

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Mary Bachmeier: Embracing God's Gift of Music

When Mary Bachmeier was about 14, the wonder of God's gift of music captured her heart, and so many years later, she continues to be deeply inspired by it.

"I've been involved in music with the church since I was about 14," she says. "I started out playing the organ at St. Mary's Catholic Church in New England, and let me tell you, it was some pretty bad organ playing! I taught myself how to play guitar in high school and started singing and playing with the nuns at weekly Mass on Fridays. I played and sang at liturgies at the University of Mary and continued to share my musical talents as an adult, as well. It's just a way of life now."

Currently, Mary is in a small group at Ascension that plays for Mass once or twice a month throughout the year. In the past, Mary has also been an active member in the adult choir, Raising Praise.

"I get the pleasure of doing music with my sister, Jeanne Jankowski, who plays the piano, as well as with my good friend, Brent Geiss," Mary says. "My daughter, Jami, joins us too on occasion, as does my other daughter, Shelby, when she's home."



The Bachmeier family

In fact, Mary finds that sharing her musical talents gives her a way to live out the stewardship vision.

"My favorite way to pray, of course, is through song," Mary says. "Stewardship is all about giving back to God and the church your time, talent, and treasure."

Further, Mary started teaching Faith Formation years ago, when her two oldest children were just starting out in the program.

"I felt it was only fair to volunteer when Jami started going to Faith Formation classes as a first-grader," Mary says. "Now she's a seventh-grader, and I'm still teaching her class. I love working with kids, and there's always a need at our church for catechists, so I volunteer."

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DECEMBER 2017

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Being a Good Christmas Steward

The Christmas season is fast approaching. We have already made our gift lists, and perhaps even checked them twice. First on the list is family, followed by friends, our children's teachers and coaches, and maybe even the mailman. Christmas inspires us to give our family and friends gifts of love and appreciation, in gratitude towards all they do for us during the year. The very idea of holiday gift giving – a display of love and gratefulness to those who have touched our lives – is parallel to the concept of stewardship. When we give to God, we are effectively saying “thanks” for all He has done for us.

Think of all God has done for you this year. How have His loving arms embraced you? Maybe He has answered a special prayer intention. Maybe He has created a job opportunity for an unemployed loved one. He may have helped safely bring a new baby into the family, or instilled peace during a particularly difficult time. God's blessings are countless, and the abundant gifts He bestows upon us are given freely out of incomprehensible love – despite our unworthiness.

Think of the ways you respond to God's bountiful blessings. How do you choose to show Him your thankfulness? As we prepare for the coming of Christ

during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan – but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.

The very first name on the list – above our spouse, children, relatives, and friends – should be God's name. As disciples of Christ, we are called to give God our “first fruits,” not our leftovers. We should joyfully place God first on our gift-giving lists, not out of guilt or as an afterthought, but out of love and appreciation.

Stewardship allows us to tangibly give a Christmas gift to God through our time, talent, and treasure. We give God gifts of time through prayer, such as spending time before the Blessed Sacrament or praying the Rosary. We can give our talents to God by way of simple charitable actions, such as bringing a meal to a hard-pressed neighbor, or watching a young mother's children so that she is able to prepare for her own family's Christmas celebration. And as for treasure, we can give God a portion of our income this Christmas by dropping an extra dollar in the collection basket. Whatever choices you make this season, make the decision to be a good Christmas steward.



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A Letter from Our Pastor

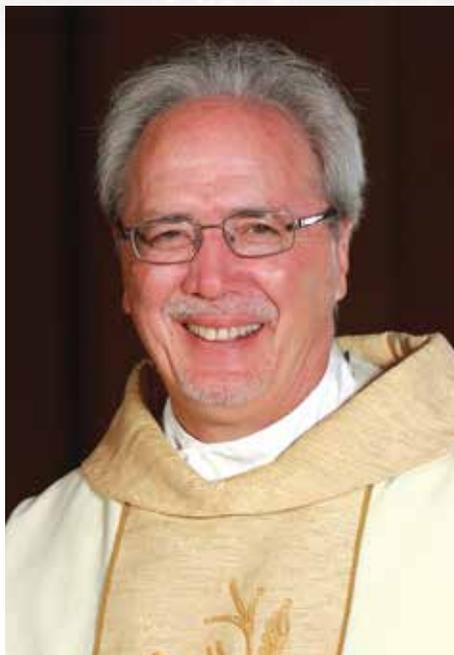
Reflections at the End of the Year

Dear Parishioners,

It seems as if we just finished Lent and Easter, and here we are at Advent and Christmas. To say this is a busy month for many is an understatement. Although December is a month of love, it can also be a difficult month for some. For those with families, it may be a month of travel as people rush to be united with loved ones, sometimes after a long period of separation.

