

## Receiving the Gift of Jesus: The Sacrament of the Eucharist

**I**t is referred to as the “source and summit” of our faith and is the gift that nourishes our belief as Catholics.

It is the Eucharist.

In the Eucharist, Holy Communion, we are invited to receive our Lord, truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. Our eternal God humbles Himself to be united with us, in this sacrament. Unfortunately, however, for many of us, it is a gift that can easily be taken for granted, as we have the opportunity to receive Jesus, each Sunday, or even more often, at Mass.

However, if you are looking for inspiration in deepening your appreciation of the Eucharist, perhaps you need not look any further than our second-grade students.

Each year, our second-graders prepare to receive the gift of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the first time, and their excitement is contagious. The year-long formation program, which also includes preparing children for the Sacrament of First Reconciliation, prioritizes parents’ involvement in their children’s faith. They learn about topics such as the Mass, prayer and the True Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist — both at home and together with others in the parish.

“As it is the role of parents to educate their children in the faith, the Faith Formation program strives to support parents with resources and experiences for parents to teach their children about the Holy Eucharist,” explains Jessica Mattson, our Director of Faith Formation. “It is also a hope of the program to inspire parents to be more devoted to the Eucharist by challenging them to teach it to their children.”



*We can often draw inspiration from the joy and excitement of our second-graders as they receive our Lord in the Eucharist for the first time.*

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Vacation Bible School

**MAY 2018**

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# Receiving the Gift of Jesus continued from front cover

First Communion this year was celebrated on April 14. Jessica encourages all parishioners to pray for the children who received the sacrament for the first time, as well as their families, that they would continue to grow in their devotion to the Eucharist.

“We pray that every child who receives the Holy Eucharist for the first time will experience God’s intense love for them,” she says. “We hope and pray that the preparation experience will lay the foundation for a future life centered on the Holy Eucharist and provide nourishment for the students to live a holy life on earth that will merit them a place at the heavenly banquet for eternity. We pray that with every reception of Jesus in Holy Communion, they become more aware in their hearts of His love for them.”

Jessica hopes that all parishioners, young and not so young, will seek to deepen their relationship with God, in the Eucharist.

“In my own life, my love for the Eucharist did not happen overnight,” Jessica says. “My love for the Eucharist has developed in a gradual way — much like a human friendship. There are times in my life when I really ‘feel’ in love with Jesus, and other times that I would characterize as dry times, when the feelings do not accompany my action of receiving Jesus and praying with Him in the Blessed Sacrament. I have read that very holy people rejoice more in the times of dryness than in the times of ‘feel good,’ as it is then that Jesus really sees how committed we are to Him.

