



Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Diaconate:

A Ministry of Giving

Last year marked the 50th year of the restoration of the permanent diaconate in its own rank within the three degrees of Holy Orders. In 1968, Blessed Pope Paul VI gave the United States bishops permission to renew the permanent diaconate as an active order of ministry.

Over the years, our parish has been abundantly blessed by the presence of a number of deacons who have given of themselves tirelessly for the good of our faith community, their own families and Mother Church.

"Because of the vibrant presence of deacons in the Diocese of Bismarck, more people are encountering Christ each day and are receiving the message of hope and healing that He offers," says Director of the Office of the Diaconate David Fleck. "As much as they have opened their hearts to receive the gift of Holy Orders, Christ the Servant lives among us and serves us in that capacity.

These men are deeply generous, and often what they give us and how they serve is hidden and unrewarded, but it bears great fruit."

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further explains, "Deacons share in Christ's mission and grace in a special way. The Sacrament of Holy Orders marks

December 2019

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Our current, active deacons (from left) Deacon Tony Finneman, Deacon John Paul Martin and Deacon Doyle Schulz, with Msgr. Jim Braaten

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The Diaconate: *Ministry of Giving*

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them with an imprint ('character') which cannot be removed and which configures them to Christ, who made himself the 'deacon' or servant of all" (1570).

While serving as deacons, these men have supported our parish priests in their ministry and radiated Christ's love on the members of our church family.

"The role of the deacon is to help bishops and priests and to proclaim by their life the Church's call to serve others," David says. "The bishop ordains men as deacons so that his daily work and that of his priests can be carried out more effectively."

Generally, those who serve as deacons find their calling deeply fulfilling in many ways.

"The diaconate gave me a way to serve God and show my gratitude for all of the blessings in my life," Deacon Ray Grabar says. "My wife, Loretta, and I

had eight children and I was so thankful for our large family. I became a deacon because I wanted to do something to make a return unto God for all I had received."

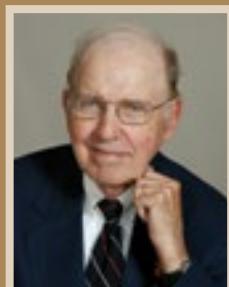
Ultimately, embracing the diaconate ministry takes a sincere heart, one that is on fire with God's mercy.

"I am now 90 years old, and I recently retired from the diaconate, but I still keep in touch with some of the shut-ins I would visit as a deacon," Deacon Ray says. "They became my friends, and we still call each other. Overall, the diaconate ministry helped me to live out my Catholic faith and serve others, which is something that has been on my heart all of my life."

Let us continue to pray for all of the deacons in our diocese, that they would be blessed richly for all they do!



Dcn. John LaMontagne
1985-2004
19 years at Ascension



Dcn. Ray Grabar
1986-2018
32 years at Ascension



Dcn. Al Schwindt
1988-2004
16 years at Ascension



Dcn. Larry Dorrheim
1993-2000
7 years at Ascension



Dcn. Steve Brannan
1999-2002
3 years at Ascension



Dcn. Ed Wesołowski
2002-06
4 years at Ascension



Dcn. Doyle Schulz
2006-present
13 years at Ascension



Dcn. Tony Finneman
2006-present
13 years at Ascension



Dcn. John Paul Martin
2018-present
1 year at Ascension

If you are interested in learning more about the diaconate or if God is calling you to become a deacon, please contact Msgr. Jim Braaten at 223-3606.

A Letter from our Pastor

A Steward's Response to the Ultimate Christmas Gift

Dear Parishioners,

Christmas is America's favorite holiday. Consider for a moment the amount of effort we put into the holiday — decorating our homes with ornate light displays, buying boxes upon boxes of presents, addressing Christmas cards and attending seasonal get-togethers. When taken all together, it staggers the imagination. Whatever might happen to be next on the list of "favorite holidays" — Valentine's Day, Halloween or Thanksgiving — it can't hold a candle to our investment in Christmas.

