



Spirit of Life

Roman Catholic Church

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

“A BLESSED MINISTRY AND A TRUE GIFT”

Parishioner Rosemarie Birrenkott can't point to a single moment or event that made her desire to join Spirit of Life's team of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. As is so often the case, it was a gradual process born out of her desire to give more to Christ and His Church, and to help out in whatever way was needed.

“They needed somebody and so I just asked if I could help,” Rosemarie says. “I think it's important to do things when people ask and to help when there is a need.”

Yet, what seemed at first like merely a simple act of service ended up being far more powerful than Rosemarie could have ever imagined. For in the process of sharing our Eucharistic Lord with others, says Rosemarie, you can't help being strengthened in your own faith as you witness the great reverence and devotion of others.

“As a Eucharistic Minister, we help distribute both the Body and Blood of Jesus to the congregation — this truly is such a gift,” Rosemarie says. “Many people come forward, especially the little



Rosemarie Birrenkott shares that she is “blessed every day” through her service as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

ones, and we get to see their faith up close. It's so moving to see.”

Beyond assisting at Mass, Rosemarie is blessed to serve as one of the Eucharistic Ministers responsible for bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. Leaving directly after the 9 a.m. Sunday Mass, she is able to literally carry Jesus to those in need. For Rosemarie, this is an extremely joyful service as she once again witnesses the intense love and gratitude of the ministry's recipients.

“I can't fully explain what a joy it is to bring Jesus to others,” Rosemarie says. “This is especially true when I go to bring Communion to the homebound. These are people who are unable to get to Mass, so without the Eucharistic Minister they wouldn't be able to

receive Jesus. They are always just so joyful and grateful. And then afterwards, we spend a little time visiting with them and getting to know them, forming those relationships.”

Because Eucharistic Ministers are handling the Body and Blood of our Lord, it's important that

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CHRISTMASTIME STEWARDSHIP

HOW WE CAN BRING HIS SON TO THE WORLD

It is not uncommon to give gifts during Advent and Christmas, but it is never enough just to leave it at that. True, Jesus gave Himself to us at the first Christmas. And, as always, we should strive to imitate Him by giving of ourselves in some way as we celebrate the anniversary of His birth. But there is a way to give even more than just ourselves — by giving the gift of Christ to others. The seasons of Advent and Christmas are perfect opportunities to share the love and message of Jesus with others in a beautiful way.

Of course, giving of ourselves in imitation of Jesus is a beautiful thing. But it is just as important to remember that, as human beings, we bear the likeness of God. As Christians, Jesus Himself inhabits our very souls. As Catholics, our Lord literally dwells within us when we receive Him in the Eucharist. Based upon this logic, we do so much more than imitate Jesus when we selflessly give of ourselves to others. Indeed, just as Mary carried Christ in her womb when she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, and just as she brought Him in her arms to Simeon as a newborn child, we can also literally bring Jesus Christ to the world.

What a profound task Our Lord has laid out for us this season! As He grew in Mary's womb, Jesus could only go where Mary chose to take Him. Of course, He couldn't do anything — He couldn't even speak. Mary became His hands and feet, and even His voice. Mary could have stayed at home during her pregnancy, resting and preparing for life with a newborn, as most mothers do. But instead, the Blessed Mother helped her Son begin His mission by bringing Him to her cousin, Elizabeth. Today, in much the same way, Christ invites us to share Him with the rest of the world. He chooses to make His presence known through us. And so, as the spiritual writer Caryll Houselander beautifully states, "We must carry Jesus in our hearts wherever He

wants us to go, and there are many places to which He may never go unless we take Him to them."

How do we bring Jesus to those in our parish and community? There are many ways. We might visit with a sick parishioner over the holidays, providing fellowship and support in their time of need. We may consider serving a local soup kitchen or food bank, and doing our part to make sure that the hungry are fed. We can sing Christmas carols for our neighbors, bringing true joy and love to their homes. Perhaps we could help a tired friend clean her house, making her life a little bit easier during this busy season. Or we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. We might even try going to work with a cheery disposition, or donating money so that a starving child in a poor country can have something to eat. These are just a few examples of how we can practice stewardship.

