

A Family That Serves Together: Meet the Schons

If you attend Church of the Ascension regularly, chances are good that at one time or another, you have been greeted by the smiling faces of the Schon family! Deb and Troy Schon and their youngest two children, Alex and Joseph, enjoy the opportunity to connect with other parishioners by serving with Ascension's Hospitality Ministry — though that is certainly not all they do for our parish!

For these parents and their sons, pitching in to help out around the parish and school is truly a family affair.

"When the kids were really little, we participated in activities that would keep them busy," Deb recalls. "Then, as they got older, other ministries got a little easier for us. Now, we sit down with them each year and they have to pick one thing to do to help. They can choose what they enjoy doing, and this year they both chose two things they like — the Hospitality Ministry and Altar Serving."

With their sons Alex, 17, and Joseph, 15, currently attending St. Mary's Central High School — their oldest two children, Samantha and Nick, are both in their 20s — Deb and Troy have become involved with the School Carnival. The couple acts as



Deb and Troy Schon with their children — (from left) Joseph, Samantha, Nicholas, and Alexander

a representative of the parish at the event by coordinating Ascension's Midway booths and recruiting parish volunteers to help with the carnival.

The Schons always have a great time helping with the School Carnival and are thankful for the many fellowship opportunities it offers them.

"This is our third year doing it," Deb says. "Our son, Alex, started school at St. Mary's that year, and our friends were all involved with it, so they got us involved. It's a lot of work, but it's also a lot of fun! It's a really good way for parishioners to volunteer with their families. And in the volunteering we do, we really meet a lot of people that we wouldn't have otherwise met."

In addition to supporting our local Catholic high school, Deb and Troy also

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Stewardship

Becoming Fishers of Men

Whether you hold a high-profile position, such as parish council president, or have more of a behind-the-scenes role as a coordinator of a parish ministry, God has called you – as a parish leader – to help build His Church.

This challenge is just as important as the call of any other Catholic leader, including the earliest disciples.

When Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, He urged a group of fishermen, “Come follow me.” Jesus promised if they laid down their nets and followed Him, He would make them fishers of men. These men were among His original disciples, and they knew Christ’s call was so important that they left their secular occupation to follow Him.

Just as He did with the fishermen, Jesus calls each of us today. He is not necessarily asking us to leave our secular careers, but He *is* asking us to put Him first in our lives and to share His message of love with others.

God truly wants us to serve Him and to build His Church through the secular occupations we have chosen. It is through the Church that new disciples are born, and it is in the Church that disciples continue to mature. Forming disciples of Christ is the most important work that can be done on earth, and each of us has been called to play an active role in this work.

So, how do we go about building the Church? Where do we find the plans?

Some people mistakenly think that building the Church – in particular, building our own parish or diocese – is no different than building a successful

business. Indeed, the purpose of building the Church is to change hearts – a goal that only God can accomplish.

Secular society has not prepared us for this work. However, the Holy Spirit – sometimes referred to as the “Architect of the Church” – has the plan. In order to implement this plan, we must become good listeners. We must open ourselves to the workings of the Holy Spirit as He transforms us and guides us to carry out God’s work and to serve as His instruments on earth, building the Church together with Him.

This is where spiritual exercises, such as retreats, come into play. A retreat offers the individual an opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord, allowing God to draw the person deeper into the mystery of who He is, who we are and what He is doing in our lives. Stewardship retreats can offer parish leaders the opportunity each year to spend time with the Lord as He directs them in the ways of discipleship. As leaders, we must take time to meditate on the Scriptures and allow Jesus to open up His Word to us. Then, as we grow deeper in our understanding of what God wants of us, we can exclaim, just as the first disciples did on the road to Emmaus, “Our hearts are burning within us” (Lk 24:32).

God has placed an extremely important call on the lives of all parish leaders, no matter how big or small the role. It is vital to understand how we, as parish leaders, can best answer His call. What, in particular, is the Lord calling each one of us to do? He most likely is not asking us to drop our nets, but to pick them up and become “fishers of men.” We must discern how we can most effectively cast our nets for Him.



