

Bishop Burbidge ([00:00](#)):

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

Billy Atwell ([00:08](#)):

Welcome to the walk humbly podcast. I'm Billy Atwell, chief communications officer for the diocese and your cohost. If you're listening to this podcast, you are benefiting from thousands of people around the diocese who have generously contributed to the Bishop's Linton appeal. The BLA supports a lot of the ministries you know, it supports our parishes in different ways, but certainly it supports our priests, our pro-life ministries. It supports Catholic charities, but it also supports the communications office. So for those who have made the BLA possible and helped us reach that goal, you have helped us obtain the studio that we have, that we record this podcast in. So we want to say thank you. If you haven't already, please make sure you rate this podcast and write a review on iTunes, Spotify, Stitcher, overcast, wherever you're listening and if you're listening on YouTube, please subscribe and ring the notifications bell. For our e-newsletter sign up at arlingtondiocese.org. You can follow Bishop Burbidge on Twitter at Bishop Burbidge, where every day you can read a short reflection on the gospel of that day. You can also follow the diocese on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If you'd like to send your question in for the podcast, email us info@arlingtondiocese.org, or you can call us at (703) 831-7013. I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how you doing?

Bishop Burbidge ([01:25](#)):

I'm doing well Billy. It's a joyful, exciting time of year in our church, in our diocese. So many wonderful celebrations occurring this time of year and hope all our listeners are doing well and wishing you continued blessings.

Billy Atwell ([01:38](#)):

Absolutely. Well, actually before we jump into our main topics here, let me ask you about one of those. You have a mass coming up on Memorial day. Talk a little bit about what that is and where it's going to be.

Bishop Burbidge ([01:49](#)):

Yeah. I was very honored to be invited by Fairfax Memorial Park with whom we have a very good relationship. They host a Memorial day mass each year and they invite area priests to celebrate the mass. So I was very grateful to be invited this year to celebrate the mass. Of course, we are remembering with devotion and thankfulness all those who've offered the ultimate sacrifice in service of God and our country on that special day and praying for them and their families. I was surprised to hear though that they told me they're expecting over 700 people.

Billy Atwell ([02:27](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Burbidge ([02:28](#)):

To be at the park that day for mass.

Billy Atwell ([02:30](#)):

That's wonderful.

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Bishop Burbidge ([02:31](#)):

I hear it's open to the public and it begins at 11:00 AM on Memorial day.

Billy Atwell ([02:36](#)):

Very good.

Bishop Burbidge ([02:37](#)):

We're blessed with so many military families in our diocese. So another occasion for me on this podcast is to thank them for their sacrifice, their service to our country. It involves not only those in the military, but also their spouses and their children and family who support them. So thanks everyone.

Billy Atwell ([02:56](#)):

Absolutely. You mentioned that the gathering being that large, brings us to an important topic. The CDC has changed its guidelines for wearing masks indoors, and this was followed by governor Northam changing some of the state regulations. I'm sure this was welcomed news to your ears.

Bishop Burbidge ([03:11](#)):

Yeah, definitely. I think everyone was delighted to hear the CDC announce that masks could be removed indoors. It's a huge step in feeling for those who have been vaccinated. This is a huge step in feeling, I think like, "All right, we see the light here. We're moving a step closer to getting back to normal." Governor Northam's directives were, I don't think entirely clear about whether masks need to be worn during church services, but we're reaching out for clarity on that. It was clear, he was very clear in saying that masks need to be worn in schools. So that will be the case. Another bit of great news is we heard that the governor moved up the date for when social distancing will cease in capacity has been moved from June 15th to May 28th. So that will make mass much more convenient for the faithful going on Sundays.

Again, we always have to read the executive orders, the specific information, and we will adjust accordingly. I noted in my celebration this weekend on Sunday and pastors have been telling me that most people came to mass this weekend wearing masks. So perhaps they're not at that level of comfort yet.

Billy Atwell ([04:31](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Burbidge ([04:32](#)):

So again, as we've been doing this from the beginning, we just ask everyone to be respectful of each other's discernment and not allow this to divide us in any way, but to keep us unified. So we're going to get the directives from our governor. I'll put my reintegration group who have been guiding me throughout this process together, and we'll get back to our parishes and schools and ministries for how that will impact our dioceses.