Don't get me wrong — I love Christmas, too. But I'm afraid that many of us somehow miss the main reason for our Christmas celebrations.

I've sometimes heard people say things like, "Getting everything ready for Christmas becomes so hectic, I don't want to do it every year. But, you know, Christmas is really for the children." And occasionally, I've heard or read in a letter to the editor that Christmas is about the hope that a newborn baby brings to the world. Even in the early winter, when the days are short, we can celebrate babyhood, a new human life.

Both those sentiments are wrong because they're too limited. Of course, it's true that many of our Christmas customs are for the children — we might not get to hang our stockings to be filled by Santa Claus otherwise. And it's true that the birth of a baby, any baby, brings joy and hope to all those around. Yes, many of our Christmas celebrations are centered on the children, and the birth of a child offers a promise for the future.

At Christmas, we celebrate not just any baby, but a particular baby. We celebrate His birth not because it's cute to see a baby in a manger filled

with hay and surrounded by farm animals — instead, we celebrate this birth because of Who this baby is and what He did as an adult, for *all* of us.

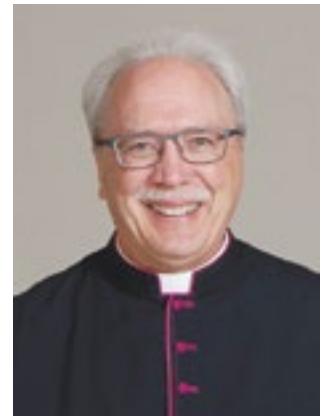
A human baby is certainly a wonderful creation, made in the image of God. But Jesus is more than that, not less, for He is God the Son who took on human nature in order to redeem us from the results of the sin into which we had fallen. He didn't stay a baby. He grew up and taught and preached and healed. Finally, He was put to death "for our sake" as the Creed affirms and rose from the dead. That's why we celebrate His birth more than 2,000 years later. That's why normal routines are suspended for a few joyful days each year.

In response to the gift the Father gave us with the birth of His Son, we joyfully exchange gifts with each other, share with the poor, and offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to the Church. God gives to us — and as stewards, we must do our best to faithfully use those gifts.

A joyful and blessed Christmas to all of you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor



Musical Instrumentalists and Accompanists Help M

When the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops composed the text *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, it emphasized the essential connections between music and our faith: "God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source... A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things... Music is therefore a sign of God's love for us and of our love for him" (1, 2).

"Knowing that my gift of music can be a comfort to others as well as another way for them to connect on a deeper level with the Lord is what motivates me to keep giving my time and talent to the church." — Michelle Friedt



Dominic Jochim shares his talent as a drummer with our Music Ministry and parish.

In turn, we are truly blessed with a number of musical parishioners at Ascension, each of whom give of their talents to beautifully enhance our prayer and worship during the liturgy. Pianist Michelle Friedt accompanies groups and individual cantors. Brent Geiss is a percussionist, working with the Raising Praise adult choir, as well as a small group. Student Dominic Jochim is also a percussionist, working with the Young People's group.

For Michelle, music is an essential part of not just her faith, but her daily life. No matter her mood, she can turn to music.

"When I am working around the house, I have religious music on in the background," she says. "When I am driving, especially with my kids, we have the Bible songs CD in the background and are all singing along. Music can help you find your inner self. It speaks to me in a way that I know it is God speaking to me."

Brent's involvement in Mass as a percussionist — specifically playing the cajón, a box-shaped instrument most often played using the hands — is an important part of his life. He admits that while life is busy and stressful, being involved in music at church is a huge blessing.

"Being involved with music, whether at practice or during Mass, allows me the opportunity to let go of life's stresses by concentrating on my faith life," he says. "It has been very therapeutic to me."

And while Dominic is in high school, he has gotten very involved in music at Ascension. When he saw a set of drums not being used at the church, he inquired how he could get involved.

"I really enjoy playing the drums, so this is just an easy and fun way for me to give back," he says. "It allows me to be a good steward and an active member in the church."

For all three musicians, a part of the motivation of sharing their music talents at Mass is to bless the lives of those attending.

