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Bishop Michael Burbidge:

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge, and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

Diana Snider:

Podcasting from the St. Clare Studio in the Diocese of Arlington, welcome to the Walk Humbly Podcast. I'm Diana Snider, deputy director of communications and your co-host for today's podcast. Without further ado, I'd like to welcome our host, Bishop Burbidge.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Thank you, Diana. Thank you for serving again as co-host. It's great to have our different co-hosts sharing this podcast with me, so thank you for doing so.

Diana Snider:

I'm happy to. Bishop, as always, we have many topics to cover in today's podcast. But before we start, I wanted to mention that we are recording this morning, on June 6th, the 80th anniversary of D-Day, which goes down in history as the beginning of the end of that horrible conflict which killed an estimated 70 to 85 million people, both military and civilian, worldwide. This week, President Biden and other leaders from around the world are commemorating this historic event along with the dwindling few of the survivors, surviving veterans, of that operation. What are your thoughts today as we remember our Allied troops storming the beaches of Normandy to wrest control from the Nazis?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

I already this morning saw some coverage of President Biden, other leaders from around the world, as you mentioned, with the dwindling few of the last-serving veterans of that operation. First of all, seeing those veterans and their friends and those who were there with them throughout that operation, those who courageously fought for freedom, and also those who offered the ultimate sacrifice. So that's one thing. But it's the 80th anniversary of D-Day. It's very sobering when you think about it. The future of the whole world really hung on the success of that operation. D-Day, as we know, was the start of Allied operations, which would eventually liberate Western Europe and defeat Nazi Germany and end the second World War. You see those scenes of such bravery and perseverance, but also such a terrible loss of lives, which is always, always tragic, no matter what the cause is, the loss of lives. And so we know that even today, in the face of conflicts we're watching around the world, including Ukraine and Russia and the Holy Land, we know how fragile peace and freedom can be. So there's a lot to think about today, a lot to pray for. Pray God for peace throughout our world, the end of conflict and division that's taking lives and causing so much suffering, and certainly remember all those, with great gratitude, who gave their lives for our freedom.

Diana Snider:

Sure. Yeah, it's a good day to go downtown to some of those memorials, especially the World War II Memorial. Bishop, we are two days out from Saturday and what you've called the biggest celebration of the year, the Diocesan Jubilee Fest. What are your thoughts about that?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

I am so excited. I've been talking about this for a while. This is our 50th year as a diocese, our Jubilee. That's a pretty big occasion. And I said from the beginning I wanted a big diocesan party, a festival, a real celebration with music and great music, dancing, food, rides, petting zoo, fireworks, amusements for the kids. So everyone can come. And I am so thrilled. As of today, I heard we have close to 6,800 people

registered. And so it goes, people will arrive at different times. It goes for quite a few hours, beginning with procession and Mass, but activities into the evening. And I am just so thrilled. This is what a Jubilee should be. It should be a festival. It should unite us as a diocesan family, and really have a great time together. And thank God I'm looking ahead. I didn't start looking until Sunday at the weather forecast, but it's been consistently good.

Diana Snider:

Yeah, let's hope those weather people are right.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Keep praying, everyone, for good weather on Saturday.

Diana Snider:

Bishop, we've held out as long as we can. We're on topic three now, and I know that you're bursting at the seams to talk about what happened this past Saturday in our diocese with the ordination of two new priests, Father Sean Nypaver and Father James R. Joseph.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

You're right, Diana. That is, in the life of a bishop ... In fact, I remember at the ordination, after that part of the ceremony when they are now priests, I turned to the transitional deacon sitting next to me. I said, "This is one of the greatest joys in the life of a bishop, what I just did." Of course, through the goodness of God, the grace of God, the sacrament and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but to be the instrument of giving to the church and giving to the diocese two new priests.

And both these men, like the priests who have been ordained throughout the years here in this diocese, are very good and faithful priests who love the Lord, love this church, and can't wait to serve in their parishes, St. Timothy's and St. Leo's. But it was a joyful day, not only for them, not only for their families, but you saw it in the church that day. It was a great day for our diocesan family, for our diocese. And we assure both Father Sean and Father James of our continued prayers and ask God's blessings upon them.

