Jenny and Ben Black Bear III

Lumen Christi 21-22 Award Nominees

Editor’s note: This story is from the papal society — Catholic Extension, Chicago, Ill. The society raises money to help support 86 U.S. mission dioceses. This year it received 34 nominations describing people who are working to make a difference in those dioceses. The Lumen Christi (Light of Christ) Award winner will be announced later this year.

Jenny and Ben Black Bear III are members of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe from Rosebud, and lifelong Lakota Catholics who grew up in the Catholic Church. Ben’s father is Deacon Ben Black Bear, Jr., who was ordained to the permanent diaconate in 1976. The Black Bears met in high school, were married in 2000, and have three grown children. Ben served in the U.S. Army and was deployed to Iraq in 2006-07 while Jenny and the children returned to Rosebud to be closer to family. During this time, Jenny became more involved with the Catholic Church. Once Ben returned home safely, they were both employed with tribal programs on the Rosebud Reservation. They also started volunteering at the tribally owned radio station, KINI, on Saturday mornings, and by 2011 had become active members of their parish, St. Charles Borromeo, in St. Francis.

It did not take long for friend and mentor Fr. Tony Lusvardi, S.J., to realize their return to Rosebud and to its Catholic community was a gift from God, and he guided them to new roles. Jenny was hired as the director of Religious Education for St. Francis Mission (SFM), and soon thereafter Ben was hired as the parish administrator for three of the parishes on the reservation. Through their work with SFM, Jenny and Ben were both able to attend the Loyola University of Chicago Institute of Pastoral Studies and obtain the Parish Health and Wellness Ministry certificate. Jenny completed the basic certification for the Veritatis Splendor Institute (VSI), a diocesan-run catechesis certification program, in 2015. Ben is currently enrolled in the VSI Basic program, and Jenny is in the Master’s Certification program.

The Black Bears are the embodiment of the vision of SFM to develop Lakota leadership for the local Catholic Church. SFM is a Jesuit-led ministry founded in 1886 on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in south-central South Dakota.

Today, the Black Bears collaborate with a team of Jesuits, a Lakota deacon, several other commissioned Lakota lay ministers, and numerous Lakota lay men and women to make the work of the church possible for 12,000 Sicangu Lakota people on the Rosebud Reservation.

As director of Religious Education for SFM, Jenny and her staff provide in-school and after-school religious education in four tribal and/or state public schools on the Rosebud Reservation. Children in first through eighth grades are released once a week from these schools to attend religious education. Before the pandemic shut down all schools on the reservation, Jenny’s staff typically reached 250-300 students each week with Catholic faith formation. The religious education program extends religious formation for children on Rosebud into the summer months through summer camps. These camps are week-long Bible school programs offered in five reservation communities that can draw up to 150 children per camp.

In his role as a parish administrator, Ben works closely with Jenny teaching sacramental preparation classes. Since 2015, the couple has worked with 215 families preparing for baptism, 124 families preparing for 1st Communion and Reconciliation, 28 Confirmation candidates and 9 RCIA candidates.

As the pandemic began, the Black Bears quickly adjusted to give reservation families alternative instruction methods for both religious education classes and preparation for the sacraments. Utilizing Zoom, social media and the postal service, not only did their ministry not miss a beat, the parishes have experienced growth despite the pandemic, due in no small part to the efforts of the incredible team of Jenny and Ben Black Bear.
In last month’s print edition of the WRC I shared the news that we will be receiving sisters from the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary to serve in the Diocese of Rapid City. I can now provide an update on this new opportunity for our local church along with a request that you help me get the sisters settled here in Rapid City.

Mother Adela, the founder of the Pierced Hearts, will be sending us Sr. Christine, who will serve as our new Chancellor. With Margaret Simonson retiring after many years of excellent service I am grateful to have Sr. Christine succeed her in this very important position on my leadership team.

Mother is also sending Sr. Rachel who will succeed Susan Safford as Director of Pastoral Ministries and Faith Formation, another important leadership position on my diocesan staff. I am grateful to Susan for her great work over the years and we are blessed to have Sr. Rachel step into this role.

