



MARY

Mother of the Church

AREA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

USHERS

MEET THE ST. JOSEPH
Fostering Hospitality and Ensuring Our Safety During Mass

ST. JOSEPH
Bertha

ST. HUBERT
Bluegrass

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST
Bluffton

ASSUMPTION OF OUR LADY
Menahga

ST. MICHAEL
Motley

SACRED HEART
Staples

ST. FREDERICK
Verndale

ST. ANN
Wadena

Joe Brandsma doesn't like to sit still. When he moved to the Bertha area — where his wife, Heidi, grew up — he saw a need and jumped in. There weren't enough ushers, so Joe said, "put me down," along with his two oldest sons, Troy and William. The three still enjoy serving as ushers at St. Joseph's. They end up ushering about once per month.

St. Joseph's ushers do everything from greeting and seating people to jumping in if there's a medical emergency. They do the collection, take up the gifts and help ensure those with mobility challenges receive the Eucharist at Communion. They sit in the back to help where needed.

"We are like the workhorses during Mass," Joe says. "We are there watching in the background. You just never know what could happen."

Joe admits he wouldn't be suited to serving as a lector or any other liturgical ministry in the front of the church. He enjoys being in the background, ready to step in when needed. He describes himself as a busybody, which works perfectly for the Usher Ministry.

"If you like being busy, we will take you as an usher," he says. "It's really easy to catch on. It keeps you involved during Mass. It doesn't take any extra time — you are there anyway."

Joe is also a fourth-degree Knight in the Knights of Columbus. He was a member of the Winsted chapter when the family lived in Delano. He enjoys the camaraderie of the group and the opportunities to volunteer. He got involved in some of the activities of the local Knights chapter before he officially became a member.

"I love giving back to the community," Joe says. The Knights provide valuable support for Fr. Aaron Kuhn. They also help with cemetery cleanup and host a fundraiser breakfast each month. Joe also has found that being a Knight



Usher Joe Brandsma



(From left) Ushers Gary Schmidt and Troy Brandsma



STEWARDSHIP: THE FOUR PILLARS

You've heard about the three Ts of stewardship, but what about the four Ps?

The three Ts – Time, Talent, and Treasure – describe the personal gifts we offer to the Church. The four Ps are the Four Pillars of Parish Stewardship described by the renowned pastor Msgr. Thomas McGread. They are the hallmark of a stewardship parish – Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service. Let's take a look at each of them to understand how we can improve in each area.

HOSPITALITY *Christian Kindness*

“When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The Gospel teaches that whenever we welcome the least of our brothers or sisters, we welcome Christ Himself. That is why the first mark of a stewardship parish is hospitality. Being friendly is one of the first ways we can be Christ-like toward others.

Modern Catholic parishes are often so large and have so many Masses that many parishioners don't know one another. To create a sense of community, be sure to smile and greet others as you enter and exit the Church. Let's try harder than ever to be a welcoming community.

PRAYER *Heart-to-Heart with God*

“Do not become so involved in the work of the Lord that you forget the Lord of the work,” a seminary professor once taught. In other words, don't get so caught up with parish projects and outreach efforts that you forget to draw aside to spend time with God in prayer. Every great saint has taught that prayer is the most essential component in the life of the Christian. Through prayer, we nurture our most important relationship – the one that will last for all eternity.

A healthy prayer life should include communal prayer such as Mass, as well as personal prayer and family prayer. The two

biggest obstacles to prayer are lack of time and lack of understanding of how to pray. We have to schedule time for prayer just as we would for an important appointment. And we have to learn how to pray from other people. Many saints have written spiritual books that describe different methods of prayer.

FORMATION *Continuous Conversion*

Pope John Paul II always emphasized ongoing conversion. From childhood through adulthood, our whole life must be a process of drawing closer to God. He never stops calling us forward to learn more and to examine ourselves more deeply.

Very often our society values material things more than interior virtues. But as personal experience shows, when we finally acquire the car or house or “toy” that we wanted so badly, it doesn't really satisfy. On the other hand, we don't tend to desire spiritual virtues with the same kind of longing, but when we actually have them, we find them far more rewarding than material things.

SERVICE *Love in Action*

“Amen I say to you, whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). This Scripture was one of St. Teresa of Calcutta's favorites. Each time she picked up a poor and hungry child, she knew she was ministering to Christ. While we may not view ourselves as saints, we too are called to such heroic service right within our own community. As St. Teresa of Calcutta said, “To be a saint is not the privilege of a few, but the duty of everyone.”