We may sometimes feel as if our efforts are in vain — especially when it is hard to see the effects of our evangelization. This temptation is particularly strong when we offer our treasure as a gift to God. The positive effects of monetary gifts aren't always as visible as gifts of time or talent. But when we give of our treasure, the love of Jesus can travel to places we could never go. While our gift may not directly affect someone in a positive way, it very well may enable someone else to do it for us. Sometimes, God doesn't just ask us to be His hands and feet, but to enable someone else to be them, as well.

Advent and Christmas give us the opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word. God has put us in a particular place, given us a certain amount of time, and asked us to perform particular tasks and selflessly share a portion of our gifts. This is all for a singular purpose — to bring His Son into the world, and make Christ's presence just as real as when He first became man more than 2,000 years ago.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

REFLECTIONS ON A BLESSED 2017

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.

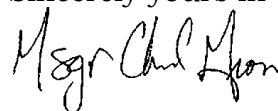
Of course, this is also the last month of the regular calendar year, which may add additional tasks to our own schedules as we finalize things for the end of the year. However, there are many opportunities for us during this month to share, to pray and to celebrate in a Christian way, and I would encourage 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. Chad Gion,
Pastor



The Joy of Loving the Poor AT



Sr. Amal Grace prepares donations to be stocked in the food pantry.



Food provided in the weekly food boxes can easily be made into a nutritious meal.

When the volunteers at our Mother Teresa Food pantry get to work, they can't help but feeling that Christ and His Blessed Mother are right there along with them.

"One day, someone came into the pantry and asked if we had a very specific kind of nutritional product, so we checked the shelves, and sure enough, we had it," says Bobbi Cusack, a regular pantry volunteer. "I was amazed at God's providence. It is incredible how we pray for things, and they just come!"

And the clients they serve also can't help but feel His compassionate presence, as well.

"Sometimes, the pantry gives out as many as 70 boxes a day worth of food!" Bobbi says. "It is a very spiritual ministry, as well. Sometimes, the Sisters will take a few of the pantry clients into the chapel and pray with them about their needs, and minister to them."

Such a divine presence is often brought forth through heartfelt prayer.

"I say a Rosary on my way to work at the pantry," Bobbi says. "I love Mother Teresa, and I have a real devotion to Mary. As I work at the pantry or help serve meals, I picture Our Lady helping me, and I feel that by doing this ministry, I am imitating her."

Our parish's Mother Teresa Food Pantry/Outreach Meals Ministry serves parishioners and non-parishioners alike who are in need of food. It is open Monday through Thursdays from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m., and from 10 a.m. to noon on Fridays. Clients may come once a week, and fill out a form including information to help determine their needs, such as how many people are in their family. They are then given several boxes of food, which include items such as bread, cereal, granola, crackers, soups, a meat product such as chicken, and fresh vegetables or fruits.

In addition to distributing the boxes, our food pantry outreach also offers a hot meal to members of our community who are in need. The meal is usually offered on Mondays through Fridays from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.,

OUR *Mother Teresa Food Pantry*

and includes menu items such as casseroles, chili, bread, fruit, a treat, and coffee or juice.

The pantry is generously stocked with donations from Great Plains Food Pantry, as well as various local restaurants, such as Panera. Our parishioners are also very willing to give their time, talent, and treasure to this ministry, exemplifying an authentic spirit of stewardship.

“I really believe in the Beatitudes, and participating in this ministry gives me a way to live them out,” Bobbi says. “It is the most excellent ministry that I have ever been involved in. It is so touching and gratifying to see people get the little bit of extra help they need. I am also amazed at our volunteers. They are so wonderful and generous.”

In December, Christmas food baskets will be distributed, reminding all of the true reason for the sacred Season — the celebration of Our Savior’s mercy.



Food donations are constantly coming in and out of the food pantry, and volunteers restock shelves as quickly as they fill food boxes.

