



BECOMING CATHOLIC: *Finding Jesus through the journey of a child*

by Elli Gifferson
Prairie Catholic correspondent

NEW ULM – Sometimes, we feel like Colton teaches us more than we teach him,” Ashley and Dustin Reinhart, parishioners of the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm, describe raising their eight-year-old son, Colton.

A second grader at Jefferson Elementary School in New Ulm, Colton, as most boys his age, greatly enjoys swimming, jumping on the trampoline, playing outside, and his electronics. However, Colton was born with Leber’s Congenital Amaurosis, a genetic disorder that affects annually approximately one in every 40,000 newborns and accounts for the vast majority of cases of childhood blindness.

Although Colton lacks vision, he can perceive light. But blindness does not hold him back from experiencing the joys and adventures of life. This year specifically, Colton continues to embrace his gifts and inspire those around him through his remarkable journey to receiving the Holy Eucharist for the first time. “Colton has such a great personality, and he is so funny!” says Heather Hacker, Colton’s parish faith formation instructor. “He is inquisitive, curious, and always asking questions,



Colton Reinhart of New Ulm receives the Holy Eucharist for the first time on Sunday, April 23, at the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in New Ulm.
(Photos by Christine Clancy)

including whether or not I drove my ‘junker car’ or my SUV to class each night. [But] I think his biggest superpower is his reading and vocabulary. [It’s] out of this world!” Hacker said.

Colton’s knowledge of reading and writing Braille is so advanced that in 2021 he was one of the top ten finalists in the Braille Challenge, an annual competition that stretches across North America. Even more impressive, Colton was only a kindergartner then and, thus, the youngest finalist in the Apprentice Category, comprising first and second-graders. “His knowledge and memorization of prayers also

amazes us,” said Ashley. “He is a positive and happy kid who brings so much joy to our family.”

Hence, in raising Colton, Ashley and Dustin always strive to ensure that their son has every opportunity possible to grow and succeed personally and spiritually. In preparation for Colton’s faith formation, the Reinharts began researching potential options to enable him to participate more actively with his peers while also engaging deeper in his course materials. Ashley credits Jessie Griebel, the former Cathedral director of Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation, for discovering the Xavier Society for the Blind in New York that provides free faith-based materials to the blind and visually impaired. It was the perfect fit for the Reinhart family.

Fast forward two years, and the Xavier Society continues to partner with Colton and his family to transcribe and emboss his faith formation textbooks in Braille, empowering him to read along with and to his sighted classmates. “We were thrilled to receive Colton’s faith formation books in Braille,” said Ashley. “Colton’s faith has really grown this year as he has prepared and had First Reconciliation and is now ready to receive the Eucharist.”

Likewise, Hacker attests to Colton’s spiritual journey, sharing that, “It’s been so fun to watch him grow not only through God’s Word in our lessons but also



Colton Reinhart is pictured with his parents Ashley and Dustin and brother Caleb along with Mass celebrant Msgr. Douglas Grams.

through different practices we have done in preparing for the Sacrament of First Communion.”

As part of his faith formation, Colton has had the opportunity to explore various features and areas of the inside of the church using his sense of touch in order to paint a mental picture, whereas most parishioners rely solely on their vision.

As Hacker explains, he has practiced genuflecting, bowing, and how to properly place his hands in preparation for receiving the Eucharist. Whereas most students have learned these traditional religious practices by visually watching others, Colton has had the unique opportunity to learn through touch and auditory instruction, including Biblical narratives and the events of Jesus’ life. Hacker said, “Colton is absolutely an auditory learner, so seeing him learn through the stories we share of Christ is so amazing.”

Overall, Colton’s journey to receiving the Eucharist has been very meaningful to him. “Colton is excited to become closer to Jesus

through receiving the Eucharist,” said Ashley. “He is looking forward to experiencing the Eucharist that we’ve been talking so much about, and he’s been learning about at home, church, and in faith formation,” she said.

