

CRUSADER UPDATE

Alumni, Development & School News

ARCHBISHOP GOLKA INSTALLED IN DENVER



On March 25, 2026, the Feast of the Annunciation, thousands of faithful gathered in Denver to witness the installation of Archbishop James R. Golka as the sixth Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Denver. The Mass, held at the CoBank Arena, marked a joyful and historic moment for the Church, filled with prayer, celebration, and a renewed sense of mission. During the liturgy, the official apostolic letter from the Holy Father was proclaimed, formally entrusting Archbishop Golka with the pastoral care of Northern Colorado. In his remarks, he invited the faithful to live with purpose and to embrace their shared call to follow Christ.

A 1985 graduate of Central Catholic, Archbishop Golka embodies the mission and values the school has instilled for nearly 70 years. Known for his academic excellence and strong faith during his student years, he discerned a vocation to the priesthood at an early age. Ordained in 1994, he has served faithfully as a priest and later as pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral. In 2021, he was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Colorado Springs by Pope Francis. His installation as Archbishop of Denver marks not only a significant moment for the Church, but also a proud milestone for the Central Catholic community.

THE STORY OF THE BOY WHO WOULD BECOME ARCHBISHOP



By Cathy Howard

Boys and girls, even when he was young, Jimmy Golka wanted to be a priest. This was not surprising at all.

Jimmy belonged to a holy family. You wouldn't think of them as holy if you saw all his brothers and sisters running through the yard with their many friends on Arthur Street. They shrieked and laughed and played ball and ran over the top of each other. Most days they fought over whose turn it was to sit by the window in the big station wagon or to empty the trash.

It was Jimmy's small, red-haired mother - feisty and gentle and practical all at the same time - who showed her ten children how to be holy. Their tall, quiet father was holy as well even though he yelled very loudly at their school basketball games and sometimes embarrassed them.

Every night Jimmy's mother prayed with all her children. She sat with each of them on their beds and spoke directly to Jesus.

"Dear Lord, Jimmy's worried about his math test," she'd say as if Jesus stood close by Jimmy's bed.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTES

Spring always feels like a season of renewal, and this year that sense is especially meaningful for me. As I begin to wind down my time as Executive Director, I find myself reflecting with deep gratitude on all that makes Central Catholic such a special place. It has truly been a blessing to be part of a community rooted in faith, generosity, and a shared love for our students.

Since joining us in January, Emily Dexter has already made a wonderful impact. Her energy, kindness, and commitment to Catholic education are evident in everything she does. I have great confidence that she will lead with both heart and purpose, and our school will be in very good hands.

We are also encouraged by the strong start to our annual fund, the One Faith – One Family – One Future Crusader Fund. It's a great reminder that people support Central Catholic because they believe in who we are and what we stand for. That love for our school continues to inspire me. In May, everyone will have the opportunity to participate in Go Big GIVE, our one-day community-wide day of giving, and a special chance to support the Crusader Fund. You can read more about this on page 3.

Thank you for the many ways you support Central Catholic. It has meant more to me than I can fully express, and I'll carry that gratitude with me as I begin this next chapter.

Many blessings,
JOLENE WOJCIK | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



A WORD FROM OUR ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

As we move through our second year at Grand Island Central Catholic Elementary, I still catch myself thinking how amazing this all is. After more than 50 years without a Catholic grade school in our community, to now walk the halls each day and see our students learning, laughing, and growing in their faith, it's something I don't take for granted.

It's been exciting to see our school continue to grow. This year, we added a third kindergarten class to keep class sizes small, and we have two sections in first, second, and third grades. Looking ahead, we'll also be adding second sections in both fourth and fifth grade next year.

We're also excited to welcome three new teachers—Jill Gillespie (1st), Rylee Lonnemann (4th), and Lexi Wolinski (5th)—who will be such a great addition to our school family.

Our enrollment numbers have been very encouraging. Both preschool and kindergarten are at capacity, with 45 students planning to enroll in kindergarten. We also have 19 students interested in joining us in other grades.

At the same time, we still have room to grow. If you know a family who might be a good fit for GICC, I would truly appreciate you helping us make that connection. We would love to visit with them and share what makes this place so special.

Thank you for all the ways you support our school. We are so blessed, and I trust that God will continue to guide us as we grow.