*Non-perishable donations can be brought to the parish entrance or to the pantry.
For more information, please contact the parish office at 701-663-1660.*

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

TUESDAY, DEC. 19 — 7 p.m., *Advent Penance Service*

FRIDAY, DEC. 22 — 7 p.m., *Anticipate Christmas, concert*

SATURDAY, DEC. 23 – 5 p.m., *Vigil Mass of the Lord’s Day*

SUNDAY, DEC. 24

9 a.m. — *Mass of the Lord’s Day*

9 a.m. — *Mass of the Lord’s Day (St. Martin)*

11 a.m. — *Mass of the Lord’s Day*

11 a.m. — *Mass of the Lord’s Day (St. Anthony)*

5 p.m. — *Christmas Vigil Mass*

10 p.m. — *Christmas Midnight Mass*

10 p.m. — *Christmas Midnight Mass (St. Anthony)*

MONDAY, DEC. 25

10 a.m. — *Christmas Mass*

10 a.m. — *Christmas Mass (St. Martin)*



The Feast of the Immaculate Conception **DECEMBER 8**

When it comes to Catholic trivia, there is one simple question that often evokes an incorrect response: “What is the Immaculate Conception?”

More often than not, this term is believed to designate Christ’s conception within Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. A good guess, no doubt. But it is 100 percent incorrect!

The term “Immaculate Conception” describes the state of Mary’s soul within the womb of her mother, St. Anne. It has nothing to do with a special type of generative conception by her parents – Mary’s body was formed in the usual manner by her mother and father.

Instead, the term “Immaculate Conception” describes how Mary was preserved from the stain of original sin from the first moment of her existence.

Every person since Adam and Eve has been born with the stain of original sin, which can be washed away in the cleansing waters of Baptism. Yet, this fallen state never touched the soul of Mary, the new Eve. She was conceived with original sanctity and innocence, escaping all faults, depraved emotions and passions, and remained sinless. She was not exempt from the temporal penalties of Adam, however — including sorrow, physical illness and death.

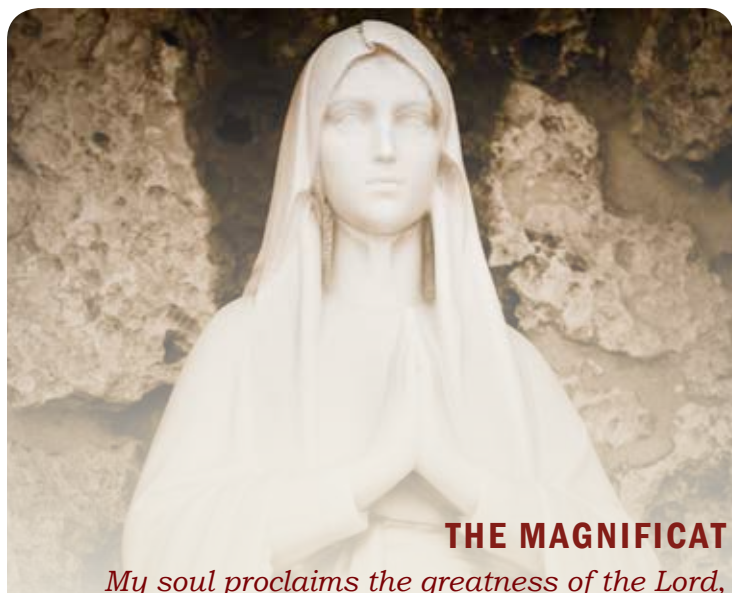
The belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception has been held by the Church throughout history, though only officially declared a dogma in 1854 by Pope Pius IX. Highly devoted to the Blessed Virgin, Pius IX hoped the official definition would draw emphasis to the already existing belief, thereby inspiring deeper devotion to Mary. This dogma finds its roots in both Scripture and Tradition, and remains consistent with reason and the teachings of our early Church fathers.

The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated every year on Dec. 8 and is one of the few declared Holy Days of Obligation on the Church calendar. All Catholics are obligated to attend Mass on this day.

Why not make this liturgical feast a special day of devotion? Bring a rose to place before an image of the Blessed Virgin in the church sanctuary, or arrange a little altar at home for your children to

decorate. Recite the Magnificat and discuss the Church’s teaching on the Immaculate Conception.

Once this beautiful feast is brought alive in our hearts and in our homes, we will never again mistakenly answer that “tricky” question: “What is the Immaculate Conception?”



THE MAGNIFICAT

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.
From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is His Name.
He has mercy on those who fear Him
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.
He has come to the help of His servant Israel
for He remembered His promise of mercy,
the promise He made to our fathers,
to Abraham and His children for ever.*

OUR PARISH COUNCIL

EMBRACING AND EXEMPLIFYING STEWARDSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE

Here at Spirit of Life, we are gifted with a Parish Council, which has as its goal “to listen, inform, advise, and to lead in the direction which the pastor wishes.” The Parish Council is one of the key leadership groups in our parish — the council members work together with the pastor, and the council itself is broadly representative of parish membership, clergy and laity. As an energizing, coordinating representation of parish life, the council unites laity and clergy in a community of prayer, leadership, service, and pastoral planning. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Parish Council may recommend policies for mission and faith.

