

Walk Humbly Podcast: Episode # 121

[00:00:00] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

[00:00:07] **Diana Snider:** Podcasting from St. Clare Studio in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly Podcast. I'm Diana Snider, deputy director of communications for the Diocese of Arlington, and your co-host for this podcast. Do you have questions for Bishop Burbidge? If so, send them to info@arlingtondiocese.org or send us a message via social media.

[00:00:30] I'd like to make a reminder to our listeners that the opening of the Golden Jubilee year will take place on Sunday, November 26th, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe, at 5 p.m. at St. Michael Parish in Annandale. I'd like to welcome our host, Bishop Burbidge.

[00:00:48] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Well, thank you, Diana.

[00:00:50] Thank you for being the co-host today in Billy's absence on a well-deserved day off here. So, thank you for filling that seat over there.

[00:01:00] **Diana Snider:** I'm happy to. Bishop, we have a lot of topics today, but before we get into those...This is our last podcast before Thanksgiving. Would you mind sharing with us your Thanksgiving plans and your message to the faithful?

[00:01:13] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Well, sure. First of all, Thanksgiving Day is a reminder that all good gifts we have come from God, including the gift of life itself, our faith, our freedom, the many blessings that are bestowed upon us. And many times in our busy lives, and as we move so quickly from one thing to another, we can sometimes forget to pause in the midst of each day to give thanks to God.

[00:01:40] So, Thanksgiving Day is a good reminder that, actually, every day should be Thanksgiving Day, because of the goodness of God in our lives. And a thankful heart, a grateful heart is always a joyful heart. And like many of our listeners, I presume I will have the opportunity to spend Thanksgiving Day—after Mass at the Cathedral—with my family, at a gathering with my brother and nieces and nephews and grandnieces and nephew, and a great dinner. My niece always does a good job.

[00:02:16] **Diana Snider:** Sounds like it'll be a wonderful time. Bishop, this week, you and your brother bishops from throughout the United States were gathered in Baltimore for your annual fall meeting. Many topics were covered, but would you describe the spirit overall of the conference?

[00:02:30] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Well, yes, Diana. Actually, the day we're recording—I just returned after a week. It was a full week at the bishop's meeting in Baltimore. It always begins with committee meetings. And since I serve on a number of committees at this time, I had to be there Friday to Sunday when the meetings take place.

[00:02:50] So I often tease sometimes, before we get to the real meeting on Monday, you're already tired out. But it's very productive. I think the faithful would be very proud of their bishops and the spirit with which we are united throughout these days. It begins on Monday, officially, with prayer.

[00:03:13] So before we even begin our formal discussions and the work ahead of us on a very full agenda, we begin with prayer. We have a Holy Hour during that time, we have Confessions. It's beautiful to see—standing in line to go to Confession—to see my brother bishops recognizing the reality that we all know to be true.

[00:03:39] We're all sinners. We try our best, but sometimes we fail and we're in need of God's mercy. And thank God we have such a loving God, a merciful God who forgives us completely and always allows us to begin anew and gives us the grace of the sacrament to strengthen us. So, what a beautiful way for us to enter into our meetings—time before the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrament of Penance, prayer, the Rosary.

[00:04:07] So we entered into our time together in such a beautiful way. And it's work. I mean, it's a full agenda. But you do also have downtime to be with other bishops. It's just a great gift to me to see friends—bishops can talk to one another in a unique way.

[00:04:30] 'Cause we're all kind of fulfilling the responsibilities. And I always find that uplifting—you share best practices, you share the joys and the challenges that are there. So, I'm actually one who enjoys the bishop's meetings and comes back a little bit energized and renewed. But it's always great to be back home.

[00:04:47] **Diana Snider:** Well, it's good to have you back too. Before the bishop's meeting, some major news was announced. Bishop Joseph Strickland

of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas was relieved from pastoral governance of [00:05:00] his diocese. An administrator has been appointed in the meantime. There's been a lot of speculation, as the Vatican's announcements did not provide specifics about his removal. Bishop, I know this is a difficult topic, but would you mind shedding any light you might have on the announcement?

[00:05:16] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yeah, it is. It's a sensitive and difficult topic, for sure. But as you mentioned, the Vatican did not share any specific information because the Vatican cannot share specific information.

[00:05:29] There was a confidential process. There was an apostolic visitation. Many people, including Bishop Strickland, but so many other people, clergy and lay faithful participated in that visitation and there was due process, but everyone was assured of confidentiality.

