

Bishop Michael Burbidge (00:00):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge and you are listening to The Walk Humbly podcast.

Diana Snider (00:07):

Podcasting from St. Clare's Studio in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to The Walk Humbly podcast. I'm Diana Snider, interim communications director for the Diocese of Arlington and your co-host for today's podcast.

(00:20):

Do you have questions for Bishop Burbidge? If so, send them to info@arlingtondiocese.org, or send us a message via social media.

(00:29):

I'd like to welcome our host, Bishop Burbidge.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (00:33):

Thank you, Diana, and thank you for being the co-host. You're doing a great job as our interim communications director, grateful for all your assistance and work, and so happy that you're co-hosting today. So thank you so much.

(00:47):

Diana, I'd like just to begin--just to share with our listeners something I'm sure that is very much on our minds, and of course I see escalating tensions in the Middle East following Iran's missile attack Saturday against Israel. The Holy Father, in fact, just said yesterday, "I follow in prayer," he said, "and with concern, even pain, the news that has arrived in the last few hours with the worsening of the situation in Israel due to the intervention by Iran." He said, "I make a heartfelt appeal to stop any action that could fuel a spiral of violence and the risk of dragging the Middle East into an even greater conflict of war. No one should threaten the existence of others," he added.

(01:31):

So obviously, our prayers and sentiments are united with those of the Holy Father praying for everyone in Israel and beyond. We know that our goal, our ultimate goal is peace, to live in harmony. That will only take place through dialogue. So we're praying for world leaders in a special way, uniting our prayers with Pope Francis, and please, everyone, continue to pray daily for peace in our world and especially where there is war, conflict, and division.

Diana Snider (02:06):

Yes, absolutely, Bishop. We will definitely keep all of that in our prayers.

(02:11):

Bishop, we have a lot of topics to discuss today, but let's start with this one. April is the Month of the Military Child, and Virginia ranks in the top five in the U.S. for the number of military personnel living in the state. Understandably, many of the schools in our diocese enroll children whose parents are members of the armed forces, including all of our high schools. Can you talk about a special designation that some of these schools have received?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (02:39):

Yeah. Well, first of all, this topic gives me the opportunity to thank all in our diocese who serve in the military. Thank you for your service to our country, not only those enlisted, enrolled, on active duty, but the spouses and the children and everyone who supports them. What a great gift you are to our nation. We pray for you every day. We pray for your safety and protection and so grateful to God for the way you serve our great nation.

(03:12):

But you're right. Let get back to your question. It's true that many of our schools serve military families. For instance, I just learned the other day, 25% of the students enrolled at St. Louis School in Alexandria are from a military family, and our schools do a very good job.

(03:29):

In fact, the Virginia Department of Education has been recognizing schools that have a special commitment to military families, and it's called Purple Star Schools. I think this has been going on since 2018. We have several Purple Star Schools, including St. Louis in Alexandria, Holy Cross Academy in Fredericksburg, and St. Francis of Assisi in Triangle. Saint John Paul the Great Catholic High School in Dumfries recently became the first high school in the diocese to achieve this recognition. And nearly 10% of the students at Saint John Paul the Great are from a military family.

(04:06):

I'll be visiting, in fact, Saint John Paul the Great later this week, and we'll meet with some of these students from our military families. I will also be there the day before because our priests have a soccer team and they're pretty good in fact, and they'll be playing the students at Saint John Paul the Great. They're coming off of victory when they recently beat the students from Ireton. So our priests are pretty competitive, but it's always great fun and it's great to see our priests and our young people enjoying time together.

(04:39):

But getting back, our schools work with military families of course to make the transitions and the challenges they face, obviously... And that's one of the reasons we're so grateful to our military families, that with a phone call, they are often asked to just get up, pack, move to another state, another part of the world, and that's what they do. And so that's challenging, including I know some of our families have made frequent moves. Some families move every two or three years on average, which is three times more often than civilian families. Sometimes they also move in the middle of the academic year when parents are reassigned.

(05:20):

So transitions, we all know, I think we all struggle with that. Transitions can be hard, whether it's making friends joining clubs or teams, dealing with different curricula, receiving permission to take advanced courses. Our teachers talk about all those challenges, but they're there to help, to help our families. That's what we do. We partner with our families in our Catholic schools, and so we're grateful for all the sacrifices of our military families. I'm really grateful for this designation of the Month of the Military Child and we will be there to support them in every way possible.

