



# MARY

## *Mother of the Church*

AREA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

## MEN'S GROUP:

*Joining Together in Faith and Fellowship to Serve the Parish Community*

**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

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The Catholic Church is built for community. It is why we come together every Sunday to worship God in the holy sacrifice of the Mass — not alone, but together. There are many ways to join together with the community to love and serve the Lord.

One way that men at St. Michael's can gather in community is through the St. Michael's Men's Group. This group had been offered for many years, but unfortunately stopped meeting due to COVID-19. However, at the end of January, they had their first meeting to restart the group and are ready to get involved in the parish once more.

The Men's Group is led by Steve Lorber. He was a member of the group many years ago and when the leader moved, he took over.

"We are the men who try to make St. Michael's not only a church, but a parish," Steve says. "Like the saying that 'you turned it from a house to a home,' that is what we are trying to do here at St. Michael."

The group is planning to meet on the last Tuesday of the month in the basement. After their meeting, they will go up to participate in the Rosary and Mass as a group. Any man old enough to be confirmed can join. They are also trying to start up a Bible study to help the men of the parish grow deeper in their knowledge and understanding of the faith.

In the past, the Men's Group has hosted a men's breakfast and two Bingo events — one at Easter and one at Thanksgiving. Their events are fundraisers for the building campaign. The men are also in charge of taking care of maintenance for



*Matt Olander and John Bentler  
cooking in the kitchen*

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# Stewardship and Lent:

## *How The Wise Men's Gifts Symbolize Our Lenten Obligations*

We experience great joy when we celebrate the coming of the Magi at Epiphany each year. For many of us, it is the completion of Christmas. Yet, the gifts offered by the Magi — gold, frankincense, and myrrh — can serve to guide us on our stewardship journeys as we observe Lent this month.

It may seem strange to connect the joyful celebration of Epiphany with the penitential season of Lent. But our spiritual life should not be divided into separate, unconnected bits, and in the same way, the Church's liturgical year also flows from one season to another. The different feasts and seasons certainly have different emphases, but they are intended to build on each other.

So, let's see if we can connect what the Magi gave Jesus with what we're going to offer Him this Lent.

The basic ingredients for our Lenten rule come from what is termed the "Three Notable Duties" — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These in turn come from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). How do we connect the wise men's gifts with the Three Notable Duties?

Frankincense is the basic ingredient in the incense used in the worship of God, in the ancient world, and in the Church today. Offering it to Jesus points out His divine nature, and so it symbolizes prayer — the stewardship of time. Our Lenten rule needs to include prayer and worship. Of course, we are bound to worship at Sunday Mass year-round. Maybe during Lent, we might add a weekday Mass. Perhaps we can increase the time we devote to private prayer at home or at adoration. Devotional reading from the Bible or another appropriate book can be added. In addition, don't forget the possibility of adding family devotions during Lent, so that the whole family prays together.

When we offer our gold to Christ to build His Church and to help His poor, we are engaged in almsgiving — the stewardship of treasure. While giving from the treasure God has entrusted to us is a duty throughout the whole year, maybe this Lent we can practice being a little more generous than usual. If our giving is a thankful response to the gift of eternal life that God has given us, we will find that the giving is indeed a means of grace.

For centuries, myrrh has been associated with fasting. In the ancient world, it was regularly used in embalming.

Generations of theological writers have seen the gift of myrrh as a foreshadowing of Christ's sufferings.

Fasting may be the most difficult of the Three Notable Duties for modern Americans. We usually think of fasting only under the heading of dieting to lose weight. Instead, try to think of fasting as a way to become more spiritually fit. Body and spirit affect each other. The whole sacramental system is built on the truth that we can receive spiritual grace through material things and physical actions.

Our specific requirements of fasting are limited — abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, and a reduction in the quantity of food we eat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But the discipline of our physical bodies for our spiritual well-being does not have to be limited to Lent!

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh were indeed valuable gifts for the wise men to present to the Child Jesus, which is stewardship at its very core. So, when we look at their symbolism, we can see their relationship to the Three Notable Duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. What gifts of our time, talent, and treasure are we going to offer to Jesus this Lent?





## A Letter From Our Pastor

# Reflections on *Lent* and *Stewardship* From Pope Benedict XVI

Dear Parishioners,

With the passing from this life of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on Dec. 31, I found it fitting to share with you some of his teachings and reflections on Lent, as we have now embarked on our own Lenten journeys.

Pope Benedict was a lifelong scholar, a priest for 71 years, and pope from 2005 to 2013. Throughout his papacy, he offered us all a treasure trove of reflections, prayers, and advice for our Lenten journeys and constantly reminded and encouraged us during this 40-day journey to increase our faith and charity. In other words, through conversion of heart, we must intensify our commitment to stewardship with the sharing of our gifts during Lent.