With Appreciation,
SARAH NORDHUES | ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL

ONE FAITH **ONE FAMILY** *One Future*

TUITION COVERS ONLY 55% OF A GICC EDUCATION

55%

Covered by tuition & assistance programs

45%

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Academic Excellence for every student



Faith Formation that lasts a lifetime

Is filled through Parish Support, The Knight, and
GENEROUS DONORS LIKE YOU.

THANK YOU

to our matching donors!

Each has pledged \$10,000 for a total of

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WAYS TO GIVE

Online at: www.gobiggive.org/organization/GICCFoundation
Deliver checks payable to "**Heartland United Way**" with Go Big Give in the memo to the Foundation, High School, or Elementary School offices.

**PRE-GIVE
STARTS
APRIL 27TH**

SCAN TO DONATE



Continued from Page 1

Jimmy marveled.

"She really thinks Jesus is in this room," he thought. "I guess He must be."

No matter how busy his family was with their many school events, Jimmy's mother and father made sure everybody went to Mass. They ate together, attended every school activity together, and prayed together.

As Jimmy grew, he read his children's Bible from cover to cover. He learned all about Jesus and considered deeply that Jesus seemed to see something no one else did. How could this be? Jimmy thought and thought. It was because, he concluded, Jesus was God.

"I want to see the world the way Jesus sees it," Jimmy thought with finality.



It wasn't always easy. His first Confession made him anxious.

"What do I say to the priest?" He asked his mother.

"Johnny," she called Jimmy's older brother, "show Jimmy what he needs to do."

With older brother patience, John related every one of his own sins to the imaginary priest beside him to show Jimmy how it was done. After that it was easy. Jimmy went to his First

Reconciliation and confidently rattled off all his brother John's sins to the good priest. He felt very satisfied with himself.

By the time he was in eighth grade at Central Catholic, the notion struck him that perhaps God was calling him to be a priest. He shared this thought with a school priest.

"You're in the eighth grade," the wise priest said. "Have fun, date a few girls, and pray."

This was exactly what Jimmy did. All through high school he competed in every sport, attended school dances, and shot pool with his friends. Occasionally he stayed out later than he should have and helped sneak a friend out of the house. Still, he was always a good student and everyone liked him. He was voted the class president and class speaker. When he graduated from Central Catholic and was ready to start college, he felt the time had come to relax and to enjoy himself.

"I'm only going to college to make friends and not be involved in much," he confided to his red-haired mother.

"We'll see," his mother smiled.

Instead, at Creighton he went every day to Mass, planned service trips to help those who were poor, and joined his campus ministry. He was still having a lot of fun, but the idea of joining the priesthood nagged him all the time.

After college, Jimmy decided to live on the Pine Ridge Reservation for a

year. He drove a bus and tutored kids and coached. He loved the Lakota kids. When he was around them, he thought about the girl back in college he'd fallen in love with and wondered about having a big family.

Just as Thanksgiving was coming that year on the Reservation, Jimmy felt God speak clearly to him for the very first time. He knew at last that he was going to be a priest.

And that's what happened. Jimmy went to Minnesota to study, and his mom and dad and brothers and sisters and many of his good friends were with him the day he became a priest. No longer was Jimmy a Jimmy. Now he was Father Jim, and if he didn't have a wife and lots of children like his good parents, he was a father instead to many, many of God's children.

God sent Father Jim to serve good towns all across Nebraska. He grieved every time the Bishop sent him from one church to another. But every time, he loved his new parish as much as the old one. People loved Father Jim, too, because he was kind and humble and wise.

Everybody in Father Jim's family was happy when he came back to his hometown to be the pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral. At the big church in Grand Island, Father Jim worked harder than he ever had before. There weren't so many priests as when Father Jim had been a boy, and there were many more people to care for. Still, Father Jim loved his church. Every day he baptized babies and confirmed high schoolers and married couples and buried the dead. When the church needed money, he prayed, and God always came through.



Then one year a terrible sickness shut down the church and the town and, indeed, the entire world. Many people died, and nobody could go to work or to school or to church.

People missed Jesus so much that Father Jim took Jesus to them. He wore his priestly robes and a mask and a hat and marched to all the neighborhoods of Grand Island. Everybody crept from their homes like prisoners from behind bars and bowed before Jesus in Father

Jim's hands.