[00:05:53] And so in announcing the decision, the Vatican is not in a position to share specific reasons or the determining factors. So, we don't know. And so, it's often important in situations like this—I know many of our listeners in the corporate world and education world, whatever it may be are aware of human resources and personnel issues—that you cannot always convey information that is only to be held in strict confidence.

[00:06:34] And so I often say that it's so important for us not to spend all of our time and energy or making judgments knowing that we don't have all the information. And I think the only thing that we should be doing at this time is specifically what Bishop Strickland asked us to do, pray for him.

[00:06:55] So we do, we pray for Bishop Strickland, we pray for the Holy Father, and we pray that this will not be a distraction to what the statement from the Diocese of Tyler said, that—and it was a beautiful statement—saying, although this is a difficult period, the work of the Church, the mission of the Church, the apostolic work, the corporal and spiritual works must continue.

[00:07:22] So this cannot be a distraction from what is at the heart of being the Church, both in the Diocese of Tyler and beyond.

[00:07:31] **Diana Snider:** Right. And we'll keep praying for them, as you said. Bishop at the meeting in Baltimore, some of your brother bishops who participated last month in the Synod on Synodality in Rome, spoke about their experiences. What of those presentations were most memorable to you?

[00:07:46] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yeah, well, first of all, I would like to thank and commend my brother bishops who did that, as well as the hundreds and hundreds of other clergy and lay faithful from around the world, because it was a huge commitment. Four weeks, and they began with retreat.

[00:08:04] But then the meetings themselves, the listening sessions went on for another full three weeks. So, a really generous commitment on the part of all who accepted this appointment to serve on the Synod of Synodality. So, we got a brief update from the bishops who were there, and all spoke very positively of their experience, that it was truly a time of listening to one another,

[00:08:31] an opportunity to share their own thoughts and opinions on various topics and questions. And don't forget, we all participated in that before the Synod on Synodality. We as a diocese—as it was every other diocese throughout the world—asked to do listening sessions across the Diocese, which we did.

[00:08:52] We did a number of them, and I was able to—with the help of Father Planty and a working team—summarize all that I heard, and that was part of what went into the working documents. So in a sense, we've all participated, and as we know, the Synod is continuing.

[00:09:13] And so the body will gather next October as well. There was a report issued which is available on the Vatican website and the USCCB website that would be an interesting read for people who would like to learn more about it. And again, you know, no definitive decisions or anything like that have been conveyed.

[00:09:35] Part of the process is for the Holy Father to continue to receive the guidance, the wisdoms, the insights that others are offering, and eventually some recommendations. But then, he is free to do with that what he wants, and that will be prayerful discernment. So, at the end of the Synod on Synodality the following year, then something more definitive would be issued.

[00:09:58] So we continue to pray for all those who are part of this process.

[00:10:01] **Diana Snider:** Right, right. Yes, we do. One of the most anticipated parts of the bishop's meeting was regarding updating the teaching document, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” and how abortion would be framed. You've affirmed throughout your ministry that abortion is the preeminent issue and that all other issues flow from that.

[00:10:21] And your brother bishops are in agreement, they voted overwhelmingly to support abortion as the preeminent priority. And they did so just one year away from the 2024 elections. So, what should people take from that overwhelming vote?

[00:10:36] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yeah well, the language that the threat of abortions are the preeminent priority was something that we agreed upon as a body of bishops in 2019, and what we have done with this faithful citizenship document is, for the most part, except for some updates to more current insights from Pope Francis and others...

[00:11:02] Basically, the only thing new in this document is the introductory note, and then the inclusion of six bulletin inserts that would make an executive summary that we would put out in various weeks, preparing people for bringing their voice into the public arena as they vote.

[00:11:20] So the introductory document was the one that restated abortion as our preeminent priority. And really, there was no debate. The amendment came from the committee which I'm privileged to serve on. And when you put that in front of the bishops, there's room for discussion.

[00:11:44] And literally, there was no discussion, which tells us that we understand very clearly, we're united in saying that the threat of abortion is our preeminent priority. Why? Because it is the direct attack on human life, and it attacks the most vulnerable and voiceless at alarming numbers,

[00:12:06] over 1.3 to 1.6 million abortions per year, just in our country. So why would this not be our preeminent issue, as you as you said? It's like a house—you have to have the foundation right and if we don't get life being sacred from the moment of conception, if we don't get that right, then that foundation's off. And then you see other areas of life that that would...the whole thing will begin to fall apart unless we get it right from the beginning. On a practical note, we have to say that certainly pro-abortion advocates and those who run for office with a pro-abortion campaign, they certainly made this their

[00:12:48] preeminent issue, we saw here so sadly, in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the last election cycle. I mean, I don't know about our listeners, but it seemed like every ad that I saw—it wasn't about the economy. It wasn't about education or the role of parents. It wasn't about safety and the alarming sense of violence that has taken place.

