



# Dakota **Catholic Action**

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## **THE CRUCIFIXION** **A SYMBOL OF HOPE AND RENEWAL**

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## Adventures in God's Country inspired by the beauty of North Dakota

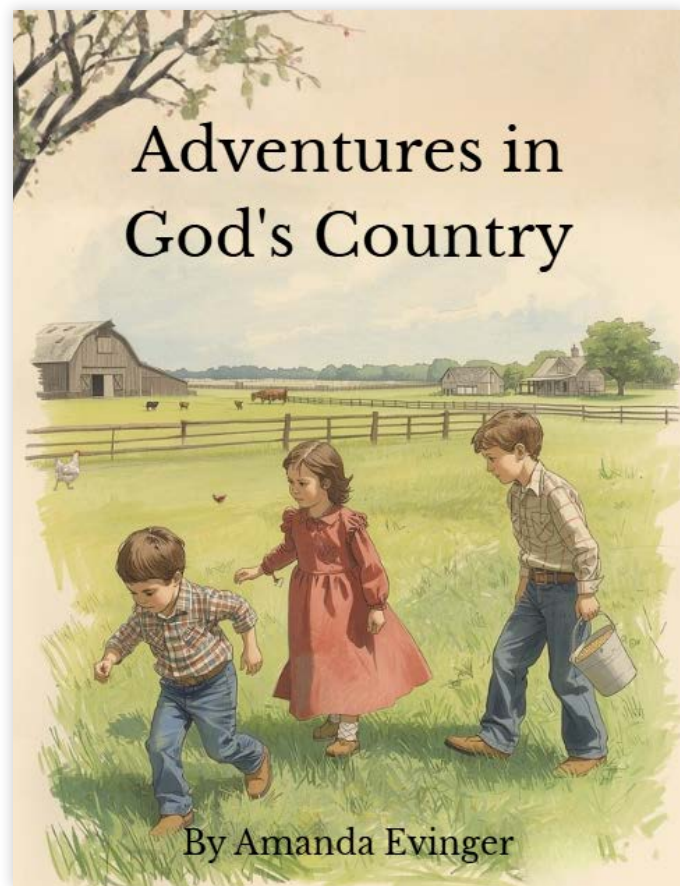
When Amanda Evinger first moved to North Dakota, she was taken aback by all the goodness and beauty she saw around her.

“I grew up outside of Detroit in Michigan; went to college in Grand Rapids and Santiago, the Dominican Republic; lived with Mother Teresa’s sisters as a missionary in D.C., Harlem, the South Bronx, and Memphis; and worked as a professional writer in Augusta, Georgia,” she said. “I was definitely a big city girl when I came here! When I first came to visit, I was totally floored at how gorgeous the countryside in North Dakota is, and how friendly small-town people are. I couldn’t believe how many stars I could see in the night sky!”

Amanda was a religious novice for a year alongside her current sister-in-law, Sr. Michelle Marie Evinger, which is how she came to know her husband, Michael.

“When I first met their family, I thought of the *Little House on the Prairie* series right away, which I loved to watch as a child,” she remembered. “Instantly, I knew there was something they had that I wanted, too—a more wholesome country-style life, away from the craziness of gigantic cities, endless traffic jams, the constant threat of crime and an impersonal way of life.”

About 10 years after moving to North Dakota, she decided to begin writing about the beauty of North Dakota and its people through *Adventures in God’s Country*, a fiction book based on real-life stories from recent Dakotan history.



“We started writing *Adventures in God’s Country* as a family after I had an extremely difficult pregnancy with my sixth child,” she said. “I needed to do something fun with my children to remind me of what was most important in life, and why I chose to homeschool and live in rural North Dakota to begin with.”

*Adventures in God’s Country* was written to educate young readers about the Catholic faith, the homeschooling movement and the beauty of rural family life.

“We desired to give families something meaningful to read together—something that celebrates the very heart of North Dakota and honors the goodness of Catholic family life.” — Amanda Evinger

“I pray it serves as a much-needed blast from the past, meant to remind us of where we came from and where we should be headed,” Amanda shared. “We embarked on this small-scale literary journey about nine years ago, and thanks to the encouragement of family and friends, we decided to keep traveling.”

*Meeting a need in the literary world*

It is meant to be the first book in a series which will help meet a need in the Catholic literary world.

