



Blessing of the Avera Cancer Institute
October 29, 2010
Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
On the Campus of Avera McKennan Hospital, Sioux Falls

It is a pleasure for me to be here today and to have the privilege of blessing this impressive structure, the Avera Cancer Institute. What an architecturally beautiful and people friendly gift this is to Sioux Falls, to South Dakota and to the region. Clearly sensitive listening, creative thought, and courageous decision-making has brought this facility to fruition. Its greatest days of course are ahead, when it becomes not just a beautiful building but a beautiful place for medical care, spiritual support, and reassuring consolation for patient and families. It truly is a symbol of hope.

We all from personal experience know of the heaviness of cancer. Just in the last several months two staff members of the diocesan chancery have died from cancer, including our beloved Benedictine Sister Martin Mergen who inspired Catholic Family Services with her big heart and tenacious love for the poor. Her last days were spent on this campus.

This building is a reminder of the commitment of the Church to continue the healing ministry Christ himself exemplified. This call motivated the Benedictine and Presentation Sisters over the years. It has resulted in the Avera health system which serves so many, especially the poor and vulnerable with dignity and respect. I am especially impressed with the commitment of Avera to assure quality health care in the rural areas of our state and diocese. Responding to this call is a reflection of our core value to respect life from conception to natural death.

Next year Avera McKennan will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Imagine the thousands who have been cared for here both physically and spiritually over those years. It started with a bequest of \$25,000 from Mrs. Helen McKennan. The Presentation sisters at the request of Bishop Thomas O’Gorman borrowed \$100,000 to build the first hospital which had 45 beds. It was the beginning of this campus. What foresight and courage they had; how proud they would be in the fruits of their leap of faith.

At the dedication of that first building, Bishop O’Gorman reminded them and his words remind us of our mission ever ancient ever new. He said: “This hospital is as broad as the spirit of Christ. If every duly licensed physician is admitted to its halls, so also every patient of any denomination can seek here relief. Illness is the only effective passport. . . Doctors of the body and doctors of the soul will find here the perfect democracy of Christianity.”

Bishop O’Gorman dedicated that first building: “to the glory of God, to the service of suffering humanity, to the memory of a noble woman. May all within these walls,” he prayed, “be blessed, the sisters and the nurses in their merciful work, the patients in their suffering, the physicians and surgeons in their science and skill.” His words ring true today. The Avera Cancer Institute continues that

optimistic charge. And so as we rejoice in the present, we remember those who over the years and with such sacrifice have made this day and this Cancer Institute possible.

Cancer is a cross; yet it can bring us together as family and friends, it can bring out the best in us and reconnect us with God who is love. Thank you to all who have made this day possible, thank you especially to the medical personnel who will make this building a living house of love.

I now have the privilege of continuing what Bishop O’Gorman began nearly 100 years ago, and bless this special and sacred place dedicated to healing, to health care, to life, and to hope.

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord Jesus, who empowered His disciples to heal the sick and bring them relief and hope be with you all.

Let us pray:

Blessed are you, God, our Father.
Through your Son you commanded your people
Who walk in the newness of life
To care skillfully, pastorally and compassionately for the sick.

Bless + this building dedicated to the care of those with cancer named the Avera Cancer Institute.
By the grace of your Holy Spirit
Make it a house of hope and a center of love,
Reflecting Christ’s love for the sick and the vulnerable.

Grant to all who come here for treatment
An awareness of your loving presence
And that of Mary, Mother of the Afflicted, and of us all.

May patients, medical personnel, administrative and support staff, families and friends
be granted courage when afraid, patience when afflicted,
Hope when discouraged, and when alone the assurance of the support of your holy people.
May peace abide in this house of healing.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

(The building is now blessed with holy water)

Concluding blessing:

Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing:

May God bless you in every way and grant you hope all the days of your life.

May God guide you and give you strength.

May God fill your heart with peace and lead you to eternal life.

May Almighty God bless you, the Father, and the Son + and the Holy Spirit. Amen.