[00:13:09] It was always about abortion. And with those running on a pro-abortion campaign, demonizing anyone who would dare to say the protection of the child in the womb—that voiceless and vulnerable child in the womb—is important, is essential. And so, certainly it's our preeminent issue. And then we sadly saw another defeat in Ohio.

[00:13:34] The bishops in Ohio did a great job of trying to bring this teaching, but we lost that ballot initiative, as we did in Kansas and Michigan. So ever since the Dobbs decision, we were so grateful that Roe vs. Wade was overturned, but it has energized those who take a pro-abortion position.

[00:13:52] And so I hope and pray that this is a wake-up call. We have a lot of work ahead of us and we've been defeated. So, when you get defeated, what do you do? You either stay down, or you say, “No, I'm going to get back up, maybe change the little strategy here, but we're going to win going forward.” We have the truth.

[00:14:11] We have the truth, but we have to find new ways to inform and to inspire both the Catholic faithful and those in our community, what is at stake here. And so, of course, it's our preeminent priority.

[00:14:24] **Diana Snider:** So much to do, but we should be energized by that.

[00:14:26] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yes.

[00:14:28] **Diana Snider:** Bishop, you still have one more year to serve as the chairman of the committee on pro-life activities for the USCCB. Just recently, March for Life announced their theme for the 2024 March for Life. Do you mind telling us what that theme is? And what do you hope the theme will communicate in our culture?

[00:14:43] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** It's a beautiful theme. The theme is “With Every Woman, for Every Child,” and that's the message that I was just talking about—how we inspire and inform.

[00:14:55] We have to make sure that our own Catholic faithful and those in our community know that we are pro-life and that means we are pro-woman. We are pro-child. We know that the sacredness of life involves the preborn for sure, but also that the Gospel of Life extends to the sacredness of life, the dignity that is owed to every person as a child of God—at every level with every person.

[00:15:25] But I think the way we inform and inspire as we're moving forward here is to say as a Church, as the Catholic Church, as the Catholic Church in this diocese, we are, for sure, with every woman, for every child. That's why we have the beautiful Walking with Moms in Need programs in our parishes.

[00:15:45] This is why we say to women who are in a crisis pregnancy or during a pregnancy who need assistance, "How can we help you? Is it housing that you need at this time? Is it counseling? Is it financial assistance? Is it some basic necessities like cribs and diapers and clothing? Is it financial support? How can we help you?"

[00:16:06] So that abortion is not even a choice, and so that this life is cherished and welcome and protected. So, we are going to walk with moms and fathers because we are with every woman and for every child. I think it's a beautiful, inspiring message, and I hope one that resonates in the hearts of those who are in our own diocese and beyond, and especially as we bring our voice into the public arena.

[00:16:39] **Diana Snider:** Yeah. So, the March for Life is January 19th, and the rally begins on the Mall at noon on January 19th, and the March itself begins at one. That morning, here in our diocese, Life is VERY Good with the Mass for Life takes place at the Eagle Bank Arena at George Mason University. That begins at 9 a.m.

[00:16:57] And there'll be a keynote address by Chris Stefanick and live music and a Chick-fil-a lunch. So go to our website, arlingtondiocese.org.

[00:17:05] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** And I am privileged as chair of the pro-life community, as you mentioned, to offer the Vigil Mass the evening before the March, at five o'clock at the Basilica Shrine, which we know, there's standing room only in the Shrine and even below, in the crypt, because thousands and thousands of people, including many of our young people from all across the country, come together to joyfully and peacefully witness on behalf of the Gospel of Life. Such an inspiration.

[00:17:37] **Diana Snider:** Yeah. You're going to be busy going back and forth across the river.

[00:17:39] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** It'll be fun.

[00:17:41] **Diana Snider:** As I mentioned during our intro today, we are approaching our Golden Jubilee year and Solemn Vespers, which takes place

November 26 at St. Michael's in Annandale, five o'clock. Can you explain what Solemn Vespers is? And can you please talk about the theme for our Jubilee year, year three: "Renew?"

[00:17:59] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yeah. Well, it does seem funny, Diana. It just seems like the other day I announced that we were going to have a three-year preparation for our Golden Jubilee in 2024.

[00:18:08] And here we are, year three! Soon it will be 2024 and a beautiful theme, as you mentioned, "Renew." We look at the words from the Lord, our God, from his heavenly throne in the Book of Revelation. "Behold, I make all things new." What a powerful message. It is the Lord. It is his saving power, his grace, his merciful love that, that makes all things new.