We have many service opportunities right here. If you have the willingness to serve and take the initiative to find where you are needed, you'll find that there is no end to the families and individuals who truly need help. How can you reach out to them in love?



A Letter From Our Pastor

The Word of God:

Hearing It and Responding to It

Dear Parishioners,

A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time – but as the month of February winds down, we will begin Lent with Ash Wednesday on Feb. 22.

The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part – the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider that these readings are about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets



of how we approach the Word of God.

For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God’s Word.

However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act requires time, practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us – that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

In Christ,

Fr. Aaron Kuhn

Fr. Aaron



Entering into the Lenten Season with Open and Honest Hearts

A Time to Model Ourselves After Christ



With Ash Wednesday arriving this month on Feb. 22, Lent is just around the corner — this is your reminder to set aside some time to pray about and plan your Lenten sacrifices! There is no one-size-fits-all approach to Lent, as we all face different struggles in our spiritual lives and God works in each of us in different ways. By beginning with the three pillars of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and by bringing our hearts to God, we can enter Lent with an openness to the transformation God wants to bring to each of our lives.

Prayer is an upward journey and God is always calling us further and deeper into union with Him. Lent is a chance to re-evaluate our prayer life. Families can incorporate times to pray together as a way to grow spiritually and in relationship with each other. Fr. Aaron Kuhn suggests asking ourselves a simple question — “What is one way that I can increase the quality or quantity of my prayer time with God this Lent?”

Fasting is a way to remove distractions and deny ourselves comforts that interfere with our relationship with God. Whether we fast from a certain food, technology, music, or another comfort, the goal is to make more room for God to enter into our lives. Our choices should help us build good habits. It should be something challenging but achievable.

“Deprivation from pleasure, power, prestige, and wealth is good for our souls,” Fr. Aaron says. “We give God freedom to teach us and form us in His love.”

Almsgiving comes in many different forms and is a way to turn our focus outside of ourselves and see the needs of others.

continued on page 5



“Whatever you choose to add in prayer, fast from, or give alms to, do so with joy and love. Jesus prayed with great affection to His Father, suffered the cross in silence, and gave His life as a gift for us. We ought to do the same.”

— FR. AARON KUHN

The Lenten Season

Prayerful Hearts

Offering Ourselves on Christ

Our time, talent, and treasure are all available in service to others. Making charitable donations and offering our service can bring Christ's light into others' lives. Service can be formal or informal. It can be as simple as seeing the needs of those present in our homes and daily lives.

"It sometimes takes a keen eye to see what others need to make their lives better," Fr. Aaron says. "If anything, be a friend to someone. In a world of loneliness, a visit from a good listener can make all the difference."

Intentionally entering into the season Lent can seem daunting, but every day is a step towards the joy of Easter, and the way we offer sacrifices should be modeled after Jesus.

"Whatever you choose to add in prayer, fast from, or give

alms to, do so with joy and love," Fr. Aaron says. "Jesus prayed with great affection to His Father, suffered the cross in silence, and gave His life as a gift for us. We ought to do the same."



There are many events available throughout the ACC to support your Lenten journey such as Stations of the Cross, Reconciliation, and groups participating in Exodus 90 and Fiat 90. See the bulletin for details.

USHERS *continued from front cover*

has helped him grow in faith.

"It's just good for the soul," he says. "It keeps me close to the church, so I don't stray too far. It keeps my faith in the forefront."

Whatever your talents or areas of interest, Joe encourages everyone to find some way to get involved and give back to those around us.

"Whether it's your church or getting involved in the community, with the Lions or the school, it's important that you get involved somehow," he says. "You get to know people and get to know your community."



To learn more about serving as an usher, call the office at 218-631-1593.



Eucharistic Ministers to the Homebound

Bringing Christ's Love and Mercy to All

For many years, Lee and Patty Kicker have been bringing the tender love and compassion of Our Eucharistic Lord to those most in need. Their generosity has brought tremendous joy to their own hearts, as well as to the hearts of the homebound parishioners they visit.

"They are all smiles when we come to see them, and that makes us feel good," Patty says. "We don't expect them to be so happy, but it is a great gift to us in return. They are so welcoming to us and they greet us with open arms. We receive as much from the whole experience as they do, if not more."

For Patty, helping others feel loved and accepted is a key aspect of service. In many ways, this attitude reflects the stewardship pillar of hospitality, as well.

"I want our homebound parishioners to feel that they are still part of our parish family and we care about them," she says. "Besides bringing them the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, communicating that is really the most important part of this ministry."

On their brief visits, Lee and Patty pray a designated prayer and give the homebound parishioner a monthly missalette, as well as a parish bulletin.