Diana Snider (05:54):

I'm a military kid myself, Army.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (05:56):

Oh, is that right?

Diana Snider (05:56):

It's crazy.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (05:57):

So did you move often as well?

Diana Snider (05:59):

Oh, often. I am trying to count the number of schools I attended.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (06:01):

How many states, do you know?

Diana Snider (06:03):

Probably seven, including Germany.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (06:06):

Wow, that's incredible. That is incredible.

Diana Snider (06:07):

Bishop, a week ago today, the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith released "Dignitas Infinita." I'm not sure if my Latin is good there, but it's a declaration on human dignity. This statement was five years in the making, and beyond covering the theology on human dignity, covers many topics that we might consider hot-button issues in our world today.

(06:31):

You released a statement on this declaration in which you encourage priests and the lay faithful to read it. Can you explain a little bit more about this document and what it's all about?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (06:42):

Yeah. It's a very, very clear, reaffirming our teachings, which we've always held, will always hold, regarding the sanctity of all human life and the respect and dignity owed to every person as a child of God, someone created in his image and likeness. The document goes right into some of the topics that everyone's talking about in the workplace, around the family tables, and our schools, and provides clear, precise teaching. Again, reaffirming everything we believe in the Gospel of Life.

(07:21):

I always say, and it's true with this document as well, I always encourage the faithful to read the document itself. It's really... It's not that difficult to read and it's worth the time that it will take. There's lots of footnotes and things like that, but I think just reading the document itself fully will be very helpful. Sometimes people do summaries or they do headlines, and that's the only thing we're familiar with, so read the document itself.

(07:51):

It highlights numerous grave violations of human dignity facing society today, including abortion, euthanasia, surrogacy, gender ideology, mistreatment of people with disabilities, violence against

women, sexual abuse, poverty, human trafficking, war, the plight of migrants. And what do they all have in common? They all fall under the umbrella of the Gospel of Life.

(08:20):

And our teaching is always consistent when it comes to life, when it comes to peace, when it comes to justice. Because all of life flows from God, the one who taught us how to live as children of God, and yet we know that the discussions and some of the false teachings that are out there, we have to be able to articulate what the Church teaches and why the Church teaches. And so Pope Francis and all who assisted him with this document have given us a good roadmap, and the document explores the evolution and thought throughout human history, biblical times about human dignity. The dignity is ours to respect and nurture in ourselves and in others.

(09:09):

So a very helpful document. It's one that I've asked our priests to continue to teach, even to do so in their homilies because there's so much for us to learn, and most importantly, to put ourselves in a position where we can explain to others what we believe as people who embrace the Gospel of Life and why we embrace it. And again, as we always say, we do it with clarity, with conviction, without compromise, but always clothed with the love of Christ.

Diana Snider (09:46):

Yeah, it's beautiful. Listeners can find Bishop's statement from last week on "Dignitas Infinita" as well as the link to the entire Vatican Declaration at ArlingtonDiocese.org.

(10:00):

Bishop, next week you're celebrating a special Mass at the Basilica of Saint Mary to mark the 50th anniversary of Catholic Charities Christ House. That's the ministry that Catholic Charities runs that serves the poor in Alexandria. You recently wrote a column for the Arlington Catholic Herald about that. Could you talk a little bit about that here?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (10:20):

Yeah. One of the treasures, one of the treasures in our diocese, Christ House. Ever since the diocese was founded 50 years ago, the church's service to the poor in imitation of Christ has always been central to its mission and a focus of our priests and lay faithful alike. Often, like many throughout our diocese, the great privilege of being at Christ House, of seeing exactly what we were just talking about, how every person who we encounter at Christ House is treated with the utmost respect as a child of God. We just don't give meals. We just don't provide housing for men living there. We treat them with respect and with the goal of providing in a way that they, God willing, will be able to sustain themselves.

(11:14):

But the love and the compassion with which this work is carried out in Christ House has every reason to make us so proud as a diocese. And it's really, it's just following the mandate that Jesus has given us and also what he said, "Whatever you do for the least of your brothers and sisters, you do for me." So that kindness, that compassion, that love, that generosity. We do for others, we do for Christ.