Billy Atwell ([05:01](#)):

Yeah, and statewide we're almost at a 50% have at least one of the vaccination shots. So I think we're going to see this situation just continue to improve and it's interesting that so many parishes they're

almost at capacity as it is. So social distancing is the key to truly getting back to normal and be able to worship as a full community.

Bishop Burbidge ([05:20](#)):

It really is, because with that social distancing, it limits the number of people who can be attending.

Billy Atwell ([05:26](#)):

But it's a great witness that with the dispensations to so many people wanting to come to church. That's a good sign.

Bishop Burbidge ([05:31](#)):

I know everyone, we've been praying for perseverance and patience throughout this process and continued to do so. Thank the good Lord we're heading in the right direction.

Billy Atwell ([05:40](#)):

Well, speaking of events and joyful gatherings, each year there's an event that has crashed our servers of the past, but it's the new priest assignments. So pre-cert or Friday do parish homes and that's been announced to the faithful and so on. What are some of the factors that go into play for you when you're looking at all the needs around a diocese? This is a large diocese, there's a lot of needs and it's a diverse diocese. We go from very metropolitan areas to very rural. So what are some of those factors that you have to include?

Bishop Burbidge ([06:11](#)):

It's a very unique time for me because I could be at one parish that read the announcements, "Thank you, Bishop." And the other parish, "How could you have changed my tester?" So I get different responses, but to answer your question, it's a good question, and the priests understand this for the reason that we're ordained. Behind every decision is what is best for the church. What is best for the diocese? That's what every priest says yes to, how can I best serve the local church? And here I am, Lord, send me wherever you need me. I always assure the priest that when we make these decisions, there are lots of information it's impacted by. Well maybe there's retirements or maybe there's health reasons, or maybe someone's been asked to go study in and one opening, any people in the corporate world understand it's human resources.

It's a domino effect and you have to start filling holes, connecting dots and things like that. But I assure every priest that the deans who formed the personnel board are wonderful advisors to me, but it's a very prayerful process. We really pray that it is the Holy Spirit guiding us because this impacts lives, the lives of priests, the lives of parishioners and so we really make it a prayerful discernment and guided by the Holy Spirit. But at the heart of it is what is best for the diocese, and we try our best of course, to match that with the unique skills and abilities, to put a priest where he has the best chance of being happy and succeeding. But it's always doughy for me this time of year, it's always inspiring because our priests are so good.

It's very hard when you're transferred, I've been transferred many times throughout my life [crosstalk 00:08:08] and it's hard, it breaks your heart. Because you love where you are, you don't want to leave, you know, but you know that's what you, you promised, that generous availability and really our priests are so generous. "Bishop, how can I serve? Yes, let me go. If that's what you need." I'm very inspired by our priests. I always say that transfers are very humbling for priests, I always tell this story

and it happened to me through every transfer I've had, "Oh father Burbidge, oh, we're so sorry you're leaving." And in the same sentence, "And who's taking your place? Tell us about the new guy."

Billy Atwell ([08:52](#)):

"Who's the new guy?"

Bishop Burbidge ([08:52](#)):

So it's a good reminder actually that you know what, it's not about us. It's always about the lure. We're just the instruments and so dear friends, please pray for your priests. Especially those priests who will be transferred and beginning new assignments, please pray for them. Thank you, you are so supportive of our priests and thank you for all the goodness you extend to them.

Billy Atwell ([09:17](#)):

I would say, when someone's distraught that their priest is leaving because they love them so much, I would say, "Well, the same reason you love him is the same reason he's being called somewhere else."

Bishop Burbidge ([09:26](#)):

Right, yeah.

Billy Atwell ([09:26](#)):

Because those gifts need to be shared and you can't live your life at one parish.

Bishop Burbidge ([09:31](#)):

I am always much more pleased to hear, "Bishop, we're so... I wish you didn't have to transfer my priest," than someone saying, "Thank you for transferring my priest." That never happens.

Billy Atwell ([09:44](#)):

No.

Bishop Burbidge ([09:46](#)):

Our priests are loved by the parishioners. But keep them in your prayers, especially our four priests soon to be ordained.