There is no shortage of reminders as to what time of year this is. However, for us as Catholics, we may need to refocus to see where we are in our faith lives. Were you aware that for us, December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception? In that regard, we celebrate a Holy Day of Obligation on Friday, Dec. 8. Advent begins on Dec. 3, and you may notice that we begin to wear purple as a sign of Advent. That color changes to white or gold beginning at Christmas.

Of course, this is also the last month of the regular calendar year, which may add additional tasks to our own schedules as we finalize things for the end of the year. However, there are many opportunities for us during this month to share, to pray and to celebrate in a Christian way, and I would encourage you to make an effort to be part of these. Right here in our parish, much is happening along



those lines, and a careful reading of the bulletin will alert you to the “when, where and what” of these upcoming opportunities.

As I indicated earlier, this can also be a difficult time for some. In the midst of our own celebrations and joy, we need to be aware of that reality and of those living with it. This is a time to reach out, and it is a time to show love.

This December, let our minds be focused on Christ, Who will be born for us at Christmas, and for Whose coming we must always be prepared throughout the year. This is a time to thank God and to pray. It is a time to reach out to love and live peacefully with one another. We need to remember that life continues

after December, in spite of everything we feel we need to get done.

My prayers and blessings go out to each of you and your families. May God continue to watch over you. May the year 2017 end well for all of us!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor

Ladies of Ascension Targeted



This array of desserts and salads is prepared by the Ladies of Ascension for a funeral luncheon.



Here, four members weigh and package nuts.

With the New Year approaching, the Ladies of Ascension are focusing on making some important parish kitchen improvements.

"We would like to make improvements such as changing the cabinets, installing an icemaker, a coffee station, and possibly a new stove," says Rita Ritter, President. "We are working with the Knights of Columbus to make these improvements. We'll probably hold a breakfast with home-baked goodies."

Meanwhile the Ladies of Ascension are selling a variety of mixed nuts this month. And don't miss the semiannual bake sale slated for Dec. 9 and 10 in the church foyer after all the weekend Masses.

"It's a major event, and we really have wonderful participation by the Ladies of Ascension," Rita says. "Our parishioners look forward to shopping for their Christmas goodies. The nut sales will continue at that time, too."

The funds raised by the bake sale in

December and in the eSpring, are targeted for projects in the parish. In the past, the group has been able to buy dishes, coffee carafes and urns, water pitchers, and bread baskets for the kitchen. All women of our parish are considered members of the Ladies of Ascension, and in October, a Ladies of Ascension flyer is inserted in our Sunday bulletin inviting parish women to pay the \$5 annual dues that helps supplement the group's treasury.

The meetings are held monthly on the second Wednesday of the month, from September through May, in the Community Room. The meetings begin at 8:30 a.m. after the daily Mass.

Working with Rita are Judy Ness, Vice President, and Cathy Hruby, Secretary.

The Ladies of Ascension are active in a variety of ways that are beneficial to our parish. They take care of the cleaning of the albs and they provide pink and blue blankets to the newly baptized babies in the parish, as well



Meat Kitchen Improvements

as provide the white baptismal garments.

“We continue to coordinate funeral lunches for our parish, also,” Rita says. “Most recently, on Nov. 2, we did a light reception after the Remembrance Mass, serving a meat and cheese trays and apple cider.”

During the Knights’ fish fries on the Fridays in Lent, the Ladies of Ascension provide the

desserts. “The members really look forward to doing that,” Rita says.

“It’s a wonderful bonding with other parishioners,” Rita says. “It’s the giving part of stewardship — that and using your talents. It’s a small community of talented people who have a real kinship with each other, and who want to make good things happen for our parish.”

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— Rita Ritter, President

Any woman who is interested in taking part in the Ladies of Ascension and who has questions, may contact Rita Ritter at 701-223-3606. “I’d be happy to visit with them!” Rita says.