We will also be receiving two sisters to work for the Rapid City Catholic School System. Sr. Maria Belen will head up campus ministry at St. Thomas More Middle School and Sr. Brooke will do the same at St. Thomas More High School. I am very grateful that we will have these talented and energetic sisters ministering to our students, families and staff at STM.

MY REQUEST: Could you please help us welcome these new sisters and help them begin their service in our diocese? We are in the process of preparing and furnishing a suitable convent for them. We could use donations to help purchase appropriate furniture and supplies for the convent and help with the ongoing expenses involved, including the cost of rent for their housing and providing two vehicles for them. Please see the list of these opportunities below to help provide for this exciting new ministry in our diocese.

I am so grateful that God has opened this door for us. Please join me in welcoming the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary to the Diocese! +Bishop Peter

Opportunity to help establish new convent
The Diocese of Rapid City is seeking monetary donations so the sisters may purchase furnishings for the Convent of Our Lady of Fatima for the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary. They will begin serving at the Catholic Chancery and in the Rapid City Catholic School System beginning in mid-July.

Financial contributions will be used for:
- Housing
- Home Furnishings
- Transportation

Click button to donate —

Donations may be also sent to: Development Office Diocese of Rapid City PO Box 678, Rapid City, SD 57709. For information call (605) 343-3541, or email development@diorc.org.
**Court St. Rita #916 is state number 1!**

**BY FLORENCE SKINNER**

The Catholic Daughters have 39 courts in South Dakota. In April, the state CDA met virtually for a one-day convention. At this time the Rapid City Court St. Rita # 916 of the Catholic Daughters of America was awarded the prestigious “Court of the Year” designation for the state.

During the past two years, the 106 members of St. Rita court have forged ahead with fundraising and charitable causes while still practicing safety measures. Personal spiritual enhancement has also been emphasized. Regents Rene Brand and Kristine Engelhardt spearheaded activities which included: an area-wide day of recollection, rosary rallies, in-person memorial Mass for CDA and Knights of Columbus members, Rose Ceremony for each deceased member, mailed out cookies for seminarians, Angel Jar to help with dues, meals for mission/women’s shelter, home-bound cookie/teddy bear visits, and clergy days pies. They were in charge of monetary donations to priests, Catholic Social Services, the seminarian fund, St. Vincent de Paul, Right to Life, Lifesavers (project fighting abuse in any form) etc. Members helped the Knights of Columbus with the Thanksgiving dinner and golf tournament, national cemetery flags, special spiritual exercises for members, scholarships for youth, and the community Mother/Daughter Brunch.

In keeping with the national motto, “Unity and Charity,” St. Rita members have stressed “the need is great, and we must be true warriors in the fight to bring charity to mankind.” The group is most thankful for clergy, religious, and people of faith who have supported them in their service, culminating in this award.

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**Hubbeling scholarship winner announced**

The 2021-22 winner of the $1000 Hubbeling Family Scholarship is Ximena Contreras. Ximena is a Catholic senior who has recently graduated from Hill City High School and plans to attend Black Hills State University. As part of her application, she offered two letters of recommendation and a personal essay on the influence of the rosary on her coming college life. The letters told of the exceptional involvement she gave to her faith life, school and community, as outlined by Maura Megennis, a teacher, and Fr. Mark Horn, her pastor.

Ximena immigrated from Mexico several years ago, and her essay reflected the hardships the family suffered and their commitment to the rosary to see them through. She has continued the practice, and believes the “rosary” will be the weapon and the power she will use to face any challenges in college and in life.

The Hubbeling Scholarship is administered by Court St. Rita #916 of the Catholic Daughters, St. Therese Parish, Rapid City.

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**2021 CDA education contest local winners**

This year’s theme was: “Let All You Do Be Done With Love” (1 Cor. 16:14) or “Show Love To One Another,” Court St Rita #916 of St. Therese Parish, Rapid City, announces local winners in the contest.

