

A FARMER'S WORK IS NEVER DONE

Trust, Perseverance and Patience in Rural Kansas

By Most Reverend Gerald L. Vincke

I feel extremely blessed to serve as bishop in a diocese that has so much farmland. Those who farm the land are really wonderful people. They love their faith, their family and the land. I enjoy talking with them about what is going on with their lives. I also enjoy the car rides in western Kansas looking at the crops. It reminds me of driving with my dad who often wanted to go for a ride to look at the crops on both sides of the road.

The Diocese of Salina, Kansas is mostly farmland. The farmers are dedicated to the land, and they love farming. They work hard, with long hours. I grew up on a small farm in Michigan, and so I know firsthand that there is always work to do. There is also an element of virtuosity in how farmers and rural people handle trials. I remember being very moved when a religious sister told me the story of her childhood. Hail completely ruined their wheat crop, and a month later, a tornado destroyed all of their buildings and houses. Their response: rebuild. Everything worked out in the end. Farmers have to have a great deal of trust,

perseverance and patience.

Weather in our diocese is diverse. With a large geographic area (more than 26,600 square miles), the weather affects different areas in different ways. We had some farmers with 100 bushels per acre wheat yields this summer in the western portion of our diocese, while others, 150 miles away in the northern region, suffered substantial hail damage to their wheat and corn crops.

With strong agricultural ties, we are reliant upon the weather and rain or snow at the right times for crops to prosper. Without appropriate moisture, our crops suffer, and thus our farm families struggle with their livelihood.

WEATHERING STORMS

This past winter, the temperatures were frigid during a portion of the “calving season.” If the newborn calf gets too cold, it could die within an hour. I know some farmers who woke up every hour throughout the night so they could check on the calves. During the calving season, not only is the weather a factor, but also coyotes. It is a wild territory.

In August of 2017, a massive

hail storm hit WaKeeney. Winds up to 60 mph were reported, and up to softball-sized hail was also reported. Many windows were broken throughout town, businesses and homes lost their roofs and windshields throughout town were shattered. The press box was blown off of the high school football stadium, and more than 1,000 residents were without power.

I spoke with the pastor at Christ the King Parish in WaKeeney, Father Charles Steier, about the storm: “Once the storm passed, I stepped outside where I found myself overwhelmed by the damage all around me. The roof of every home in WaKeeney was destroyed and 900 vehicles were totaled. In many instances, the destroyed cars belonged to the working poor.” He added, “Those who were uninsured or underinsured were facing the worst of the losses.”

My predecessor received consent from the Diocesan Council of Priests, and he immediately transferred \$3,000 from the Priests Council Aid Fund to Catholic Charities of Salina. The Hays office helped distribute the

money and assisted residents with cleanup efforts. Additionally, Catholic Charities received a \$10,000 grant from Catholic Charities U.S.A. (the National branch of Catholic Charities). Catholic Charities was able to use some of these funds in collaborative efforts with Trego County Emergency Management to assist WaKeeney residents. Catholic Charities staff also met with the local Ministerial Alliance multiple times, coordinating with the Alliance to make sure that all who are suffering receive the help they need.

“We are blessed in our diocese to have such dedicated staff at Catholic Charities,” Father Steier said. “As of this [October 2017], the people of our Diocese have generously donated \$47,000 for this disaster relief. I’ve never been more proud of Catholic Charities or more grateful for the generosity of our people. I should note that Christ the King Parish of WaKeeney has full replacement insurance coverage, and for that reason the parish itself was not a recipient of any of these funds.”

In July of 2018, heavy storms passed through Ellis, Kansas, damaging St. Mary Church and school as a result of a microburst. The roof of the school was blown off, and part of the brick facade on the east side of the school collapsed. Five classrooms had significant water damage, and classroom supplies and textbooks were damaged. Everyone in the community pitched in to help. At first, they did not think they could start school in time because of the damage. However, with all the help from the community they were able to start from day one.

In September of 2018, Wildcat Creek in Manhattan, Kansas, flooded, displacing more than

300 people in a college town on the eastern border of the Salina Diocese. More than nine inches of rain fell in a 24-hour period, causing power outages for more than 3,000 residences. Once again, Catholic Charities assisted those who were displaced by floodwaters. Catholic Charities banded together with other local

patience comes to mind: “See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.” (James 5:7). We live in a world where we want everything now, and for the most part, because of the Internet, we can have access to the world at our fingertips. I remember my



aid agencies to provide a multi-agency resource center, where about 150 households turned for assistance. Services ranged from assisting with replacing legal documents and driver’s licenses, to providing toothbrushes.

In addition to assisting with a location for agency assistance, the St. Thomas More parish hall was used as an emergency shelter for those displaced from their homes. The local parish is one location in Manhattan that is designated as an emergency shelter.

PATIENCE AND SACRIFICE

When I reflect upon how the weather affects rural communities, St. James’ exhortation on

aunt, Sr. Josephine, used to say to me, “Things that are worthwhile are worth waiting for.” A farmer has to be patient for the crops to ripen. It is a great lesson for life. Trust and patience are key in every aspect of our lives.

A farmer told me once that, “Most people get paid every two weeks, but many farmers get paid twice a year.” (Wheat harvest in the summer and the corn harvest in the fall). And yet, farming is something in their blood and they would rather do that than anything else.

A farmer’s work is never done. They sacrifice so much to produce for everyone else.