Billy Atwell ([09:53](#)):

That's exciting.

Bishop Burbidge ([09:53](#)):

They begin their first assignments, June 24th. So pray for our soon to be ordained priests.

Billy Atwell ([10:00](#)):

That's wonderful. Well Bishop, last Monday Pope Francis established the lay ministry of catechism as what he called quota, "a stable form of service rendered to the local church in accordance with the pastoral needs identified by the local ordinary." For those wondering, local ordinary is the local Bishop typically. So in our case, it would be you, Bishop Burbidge. For many in the US this news is a little bit

confusing because we have catechist and we hear the appeal, "Hey, if you'd like to be a catechist, please step forward." So what's different about this announcement and formalizing this ministry of catechists.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:32](#)):

Yeah, you're right Billy. We are blessed with hundreds of men and women throughout the diocese who serve as catechist, meaning they assist their pastors to teach, to pass on the teachings of the Catholic church and in our Catholic schools and faith formation programs and the RCIA program, and so many ways. Beautiful ministry. However, this ministry is not nearly as formalized throughout the global church. It takes a different meaning depending on the country. So by the holy father formerly instituting this as an official ministry church, I think what it does, it creates a unity and a universal meaning among catechist everywhere.

Billy Atwell ([11:13](#)):

Okay.

Bishop Burbidge ([11:13](#)):

It also lifts up the work. Our catechists, they work so hard. They have to keep themselves informed and constantly learning, find the skills on how to bring and share the faith. They work so hard in this ministry and I think they all should be uplifted by this beautiful news from the holy father. I asked them especially, to read his statement is most appropriate on this topic. He lays out in it, the historical foundation of his ministry. In fact, the translated title of this document is ancient ministry. So the lay faithful have always been instrumental in service to the church, especially as teachers, as educators and as evangelists. It's a call we all share to participate in through our baptism.

Billy Atwell ([12:06](#)):

They have a unique relationship with you, like that quote I mentioned the beginning.

Bishop Burbidge ([12:06](#)):

Right.

Billy Atwell ([12:10](#)):

Is that they're assisting you in this teaching ministry that you've been handed. You obviously can't do all the teaching that's needed for half a million Catholics, so they're able to assist you in that way.

Bishop Burbidge ([12:18](#)):

Then the same thing within the parishes, the pastor can't do it all. So thanks to all of our Catholic educators, formators, catechists participating in this beautiful ministry.

Billy Atwell ([12:27](#)):

Absolutely. Bishop as you are well aware of the topic of Eucharistic worthiness has been circulated in the news a bit lately, even in the secular news and emanates out of a concern that some prominent politicians who profess the Catholic faith, they work at odds with the teachings of the Catholic church when it comes to fundamental issues, particularly the issue of abortion, many advocate for expanded access to it and even funding for it. We've talked about some of those instances where that's happened here on the podcast.

So the question that's raised is whether politicians can maybe forfeit the right to receive holy communion because of the gravity of their sin and should thus be denied communion. It has been publicized that during the spring meeting of the US conference of Catholic bishops, this issue is going to be raised and discussed. Just last week ahead of that meeting the head of the congregation for the doctrine of the faith in Rome issued a statement, encouraging the US bishops to take the issue slowly and to ensure there was full consideration of various factors. He also reaffirmed that the reality is that no Bishop's conference can impose a policy of whether prohibition abortion politicians would receive communion, since that's left to the local Bishop to make that pastoral decision. So going into this meeting that you have in June, what should people know and what should they maybe understand about this issue? Because it is fairly complicated.

Bishop Burbidge ([13:45](#)):

Yeah. First of all, even though our June meeting regrettably is going to be Zoom. When you're dealing with close to over 300 bishops participating via Zoom, that does not provide the best setting for such a serious and sensitive topic. So I don't think we will have the time or the occasion to in depth address this issue. But it's certainly my hope that this will be a significant part of beginning that discussion. As bishops we've discussed it for many years. But it's a significant point in time in our history that I think we have to resurface that and at least hear from each other. It's my hope that that will be part of our June meeting. The whole issue is incredibly difficult, I think, for a Bishop. If you permit such a politician who outright rejects the teachings of the church to receive communion, you appear to be lax, when it comes to the gravity of their sin and the scandal actually it causes.

