

March 13, 2016

Happy 50th, *SKC*

This month, the *Southwest Kansas Catholic* turns 50 years old.

First, some history: The then-*Southwest Kansas Register* began publishing in 1966. As many of you know, this was before electric printers had reached Southwest Kansas.

Like the early monastic scribes who sat hunched over in cold, darkened rooms, laboriously hand-copying intricate manuscripts by candle-light, the first *Southwest Kansas Register* editor sat hunched over a Formica table, laboriously hand-copying text by neon-light at Doreen's Diner on 47th Street.

He would (as per dictum by then Bishop Marion Forst) make several copies by hand onto napkins to be distributed—one napkin each—to parishes throughout the diocese.

The notion of the news being written on a napkin wasn't an afterthought:

According to Chapter four of Tim Wenzl's "Legacy of Faith", "Diocesan Code of Canon Law (Can. 6 §1) dictated that the napkin be 'passed from one person to the next at the coffee and doughnut gathering after Mass, henceforth, forthwith, and other words with forth in it'."

According to *Legacy*, "Because readers would often forget and wipe their mouth on the napkin and risk smudging an important text with chocolate sprinkles, the *Register* began adding a 'You've-Got-Something-On-Your-Mouth' feature, which was a blank space on which people could dab their mouths."

Ironically, this feature went on to win several consecutive National Catholic News Service awards.

In 1972, it was finally discovered that printing *had* been invented, apparently, by someone named "Gutenberg" some 600 years prior. On a Tuesday.

(It should be noted that the invention still has not reached South Carolina, where the daily news is shouted from Safeway parking lots every day at Noon. Somebody might want to give them a call.)

Over its 50-year history, six editors have helmed the *Register*, one woman, four men, and a hamster who served for several months under President Carter's "Put a Hamster to Work" initiative in the 1970s.

Before I came on board in 2000, the editor was Tim Wenzl, who now serves as archivist, advertising representative, contributing writer, and ornithologist. I will always be indebted to Tim for his help in procuring my job. We had never met prior to 16 years ago, and yet herein lies a strange and bizarre coincidence. When Tim was a child he had a dog. The dog's name? *Dave Myers*. Meanwhile, my great aunt on my mother's side, her name was Lucille. But her nickname was *Tim Wenzl*. Yes, this is true.*

In March of 2015, the *Register* was renamed the *Catholic*, which caused many parishioners to say, "Ohhhh, I wondered why it had all that Catholic stuff in it! It totally makes sense now!"

The newspaper has served five bishops over the last half century.

Lessons lurned: On April 1, I'll begin my sixteenth year as editor. Part of the reason for my longevity is that I don't include jokes following sentences such as, "The newspaper has served five bishops over the last half century."

This was a very strange choice of professions for me. As a child, I thought that my inability to spell was a disease, like Diabetes, that would stay with me the rest of my life. And of course I was right.

Despite my dissa ... disability, I've learned many valuable lessons in my 16 years here. An example? I have abnormally loud internal organs. If I'm at a staff meeting and someone hears "Ork, ork, ork! Grrrrrrep!", you can be sure it's coming from my stomach. Here's what I learned: Instead of facing embarrassment, I simply announce it ahead of time: "Excuse me, I don't wish to disrupt the proceedings, but I believe that sounds are about to emanate from my digestive track." Very professional; very matter-of-fact.

I've also learned to detect the degree of favor someone wants of me by their initial greeting:

"Hi, friend!" means that someone needs minor help uploading something to our website.

"Hello, best buddy, best pal!" may follow with a request that after work I help them fight an army of rabid pit-bulls.

And worst of all:

"Greetings, oh ye of noble birth and pleasant odor of which all humanity doth think cool." The only time this occurred (thank goodness) was when I was asked to come up with three work-related goals to be discussed at the next staff meeting.

The most important lesson I've learned, however, is that God is not just an observer, but an active participant in our lives. How else can I explain how a person who spells at the toddler level could become editor of a newspaper? Or how someone who once thought it was the Greeks whom Moses led out of slavery could become editor of a *Catholic* newspaper?

This could only happen through the mighty mercy of an awesome God, a God who is fully immersed in every aspect our lives; a God who, in his infinite wisdom, leads us forever along our winding path, celebrating our joys, lifting our burdens, and all with little concern for the occasional typo.

**No, it's not.*