Mary Bachmeier *continued from front cover*

“When I help out at the parish, I feel more involved, like I am really part of something,” she continues. “The parish is like a family, and it only works if we all work together. I would encourage people to be active at church, because you get to know more people that way, and feel more like you belong in the community, which is always a good feeling. It may draw you closer to God, too! Being involved at Ascension has made my faith stronger.”

Mary isn’t the only one in their

family practicing stewardship. Her husband, Jay, has been on the Parish Council for two consecutive terms for a total of six years. Jami, their youngest daughter, is also an altar server.

Most importantly, Mary also lives out the call to stewardship through the vocation of married life. She and her husband, Jay, have three daughters.

Their oldest daughter, Shelby, is a special education teacher at Liberty Middle School in West Fargo. Sara, their next oldest daughter, is a senior

at North Dakota State University, earning a degree in biology with an emphasis in aquatics and fisheries. Their youngest, Jami, is a seventh-grader at Wachter Middle School.

Mary also works as an instructional aide at Solheim Elementary School, while Jay is a Manager of Safety and Rules for a shortline railroad company.

At the turn of the New Year, let us keep the Bachmeier family in our prayers, as well as all of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

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Focusing Our Hearts Heavenward: *The Origin and Beauty of the Nativity Scene*

With all the commercialism surrounding Christmastime, it's far too easy for us to lose sight of the true reason behind the season. Overwhelmed by our endless to-do lists and the hustle and bustle of last-minute shopping, our focus quickly shifts away from the Christ Child's birth. And yet, hidden amongst the holly wreaths and garlands, the Christmas Nativity remains a tangible reminder of the Incarnation, pulling us back into time for a moment as we reflect upon the incredible gift of Christ's birth.

Interestingly, it was circumstances much like our own today which first led St. Francis of Assisi to recreate the Nativity scene nearly 800 years ago. Frustrated with the growing materialism and greed that seemed to pervade 13th century Italy, St. Francis wanted a way to visually remind people of Christ's humble beginnings — to show them that Christmas isn't about pomp and circumstance or material goods, but rather about unselfish love. Describing the idea to his friend Giovanni, St. Francis wrote, "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger, and how the ox and ass stood by."

And so St. Francis' idea took form on Christmas Eve in 1223. This original Nativity scene was a living one, even including an actual ox and ass. Villagers were deeply moved by the silent display of humble beauty, and the Nativity tradition soon spread



throughout Italy and surrounding Europe. It is a tradition that remains today in nearly every Christian church and in many homes. In fact, it's hard to imagine Christmas without a Nativity scene somewhere.

Coming in various sizes and styles, each Nativity replica continues to focus our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas — to help us remember that Christmas isn't about the amount of gifts under the tree or the festive decorations, but rather about celebrating Christ's birth. Many families have a tradition

of hiding the Infant Jesus, only placing Him in the crib on Christmas morning. This helps build anticipation during the Advent season as we anxiously await the Divine's birth. Others go a step further, actually wrapping up the Christ Child to be opened as the very first gift of Christmas.

Yet, whatever your family's particular traditions, we hope that the Christmas Nativity continues to draw your heart heavenward this Christmas season — to center us all on the greatest gift ever given, our Incarnate Lord.



Christmas Eve Dinner Continuing Legacy of Stewardship for Parish Families

This Christmas Eve, while people all over the world celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, parishioners at Ascension will join together to celebrate His life in an active way. The Christmas Eve Dinner is now in its 11th year at our parish. In the spirit of Christ's love for others, the church opens its doors to members of our community who might not have anywhere else to spend the holiday evening.

"The dinner is an awesome opportunity that Ascension has taken on to serve people in our community that are potentially alone on Christmas Eve, or they're living in a homeless shelter or are underserved people who maybe can't afford a Christmas dinner," says Heather Leier, a parishioner who volunteers at the dinner with her husband, Neal, and their children.

This year's dinner will take place in the Community Room from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. In addition to a delicious meal, those who attend are also treated to gifts, toiletries and personal care items, music, and a visit from Santa Claus. In all, the parish expects to feed about 425 people.

"It's a good opportunity to help the community out," Neal says. "All the people that show up get a gift just for coming. The kids get a toy and they can see Santa Claus. It's a cool experience."

Heather says the family initially became involved as a way to spend time volunteering with their adult children.

"It used to be that on Christmas Eve, Neal's family would get together and after his mom passed away, his dad went into the nursing home and suddenly we didn't have plans," she explains. "It filled a void in our lives as well as giving us a way to give back to the community."

