who recently had to sell their herd of dairy cows was Dan & Bernice Becker, parents of Fr. Aaron Becker, Associate pastor of Our Lady Queen of Heaven and chaplain at Assumption Middle and High Schools in Wisconsin Rapids. “It was really hard. The first crop of hay was not very good and then my parents ran out of it. With the shortage of hay, the price is just too expensive and milk prices are low. We had no choice but to sell,” explained Fr. Becker.

Historically, it has been customary to experience three-year cycles of lows and highs in milk prices. During the higher price cycles, farmers have been able to recover from the low years, catching up on

past due bills and replacing worn-out equipment. Currently, however, we are in the fifth year of a low-price cycle, causing devastating hardship on too many farms.

Often the “solution” presented to farmers is – “just get a different job.” However, the life of a farmer is unique. Fr. Daniel Sedlacek, associate pastor of St. Mary’s in Altoona and St. Raymond of Penafort in Fall Creek, grew up on a farm near Cornell and offers some valuable thoughts: “I’d argue that the vocation to farming is distinct from other occupational-related callings. It is the primordial vocation established by God at creation, along with marriage, motherhood, and fatherhood (‘be fruitful and multiply’). God certainly calls people to all sorts of work - to be doctors, teachers, writers, and engineers - but to be a farmer runs deep into the roots of what it means to be human. And so, although the life of modern man is increasingly alienated from creation, God still calls us today to ‘till the earth and keep it.’”

Because of this “primordial call” and deep connection to the land and one’s family heritage, leaving the farm can present challenges that are not just financial, but also emotional and psychological. Especially in light of the high suicide rate among farmers, UW-Extension has been offering

support and resources to combat this tragedy, including a series entitled “Supporting Farmers during Challenging Times.”

Veterinarian Dr. AnnMarie Elwing of St. Charles Borromeo parish in Genoa shared a recent experience while conducting a monthly herd health visit. “I asked the farmer, ‘how are you feeling?’ And he broke into tears and said, ‘You’re the first person to ask me how I feel.’”

One of the biggest aspects of this farm crisis is that so many of us are unaware of its existence and of the great suffering it is causing. Pope Francis has spoken often of the importance of accompaniment, of walking alongside others. We are called by Jesus himself to love our neighbor as yourself.

Let us be committed to learning about this crisis, praying for those affected, and reaching out personally when we have the opportunity. To learn more, visit the diocesan website at www.dioc.org/farm-crisis.

The farm crisis is being recognized nationally. Similar to the Farm Aid of the 1980’s a concert is being planned for Sat., Sept. 21 in the Milwaukee area featuring nationally recognized recording artists such as Willie Nelson and John Cougar.

By Dan Kitzhaber,
Director for Marriage and Family Life



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