One day a young woman rushed out of her house to beg Father Jim to pray for her father who was sick and dying in the hospital. It was very dangerous, and no one was allowed to visit the hospitals because of the sickness that was everywhere. Still, Father Jim wrapped himself from head to toe and went to visit the young woman's father who lay close to death. Even though the father was asleep and would never wake up again, Father Jim anointed the man's hands with oil and prayed for Jesus to heal him.

Later that day, the daughter called Father Jim to tell him that a miracle had occurred.





"My father woke up!" The daughter cried.

When the good man could speak, he told Father Jim that he had been in a dark place of death but had suddenly known that Jesus was with him in the darkness to heal him.

"Jesus does it all," Father Jim said to the happy man, and they cried together.

Father Jim happily would have stayed at St. Mary's forever. God had other plans.

One day the phone rang, and the voice on the other end told Father Jim that Pope Francis was sending him to Colorado Springs to be a Bishop. Father Jim's heart sank.

"Why me?" He said to God. In Father Jim's eyes, he knew himself to be a shy, quiet man. How could God ask him to be a Bishop, of all things? But God knew exactly what he was doing.

Father Jim was not a Father Jim any more. Now he was Bishop Jim. He was sure he had learned to trust Jesus. Now he had to learn to trust him all over again. But just the way it had always happened before when he was called from one place he loved to another, Bishop Jim discovered a great love for his big Colorado diocese. God knew things about Bishop Jim that even Bishop Jim didn't know.

Although he was far away from home and family, Bishop Jim still came back to see all his Golka family and his St. Mary's Cathedral church. He even came home to bless the brand new GICC Elementary School, boys and girls - this very school we're in today.

One day, though, he came home for a very sad reason. His little sister Jean died. All her family was filled with sorrow, and Bishop Jim's mother and father seemed to grow old overnight. They gave their precious daughter back to God, and Bishop Jim buried his little sister.

The church was standing room only. Everybody cried at the sad funeral - the loss of a beautiful young woman was very difficult. But when Bishop Jim stood in front of the congregation and smiled at his family and prayed for his sister, every person in the church could see the faith shining from the Bishop's face. In fact, all the Golkas radiated that faith. Even in their heartbreak, this holy family trusted God.

It seemed Bishop Jim had barely been named Bishop when another bolt

came from the blue. God called Bishop Jim to become the Archbishop of Denver. Again, Bishop Jim grieved. He had grown to think of Colorado Springs as home. Yet, here again God was calling him to a new challenge.

Bishop Jim was not a Bishop Jim anymore. Now he was Archbishop Golka taking care of the great and wonderful city of Denver. All his family came to Denver to celebrate the big announcement - all except Bishop Golka's feisty, kind little red-haired mother. Only two months before the announcement, she died in the arms of the good Lord with her big family all around her.

With great gentleness, the new Archbishop of Denver embraced his frail father - who beamed upon his son with heartfelt pride.

"When I was named Bishop of Colorado Springs," Archbishop Golka told all the people assembled for the announcement, "my father put his hands on my head and blessed me."

It was a special day to celebrate the new Archbishop of Denver. Sadly, however, just days later, Archbishop Golka's father, the saintly man who roared at every athletic official in Nebraska, quietly died and joined his wife and daughter in Heaven.

People thought how very sad it was that his mother and father couldn't be at the great ceremony in Denver to see their son become the new Archbishop.

But, of course they were there. Heaven is not so far away that a mother and father and beloved little sister can't be present for their much loved son and big brother. Heaven is much closer to Colorado than Nebraska is and much closer to Nebraska than Colorado is.

Rest assured, every member of the new Archbishop's family was there - even the ones from all those generations ago who smiled from Heaven at the man they'd loved as a boy. They remembered the way he searched for Jesus even when he was only Jimmy - not a Father Jim or a Bishop Jim or even an Archbishop - but just Jimmy. They were very proud.

Nobody, however, was prouder than the three people beaming from Heaven's first row: the beautiful little sister, the quiet man who still bawled out Nebraska referees, and the feisty little red-haired woman.

She'd known who Jimmy would be from the day he was born. Archbishop James Golka, she smiled, was exactly where God needed him to be.