“For me, the Parish Council has a twofold purpose,” says Parish Council Chair Dr. Bob Biwer. “First, we serve as advisors to the pastor on things that he presents, or we may offer our own input on other items. However, the key word is ‘advisors.’ We are not the decision makers. Second, our lay group is the key communications between the clergy and the parishioners. Trying to improve communications is a key part of what we are trying to do.”

As Dr. Biwer notes, while the council tries to meet every other month on the second Thursday, the meetings are somewhat variable dependent on the issues at hand.

“Monsignor may wish us to meet to discuss something, or we may wish to present something to him,” he says. “Under both circumstances, he and I meet to set the agenda for the meeting. Of course, we always begin with prayer, as that is important. Our meetings tend not to be too formal, as to really accomplish things, people must be comfortable to be open and honestly express their feelings.”

One particular project on which the Parish Council has focused is that of the rectory.

“After the Carmelite nuns arrived and needed a convent, we converted what had been the rectory for the pastor and other priests to a convent,” Dr. Biwer says. “That left them without any housing. It soon became clear to us that we needed to build a rectory,



The Parish Council — (from left) Pam Treib, Steve Moore, Msgr. Chad Gion, Ryan Caya, Nathan Swenson, Dr. Bob Biwer, and Kevin Martian.

so for the past few years the Rectory Project became paramount for us. We combined with the Finance Council to plan and oversee that effort. This past August, the rectory was completed. Now we need to work with people on collecting the pledges and commitments which were made.”

Of course, there is still more to be done — from maintenance and repairs on some parish facilities, to possible future building.

“These are all subjects of discussion for us,” Dr. Biwer says. “As we have embraced stewardship as a way of life, we have learned how important it is to give back for our many blessings. My own service and that of others is indicative of our understanding that we have received much, and we need to give back in gratitude for that.”

The pastor appoints members of the Parish Council. However, Dr. Biwer assures that if anyone is interested in being involved, “we would be most attentive to their willingness to serve in that way.”

“I would encourage them to contact Msgr. Gion or any member of the Parish Council,” he says. “Our current members include, in addition to me, Ryan Caya, Kevin Martian, Steve Moore (who is also a member of the Finance Council and serves a liaison between our two councils), Nathan Swenson, and Pam Treib.”

*If you would like more information about our Parish Council,
please call the parish office at 701-663-1660.*

801 1st Street SE | Mandan, ND 58554
Phone: 701-663-1660 | myspiritoflife.com

Change Service Requested

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Spirit of Life

Monday: 8 a.m.

Tuesday - Thursday: 7 a.m., 9 a.m.

Friday: 7 a.m., 9 a.m.,

Saturday: 9 a.m., 5 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 6 p.m.

CONFESSIONS: Sunday: 8-8:30 a.m.

Saturday: 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Wednesday: 7-8:30 p.m., and 20 min. before
weekday Masses except Mondays

St. Martin's Parish

Even Months: 9 a.m.

Odd Months: 11 a.m.

St. Anthony's Parish

Even Months: 11 a.m.

Odd Months: 9 a.m.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

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each minister has a personal commitment and reverence for the Eucharist, which includes a faithful attendance of Sunday Mass. Additionally, ministry volunteers must have received their Confirmation and must be in good standing with the Church. New volunteers are always welcomed, helping in what Rosemarie describes as a "blessed ministry."

"I know I'm blessed every day, and I hope that I'm being a blessing to the people through my service," Rosemarie says. "They certainly bless me through their response. We are also always happy to have more volunteers, and I know that they will be blessed through their service, as well."

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— Rosemarie Birrenkott

To learn more about becoming an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, please contact Deb Rath, Director of Perpetual Adoration, at deb@myspiritoflife.com while those interested in bringing Communion to the sick and homebound can contact Mari Jo Sigl at marijo@myspiritoflife.com. Both women can also be reached at the parish office, 701-663-1660.