(11:42):

Serving a free evening meal, 365 days. And again, only because we have so many volunteers for more than 40 parishes and community groups who help us to prepare and serve a home-cooked meal, in a sense. Really good food, with good nutrition. As I mentioned, transitional housing for formerly homeless

men is also provided with workforce development and life skills training. We've also housed a food pantry, emergency assistance ministry, and more.

(12:18):

So that's the good news in a sense. It's sad in some ways because the need is so great. Catholic Charities was telling me that between July of 2022 and June of 2023, Christ House saw a 42% increase in the number of evening meals provided,

Diana Snider (12:38):

Yeah, that's amazing.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (12:38):

Now totaling over 17,000 meals per year. So everyone, there's so many opportunities out there in Christ House, but also in your own parishes and communities to live the Gospel call, to serve others through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. I think of our parishes, Catholic Charities, the Knights of Columbus, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, all the ministries, beautiful ministries in our parishes. So perhaps this might be an opportunity for you to offer your services, your time, and generosity to help the brothers and sisters who need us the most.

Diana Snider (13:16):

Yeah, it's great to donate to serve the poor, but it's also really wonderful to be able to do it yourself, to physically help the poor as you can.

(13:27):

Bishop, on April 6th, just a little over a week ago, you ordained 12 men to the transitional diaconate. That's one of the last steps on their path to become a priest. And on June 1st, you're going to ordain two men as priests. As we're celebrating our 50th anniversary, the number of vocations we've had to the priesthood and religious life has been strong for decades. So what do you attribute this to?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (13:53):

Yeah, I'm often asked that question because we thank God, with the grace of God, we are blessed with vocations. And we talked a lot about it at the diaconate ordination, and it was one of the most glorious days I've ever had to ordain 12 men to the diaconate, and God willing, they will be our priests next year. But it's not just the number 12 as far as a number; it's the quality of the men as well. I mean, these are good, holy, faithful, young men on fire with the Gospel, ready to come out and serve, just like the two, God willing, I'll be ordaining as our newest priests. And so we are truly blessed.

(14:38):

So where does it come from? I always say that our diocese was founded with a strong foundation as it related to vocations. Bishop Welsh, our first bishop, that was one of his highest priorities, vocations. We need homegrown priests to serve this growing, this vibrant diocese. And one of the first things he did is he was so... He had great vision of bringing the Poor Clares, the cloistered nuns, to our diocese with the primary purpose of, "Please come here and please pray for vocations in this local church that's just beginning." And so the Poor Clares have been doing that and continue to do that.

(15:26):

And I really do think that, as that priority has been continued with Bishop Keating and with Bishop Loverde, and certainly now, I think it all goes back to, we got off to a great start as a diocese. And it's just

been very incredible, and I was just visiting Mount St. Mary's Seminary where a number of our seminarians are, and I'm so proud. The Diocese of Arlington, through our seminarians and transitional deacons in the seminaries, have such a great reputation of men who are always ready to serve, who are respectful, who are joyful, who are really committed, both feet down in being formed in seminary life.

(16:14):

And again, a great opportunity for me to thank our listeners and the faithful of this diocese for allowing us to provide such strong priestly formation through your generosity, through your kindness to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal because a great part of what we receive helps us to educate our seminarians. So everyone who contributes to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal is contributing to the formation of those who will serve you and your children and your grandchildren as the future priests of our diocese.

(16:49):

So we have a bright and promising future. And I also want to thank my brother priests who mentor them by accepting them for summer assignments, but most especially through their own example of good and holy priests.

Diana Snider (17:05):

That's wonderful.

(17:08):

Bishop, it's an election year and already filled with vitriol and interest rates are high and cost of living is high, and war is raging in the Holy Land. And then there's more. But it's still the season of Easter. So how do we live our faith fully as Catholics and still maintain our Easter joy?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (17:27):

Right, and it's an Easter season, of course, and we're in the midst of the Lord's showering his Easter blessings upon us. Just yesterday in the Gospel, Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples and what he said to them, he says to us, "Peace be with you." That's what the Lord wants to give us is the gift that only he can provide of genuine peace and a gift that we, as I mentioned at the beginning of the podcast, one which we must pray for: Lord, give us your peace in our world, in our nation, in our own hearts.

(18:05):

And so yes, just as he walked with his disciples, back then as now, there was conflict and division, but he was reassuring them in their doubts and their fear. And in the midst of living in such darkness, "Don't despair, I have been victorious. I've taken on all the world had to offer and defeated it, darkness to life, suffering to glory, even death to life." That's what we celebrate.