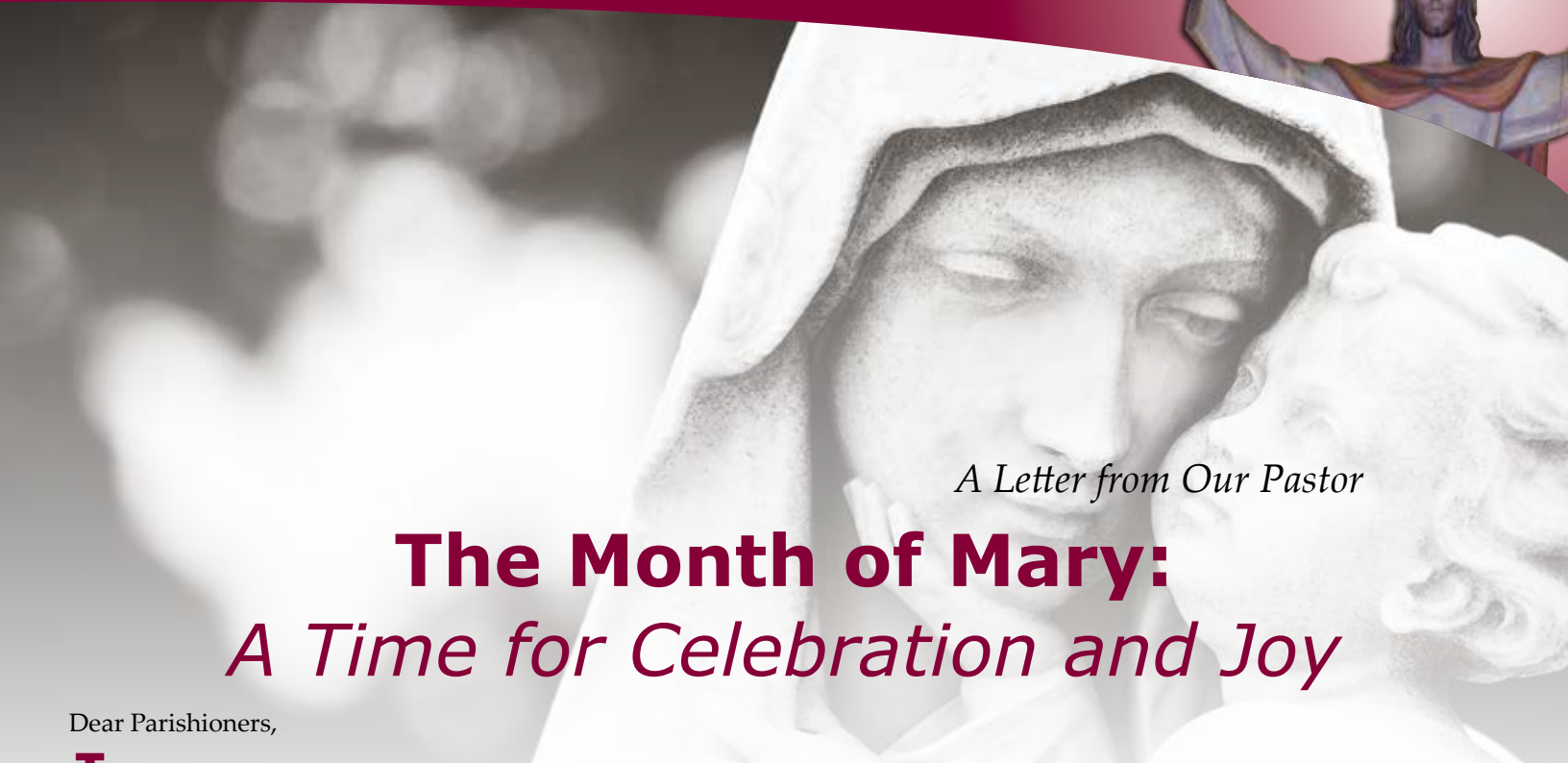
“I would propose that each one of us take a few minutes to reflect on how prepared we are to receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to set a goal for how we can be more devoted to Him in this Sacrament,” she adds.

“We pray that every child who receives the Holy Eucharist for the first time will experience God’s intense love for them. We hope and pray that the preparation experience will lay the foundation for a future life centered on the Holy Eucharist and provide nourishment for the students to live a holy life on earth that will merit them a place at the heavenly banquet for eternity. We pray that with every reception of Jesus in Holy Communion, they become more aware in their hearts of His love for them.” — Jessica Mattson, Director of Faith Formation



*Our First Communion Preparation program seeks to involve families in the process of preparing our students to receive the Eucharist.*

*If you would like more information on our First Communion Preparation program, or to register your child for next year’s classes, please contact Director of Faith Formation Jessica Mattson at 701-223-3606 or [jmattson@ascensionbismarck.org](mailto:jmattson@ascensionbismarck.org).*



*A Letter from Our Pastor*

# The Month of Mary: A Time for Celebration and Joy

Dear Parishioners,

In the Catholic Church, we designate a particular devotion for each month — and May is when we honor our Blessed Mother Mary. Thus, this is a good time for us to think about and concentrate on our devotion to the Mother of God. Perhaps we can add a few more Marian prayers to our daily routine. Praying the Rosary might be even more important. Of course, that assumes that daily prayer is part of our daily routine — which it should be.