"We mainly visit people we know well, so we enjoy asking them how things are going for them, and talking to them about how their families are doing," Patty says.

Lee and Patty signed up to volunteer with this ministry about 15 years ago when our parish priest invited them to do so. After taking a couple of years off of the ministry around the time of the pandemic, they gladly started back up last November.

"We saw there was a need, so we were happy to volunteer to do it," she says. "At this time, there isn't anyone else doing the ministry from St. John the Baptist. There are too few priests to bring Communion to all of our homebound parishioners, especially because our diocese does not have many priests and we are part of an eight-parish cluster."

As a man, Lee finds that he can offer a unique gift to this ministry.

"It helps to have Lee with me when I bring the Eucharist to men, and they really appreciate being able to visit with another man," Patty says. "This ministry has always been meaningful to Lee as well. Overall, it is something very rewarding to do together as a couple."

For more information on how to bring Christ's Eucharistic love and mercy to others through this ministry, please call the office at 218-631-1593.





The Sign of the Cross:

A Powerful Prayer Tradition in the Catholic Church

Since we say and make the Sign of the Cross so often, it may easily become a rote, perhaps even thoughtless, action. However, it is important to remember that the Sign of the Cross is much more than a simple gesture. Even in its most basic form, the Sign of the Cross — accompanied by the spoken or unspoken words “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” — is a prayer, a creed stating our belief in the Holy Trinity, the dual nature of Jesus Christ, and the dependence of our salvation on His crucifixion and resurrection.

In addition, making the Sign of the Cross is an indication of a willingness to take up our own cross and suffering for the sake of Christ. The prayer is considered one of the greatest weapons against Satan and all demons, and an added strength against the temptations of the flesh.

In the Roman Catholic Church today, the Sign of the Cross is typically made with either three fingers or an open hand touching first the forehead, then the chest, followed by the left shoulder and then the right (in the Eastern Church, the right shoulder is touched before the left). The concept of making a sign, or “setting a seal,” upon the forehead of those who place their faith in the Lord appears in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible — see Ezek. 9:4 and Rev. 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1.

Early versions of the Sign of the Cross were traced on

just the forehead, using the thumb and forefinger held together in the shape of a tiny cross. We still see this version of the blessing performed during Baptisms (with the cross traced on the infant’s forehead) and on Ash Wednesday (with the cross traced in ashes on the foreheads of the faithful). Similarly, when the Gospel is read during the Liturgy of the Word, the priest or deacon leads the congregation in forming this small cross on the forehead, mouth, and chest, indicating a willingness to keep the Word of the Lord in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

There is no doubt that our early Church fathers were strong believers in the sanctifying power of the Sign of the Cross. A second-century ecclesiastical scholar, Tertullian, and a third-century saint, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, both wrote about the necessity of performing the Sign of the Cross at one’s waking and one’s lying down, at entering and leaving a room, at mealtimes, and more. St. Augustine also referenced the importance of marking the cross on the faithful’s forehead during the administration of the sacraments.

It is likely that the sign transformed from the tiny cross on the forehead to the larger, full-body cross used today sometime in the fifth century, when heretics began questioning both the dual nature of Jesus Christ — fully human and fully divine — and the unity of the Holy Trinity. Believers in these crucial

continued on back cover



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C/O The Church of St Ann
514 1st Street SE | Wadena, MN 56482
(218) 631-1593 | www.marysacc.org



Saturday:

4:00 p.m. - St. John the Baptist, Bluffton
4:00 p.m. - St. Michael, Motley
6:00 p.m. - St. Frederick, Verndale
6:30 p.m. - Assumption of Our Lady, Menahga

Sunday:

8:00 a.m. - St. Joseph, Bertha
8:30 a.m. - Sacred Heart, Staples
10:00 a.m. - St. Ann, Wadena **livestream*
10:30 a.m. - St. Hubert, Bluegrass

The Sign of the Cross *continued from page 7*

Church doctrines began forming the cross with three extended fingers (representing the Trinity), keeping the ring finger and little finger pressed down into the palm (representing Christ's dual nature), and tracing a cross on their entire upper body so there could be no mistaking the gesture.

Today, the Sign of the Cross still figures predominantly in our prayer life as Roman Catholics. We commonly perform it upon entering a church; at the beginning and end of the Catholic Mass, a Benediction, or the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; when opening and closing our personal prayers; at mealtimes; and when passing by a Catholic Church (in recognition of Christ, present in the tabernacle). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, the frequent, intentional use of the Sign of the Cross can help the faithful dedicate each day to the glory of God and provide strength in the face of trial and temptation (2157).