If you do not permit them to receive communion, you look as though you are using the Eucharist as some sort of political tool or something like political football or some image like that. But in reality however, how we are perceived does not matter. What matters is prayerfully discerning the best way to balance the two goods, the sanctity of course, of the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith and the soul of an individual who I am asked and tasked with shepherding as a spiritual father. So we always want to teach in truth. So all people have to judge, and this is true for all of us. It's not just true for politicians or healthcare workers, this true for all of us, all of us have to judge whether we are worthy, we're in our state of life puts us in a position to receive holy communion.

None of us, we even say it at mass. We're not worthy.

Billy Atwell ([16:05](#)):

Right, we don't deserve that.

Bishop Burbidge ([16:07](#)):

It's a pure gift from God, but have we put ourselves in the disposition to receive him in union with him and in his church? So it's not just a matter for a Bishop priest to discern, it's really a matter of every individual to discern. So we have to ask questions of ourselves, am I in full communion with the Catholic church? Meaning do I object to any of the fundamental truths and teachings of our church? Am I guilty of grave sin, like actively supporting abortion or being divorced and civilly remarried without a declaration of nullity? Have I incurred a penalty that forbids me to receive communion? That's very rare, like excommunication or even sometimes we forget too, we want to make sure that the fasting before communion is still part of proper disposition, at least an hour before holy communion. So all of us have to say my going up to holy communion is a reflection as a person of integrity of unity, of unity with the Lord and his church. Am I in that disposition? The question of whether a Bishop permits a pro-abortion politician to receive communion should be mitigated by the fact that the individual should not do that.

Billy Atwell ([17:27](#)):

That's an important point by what you're saying is we should be first discerning whether or not we are worthy of it. You shouldn't put, especially for a public person, a Bishop or a priest in that spot. When you know you can answer these questions pretty simply and know whether or not you should be receiving communion.

Bishop Burbidge ([17:39](#)):

Anyone with even a limited training in the Catholic faith should know. I know that this is not what the church asks of me if I'm in this position. However, when they do present themselves, the Bishop has to exercise pastoral discretion and prayerfully consider what's best for the church and the soul of the individual. I can say Billy, with certainty that the United States conference of bishops understands fully that the final decision is always left up to the local Bishop. We're not going to come out of the June meeting or the November meeting with some sort of national policy. That's not what a conference of Bishop does. Conference of bishops brings together bishops for dialogue. "Hey listen, let's hear some wisdom and guidance from each other." So to discuss the challenges we have in managing high profile individuals who scandalize the church they profess to believe in, while advancing the cause of what is the evil of abortion.

So whether the individual has full knowledge of their actions, their duties Catholic in the public eye is not always certain. So many people have opinions how bishops should manage these situations. I would ask everyone if they would please remember that there usually is always more happening behind the scenes than what you may see publicly. So whether you feel that a particular Bishop is being too harsh or not strong enough, just know that there's quite the possibility that you do not have access to all the information. So pray for your Bishop, we need your prayers as these situations are very challenging and the right decision isn't as easy as it may see, but that dialogue, that engagement is important. But dialogue reaches a certain point where you've dialogued and you have dialogued and the person has made clear his or her decision. Well, then there're consequences to that.

We never give up on this sermon, because at any moment God can miraculously transform the heart of an individual. So we never give up that although at this particular time, someone should not present himself for communion because of his or her decision, doesn't mean that there's not going to be a time in the future where that heart has been transformed and God willing would be in the position to do so.

Billy Atwell ([20:10](#)):

Some of the greatest saints of the church went through enormous conversions, where they were living very against the teachings of Christ in his church and reform their lives dramatically. So we know it can happen.

Bishop Burbidge ([20:20](#)):

The only thing I do worry about a little bit is that this is an important topic, absolutely. But it is also a moment of time, especially after all we've been through this past year to talk about the Eucharist in a very positive way, to have a sense of Eucharistic wonder of all. This is the gift, the most perfect gift God has given to us, the gift of himself, his own body and blood that heals us, that strengthens us and nourishes us. We also have to use this as a moment of time to talk about why it is so important for us to come back together as the body of Christ, because when someone from the community is missing, is not at the table, then we're all hurt. So we have to use this as a time of renewing that sense of wonder and

all of God's precious gift of teaching why it's really important now that for those who are able to be at church.