"It has always made me feel good to be able to give my time to the church through voice and

ake Mass at Ascension

More Prayerful

song," Brent says. "But it is also nice when you realize how much it means to other members of the congregation."

"Knowing that my gift of music can be a comfort to others as well as another way for them to connect on a deeper level with the Lord is what motivates me to keep giving my time and talent to the church," Michelle says.

"I love that by playing the drums in church and doing what I love and enjoy in church, it can help me, and everyone else listening, get closer to God," Dominic says.

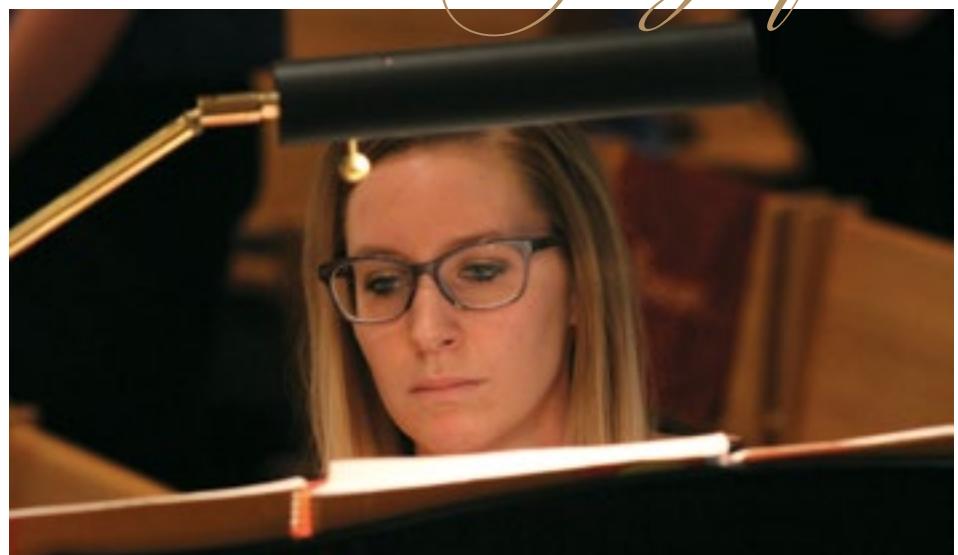
All three musicians know how important music is to the experience of the Mass and our faith lives in general. Michelle sums it up well.

"Music speaks to the soul, and that's what connects us as humans, to each other and to our Savior," she says.

Julie Ternes, Director of Music and Liturgy at Ascension, encourages anyone with talents in music to get involved. She points out that her own life has been changed through music, and that music can have a positive impact on our prayerful worship experience at Mass.

"The prayers of the Mass unite our hearts and prayers to the prayers being prayed by thousands of other Catholics each day throughout the world," Julie says. "Music can enhance those prayers and give us another way to express ourselves and participate in the Mass."

If you would like to talk to Julie Ternes about sharing your musical talents, please contact her at 701-223-3606 or jternes@ascensionbismarck.org.



Michelle Friedt shares her talents on the piano by accompanying our groups and individual cantors.



Brent Geiss serves in our parish Music Ministry as a percussionist

Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Upcoming Parish Events

Nov. 30-Dec. 1

Giving Tree in Church Entrance for families to purchase gifts for needy children in our community

Dec. 4

Parent/Child Learning Center for First Reconciliation, 4-8 p.m. in Community Room

Dec. 5

Circle of Friends Christmas Luncheon, 11:30 a.m. in Community Room

Dec. 6

First Friday Fellowship, 8:30 a.m. in Community Room

Dec. 7

First Reconciliation, 10 a.m. in Church. Please pray for our Second graders as they encounter God's loving mercy this day

Dec. 7

Grade 7-8 Confirmation Retreat, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Parish Center

Dec. 7-8

Ladies of Ascension Nut Sales after all Masses

Dec. 8

ADVENT FESTIVAL, 2 p.m. in Church. Join us for a walk though the nativity story read by the youth in our parish accompanied by music from Cheneniah.

