



MARY

Mother of the Church

AREA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

Widows and Widowers Social: *A Place of Friendship and Community for Those Suffering Grief*

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

When Bonita Hansen lost her husband, Delbert, in 2021, she felt deep grief. She describes the grief as having your arms and legs chopped off and then being forced to swim in the ocean — you are drowning.

“Sacred Heart didn’t have a grief support group,” Bonita says. “I knew I needed something like that as I navigated the loss of Delbert.”

Bonita knew she could go to grief support at the hospital, but she wanted a gathering that was Christian-based. So, with the support of both priests, she decided to start her own group at Sacred Heart in August 2022.

“I didn’t want something clinical,” she says. “I wanted it to be a gathering of friends.”

It was outside Bonita’s comfort zone to start a ministry, but she felt a deep calling.

“I kept hearing the Holy Spirit tell me, ‘If you want this to happen, you have to do it,’” Bonita says.

The Widows and Widowers Social gatherings take place on the third Thursday of the month at 1 p.m. at the rectory. All those who have lost a spouse, no matter how

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thing. They know what you are talking about.”

— BONITA HANSEN



Stewardship

Hannah, the Good Steward

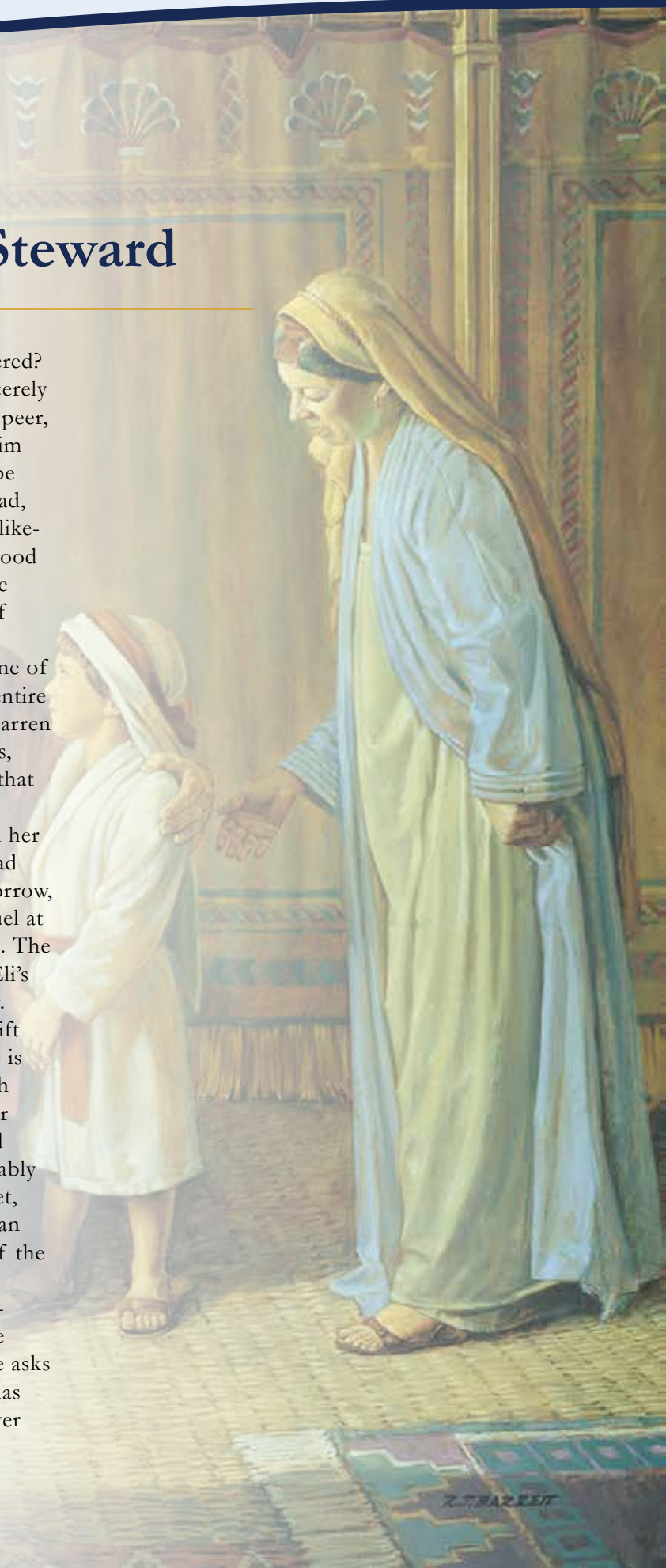
What should we do when our prayers are answered? Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead, God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her faithfulness, God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”