A Letter from Our Pastor

Resolve to Give Back to God in 2018

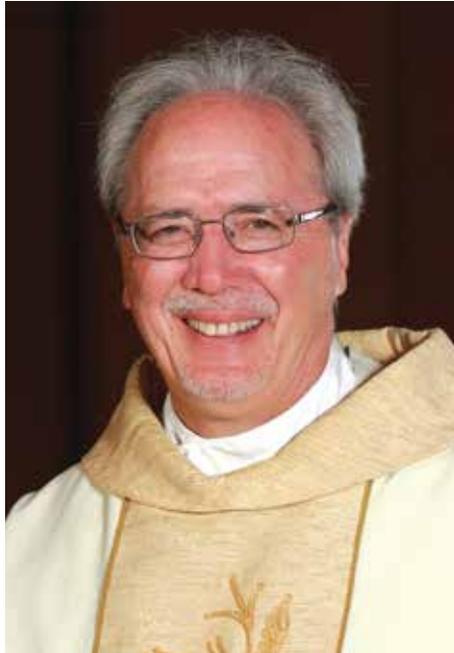
Dear Parishioners,

Another new year — 2018! There was a time in my life when this date (and others) seemed so far in the future. It is amazing how those dates start to pile up and stream by, isn't it? I have reached a point where measuring one's life by the years and dates is not as significant as many other things.

I recall reading somewhere, "The world around us asks, 'What does a person own?' But God asks, 'How does a person use what he or she has been given?'" This month of January is one filled with reminders of holiness — the official end of the Christmas season; the Epiphany of our Lord; the Baptism of the Lord; and the return to Ordinary Time, which, as we know, is not "ordinary" at all.

At Epiphany we hear, "Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts" (Matthew 2:11), a reference to the Magi and their visit to the Christ Child. The image of the Magi kneeling before the infant Jesus and opening their gifts for Him is one we should all try to follow. Each of us is called to open our gifts before Jesus and offer Him what He needs. I heard a suggestion once that if you have a problem with this thought, you should perhaps keep one of the Magi from your Christmas Nativity set and place it on your desk as a reminder.

During the Baptism of the Lord, God makes it clear when He proclaims from the Heavens, "You are my



beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). God has given us the greatest gift He could give. He gave His only Son. When we think about the enormity of that gift of Jesus sent to save us, in addition to all the other blessings which God has entrusted to us, it is very humbling. God has given us so much. What do we give in return?

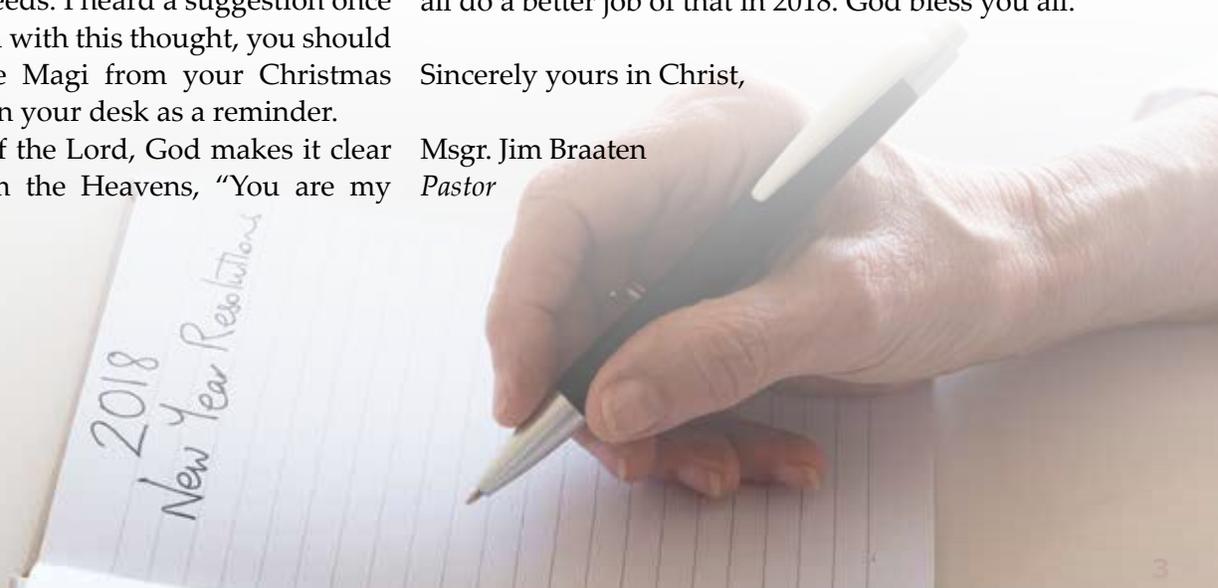
Making resolutions is common at this time of year. We will also hear this month about how Jesus called the first apostles. The Lord calls us as well to follow Him. Let us resolve to try to do that better — all of us. That does not mean we have to leave our work and our families behind, but we do need to put our service to Jesus. That