In his final Lenten message as pope in 2013, he wrote: *"The celebration of Lent... offers us a valuable opportunity to meditate on the relationship between faith and charity: between believing in God — the God of Jesus Christ — and love, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and which guides us on the path of devotion to God and others."*

While Lent is a time when we tend to ramp up our prayer lives, Pope Benedict always pushed us to do even more, and he encouraged us to take the next step as good and faithful stewards. He explained how faith leads to charity, which is a response to God's love for us, thus urging us to use our renewed faith by sharing our time, talent, and treasure with others.

He wrote: *"The entire Christian life is a response to God's love. The first response is precisely faith as the acceptance, filled with*



*wonder and gratitude, of the unprecedented divine initiative that precedes us and summons us. And the 'yes' of faith marks the beginning of a radiant story of friendship with the Lord, which fills and gives full meaning to our whole life. But it is not enough for God that we simply accept his gratuitous love. Not only does he love us, but he wants to draw us to himself, to transform us in such a profound way as to bring us to say with Saint Paul: 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'" (cf. Gal 2:20).*

Pope Benedict continued his 2013 Lenten message, saying: *"For its part, charity ushers us into the love of God manifested in Christ and joins us in a personal and existential way to the total and unconditional self-giving of Jesus to the Father and to his brothers and sisters. By filling our hearts with his love, the Holy Spirit makes us sharers in Jesus' filial devotion to God and fraternal devotion to every man"* (cf. Rom 5:5).

While we grieve that he is no longer with us here, I remain grateful to our Lord for Pope Benedict XVI and his ministry and invite you to reflect on his teachings and messages on Lent as you continue your own Lenten journeys with trust and joy.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Aaron Kuhn".

Fr. Aaron

Want to read more from Pope Benedict XVI on the Lenten journey? Pick up his 2006 book, *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflections for the Lenten Season*, and his 2012 book, *Lent with Pope Benedict XVI: Meditations for Every Day*.



# The Importance of Loving God

## *More Deeply at Mass*

When young people see a person that intrigues them, that attraction becomes the topic of conversation at every opportunity. This attraction alters behavior so that we become enthralled with the other and desire to share our enthusiasm.

Imagine if we were more enthralled with the presence of Christ in our lives. Imagine if we fully recognized that Christ is truly present to us in His precious Body and Blood, and present as well in the proclamation of His Word and in the gathering of our community, praying and singing (see *Sacro-sanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], para. 14). Recognizing the living Christ in all these ways would awaken in us the desire to be with the One who is the object of our most fundamental, pure, and holy attraction to our merciful, loving, and gracious Savior.

If we were to recognize the presence of Christ in these beautiful ways, wouldn't our desire to be more completely in His presence increase? Surely our desire to be better stewards of our time with the Lord would grow. Our attention to the readings and other prayers of the Mass would bring about within us deeper communion with the One who suffered and died for us. If I recognized that God is the answer to all my pangs of hunger, that Christ is my way to the Fa-

ther, and that the Holy Spirit works to convert my heart and soul every day, would I not seek to fill that hunger at the banquet of the Lamb?

While active participation in Sunday Mass is an obligation for Catholics, we also will do well to see the lovely, motherly care the Church shows us in establishing that requirement. The *Code of Canon Law* states clearly in paragraph 1247, "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are bound to participate in the Mass." Sometimes, we might hear that as an overbearing rule. But it might more correctly be understood as our Mother, the Church, helping us learn what is best for us. At Mass, we hear the living Word of God proclaimed. He speaks to us. We receive as hungry, needy sinners, the precious Body and Blood of Christ. We encounter Christ's living presence in our brothers and sisters worshiping God with us. If we truly understood that amazing truth, then how might it affect our lives? How might it affect our relationships? How might it impact our decision to bring our children along to Mass? How might it awaken within us a deeper attraction, fascination, and desire for the Lord?

Generally, when we find ourselves fascinated with someone, we do not decide to spend as little time as possible with them.

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# The Importance of Loving God

## *More Deeply at Mass* continued from page 4

We do not ration our time with them. We want to spend time with them, to see them, to listen to them, to get to know them and to develop a healthy, loving relationship with them.

Considering our reliance on the Lord of life and love, our fascination with His mercy, His goodness, His willingness to call us to Himself, maybe we should ask ourselves about what happens in us at Mass. As I prepare to come to Church, do I find my mind turning to a receptive welcome of the Lord, just as I'll be welcomed at the door of Church? Have I dressed for the important weekly (or daily) moment of meeting my King? Do I expect some profound wisdom from God in the readings? Am I open to correction, to challenge, to affirmation in the readings of God's Word? Do I intently pray along with the priest presider throughout the Mass? Do I make an offering of my life, along with the bread and wine? Do I genuinely

hunger for the Body and Blood of Christ? And do I long for that blessing that sends me on my way with the mission to build the Kingdom?

Instead of worrying about what "counts" when it comes to Sunday Mass, maybe we should work hard at fostering our love for the Eucharist, our desire for eternal life, and our attraction to the Master who calls us into a life of active discipleship. Instead of a merely heavy-handed requirement, maybe we can see more clearly that being at Mass together helps nourish us for a whole week of building God's Kingdom. Coming with those expectations, desires, and hopes, leaving early when unnecessary would disappear as a temptation instantly. Coming late because other things have taken priority would not typically happen, other obligations notwithstanding. Christ desires our company at Mass, from beginning to end. Let's draw near to Him.