It's been good, it's been a help to so many people participating via Zoom and making spiritual communions, but nothing ever replaces being present for the sacrifice of the mass and receiving the body and blood of Christ. So yes, what we just talked about is important, but now it's a moment in time to, I hope and pray, for a renewal in love and worship and devotion for the precious gift of the holy Eucharist.

Billy Atwell ([21:54](#)):

I think we'll get there.

Bishop Burbidge ([21:55](#)):

We will.

Billy Atwell ([21:57](#)):

This is one of the most joyful times of year for a lot of people because we're on the cusp of a very momentous time for so many people, graduations, high school and college graduations are going on right now, actually and there'll be going on for a little while. You've been down the road a few times. You've got numerous degrees actually. So what is your message or maybe the counsel you would offer to those preparing for graduation at various levels?

Bishop Burbidge ([22:20](#)):

Yeah, definitely. I would first of all say to the graduates, be proud. I know in our diocese, I was just at Chris Adams baccalaureate mass, I'll be participating in all four of our high schools graduations, and our schools have very high standards because they're committed to excellence in education. So I always say to the graduates, "First of all, be proud. You've worked hard, you've persevered and this diploma is a recognition of that. You've achieved. It's a significant achievement. It's not just a piece of paper. Be proud that you've accomplished something wonderful." Now I say to the graduate, "You didn't do it all by yourself. First of all, you begin by thanking God for the gifts and abilities that the Lord has given to you and thank all those who support you, first of all, your parents and for the sacrifices that they've made to provide you with a sound education, and also your educators, your teachers, and whatever school you attended. The teachers who played a role in your years in the college or the high school you attended are owed a deep sense of thankfulness for you, for their beautiful work as they carry out."

Then as you go forward, I say to our graduates, "Remember to always be asking not what am I going to do with the rest of my life?" But take time and say, "God, where are you leading me? What is it you want me to do my life?" Because that's where we'll find our peace. That's where we'll find our fulfillment, "Lord, what is it you want me to do with these gifts, these talents, these experiences that you have given me?" I say to our graduates, "You will always find peace that way."

And I do say to our graduates, whatever college or a university they are tending to our high school graduates. I suggest right away that they get involved in Catholic campus ministry, in just about every college and university throughout the nation will have a Catholic campus ministry program with very fine priests, forming a nice community where Catholics can come together and support each other in our faith, receive the sacraments, learn about scripture, participate in service and missionary activities and have your own community. Because I said to graduates, "You're going to be challenged."

Billy Atwell ([24:59](#)):

It's a rough road ahead.

Bishop Burbidge ([25:00](#)):

We prepared you. Your parents have prepared you, our schools have prepared you to be men and women of faith and conviction, to live morally and purely in justice, but you will be challenged. So don't try it alone, stay close to the Lord and try to find that community where you can support and encourage each other in faith." So a word of sincere congratulations to all of our graduates and I look forward to being with our four diocesan high schools on the special day.

Billy Atwell ([25:35](#)):

Very good, Bishop thank you very much. Any final thoughts? Then if you would send us off with your blessing.

Bishop Burbidge ([25:40](#)):

No, but it truly, really is an exciting time of year. I'm very excited about our ordinations that are approaching. I'll be ordaining four new priests in June, the first Saturday in June. They're wonderful men and we're blessed to have four new priests. I'm also, this Saturday in fact, I'm very honored that I'll be ordaining five Dominican's to the priesthood, which is not a usual, but it's their religious community and they've invited me to ordain five wonderful men to the priesthood this Saturday in Washington. I've met them, and again, it just gives us such hope for the church that these men who are being ordained, they are on a fire. They're filled with the zeal and love for the Lord and they are ready. They're ready to come out and serve. So praying for them and praying for our graduates that God will lead you in the path that will bring you much peace and joy. So thank you everyone. Thanks for listening and we'll continue to persevere together and pray for each other as we walk humbly with them.

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