A Letter From Our Pastor

Using Our Time, Talent, and Treasure for the Good of Our Nation

Dear Parishioners,

As we celebrate our nation with the Fourth of July holiday to start the month, it is important for us to reflect on the connections between Catholic stewardship, discipleship, and American patriotism.

As Catholics, we are called to be good stewards of the gifts that God has given us, including our time, our talent, and our resources. This means using these gifts in ways that honor God, build up our communities, and serve our fellow human beings. In doing so, we are living out our calling as disciples of Christ.

American patriotism, in its best form, is a natural outgrowth of Catholic stewardship and discipleship. It is a recognition that we have been blessed with a great country, with a rich history and diverse culture, and with opportunities to live out our faith in the public sphere. It is a call to use our gifts and our resources to make our country a better place, to serve our fellow citizens, and to uphold the values that make our nation great.

At the same time, it is important to remember that American patriotism is not the same as blind nationalism



or jingoism. We are called to love our country, but not at the expense of our faith or our commitment to justice and the common good. We must always be willing to critique our country when it falls short of its ideals and to work for change when necessary.

As we celebrate the Fourth of July holiday, let us remember that our Catholic faith calls us to be good stewards, faithful disciples, and patriotic Americans. Let us pray for our country, for our leaders, and for all those who strive to make it a better place. And let us commit

ourselves anew to using our gifts and our resources to serve others, to work for justice, and to build up the common good.

May God bless you and your families, and may God bless the United States of America.

In Christ,

Fr. Aaron



Fires with

PROVIDES YOUTH WITH OPPORTUNITY TO



In the warmer months, the ministry builds a fire outside and teens congregate around it — hence the name, Fires with Father.

Life as a Catholic teen in this day and age is far from easy. Young people receive so many mixed messages and are under so much peer pressure that many teens today live in an overwhelming state of confusion. Yet, as Nicki Fink, the coordinator of youth ministry for the ACC, explains, our young Catholics are hungry for truth.

“With so many things going on in society, it can be confusing for the kids to know what to believe,” Nicki says. “But kids want the truth. They thirst for it!”

What’s more, kids are curious creatures. They have lots of questions, and they need a place to ask those questions on their quest to find the truth. So, Nicki and Fr. Gabriel created the Fires with Father Ministry.

“It is a ministry open to all ACC high school students,” Nicki says. “It gives them a time and a place to ask any question they have without judgment and to get the answers they so desperately crave.”



The Fires with Father gatherings have provided our youth with a great opportunity to share in fellowship.

Fires with Father, which began last May, is a ministry wherein the high schoolers meet up one Saturday a month during the school year and two Wednesdays a month in the summertime to hang out together and chat with Fr. Gabriel. In the winter months, they meet inside the open rectory in Verndale, and in the warmer months they build a fire outside and congregate around it — hence the name, Fires with Father.

“It has been an incredible ministry so far,” Nicki says. “The kids seem very comfortable asking Father questions, and he is quick to respond in a loving and informative manner. It has created such a bond between the youth and Fr. Gabriel. It has been beautiful to witness.”

What’s more, Nicki says she has witnessed bonds grow between the youth as a result of these gatherings.