- Art Division 1 (Gr. 4-5)
  - 1st place-Catherine Mutchler
  - 2nd place-Megan Lee
  - 3rd place-Isaac Clement

- Essay Division 1 (Gr. 4-5)
  - 1st place-Jeanne Kirsch
  - 2nd place-Macy Stephens

- Poetry Division 3 (Gr. 4-5)
  - 1st place-Trinity Mutchler

- Photography Division 4 (Gr. 6-8)
  - 1st place-Catherine Mutchler

**and the winner is...**

**Computer Art Division 1 (Gr. 4-5)**
- 1st place-Catherine Mutchler

**Computer Art Division 2 (Gr. 6-8)**
- 1st place-Elise Daniel

**Computer Art Division 3 (Gr. 9-12)**
- 1st place-Trinity Mutchler

**Essay Division 1 (Gr. 9-12)**
- 1st place-Jeanne Kirsch

**Essay Division 2 (Gr. 9-12)**
- 1st place-Isaac Clement

**Essay Division 3 (Gr. 9-12)**
- 1st place-Trinity Mutchler

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**KC Scholarships**

Tane Pravecek from Immaculate Conception Church, Winner, receiving the KC’s Scholarship from Tim Pravecek, a Knights of Columbus member. (Courtesy photos)

St. Isidore, Colome, KC’s Scholarship winner is Linkyn Petersek; Van Mansheim is presenting the award.

Linkyn’s name was accidentally misprinted in the May WRC. It is correct here.

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**Held**

**A Spiritual Retreat for Grieving Parents**

Friday-Sunday, Jul. 30-Aug. 1, this retreat is designed and led by grieving parents Dionne Eastmo and Briarne Edwards under the direction of Fr. Leo Hausmann. It is rooted in Catholic tradition, but open to all grieving parents who are seeking to be held by Our Lord. Register at terrasancta.org/held.

Supported by a grant from the Catholic Institute of Mental Health Ministry of the University of San Diego. Cost is based on participant’s ability to pay.
Harrowing account of sudden illness and recovery

BY LAURIE HALLSTROM

On Valentine’s Day, 2019, Chris Maxwell, a father of four young children, received a devastating diagnosis: he had Guillain-Barré (gee-YAN-buh-RAY) Syndrome. It is a rare disease in which the immune system attacks its own body. His wife, Molly Weisgram, has written a forthright account recalling the year of his life-threatening illness, the impact on their family and ultimately, his recovery in “The Other Side of Us.”

They are parishioners at St. John the Evangelist Parish, Ft. Pierre. Their pastor, Fr. Ron Garry made multiple trips to Sioux Falls while Maxwell was in a hospital intensive care unit. “He was always available to us, a reminder of the constant presence of God that we can call upon at any time,” said Weisgram. Her priest’s presence was not the only reminder of her faith. “In my book, I describe staring at the crucifix in my darkest hours. Our experience gave me a new understanding of suffering, something that Jesus did so willingly and for a bigger purpose. I wasn’t alone. I had a companion,” she said.

During her husband’s illness Weisgram was stretched in many directions. With the help of her parents and Maxwell family members, she juggled being present for her husband, working for the South Dakota Board of Regents, and reassuring her three sons and a baby daughter. The situation was also complicated because Maxwell had just launched a new consulting business. 

“My husband owns Maxwell Strategies, an outsourced executive leadership consulting firm. Thanks to my mother, a few employees Chris had hired just weeks before his illness, a past business partner and friend, and truly amazing clients, he was able to keep his business,” she said.

“I wrote my book as a way to sort through and heal from the trauma of our year-long experience with Guillain-Barré Syndrome,” she said. “I also wrote it as a way to catalog the series of events for my children so that they would have an opportunity to examine it from adult eyes someday, too.”

To date, she has sold more than 1,000 copies on Amazon and bulk orders have gone to the healthcare facilities which supported Maxwell in his recovery.

Maxwell has experienced a “miraculous recovery.” While he continues to experience nerve damage in his hands and feet, he can do things his family would not have dreamed possible. He ran his first half-marathon in May and is training for his first Olympic length triathlon in July.

Asked if the disease could reoccur, Weisgram said, “Guillain-Barré Syndrome is a fluke reaction by the body’s auto-immune system to fight against it self rather than the intended virus or bacteria. At this point, Chris’ chance of GBS recurrence is unlikely. His percentage chance of getting it again is about the same as anyone else’s chance of experiencing it.”

Maxwell was released from his rehabilitation center prior to the pandemic quarantine. The family took a vacation in Florida. “We were finally able to be together and have fun, rather than just cope,” said Weisgram.