“After serving as a publisher of thousands of articles, authoring several books and homeschooling my seven children, I have come to appreciate the value of cultivating a reading culture in one’s home,” Amanda remarked. “In spending countless hours searching libraries and online bookstores for inspiring literature picks, I consistently noticed a troubling lack of engaging Catholic literature for younger readers, and I wanted to do something about it.”

Wanting to fill this gap, the Evinger family began drumming up ideas and drawing inspiration from the homeschooling pioneers and farm families they had grown to respect.

“We desired to give families something meaningful to read together—something that celebrates the very heart of North Dakota and honors the goodness of Catholic family life,” Amanda shared. “We wanted to make a way for them to go on a literary adventure together—an action-packed adventure that will edify their souls and lift up their minds to higher

things. We hope to put our little drop in the ocean of literature and make a difference in our own little way.”

However, there were hurdles to overcome along the way.

“I tell people I might as well have a ‘CG’ for City Girl branded on my forehead—pun intended,” Amanda shared. “Michael and I went to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico for our honeymoon, and he spent much of the plane ride there teaching me the names of farm animals and their babies. I grew up in an extended family full of engineers and was totally ignorant about country living when I married him. Even after living the rural life for years, I still sort of am—so this book was an eye-opener for me. I had to ask Michael and the children so many questions just to get a basic paragraph written!”

*Value of cultivating the art of reading*

After performing a decade of research on literacy education, Amanda wholeheartedly believes that the “lost art” of reading “good ol’ books” is a worthwhile endeavor.

“Nearly all of the research on literacy education supports the same conclusion—that nurturing an appreciation for good reading helps children in more ways than we can even comprehend,” she said. “For example, fascinating studies have been done on the effect of mothers reading to their babies in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU).

They all reveal how amazingly therapeutic such reading can be, and how drastically it aids the infants physically, emotionally, psychologically and perhaps even spiritually.”

Amanda feels there is no better time than now to foster a genuine love of wholesome reading in our children, especially in this excessively digital age.

“Young minds and hearts are so impressionable,” Amanda observed. “This is a very good thing, but it needs to be navigated well, in order to preserve the purity of their souls.”

Truly, the beauty of the written word has the power to communicate love, wisdom and virtue to people of all ages, cultures and interests.

“Renowned Catholic author Michael D. O’Brien once expressed that through stories we encounter the depth of human experience and the complexity of moral choices,” Amanda said. “He also wrote, ‘Literature opens the door to the human soul, revealing truths that lie beneath the surface. [It] has the power to transform hearts and minds, fostering empathy and understanding.’ His words were right on!”

A branch of Tan Books offered to publish the book, but the cost for them to illustrate it was too steep. Noticing her discouragement, her daughter Marella offered to illustrate it instead.

“I thought it would be way too difficult of a job for her, but she proved me wrong,” Amanda said. “As a homeschooled student, she has plenty of time to

develop her God-given, artistic talents. She has taken over 100 challenging courses in vintage drawing, typography, graphic design fundamentals, digital design and computer programming, earning over 20 professional certifications. She is currently learning Java, which is helping her a lot with her design work.”

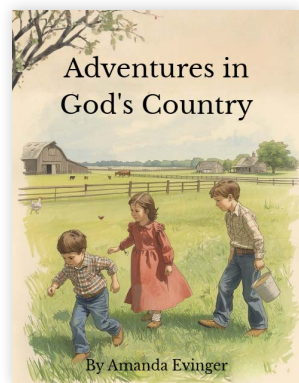
Last fall, after En Route Books and Media agreed to publish *Adventures in God’s Country*, Marella took a leap of faith and submitted two prayer journals she designed for publication to En Route as well. These beautiful, vibrantly illustrated journals are titled: *My Prayer Journal: It’s for Girls!* and *The Joyful Catholic Mother’s Prayer Journal*. The journals have simple but inspiring writing prompts, a saint quotation for each day, topics for reflection and more. Marella is also currently creating two more prayer journals in the series—one for teenage girls and one for women.

“I had never published a book before, so I didn’t think they would actually give my work a chance,” Marella said. “I suppose God wanted it done, because they said they would! We were all really surprised and excited! I am so thankful I can share these journals with others and help people pray better.”

Due to the enthusiasm people have expressed about Marella’s work, as well as the pressing need for authentically Catholic, affordable designers, she decided to start her own digital design and illustration business, which she named Grace-Gra-Fix Design. Further information about Marella’s design business and her creations can be found on her website at [gracegra-fixdesign.my.canva.site/](http://gracegra-fixdesign.my.canva.site/).