“This ministry brings high school youth from all over the ACC together,” Nicki says. “I see them growing deeper in relationships

“This ministry brings high school youth from all over the ACC together. I see them growing deeper in relationships with one another as they deepen their understanding of the faith together.” — NICKI FINK

Fires with Father

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS ROOTED IN FAITH

with one another as they deepen their understanding of the faith together. I have even seen so many of them going to Confession regularly recently. It has been wonderful to witness.”

In addition to talking with Fr. Gabriel, the Fires with Father gatherings always include some sort of snack — typically s’mores by the fire — and a drink as well as time for fellowship and fun for the teens. If time permits, the volleyball net or a board game is set up, and the kids just hang out together.

“Bonds between the teens are so important for them,” Nicki says. “They need one another as they strive to live their faith today. So we try to make sure they have time for fellowship

as well. And it has worked out great.”

Nicki is quick to point out that, as wonderfully as this ministry has served the teens of our parishes, it is not simply the work of her and Fr. Gabriel that has made that possible.

“Many of our parishioners have helped make this happen,” Nicki says. “We’ve had parishioners donate a fire pit and others have built benches for us.”

It is a work of the parishes, out of love for our teens and eagerness for them to grow in their faith. We are so excited to see this ministry continue to grow and fruitfully serve the teens for years to come!

If your teen is interested in attending the next Fires with Father event, please refer to the bulletin for the next event’s date.

Widows and Widowers Social *continued from front cover*

long it’s been, are invited. The group starts with a prayer and has time for sharing. Most of the time is spent in fellowship — playing cards, talking, and sharing coffee and a snack. The group also has an informal gathering on the second Tuesday of the month at a local restaurant for brunch.

“I want to make sure we have time to visit so it’s not all just talking about our grief journeys,” Bonita says.

The group has been meeting for about a year, and Bonita knows she shares the same sentiments with the other group members. It’s a great time to be together in friendship and fellowship.

“I look forward to these gatherings so much,” she says.

Bonita is glad to have a few members who are further into their grief journey.

“They give us hope as we go through our grief,” she says. “It’s nice to be able to share with people who understand and are going through the same thing. They know what you are talking about.”

This past Valentine’s Day, the group got together for a potluck — Bonita recognized members likely had no one they could spend the holiday with.

All widows and widowers are welcome, no matter their faith background.

“A lot of people say it’s been a big support,” Bonita says. “They thank me all the time for what I do.”

If you are a widow or widower, you are welcome to attend both monthly gatherings of this group. Contact Bonita Hansen at 218-894-2445 for more information.



Drawing From the Traditions of Spirituality in Our Catholic Church

If you knew that the person who loves you most in the world was longing to spend some time with you, would you want to meet with them? What if this person was also the only one capable of saving your soul for all eternity, not to mention blessing you abundantly on earth?

It would seem ridiculous to say “no” to getting to know them just a little better, right?

That being said, you may wonder how you can best go about getting to know this particular person. To do just that, as Catholics, it is important that we seek out and read things from our Catholic Christian tradition — immersing ourselves in the spiritual works of those who have found Christ in a very deep way in accordance with the Church.

Indeed, there are many great saints who have flowered out of the community of believers, and we can turn to them to get to know God better.

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has been profoundly touched, enriched and enlightened by spiritual masters whose works are powerful enough to convert souls. It is also important to recognize that the spiritual traditions in the Church express many of the same ideas but in different ways, bearing witness to the ineffable, mosaic-like beauty of Catholicism.

St. Benedict began the first formal monastic tradition in the western Catholic Church, basing it on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. To this day, Benedictine spirituality is

centered around the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, simplicity and the appreciation of the Holy Eucharist.

The Franciscan spiritual tradition began with St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. These saints brought about the Counter-Reformation that still marks the Church with splendor today. St. Francis is widely known for his Gospel-centered living, love of poverty, devotion to Christ Crucified, and mercy for all men and creatures. *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Bonaventure, as well as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* both help one to learn more about this magnificent saint.