[00:18:33] We are instruments. We participate in bringing new life into the world in situations we live, but only with reliance on the power of God. It's so beautiful, especially in what we're experiencing now in our world, in our nation—in our own lives—perhaps, we need newness of life that only God can give.

[00:18:54] Praying that this will be a special time for our diocese and our families and all of us to be renewed by God's grace. We're going to begin, as you mentioned—hope a lot of people come. I'd like to see all of you there. We're going to have a nice reception afterwards. We'll be praying together. And as you mentioned with Solemn Vespers, which is the evening prayer of the whole Church.

[00:19:09] Bishops and priests are bound to say the Liturgy of the Hours every day, which will include Vespers or evening prayer. And we're going to do it together, as we begin this exciting time in the life of our diocese. And basically, Solemn Vespers, because we'll be singing. Our beautiful choir will be helping us to pray so beautifully.

[00:19:34] But evening prayer, or Vespers, is made up of hymns, psalms, Scripture readings and intercessions, ending with the recitation of the Our Father and the concluding prayer. So, this evening prayer that we'll be praying together, the Pope will be praying, all the bishops and priests throughout the country will be praying, and those who commit themselves to pray in the Liturgy of the Hours.

[00:19:56] It's the universal prayer of the Church. So what a way for us to be reminded that, yes, we are a part of the Universal Church, but also, in God's

plan, we make up this local church, this diocesan church, this diocese of Arlington. I cannot think of a better way than being in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament to pray this beautiful prayer the Church gives us as we begin this exciting time in the life of our diocese.

[00:20:20] **Diana Snider:** It'll be a beautiful way to round out Thanksgiving weekend, and to start Advent, and start our Jubilee Year.

[00:20:25] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Exactly, exactly.

[00:20:27] **Diana Snider:** Bishop, virtually every major news outlet covered a recent document published by the Vatican's Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. In this document, it stated that those who experience gender dysphoria can receive Baptism and can witness at weddings and be godparents to a child being baptized.

[00:20:46] This was viewed as a new step regarding Catholic teaching as it relates to gender ideology. You wrote a catechesis about gender ideology and the human person in consultation with experts. What was your reaction to the document from the Vatican and the way it was reported in the media?

[00:21:01] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Well, sure, and thanks for mentioning the document that I wrote through much prayer and consultation with people who have expertise.

[00:21:14] Hope everyone listening, if you have not already done so, please read that document. I think it's helpful in trying to explain this issue to family members, coworkers, friends who may not understand what we say and why we say it. It's not a long document, and it was written to try to be very pastoral.

[00:21:33] And you know, it is an issue. It's an issue facing all of us, in our parishes and also in society. And unfortunately, we're seeing it's an issue that sometimes is dividing people. So I think this is a good question you asked because I would like to use this time to offer clarity about what was said and what was not said by the Vatican and what it really means.

[00:22:01] And so, first of all, as I say in the document we issued, this issue, like all pastoral issues, must be stated in truth. It's because we love that we speak truthfully, so we can speak the truth with compassion. But it's because we love that we say what is true. And we always, always have to avoid any insensitivity or, God forbid, discrimination

[00:22:29] in addressing such situations, always bound to speak the truth in love. And so those experiencing gender dysphoria, they're not prohibited from receiving the sacraments. In fact, all those who are struggling, all those who are discerning need to open themselves to God's grace and healing.

[00:22:52] God makes that available to all of us. But, you know, with this issue, There is also a pastoral complication as to whether or not the person understands that their belief—that their gender and biological sex are not the same—is disordered. And so, we have to be able to say that compassionately.

[00:23:13] What is new in our times, however, is the growing cultural acceptance of the erroneous claim that some people, including children and adolescents, are in the wrong body, and therefore must undergo gender transition, either to relieve the stress or as an expression of personal autonomy. The Church—and this is important, Diana—the Church does not want to turn well-meaning people away from the sacraments, which we all desperately, desperately need.

[00:23:43] But we also do not want to appear as celebrating their attempt to change their body, to misrepresent what God made them to be. So, the Vatican explained that in the document, though much of that was excluded, unfortunately, in media reports. So, for instance, on the issue of being a godparent, the dicastery said, “for the child to be baptized, there must be a well-founded hope that that child will be educated in the Catholic faith, in the Catholic religion.