CELEBRATING FAITH, COMMUNITY, AND SERVICE: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK AT CENTRAL CATHOLIC

Each year, Catholic Schools Week provides an opportunity to celebrate far more than a series of activities. It is a nationwide celebration of Catholic education, uniting schools across the country in a shared mission. Established in 1974 and promoted by the National Catholic Educational Association, Catholic Schools Week highlights the value Catholic education brings to students, families, the Church, and communities throughout the United States.

Centered on the theme "Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community," this year's celebration emphasized what makes Catholic education unique: a commitment to forming the whole person in mind, body, and spirit. At Grand Island Central Catholic, that mission was not only celebrated but lived out in meaningful and visible ways throughout the week.

The week began with a strong witness of faith as students attended Mass at their home parishes, proudly wearing their school uniforms. This simple gesture reflected a deeper truth about Catholic education: it extends beyond the walls of the classroom and into the life of the Church. It is in these connections between school and parish where faith is strengthened and lived. That same spirit carried into the Faculty Day of Prayer, where staff

gathered to reflect on their role in forming students. Fr. Fulton's message on *cura personalis*, care for the whole person, served as a powerful reminder that Catholic education is rooted in relationships. Teachers are not only educators, but mentors who are called to recognize the dignity and potential of every student and to never give up on them.

Throughout the week, students were given opportunities to express gratitude, deepen relationships, and grow in faith. Middle and high school students wrote heartfelt thank you notes to priests and seminarians, recognizing the importance of vocations in the life of the Church. Younger students partnered with their buddies to create lanterns, symbolizing the light of Christ present within each member of the school community. These moments reflect the partnership between school, family, and parish that is central to Catholic education.

One of the most powerful themes of the week was the continuity of faith across generations. When fourth graders and seniors came together to create rosaries, it was more than a shared activity. It was a visible sign of lifelong formation, a reminder that the faith nurtured at Central Catholic



Catholic Schools
United in Faith and Community



continues to grow and guide students long after they graduate. This sense of unity was further reflected in the Living Rosary, where middle and high school students physically formed a rosary in prayer, embodying both devotion and community.



The Eucharistic Procession and day of Adoration provided a profound opportunity for the entire school community to pause and reflect. In these sacred moments, students encountered Christ at the center of their education, reinforcing that faith is not simply taught, but experienced. These traditions are what distinguish Catholic schools and give deeper meaning to everything that happens within them.

Even the week's more lighthearted activities carried a greater purpose. The Pennies for Charity challenge brought together preschool and

elementary students in a fun and competitive way, while also teaching the importance of generosity and service. The Preschoolers won and chose the nonprofit One Rose, One Life. Students learned that small acts of giving can make a meaningful impact.

Participating in Catholic Schools Week connects Grand Island Central Catholic to a nationwide community of schools that share the same mission and values. It strengthens our identity as a faith-filled community and reminds us that we are part of something much larger than ourselves. Across the country, Catholic schools are celebrating the same mission, forming students who are called to lead, serve, and live out their faith.

Catholic Schools Week at Central Catholic is not just a celebration of what we do. It is a reflection of who we are and a renewal of the mission we carry forward each day.



SCHOLARSHIPS

We are blessed by the generosity of our community, as several donors have recently contributed to scholarships that provide both tuition assistance for families in need and college scholarships for our students. These gifts make it possible for more children to receive a faith-filled education while also supporting them as they continue their journey beyond GICC. We are deeply grateful for their kindness.

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- Frances, Mary, & Diane Dolton Scholarship
- Dryer Family Memorial Scholarship
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JANUARY 9, 2026 - APRIL 7, 2026

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Sydney Rogers-Morrell

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Class of 1970 fellow classmates

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OUR HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES

BETTY JO (GUTHMANN) KRUSE '60

Survived by her daughters, Amy (Robert) Almquist, Jennifer (Cameron) McCarthy, and Michelle (Eric) Heilig; nine grandchildren; and her brothers, Jim (Nancy) Guthmann, Dick (Sharon) Guthmann, and John (Lanette) Guthmann.