Ashley and Dustin feel so blessed and thankful, not only for the beautiful gifts of their two children, Colton and his older brother Caleb, but also for the incredible faith support provided by their parish community. “Raising Colton has opened up so many opportunities that other families may not have in the people we’ve met and the experiences we’ve had,” said Ashley. “[Our parish] has been wonderful and so supportive of Colton and our family.”

During this time of Colton’s journey of witnessing his spiritual growth, Ashley and Dustin have become more aware of their own faith. “It has brought us back to the basics of the Church. Being able to witness Colton prepare for the Eucharist through the eyes of a child is magical!”

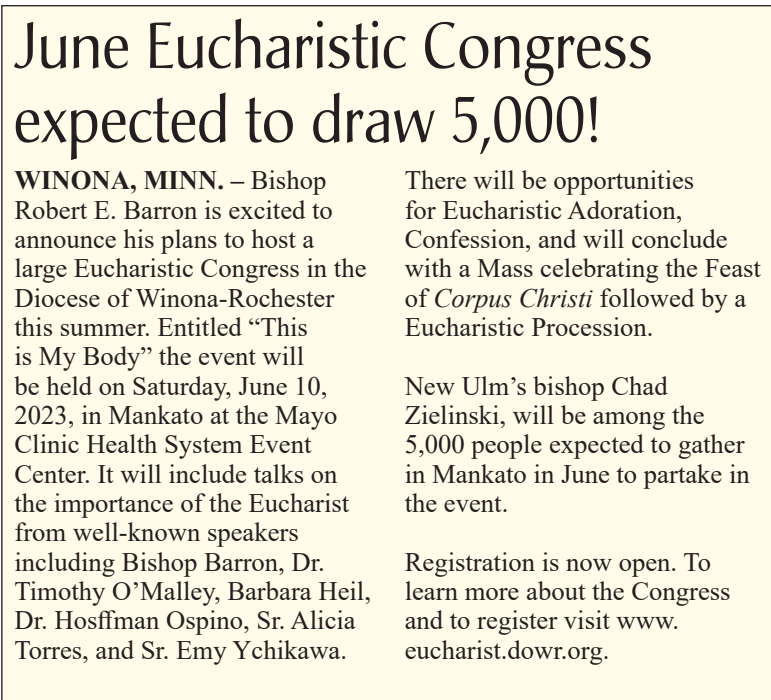
June Eucharistic Congress expected to draw 5,000!

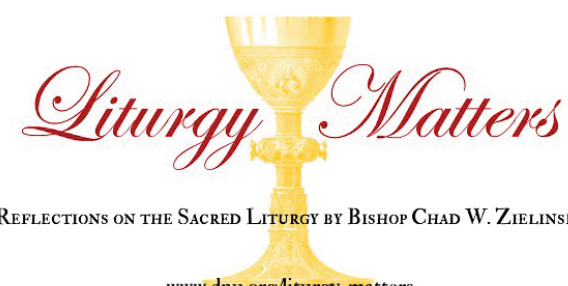
WINONA, MINN. – Bishop Robert E. Barron is excited to announce his plans to host a large Eucharistic Congress in the Diocese of Winona-Rochester this summer. Entitled “This is My Body” the event will be held on Saturday, June 10, 2023, in Mankato at the Mayo Clinic Health System Event Center. It will include talks on the importance of the Eucharist from well-known speakers including Bishop Barron, Dr. Timothy O’Malley, Barbara Heil, Dr. Hosffman Ospino, Sr. Alicia Torres, and Sr. Emy Ychikawa.

There will be opportunities for Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, and will conclude with a Mass celebrating the Feast of *Corpus Christi* followed by a Eucharistic Procession.

New Ulm’s bishop Chad Zielinski, will be among the 5,000 people expected to gather in Mankato in June to partake in the event.

Registration is now open. To learn more about the Congress and to register visit www.eucharist.dowr.org.





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