Our Blessed Mother is important to our faith and to our Church. Her willingness to serve in a way that allowed the Lord to take human form really made our salvation a possibility. Because of her complete trust in God, she lived her life free from sin, and after her life, she was assumed into heaven by the power of God and crowned Queen of Heaven and Earth.

She is, of course, not divine. We worship only our Lord Jesus Christ, but we honor Mary as a saint and in many other ways. We honor God when we remember the role of Mary in our salvation. Devotion to Mary always leads to Jesus Christ Himself.

Mary was joyous when she said “yes” to God. That is the kind of joy we need to seek — and we, too,



must say “yes” to the Lord. Let us be grateful to Mary for bringing us her Son. This is why we crown her on our Catholic version of Mother’s Day. Through Mary, we are given an invitation into the Catholic fold. Her feminine presence and the safety of her motherhood may help us grow.

For most of us, this time of year is a month of growth in relation to nature. It is difficult not to have May as one of our favorite months for so many reasons. May is a beautiful time. We are called to make it even more beautiful, and we can do that as we serve and love one another.

I am deeply blessed to be your pastor. I may say that often, but it is true. My priesthood has been a blessing, and serving you all has made that blessing even more significant. I pray for you daily. Please pray for me. God bless you and keep you always.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten  
*Pastor*



## Judy Ness Reflects on and with Ministry

**W**hen parishioner Judy Ness retired from the insurance business after 34 years, she knew she wanted to find something meaningful to do in her newfound free time. Already active in many parish ministries here at Ascension, she heard about the wonderful work of Ministry on the Margins and decided to get involved. Now, she is so thankful that she found this incredible ministry to serve, and plans on helping out with it for as long as she can!

Staying active in the parish has long been an important part of Judy's life. Since joining our faith community shortly after moving to Bismarck in the early 1980s, she has served Ascension in various capacities. Judy has been an usher with the Hospitality Ministry and the Chair of the Environment Committee for many years, and continues to enjoy both activities. She is currently the Vice President of the Ladies of Ascension, helps the Knights of Columbus with the Faith Formation program suppers, and assists with the weekly church bulletins and mailing the monthly newsletters — yes, it is thanks to Judy that you are able to read this piece right now!

A few years ago, Judy was asked to take on laundry duties for the altar linens along with Cathy Hruby, and she has come to enjoy this task more than she had anticipated.

"I'm not an ironing person," Judy admits. "But I've learned to iron. And I can do it in the living room while I watch television. Monsignor calls us 'elves' because he'll come in and everything will be done."

While Judy certainly already had a long "laundry list" of ministries she had been participating in for many years, she began looking to get even more involved following her retirement from full-time work. When she heard Sr. Kathleen Atkinson speak to a local organization about Ministry on the Margins, Judy knew she had found another group to serve.



*Judy Ness*

Ministry on the Margins was founded by Sr. Kathleen in 2013 to provide services to prison inmates, at-risk youths, the homeless and other individuals experiencing a difficult time of transition.

Following Sister's talk, Judy felt that her eyes had been opened to the struggles of many people living on the margins right here in Bismarck.

"If you aren't aware of how many homeless people are in the community, you don't even think about it," she explains. "When I visit my son in Minneapolis, I see them out on the off ramps and other places, but



# Service in the Parish on the Margins

you don't usually see them in Bismarck. And as Sister said, once you are aware of it, you see the people — you see them on the streets, in the libraries and at McDonald's. Her ministry has grown many-fold in the last few years, and her passion is inspiring."

For the last two years, Judy has volunteered regularly in the ministry's food pantry, stocking the shelves and helping individuals and families "shop" for necessities. She is constantly amazed by the accomplishments of Ministry on the Margins. For example, in December, they served 466 households — or 12,046 individuals — and distributed almost 11,000 pounds of food! Judy is thankful for the abundant generosity of those who make the food pantry such a success.