Diana Snider:

It was a glorious day, I will agree. So shifting gears a little, Bishop. On June 17th, you are celebrating a special Mass to pray for the healing of victims, survivors of sexual abuse. The Mass is at 6:30 PM at our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Arlington. Can you tell us a little bit about this Mass and who should attend?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Well, everyone is invited to attend, not only those victims of sexual abuse from members of the church or from family members or from other individuals. We know sexual abuse sadly and tragically take place at all different levels. And so it's really for the people of God to come together to pray for the healing of the victims who have suffered from this tragedy, because it's a lifelong process, that healing.

And we try to support that healing in many ways. I am always privileged and welcome the opportunity to meet with victims of sexual abuse one-on-one. We have always consistently done a great job in our diocese and through our various offices to reach out to victims. We gather with victims of sexual abuse, not only by clergy, but by any individual, throughout the year, to have listening sessions, opportunities for them to be with each other, to talk to each other, to pray together, to have formation together, a day of recollection. So this is lifelong.

And so this Mass is an opportunity, a perfect way to pray for healing for victims of sexual abuse. So I really would like our entire diocese to know that, as a faithful, as one of our brothers and sisters who have suffered and continues to suffer from this great tragedy, we need to be there for them. And this Mass is why those doors are open for everyone.

Diana Snider:

Right. Beautiful way to accompany and pray with those people. Listeners can find out more about this special Mass on our website, arlingtondiocese.org, and also on our Facebook page. Bishop, earlier this week, the social media platform X announced that it will now formally allow its users to show consensual adult contact if it is clearly labeled as such. This move makes official a policy already in place when the platform was known as Twitter. X said it is allowing users to create, distribute, and consume material related to sexual themes if it is consensually produced and distributed. Sexual expression, whether visual or written, can be a legitimate form of artistic expression, they say. X maintains that it is restricting adult content for children and for adult users who choose not to see it. What are your thoughts about this?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Well, I am sure as our listeners here, what you just read, like them, I am deeply disturbed and dismayed that X has formalized a policy they should never have established. Reportedly, X has some 556 million active monthly users. So the chance that people who don't want to see this content, which is pornographic, is quite high. X's policy contrasts with that of other social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook as well as YouTube. And while X says that they will place restrictions on youth from having access to this pornography, we know that the main consumers of all pornography, free and paid, are children and young people between 12 and 17 years old. Isn't that horrific, to know of that fact? That is a reality.

So it's not just a moral issue, it's also a health and social issue. There are currently, I was told recently, 27 major studies that speak to the impact on the individual, psychologically, socially, and even at times physically, regardless of age and maturity, speaking about the impact of those who come in contact with pornographic sites and images. And it's never good for society. And for 60% of the women involved, it is actually sexual human trafficking.

So this is really a grave concern. It's not just with X. We know that this availability, especially on the phone and through other tools, it is just so accessible. And there may be the so-called block or something, but it's so easy, I'm sure, for our younger people. They know how to find a way around it if it's available for them. So the problem is it's available to them. And now it's a formalized policy on this particular outlet. So it's a grave concern, but it's just really a tragedy in our society today. I know our parents are very concerned about this as they try to raise their children in virtue. And I know our parents work really hard at trying to monitor the use of internet and all such outlets like this, but it's a great temptation.

And it's a call, as long as we're talking about this subject, it's a call for all of us to be reminded of the need to be vigilant. We're human, we're of the flesh. Temptations are all around us. Pornography is so available. So there's only one way to avoid that, is to freeze yourself out, not even to put your feet in the water when it comes near this because once you put the feet in the water, then this pornography industry has a way of gripping you in its clutches and it's very hard to get out of that. But anyone dealing with this addiction to pornography, please know, speak to your pastor, speak to your priest, there's always help available to free you from this addiction because as we mentioned, mentally, emotionally, even physically, it just takes a toll on everyone.

Diana Snider:

Devastating impact on families too, and marriages.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Exactly. Exactly. So pray God that this terrible darkness that has plagued our society will be eradicated. But don't forget, no matter how dark this obstacle, this temptation may be, it's never more powerful than the light of Christ, and so praying for the special intention.