(18:35):

And so we, as believers who follow the Risen Lord, even when it seems dark out there, we can never despair because we know the victory, the victory that is ours. And so we walk in that faith and we try our best to share that joy with others. And as I often say in my confirmation homilies, because after I anoint the candidate, that's what I say to them right after I anoint them, "Peace be with you."

(19:05):

And I often suggest in the homily that one of the ways that gift of peace that the Lord so much wants to give us is ours is when we live in right relationship with ourselves, believing that we truly are children of God, and we're precious in his sight. When we live in right relationship with others, we can't have peace if we have bitterness or anger or are unwilling to forgive others. No, we have to live in harmony with one another. And when we live in right relationship with God. We always know when life gets most

stressful, it's when we're trying to do things according to my way, my will. But when we walk in the ways of God and do what he's asking, say yes to his will, peace always follows.

(19:50):

And so during this Easter season, open your hearts, dear friends, to receive the gift that our Risen Lord so much shares with us, the gift of his peace.

Diana Snider (20:00):

Yeah, we definitely have to hang on to that. Bishop, we have a question from a member of the faithful. This is from Jim at St. John the Apostle. He'd like to ask you, "Can you comment on the oxymoron of Christian nationalism? Is it consistent with our faith?"

Bishop Michael Burbidge (20:19):

That's a good question, isn't it?

Diana Snider (20:20):

Yeah, yeah.

Bishop Michael Burbidge (20:23):

Yeah, I think it's good to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. Of course, a good Catholic should also be a good citizen, a faithful citizen. We always say that, "A faithful citizen," and that means to be patriotic of course. We should have a proper, healthy love for our nation because it is ours and we live in a nation that, through the sacrifices of so many people, gives us the gift of freedom, the gift of religious liberty, and we should be thankful for that.

(20:56):

Pope Francis has said, "A good Catholic meddles in politics offering the best of himself so that those who govern can govern." So that doesn't mean we approve of everything our government does, and it doesn't mean that we think our nation is without fall, but it means that we work for the common good in our nation and for it to be a force for good. However, a patriotic person doesn't need his nation to be greater than others in order to love it.

(21:29):

Nationalism, on the other hand, is a view of one's nation only in competition with others. It tends to emphasize devotion to the nation, to the exclusion of other devotions, including one's faith. So above all, we are Catholic. We are a follower of Christ, we are Christian. That's where it all begins, and it is that that we live in the situation that God has placed us.

(22:00):

So "Christian nationalism" is a confusing term because it can confuse two things that should be distinct: devotion to the nation and devotion to the Church. A Christian, Diana, never identifies oneself entirely with a particular nation. A Christian loves his nation, but within the broader and larger love for God and neighbor. See, that's that distinction we're trying to make. And how blessed are we, as we celebrate our 50th anniversary, that we have as our patron, Thomas More? It's such a great example. He was a devoted British subject and servant, but he was a Catholic first. In a time of persecution, he chose his faith over his ruler. As he famously put it, he was, "The King's good servant, but God's first," and that's who we should be.

Diana Snider (22:47):

He is one inspiring saint.

(22:50):

So if you're listening to this podcast, you're benefiting from the generosity of those who have given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal. The BLA supports many ministries throughout the diocese, including the communications office. So thank you to all of those who have made this possible.

(23:04):

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(23:21):

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(23:40):

Bishop, you've talked about many topics here. Do you have any final thoughts and can you send us out with your blessing?

Bishop Michael Burbidge (23:44):

Sure, Diana, great job. Thank you. Thanks for being the co-host today. Thanks for having this conversation. I really appreciate your help.

(23:53):

Just one other thought. It was from our Gospel reading today. I just, in a comment I posted on X today, I know our listeners work very hard. People work hard these days, and sometimes long hours, and I know they try to put forth their best efforts, and there's a great dignity in work, as long as we remember what Jesus encourages us in the Gospel, in fact, in this Easter season especially, of why we work, what is the ultimate purpose of our work and for whom we work.

(24:33):

So the true purpose of our work is to give praise to God and to serve others, and our ultimate goal is to get to heaven. And so, as you carry out our work, dear friends, keep in mind the purpose of your work and your ultimate goal. And the way we get to heaven is by believing in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and following in his ways and entrusting our lives to him. And as you carry out your work, do so by walking humbly with your God.

(25:07):

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(25:30):

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