[00:24:18] And at the same time, it is necessary to consider the real value that the ecclesial community gives to the tasks of godfather and godmother, the role they have in the community, and the considerations shown by them towards the teaching of the Church.” That's the role of the godparent. Many listeners, I'm sure, have been given that great privilege.

[00:24:37] So you have to be that one who models, that one who lives and professes all that the Catholic Church teaches and believes. And so, if a proposed godparent would attempt to deny Church teaching or mislead the child about our fundamental beliefs, they should not be a godparent. This applies to any person, not just those with gender dysphoria.

[00:25:02] Regarding the reception of Baptism, here's what the dicastery said: “A transsexual who had also undergone hormone treatment and sex reassignment surgery can receive Baptism under the same conditions of the

other faithful. If there are no situations in which there is a risk of generating public scandal, or disorientation among the faithful.”

[00:25:26] This is the standard for any person. Anyone who experiences an authentic conversion of heart and mind and who genuinely repents can receive the sacraments and should be encouraged to do so. Without that conversion and repentance, however, the sacraments are unavailable at that time. We're not saying “never.”

[00:25:49] We're saying “not at this time” because we always allow the grace of God to lead to that conversion of which I just mentioned. We're all imperfect. So, this does not mean a person's life has to be totally in harmony with God's law to receive the sacraments, but this does mean they must recognize the Church's teachings as true and desire to live in God's grace through virtue.

[00:26:11] It's a lifelong process for all of us. The sacraments are the source of our strength and grace upon which we must rely.

[00:26:21] **Diana Snider:** Thank you. Yes. If you'd like to read Bishop Burbidge's “Catechesis on Gender Ideology and the Human Person,” go to our website arlingtondiocese.org, and search “gender ideology” and it'll be the very first result that you see.

[00:26:35] Bishop, you're celebrating this weekend the Mass for catechists on Saturday, and catechists have an important role in parish life and in the Church in general, but not enough people really know about what catechists do, can you talk about how they serve here in the Diocese of Arlington?

[00:26:52] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Yeah, and I always enjoy this.

[00:26:54] This is an annual Mass and it's always a wonderful opportunity for me to celebrate because it gives me the opportunity, on behalf of all of our parents and our young people, to thank our catechists who devote so much of their time in helping parents, because the parents are the first teachers of the faith for their children.

[00:27:12] So catechists, like our Catholic educators in schools, are those who assist parents in handing on our faith in the faith formation and education of their children. And this is really a particular calling from God. And then when that person accepts it in faith, it empowers the person for the service of this task of initiating others to the Christian life, and most importantly leading others to a deeper relationship with Christ.

[00:27:43] So that catechist, in a very real sense, is a witness to the Church's living tradition, a mediator who facilitates the incorporation of new disciples of Christ. So many, many thanks to those who offer their time, their service to serve in this beautiful ministry in the life of the Church.

[00:28:03] **Diana Snider:** It'll be a great Mass. So, here's some housekeeping details.

[00:28:07] If you're listening to this podcast, then you're benefiting from the generosity of those who've given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal. The BLA supports many ministries throughout the Diocese, including the communications office. So, thank you to all who have made this possible. If you haven't already, please make sure you rate this podcast and write a review on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher or Overcast.

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[00:28:50] And you can follow the Diocese on Facebook, Instagram and X. Bishop, we've talked about many things, do you have any final thoughts and would you send us off with your blessing?

[00:28:59] **Bishop Michael Burbidge:** Sure. Thank you, Diana, once again for serving as a co-host today. Great to be with you and our listeners. As you mentioned, this is our last podcast prior to Thanksgiving Day.

[00:29:11] So, first of all, allow me to express deep gratitude and thanks to all the priests, the consecrated religious, the deacons, the seminarians, the lay faithful in this wonderful and vibrant diocese for the many ways you offer such beautiful witness and living out your vocation. For the many ways that you inspire me and for your prayers and for your tremendous support.

[00:29:35] I'm deeply, deeply grateful to all of you. I'm grateful to God for allowing me to serve with you in this beautiful diocese, and I wish all of you and your families a very, very happy Thanksgiving filled with abundant blessings. And may all of us have a grateful heart, recognizing that the source of all good gifts is God, the Lord himself.

[00:30:00] And that grateful heart, that joyful heart will allow us daily to walk humbly with our God. Thank you for listening to the Walk Humbly podcast. Make sure you check out more episodes on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher and Spotify. You can follow me on Twitter @bishopburbidge where I offer Gospel reflections each morning and share photos and updates of what is going on in the Diocese of Arlington.

[00:30:25] Stay up-to-date with news, event information and inspirational content by subscribing to our e-newsletter at arlingtondiocese.org.