Diana Snider:

Right. That's very helpful. Bishop, the communications office has been without a director since early April, and I know you have some good news to share on that front.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Well, yes. First of all, in that time period when we've been without a chief communications officer, you, Diana, and your team, and the wonderful team at the Arlington Catholic Herald, you all have done such a great job. While there is a void, I don't think we have missed a step. And I just want to thank and commend all of you, especially you, in serving in this interim position. So very grateful to you. But we did, immediately upon learning that we need a new chief communications officer, we did form a search committee to help us in that search. And we also employed a search firm who is known for hiring Catholic executives, so people who already understand the meaning of ministry and mission. We didn't have to explain Catholic theology or terms to them.

Diana Snider:

There are a lot of them.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

We were really blessed to have some fine candidates as finals. We really had some very, very fine candidates. But I did, in the end, receive a unanimous recommendation from the search committee, and then I met with the candidate and I could tell right away that this is our man. And you and your team and all of us have been saying a special prayer.

Diana Snider:

Yes, we have.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

So this search has been rooted in prayer. So I really actually believe the Holy Spirit is the one who has sent our new chief communications officer to us, and his name is Tom Shakely. For the past six years, Tom has served as the chief engagement officer for Americans United for Life. Since 2020, he has also served as a research fellow for the Discovery Institute Center on Human Exceptionalism, where he has focused on issues of human dignity, human rights, law, and policy. He has worked in journalism, communications, and news publications. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Penn State. That's yours.

Diana Snider:

Go team.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

That's your team, right?

Diana Snider:

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Yes, indeed. We are.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

A Master of Science in Bioethics from the University of Mary, a Master of Arts in Human Rights from the Catholic University of America, and is also completing his PhD in Political Theory also from the Catholic University of America. I asked him what he does in his spare time, by the way. He and his wife are proud parents to a two-year-old and are expecting their second child in the fall. So I ask everyone to please pray for Tom, as he will begin officially this position on June the 17th.

Diana Snider:

Coming up.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Okay.

Diana Snider:

We're excited to welcome him. Absolutely.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Thank you. And while we're on it, another commercial, on June the 6th ... If I don't say this then I'll be in big trouble, family trouble. But it is also the 40th birthday of my niece and my nephew. So I have to give a shout-out to Fran and Chrissy on their birthday. Happy Birthday to them.

Diana Snider:

Happy Birthday. That's great.

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

I teased them how old they were, and they said, "Well, that doesn't mean you're getting any younger either."

Diana Snider:

Oh, that ticking clock. Okay. So Bishop, are you ready for some questions from our listeners?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Sure.

Diana Snider:

All right. We have two questions. Bishop, this question comes from an anonymous listener, and it's posed during what is generally known in the secular world as Pride Month. Here is the question. How are you working within the administration of your diocese to ensure that the voices of the LGBTQ community are heard, given a place at the table, and not being left at the margins?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Yeah. Very good, very fair question. But let me just begin by saying that, yeah, June is Pride Month in the secular world, but in the church's calendar, June is the month dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. So it's time to reflect, a special time to reflect on His love for all of us, a love that knows no end, even until

death. And so we do pray throughout this month, the traditional aspiration. Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.

And I think that's what the Sacred Heart does. It prompts us to know the Lord's love for everyone without exception, and then that's the love that we are called to imitate. And that's without exception. We love all people without exception, and especially those who are struggling. And our Catholic Church always affirms the dignity of every person who is made in the image and likeness of God, as a child of God. And this holds true for those who struggle with or experience confusion or difficulties, especially in the area of sexuality.

So we want everyone, the church and the Diocese of Arlington, we want everyone to know of our love for them. That's why God created them, not only to love, but to be loved. And we have throughout the years continue to, at the encouragement of Pope Francis, to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak and to be heard, and for us to listen to them. And we did that throughout our diocese, as we did the formulation of our strategic plan. And as we twice did listening sessions throughout, in response to the Holy Father's call, to prepare for the synodality.