Perhaps more than anything else, Judy has felt blessed by the opportunity to truly connect with the people who come to the food pantry for assistance.

"Sr. Kathleen always says we try to make them feel normal for those two hours that they're here and

let them know that they're one of us," she says. "You sit and talk with them. So many of them have other issues, so you try to help them work on one thing so they can get to the next. They wouldn't be there unless they had to be, and everybody is so appreciative. Once I started working there, I was hooked — I think I caught the passion!"

For Judy, serving others — especially with Ministry on the Margins — comes down to recognizing Christ in each individual, and seeking to use her time and talents to serve Him and His people as best she can. And the rewards, as she has found, are boundless!

"You can see God in every person if you look at them with an open mind and realize they have as much to offer you as you offer them," she affirms. "When the end of the day comes, if I've spent four hours in the food pantry and my feet and knees hurt, I can be happy about how many people I've helped, and that I've made a difference in their lives, and they've made a difference in mine."

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# St. Isidore's Simple Stewardship

When we consider the lives of the saints, the first that usually come to mind are more than likely classed into four categories — martyrs, priests, religious, and great miracle workers. St. Isidore was none of these, and yet he is revered in Spain as one of “the five saints,” which include St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Philip Neri, all of whom were canonized with him in the same year. His feast day is May 15.

The life of St. Isidore is a great testimony to how, with God’s grace, we can take the occurrences of a simple, mundane, and even sometimes difficult life and use them as opportunities for sanctification.

Isidore was born near Madrid, around the year 1070, into a peasant family. While still a young boy, he began working as a day laborer on the farm of Juan de Vergas, a wealthy landowner, just outside of Madrid.

Despite the hard work on Vergas’ farm, where Isidore spent the rest of his life in service, he did not complain and always tried his hardest to meet the tasks requested of him. Above all things, he upheld his relationship with Jesus. As he walked behind his plow, he would talk to God, offering up his work as a prayer. He rose up extra early each day before work to attend daily Mass. He would even spend his vacations touring the different churches of Madrid and the surrounding areas.

As hardworking as Isidore was, his fellow workers complained to Vergas that the pious laborer always arrived late for work because he attended Mass every day. Isidore could not deny the accusation, but he assured his employer that he always made a special effort to compensate for the extra minutes he spent in



prayer. One day, Vergas decided to see for himself whether Isidore was really slacking in his work. Hiding in the bushes, he watched as Isidore came out of church, went directly to the fields, and began his plowing. To Vergas’ astonishment, he saw a “man” with another plow beside Isidore, driving a team of white oxen. When he ran toward the mysterious team, it disappeared and Isidore only looked puzzled when Vergas asked him about it. “Sir, I work alone and know of none save God to whom I look for strength,” Isidore said. No doubt, God had sent His angels to help ensure that Isidore’s work would not suffer because of his placing the spiritual above the temporal.