PATRICIA "PAT" GOLKA AND ROBERT "BOB" GOLKA

Survived by their children, Rev. Mr. Ron '80 (Chris '81) Golka, John '81 (Pam) Golka, Barb '83 (Scott) Brokaw, Most Reverend James R. Golka '85, Cindy '86 (Jim) Jussel, Greg '88 (Tiffany) Golka, Sheri '89 (Mike) Genereux, Gary '94 (Tanya) Golka, and Tim '95 (Jenny '96) Golka; grandchildren, Joseph Golka, Michael (Leah) Golka, Sarah '11 (Shawn '11) Ruzicka, Katie '15 (Kris) Czerwicz, Brian '09 (Madeline Burkemper) Golka, Brianna '11 (Dustin) Olson, Brett '12 (Leah) Brokaw, Brady '15 (Anna) Brokaw, Kylie Jussel, Kaci Jussel, Josie Golka, Sophie Golka, Addie Golka, Clara Genereux, Ryan Genereux, Aaron Golka, Madison Golka, Mia '22 Golka, Cody Golka, Kade Golka, and Marissa Golka; 14 great-grandchildren; Brothers, Lee (Joyce) Ostdiek, Larry (Diane) Ostdiek, Allen (Nancy) Ostdiek; sister Doris Bradley; brother-in-law, Rich Sullivan; sisters-in-law Helen Ostdiek, Jan Ostdiek, and Sharroll Golka; many nieces, nephews, other relatives and a host of friends. Preceded in death by their daughter Jean Golka '87.

RICK STEPANEK

Survived by his wife, Mary Ann; their children, Heather (José) Medrano, Brian Stepanek, Jeff (Vanessa) Stepanek; four grandchildren; siblings, Lenny (Kay) Stepanek, Frank (Mary) Stepanek, Dwayne Stepanek, Mike Stepanek, Mark (Linda) Stepanek, Dee (Mark) Crane, Gloria Stepanek, Jackie (Kenny) Markvicka; brothers and sisters-in-law, Mike (Phyllis) Smith, Joan Wiese, Jim (Gloria) Smith, Dick Smith, Janet (Rich) Savageau; and many other extended family members.

EDWARD KESTER

Survived by his wife Marge; sons Keith, Ken (Meg), Cliff (Karen), and Cordy; nine grandchildren; seven great-grandchildren; brother Howard Jr. (Valaine); and Marge's family of grandchildren, great grandchildren, and siblings. Preceded in death by his wife Marilyn.

LARRY CORNELIUS

Survived by his wife, Ellie; their children Paul (Donna) Cornelius and Rose (Will) Saafeld, siblings, Rick (Kathy) Cornelius, Mike (Colleen) Cornelius, Carol (Bob) Heinen, and Diane (Dave) Spotanski; brothers and sisters-in-law, Larry (Pat) Anderson, Marvin (Marsha) Anderson, Ron (Pam) Anderson, Joe Anderson, Marilyn Jacobson, Rose Marie (Rusty) McPhillips, Sue (Brad) Czaplewski, Linda (John) Berry, and Helen (Steve) Parr; numerous nieces, nephews and great-nieces and nephews.

UPCOMING CLASS REUNIONS

SEPTEMBER
18-19

CLASS OF 1966
60TH CLASS REUNION

CONTACT

Mike Hamik
(308) 380-9656
or
Dave Chmelka
(308) 390-2776

More details coming soon.

SEPTEMBER
11-13

CLASS OF 1976
50TH CLASS REUNION

- Friday: Sluggers Bar and Grill
- Saturday: School Tour, Husker Football, Social Hour & Dinner at the Saddle Club
- Sunday: Mass at Blessed Sacrament

CONTACT

Connie Swanson (308) 380-0388, Alan Large (402) 955-9506, Mary Wetterer Stoltenberg (308) 379-4585, or Colleen Halpin O'Neill (308) 379-1338

JULY - AUGUST
31-1

CLASS OF 1996
30TH CLASS REUNION

- Friday: Live music at Railside
- Saturday: 10:00 School Tour, Dinner & Drinks at The Chocolate Bar

Block of rooms at Ramada on
South Locust

CONTACT

Jeni Kenyon (303) 946-9407



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CATHOLIC
DEVELOPMENT
FOUNDATION

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SAVE THE DATE



Friday, November 20, 2026 | Riverside Golf Club

The Knight Co-Chairs
Libby & Dr. Ben Hanzel | Abby & Dr. Zach Meyer