And in every listening session, there wasn't one exception, even publicly or in privately, after the formal session that ... There was never session that someone did not come up to me, either an individual from the LGBT community or someone who has a family member or friend in that community who are struggling, who sometimes do not feel loved or welcome or embraced, and to share that experience with me. And so it is important to listen. That's the person's experience. And to do our best without compromising who we are without ... We love them, so we're never going to compromise the truth, but to find ways to make sure that that love is still communicated to them and that desire for them to always remember that they are God's child.

There have been some pastoral suggestions that have been offered to us of how we, as a diocese, we as a church, could maybe be more effective in doing that. We have shared that with our own team here, with our pastoral councils, and I ask our pastors to continue to do that.

Diana Snider:

Okay, good. Thank you. So in the aftermath of the Dobbs decision, what is the strategy of the Bishop's Conference and of the Diocese of Arlington for the next phase of the pro-life effort in Virginia and throughout the country?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

Right. It's a great question. As we approach the second anniversary of the Dobbs decision on the 24th of this month, overturning of Roe vs. Wade, caused us to rejoice. We had a moment of celebration there. But even more, it caused us to engage by speaking the truth in charity and continuing and expanding our long history of defending life, protecting life, serving families in need. So our work is only just beginning, because what we must recall is that the Dobbs decision did not make abortion illegal. Instead, it cleared a path for each state to regulate abortion or not, according to the will of the people in that state.

And we know that sadly, abortion is still legal through all nine months of pregnancy in our own commonwealth. Of course, we want innocent, unborn children and their mothers protected and supported everywhere. Abortion continues to be the preeminent issue for the Bishops Conference and for all of us, especially in our own diocese, proclaiming the gospel of life.

Different states have had the ballot initiatives, and we've suffered defeats because we have to realize that now that this is back in the states, those who are our opponents are sparing no expense, coming in from all parts of the country to oppose us. And unfortunately, we have suffered some defeats. But this will continue throughout the country. And so I know working with the Bishops Conference, we have put together advisory groups and councils of states that will be soon facing this ballot initiative, of what we can do in advance.

And of course, it begins with prayer, but it also means to be talking about this issue as soon as possible, not like the couple of weeks before it goes to the ballot, because there is a lot to do to get out the Catholic vote. We have to get out the Catholic vote on this issue, but also to try to transform hearts and minds of why states should embrace those laws that will protect life, not take away life, not destroy life.

And we had to see the extreme here. And the extreme is that there are elected officials, there are groups, there are advocates who are really no limits to abortion, even after abortion. We saw that, sadly a couple years ago in our own state, where that was discussed. So the work is just beginning. And so as a Conference of Bishops, as a diocese, we are continuing to be vigilant and we bring this issue to the forefront through prayer, through witness, and through advocacy.

The other way we do that is we transform hearts. And we have to let people know, even our own parishioners, that we who are pro-life do everything possible to support life, to support mothers in need, to walk with moms in need, to make sure that there's no reason for abortion to be a choice, that we will be with them, to help them, to welcome this child into the world. Whatever they need, whether it be financial assistance or counseling or baby food or diapers. Whatever it may be, we're here to help them. We love women. We love children. And that's what it means to be pro-life, but we have to be steadfast and say no one has the right to take the life of an unborn child at any stage.

Diana Snider:

Right, right. Absolutely. So if you want to learn more about how you can become engaged in the state of Virginia, the commonwealth, join the Virginia Catholic Conference. Take a look at their website, at vacatholic.org. If you're listening to this podcast, you are benefiting from the generosity of those who've given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal. The BLA supports many offices throughout the diocese, including this communications office. So thank you for those who have made that possible. Bishop, do you have any final thoughts? And can you close us out?

Bishop Michael Burbidge:

No, thank you, Diana. Thank you again for serving as co-host. Thank you for your role as interim chief communications officer. I really appreciate all that you have done. And I do hope for our listeners that the summer does allow time for some renewal and refreshment, for some quality time with family, because don't forget, we have to be restful also, to stay strong in body, soul and spirit. So I hope the summer brings those kind of blessings to all of our listeners as together we continue to walk humbly with our God.

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