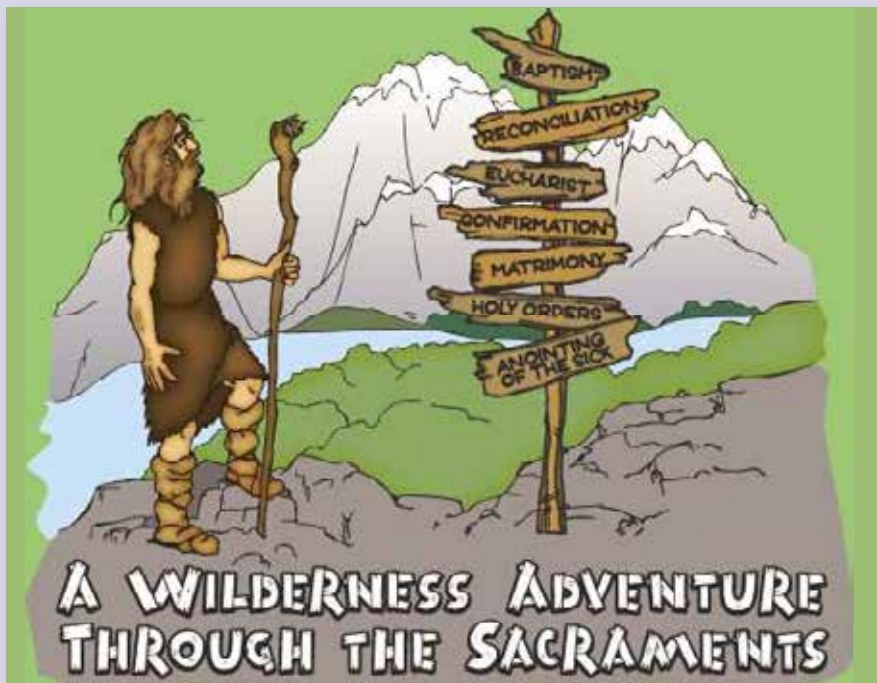
While working for Vergas, Isidore fell in love with and married a young woman, Maria Torribia, who shared his devotion and faith. They had one child, a son, who died while still a boy. A model of sanctity herself, Maria — also a canonized saint — served her husband faithfully all her life. Together, Isidore and Maria would look for ways to serve the poor, even though they had very little themselves. One story says that when Isidore brought a number of hungry people home with him one day, Maria realized as she scraped the bottom of the pot that there was no more stew. Isidore asked her to check one more time, and she was able to spoon out enough to feed everyone. They could not refuse an act of kindness to anyone.

At times, we might be tempted to think that we do not have the talents or the assets to be good stewards. But St. Isidore shows us by his simple, humble example that we can live out the call to discipleship in the smallest actions of charity and piety — that we only need do as much as we can, and trust that God will do the rest.



# Youth Ministry in Action

Parish seventh and eighth-graders recently attended a retreat led by the University of Mary Ministry Team, and a talk on chastity was recently given to parish ninth-graders by Chris Kraft and Elise Bauman.



## A WILDERNESS ADVENTURE THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS



For Children entering Grades K-5 in the Fall  
**Church of the Ascension**  
**June 4-7, 2018**  
**1:00-4:00 PM**

**2 WAYS TO REGISTER:**  
1. ONLINE at [www.ascensionbismarck.org](http://www.ascensionbismarck.org)  
-OR-  
2. Fill out registration form on the back of this flyer and bring to your parish office

**REGISTER BY:**  
Wednesday, May 2

*Vacation Bible School is hosted by Ascension, Cathedral and St. Anne parishes.*

Ascension Contact: Jessica  
[jmattson@ascensionbismarck.org](mailto:jmattson@ascensionbismarck.org)  
258-5692

Cathedral Contact: Kathy  
[kolson@cathedralparish.com](mailto:kolson@cathedralparish.com)  
222-2259

St. Anne's Contact: Holly  
[hkeller@stannesbismarck.org](mailto:hkeller@stannesbismarck.org)  
223-1549



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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.*

## Upcoming Events for May

**Confirmation**

Friday, May 4 — 7:00 p.m.

**Joint Ladies of Ascension & Knights of  
Columbus Potluck & Meeting**

Tuesday, May 8 — 6:00 p.m.

**Closing Faith Formation Mass  
and Grill-Out**

Wednesday, May 9 — 5:30 p.m.

**Mother's Day Breakfast**

Sunday, May 13 — 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

**Parish Leaders' Meeting**

Monday, May 14 — 6:30 p.m.

**Graduating Seniors Recognition**

Saturday, May 19 — 5:00 p.m. Mass

**Vacation Bible School**

June 4-7 — 1-4 p.m.

Register at [www.ascensionbismarck.org](http://www.ascensionbismarck.org)

**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.