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# HOSPITALITY:

## *The Cornerstone of Stewardship*

The dictionary defines “hospitality” as “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.”

A Christian worldview can refer to hospitality as “Christian kindness.”

We see the effects of hospitality – or the lack thereof – time and time again throughout the Bible. Christ speaks of hospitality in Matthew’s Gospel when He says, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The Old Testament told of the Israelites, as they wandered the desert for 40 years in search of hospitable environs. Even the Holy Family spent ample time searching for shelter before the birth of Our Lord.

It is safe to say that hospitality is, and most likely has always been, of great importance to people everywhere. Modern hotels and hostels often use the image of a pineapple to advertise their special brand of hospitality. There is no doubt that in ancient times, the distant lights of an inn or tavern struck a chord of hope within weary travelers’ hearts.

Indeed, hospitality’s meaning has not diminished at all over the years, decades, and millennia.

Christians view the presence of hospitality as meaning the difference between calling others “guests” and “strangers.” Guests are welcomed with open arms and warm smiles, but strangers aren’t. Guests feel the genuine love present in a hearty welcome, but strangers don’t. Guests often return for second or third visits, while strangers don’t.

As a parish, do we find ourselves surrounded by guests, or burdened by strangers?

Hospitality is, in many respects, a mindset. The same person may be treated as a guest at the church just down the road, but as a stranger here.

Matthew’s Gospel tells of Christ as He reveals a profound truth about hospitality: “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.” That is, “I used to be a stranger, but you fixed that when you welcomed me.” It’s a classic example of before and after. All it took was a change of heart.

Stewardship holds hospitality as an immensely important concept. Remember the “Three Ts” of stewardship – Time, Talent, and Treasure? Well, there are also “Four Ps,” the Four Pillars of Stewardship – Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service. Hospitality is mentioned first. Why? If not for hospitality, none of the other pillars will ever take hold. Hospitality is the cornerstone of stewardship because it opens the door to a person’s heart and allows them to receive joy, grace, and love.

Hospitality must become second nature if stewardship is to truly take hold within a parish. So, when a stranger visits our parish, welcome them as a guest. Perhaps one day, they’ll pay us a second visit.

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# The Prayer Chain Ministry

## *Connecting Those in Need with a Powerful Network of Prayer*

Some of us have busy schedules that don't allow much time for church ministries. And, for some of us, leaving our homes isn't a possibility, so volunteering at church is challenging. But every single one of us has time and space to pray. So, the Prayer Chain Ministry is available and accessible to all. The ministry has been active for about 10 years, and it's wonderful to know that there is a group of dedicated people out there who we can call anytime we need prayer.

People in need of prayer reach out to Sarah Bobst, a parishioner at Assumption of Our Lady, to be added to the Prayer Chain. Then, Sarah calls the first tier, which is five people. Those five people each have about five people that they call or email. So, when someone needs prayers, there are about 25 people from the parish praying for them.

There are no rules on what the prayers need to be for, and it doesn't need to be a recent issue. Also, the person needing prayers doesn't need to be a member of the Mary, Mother of the Church Area Catholic Community.

"If you feel like someone needs prayers, give us a call, and we will pray for them," Sarah says. "It's that simple."

As Sarah explains, this ministry offers a valuable way to connect people with the same goal — ensuring people in need of prayers are cared for. For those Prayer Chain members who are elderly and living alone, connecting with the ministry member who calls them is a chance for a quick phone visit.

"They maybe don't have anyone to talk to that day," Sarah says. "This takes away the isolation."

Sarah sends out an updated list of intentions each month — some names have been kept on the list for more than a year. She also sends out updates on people when she receives them.

"We have had some miraculous results from those we have prayed for," she says.

Sarah is thankful to be able to offer this to parishioners and non-parishioners. It's a way to show people that someone cares.

Many of the people she has prayed for, she has never met.

"I'm glad to pray for those who need it, and I know it makes a difference," she says.

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**"If you feel like someone needs prayers, give us a call, and we will pray for them. It's that simple." — Sarah Bobst**

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**To join the Prayer Chain, or to add someone to the prayer list, contact Sarah Bobst at 320-232-9828.**





**MARY**  
*Mother of the Church*  
—  
AREA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

C/O The Church of St Ann  
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**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

## MEN'S GROUP *continued from front cover*

the parish. They do things like shoveling and changing the filter on the furnace.

“We are giving of our time and talent,” Steve says. “That is what stewardship is, so that is what we sign up to do. We do different things around the church. I love our church and I want to see it grow and see more people involved. The more you are together and the more activities you do together, the closer you become — almost like a family.”



*Jon Fink, Dale Becker, and Seth Berry serving brunch*

To join the St. Michael's Men's Group, or for more information, contact Steve Lorber at 218-352-6327 or 218-821-5249, or Matt Olander, Vice Chairman, at 218-296-2213.