To purchase *Adventures in God’s Country*, scan the QR code or visit [enroutebooksandmedia.com/adventuresingodscountry/](http://enroutebooksandmedia.com/adventuresingodscountry/).†

—Staff report



## UPCOMING EVENTS



### Big Smoke BBQ Competition June 21

The 2026 Big Smoke event at the Flickertail Garden on the ND State Fair Grounds in Minot is Sunday, June 21. Doors open at 3 p.m. Come and spend the day with priests and diocesan seminarians at this event held by the Serra Club of North Central North Dakota. Tickets can be purchased at the door. Take part in taste testing at competitor stations and stay for a BBQ dinner with all the fixings served by the seminarians. Proceeds of this event work to ensure the future of our Catholic Faith by supporting new priests, the priesthood and the consecrated life.



### Home On The Range golf scramble June 27

Home On The Range is hosting the 9th Annual Dakota Scramble Golf Tournament at Pheasant Country Golf Course in South Heart, N.D. There are options to join as a partner in this special event—whether as a corporate sponsor, hole sponsor or by bringing your own team. The tournament takes place on Saturday, June 27. Registration will be held from 7 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. MST, with a shotgun start at 8 a.m. MST. You can look forward to great door prizes, contests for longest drive and longest putt and plenty of additional fun. Every dollar raised will directly support Home On The Range and the boys and girls in their care. For more information, go to [www.hotrnd.com/golf-tournament](http://www.hotrnd.com/golf-tournament).



### KC pancake breakfast July 3-4

All are welcome to the Knights of Columbus Art in the Park 4th of July pancake breakfast on Friday, July 3 and Saturday, July 4. Each day the breakfast is served from 7-11 a.m. on the Morton Mandan Library patio behind the band shell on Main Street in Mandan. Cost is \$7 for adults and \$4 for children aged 10 and under. Proceeds to benefit various charities.



### Town and Country Celebration July 19

You are invited to the annual Town and Country Celebration on Sunday, July 19. The event will be held at the Church of St. Vincent de Paul near Crown Butte. The day will begin with Mass celebrated by Bishop Kagan inside the church at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow Mass. There will be a blessing upon rural communities, equipment, land and animals. Attendees are invited to bring a container of soil or seed from their field or garden to be blessed. Bring your lawn chairs, blankets and umbrellas to enjoy the day outdoors. The event is hosted by Fr. Nick Schneider and the parishioners of the Church of St. Vincent de Paul. Register at [bismarckdiocese.com/townandcountry](http://bismarckdiocese.com/townandcountry) or call Amanda at 701-204-7205. Registration is required for an accurate meal count. Note that although there is a simple ramp, the church is not handicapped accessible, especially for seating.



### Champion’s Ride is Aug. 1

Everyone’s invited to the Champions Ride Rodeo on Saturday, Aug. 1 at 1 p.m. (MT)—a premiere event with top ranked professional cowboys invited to ride the toughest saddle broncs in the region. The Champions Ride not only has a rich history of cowboys, but also as a major fundraiser for the organization, Home On The Range (HOTR). Gates open at 11 a.m. with the grand entry at 12:30 p.m. All times are mountain time zone. Cost is \$20 for adults in advance or \$25 at the gate and \$13 for student tickets in advance or \$15 at the gate. HOTR is a diocesan-supported, nonprofit organization which helps abused, neglected and traumatized teenage boys and girls. For more information, go to [hotrnd.com](http://hotrnd.com).



### Vocation Celebration Aug. 6

All are invited to the first-ever Vocation Celebration on Thursday, Aug. 6. The event, sponsored by the St. Serra Vocations Apostolate of Bismarck-Mandan, will be held at Our Lady of Victory Chapel at St. Mary’s Central High School beginning with 5:30 p.m. Mass. There will also be food, fun and adoration to follow. Come celebrate, support and visit with our seminarians and men and women in formation for religious life. Funds raised from the event go towards vocations for the diocese.



### Patriotic rosary at Spirit of Life

Come in prayer to heal our nation. A patriotic rosary dedicates one Hail Mary in a traditional Catholic rosary to each state of the United States and asks God’s protection and guidance for our nation. This will be said the first and third Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. at Spirit of Life in Mandan. Please join as we come together and unite to strengthen our nation.