In a similar way, the Bushaw family has also made the dinner a yearly family event. Volunteering with their three now-grown children, Jill and Brad Bushaw enjoy helping staff the cafeteria-style serving line as they continue a tradition Brad's family began when he was young.

"Our church always had a Christmas Eve dinner, and as early as I remember, we went to the dinner," he says of his family's involvement at the parish he attended growing up. "We'd give people rides that couldn't get there. We'd serve food and they'd have live music. In our history, we were kind of used to doing that on Christmas Eve."

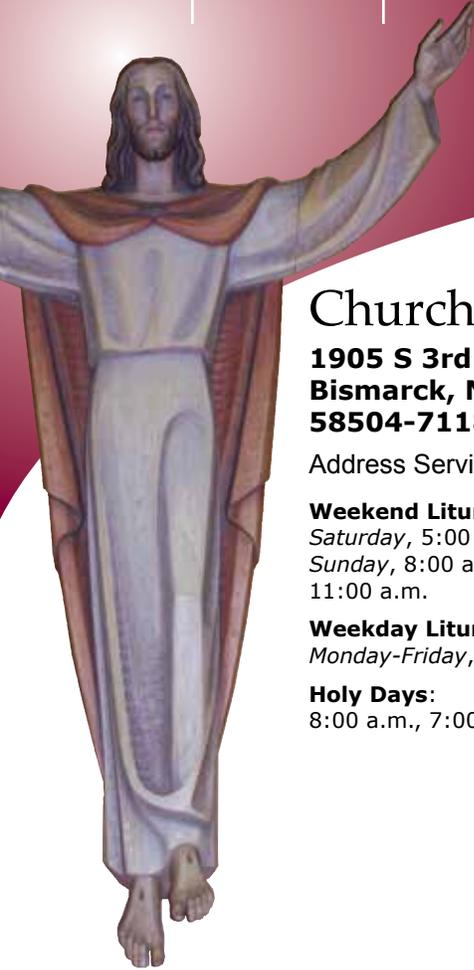
"It's Christmas to us," Jill adds. "We've worked it every year but one. We were looking for something like this for our family to do."

"It's really a rewarding thing, I think, to be able to give of your time to people that don't have what you have or have a family to be with," Heather says. "It's a rewarding experience when you're able to give back to the community that you live in and to help people. Christmas Eve is busy and it's hard to work it in, but it's the coming together of our church community to get these people fed in an orderly fashion. Our kids have experienced the most gracious people and it's a learning experience, as well. It's eye-opening for them in learning that other people have other struggles and aren't in the same place as we are."



Brad and Jill Bushaw family plating up our delicious Christmas Eve turkey dinner.

If you would like more information on the Christmas Eve Dinner, please contact the parish office at 701-223-3606.



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Weekend Liturgy

Saturday, 5:00 p.m.

*Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m.,
11:00 a.m.*

Weekday Liturgy:

Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m.

Holy Days:

8:00 a.m., 7:00 p.m.

Advent and Christmas Schedule



Friday, Dec. 8 — Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Mass Times, 8 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 13 — Caroling, Cookies and Cocoa for Faith Formation; 4 p.m., 5:30 p.m., and 7 p.m. in Community Room

Saturday, Dec. 16 — Wrapping gifts and preparing treat bags for Christmas Eve Dinner, 10-11:30 a.m. in Community Room

Tuesday, Dec. 19 — Advent Penance Service, 7 p.m. in Church

Tuesday, Dec. 20 — Advent Penance Service, 7 p.m. at Cathedral

Tuesday, Dec. 21 — Advent Penance Service, 7 p.m. at St. Mary's

Tuesday, Dec. 22 — Advent Penance Service, 7 p.m. at Corpus Christi

Friday, Dec. 22 — Christmas Eve Dinner Set-up, 7 p.m. in Community Room

Sunday, Dec. 24 — Christmas Eve Dinner, 5-7 p.m. in Community Room

Mass Schedule

Sunday, Dec. 24 — 4 p.m., 10 p.m. (Christmas Vigil and Midnight Mass)

Monday, Dec. 25 — 9:30 a.m., 11 a.m. (Christmas Mass During the Day)

Sunday, Dec. 31 — 4 p.m. (Solemnity Mary, Mother of God)

Monday, Jan. 1 — 9:30 a.m. (Solemnity Mary, Mother of God)

Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God's gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.