should be our top resolution.

In *The Theology of the Hammer*, Habitat for Humanity co-founder Millard Fuller wrote, "The only truly safe investment one can make in life is what is given away." First and foremost, God wants us. That should be our real resolution — to give ourselves to the Lord. May we all do a better job of that in 2018. God bless you all.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor





THE FIRST STEP INTO THE CHURCH: *Th*

In reflecting upon the Sacrament of Baptism, parishioner Sharon O'Reilly recalls a powerful story.

"Pope John Paul II was once approached by a reporter," she says. "The reporter said, 'You're considered by many to be the most respected, maybe the most powerful man in the world. You lead the largest Christian denomination, you've changed the minds of world leaders, and you're often the one person people have most wanted to meet. What is the most important thing you've ever done?' Pope John Paul II replied, 'I was baptized.'"

The Sacrament of Baptism is the foundation of a life of faith, the first step in the journey towards spending eternity with God, in heaven. And while it can be received in a number of different situations, including the Baptism of older children or adults, the most common form of Baptism in the Catholic Church takes place when a child is an infant. Sharon, who recently moved to the

area, and joined Church of the Ascension, serves as part of our Baptism Ministry, as one of the teachers who helps Deacon Finneman prepare parents planning to have their child baptized.

"We work with families who are baptizing a child in the Catholic Church for the first time," Sharon says. "I teach a class for the parents to give them a short outline on what the Catholic Church teaches about the Sacrament of Baptism."

Sharon hopes to help parents understand the beauty of the sacrament, including the significance of the symbols used within the Rite of Baptism.

"The oil of catechumens signifies a new candidate is entering into the Church and the Kingdom of God," Sharon says. "Water is blessed and symbolizes life and the cleansing of sin, Original Sin. Sacred chrism is consecrated by the bishop, and signifies that the child is filled with the Holy Spirit. The white garment is a symbol of purity and putting on Christ and the baptismal candle

BAPTISM



The Sacrament of Baptism

symbolizes enlightenment and is a reminder to us that we walk in the light of Christ.

"In the Baptismal ceremony, the parents are committing to carry that light of faith forward for their children and help them grow in their relationship with God and the Catholic Church," she adds.

She also reminds people of the Scriptural basis of all the sacraments, including Baptism.

"Jesus was baptized and He also taught that we need to be baptized," Sharon says. "We need the grace of the Holy Spirit to be cleansed of our sins and enter into the family of God."

Learning about the traditions that different families hold, in order to celebrate and commemorate their children's Baptisms has been one of Sharon's favorite parts of sharing in this ministry.

"A lot of families are framing the baptismal certificates and keeping the baptismal candle," Sharon says. "So every year on their child's baptismal date, they bring out the certificate and the candle, to mark when the child was cleansed of original sin and entered the family of God and was blessed by the Holy Spirit. It drives home the importance, especially of that very first sacrament.

"By annually celebrating, it teaches the children how important the sacraments are in their lives," she adds. "When the families are engaging in this process, they realize what a blessing the sacraments are, not just to the child but to the whole family, helping them to grow stronger in their faith life."