Similar to St. Francis, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila also sparked a critical reformation within the Carmelite Order, which later influenced the entire Church in a positive way. Carmelite spirituality is a desert spirituality, which bases itself on silence, deep contemplative prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, outstanding penance, and various traditional Catholic devotions. *The Story of a Soul*, which is the autobiography of renowned Carmelite St. Therese of Lisieux, the *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, and the works of St. John of the Cross all capture the essence of Carmelite spirituality.

Furthermore, Salesian spirituality stems from the great life and work of St. Francis de Sales. *The Introduction to the Devout Life* is a fantastic primer for those desiring to enter more profoundly into a life of union with Christ.

Ignatian spirituality is known for educating people on the discernment of spirits. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, as well as *The Discernment of Spirits* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher are excellent resources for learning more about this powerful spiritual tradition.

Last but not least, *The Fulfillment of All Desire* by Ralph Martin is modern-day spiritual work that can help those who are seeking Christ, to find Him.

The rich variety of spiritual traditions we have in the Catholic Church are an indication of how diverse our Church is. There are so many different ways of following Christ and praying — and to do so, we can draw from the spiritual “greats.” But of course, we must always pray in the way that God is leading us, in a way that we can truly encounter God in conversation.

GETTING TO KNOW ST. HUBERT PARISHIONERS

Mark and Mary Houle

“We Have Both Always Wanted to Serve Our Lord”

For Mark and Mary Houle, who have been parishioners at St. Hubert for almost 40 years, service is an essential component of their faith.

“We have both always wanted to serve our Lord,” Mary says. “We feel that is what He called us to do. We both feel a strong sense of peace when helping and doing things at church.”

Born in Hawaii, Mark was the oldest of 11 children. He attended Catholic school and after high school graduation, he joined the U.S. Coast Guard. While stationed in Duluth, Minn., he met Mary. He completed his time in the military while in Duluth, attended college at the University of Minnesota Duluth and Bemidji State University, and went on to teach fifth grade for 30 years. Since retiring, Mark continues to teach part-time.

Mary also comes from a large Catholic family, as the 14th child in the family. She grew up on a farm near Grand Rapids. She recalls her parents being devout in their faith despite some challenges along the way. Mary is a registered nurse, having practiced since 1975. She retired in 2018 from Tri-County Hospital in Wadena but continues to work at an assisted living facility in Sebeka.

Mark and Mary moved to the community in 1985, which is when they joined St. Hubert.

“By simply joining, the women fall into a Circle,” Mary says. “That Circle sort of guided me along by a personal drop-in visit and calls to ask for funeral food items, et cetera. The chairperson became my resource for all questions pertaining to church.”

Mark joined the Holy Name Society and got involved in Religious Education, which he taught for almost 15 years, primarily serving in the Confirmation classes.

“We were thus engrained into the faith community,” Mary says.

Through the years, Mary has been involved as a Circle member, as co-chair for Circle 4, and as a member of the Prayer Blanket Ministry, Altar Cloth Care, and the Quilting Group.

“I love to be involved,” Mary says. “I enjoy



Mark and Mary Houle

volunteering. My conscience would needle me if I didn't help out in any way I could. Additionally, when we were younger, busy with kids during their varying ages, there were times we could not give of our time. Now we have flexibility to help. I try to keep the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy in mind at all times.”

In addition to his involvement with Religious Education and the Holy Name Society, Mark has been involved in the Usher Ministry and has served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

“I feel this helps me be a better husband, father, grandfather — but most notably, a better servant of the Lord,” he says.

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MARY
Mother of the Church
AREA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY

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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

Mark and Mary Houle *continued from page 7*

The Houles say St. Hubert Parish has been a big part of raising their three children. They have formed many friendships on which they have relied several times over the years. Their children also participated in parish activities growing up, and continue to serve the church as involved Catholics in their own parishes.

In daily life, Mark and Mary live out their faith through prayer and service. They pray chaplets and rosaries, take time for personal prayer, listen to Fr. Mike Schmitz's Bible in a Year podcast, and enjoy theological discussion.

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Mark Houle



Mary Houle