For all who have been baptized, whether last year or many decades ago, Sharon wants to encourage an embracing of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

"The sacraments are the place where heaven connects to earth," she says. "With every sacrament, there's the

grace of the Holy Spirit, that's what connects us to God. When we engage in the Sacrament, we are being touched by God. Baptism opens the door to a greater life of faith."

She also hopes that parents, whether preparing to have their first child baptized, or with older ones, will find ways to emphasize and share with their children the significance and value of this sacrament.

"I want them to come away with the importance of the sacraments, Baptism especially," she says. "It's the first one that Jesus teaches about. I hope parents understand how important the sacraments are in terms of helping their children to grow in the faith, because the more they participate in and foster that, then the more the family grows in the faith. Baptism could be something that's very perfunctory, or it could be something that's really sacred and really beautiful."

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— Sharon O'Reilly

For more information on beginning the process of having your child baptized, or if you are interested in learning more about receiving this First Sacrament of Initiation into the Catholic Church, please contact the parish office at 701-223-3606.



Sharing **CHRISTMAS**

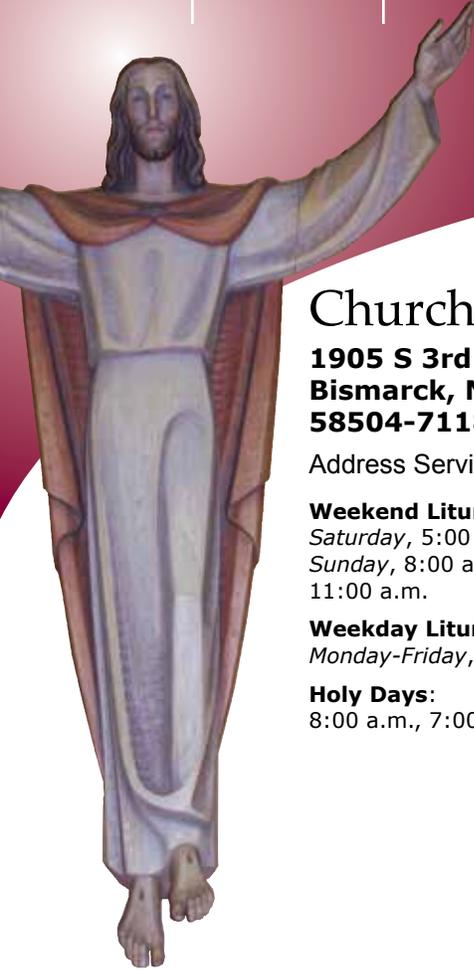
This December, our Faith Formation students enjoyed their Christmas party. In addition, we hosted the Christmas Eve Dinner, and celebrated the Christmas liturgy. We hope all Ascension parishioners had a wonderful Christmas, and that you have a very happy New Year!





CELEBRATIONS Together





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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.

Meet the Schons

continued from front cover

help out with the faith formation of our eighth-graders here at Ascension by serving as catechists for the Confirmation classes. The couple is always inspired by the eagerness to learn demonstrated by the students in the CCD classes.

Troy, who came to the Catholic faith from a Lutheran upbringing, finds that teaching the classes has strengthened his own faith life, as well.

"I definitely think it has deepened my faith, just being involved and thinking about my faith more when I do it," he affirms. "On a Wednesday night before helping with CCD, I'd just be sitting at home — now, it's another day that I spend really thinking a lot about God."

Deb also serves as a Eucharistic Minister during Mass and for the homebound. For her, service to God and His people is a way of life learned at a young age. She grew up attending Ascension with her parents, who have always been involved in parish life. So when she and Troy made the

move back to Bismarck from Mandan eight years ago, they joined Ascension and jumped into church life themselves.

The Schons view their family's involvement in parish life as a natural part of belonging to a larger church "family" that comes together and pitches in for the shared benefit of all its members.

"Everything we have done has involved our kids, and that's why we started — because it is time spent with our family," Deb explains. "You're going to church anyhow, so it's not hard to get more involved. If everyone helps out, it feels manageable and everyone is happy to be doing it."

"It's just like being a part of a family," she continues. "In my family, everyone helps out with dishes or something, and so with this family, everyone can do something, as well. You can help out in a way that you enjoy."

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.