Dec. 14-15

Ladies of Ascension Bake Sale after all Masses

Dec. 17-18

Church Directory Photo Sessions, 2-9 p.m. Visit ascensionbismarck.org to sign-up.

Dec. 21

Gift-wrapping for the Christmas Eve Dinner, 10 a.m. in Community Room

Dec. 22

Set-up for the Christmas Eve Dinner, 1 p.m. in Community Room

Dec. 24

CHRISTMAS EVE DINNER, 5:30-7 p.m. in Community Room

Dec. 28 to Jan. 2

Traveling Icon — "Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians" — in the Church, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

Dec. 29

Fifth Sunday Rosary, 9 a.m. in Community Room, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus.

Dec. 30

Altar Server Appreciation Party, 5 p.m. in Community Room

Devotion/Liturgy Schedule

Advent Eucharistic Exposition and Adoration

Mondays, (Dec. 2, 9, 16, 23) 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Commit yourself and/or your family to prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament in preparation for Christ's birth. Sign up at ascensionbismarck.org.

Dec. 22

Advent Penance Service at 3 p.m. in Church; eight priests will be present for individual confessions after a brief prayer service.

Christmas Eve Masses — Dec. 24

4 p.m. and 10 p.m.

Christmas Day Masses — Dec. 25

9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m.

Solemnity of Mary, New Year's Eve Mass — Dec. 31

5 p.m.

Solemnity of Mary, New Year's Day Mass — Jan. 1

9:30 a.m.

Young Parishioner **Milla Weigel** Makes Faith and Involvement in Parish Life a Priority

During World Youth Day 2013, Pope Francis spoke to millions of young Catholics who had gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: "You too, dear young people, can be joyful witnesses of His love, courageous witnesses of His Gospel, carrying to this world a ray of His light." The pope's message reminds us of the importance of encouraging young people to participate fully in our faith, and reassures us that we can expect great things from the future of our Church. Here at Ascension, 14-year-old Milla Weigel is proving just how true these words can be!

A parishioner at Ascension her entire life, Milla is an altar server at the 8 a.m. Sunday Mass, volunteers at various parish events such as the Christmas Eve Dinner, and is currently preparing to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the spring. She has also helped her grandmother with Wednesday evening Faith Formation classes, attended last year's youth retreat in Minnesota, and played the violin for Christmas Mass.

While Milla's studies as a freshman at Bismarck High School and her participation in the school orchestra and the Strolling Strings of Bismarck keep her calendar full, she continues to make her faith and involvement in parish life a priority. While she enjoys all of the parish activities in which she takes part, Milla feels especially blessed by serving at the altar.

"I enjoy Mass more and I listen more when I'm serving," she says. "I get to joke around with the priests before Mass, and we always have a good conversation. It's great to have connections with your priests. I also enjoy teaching the younger kids how to serve. It's really hard to get kids to come to serve

at our early Mass, so it's always good to see them and be able to train them."

Feeling thankful for her early formation in the faith, Milla encourages other young parishioners to nurture their spiritual lives by regularly attending Mass.

"I feel like there are kids who are really wanting to get into their faith, but they're afraid that their friends won't approve or don't know how to ask their parents to take them. But they should try it. They might not find their faith right away, but they'll find it faster if they're coming to Mass. And then they might end up wanting a bigger part in the Church when they're older."

— Milla Weigel



Milla Weigel

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1905 S 3rd St. | Bismarck, ND 58504-7118
701-223-3606 | www.ascensionbismarck.org

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Young Parishioner Milla Weigel continued from page 7

might not find their faith right away, but they'll find it faster if they're coming to Mass. And then they might end up wanting a bigger part in the Church when they're older."

Having already received her Baptism, First Reconciliation, and First Communion here at Ascension, Milla is looking forward to her Confirmation on May 7. Rather than viewing this sacrament as the conclusion of her early faith formation, she realizes that the graces she receives with Confirmation will inspire her to continue participating fully in Church life as an adult.

"In our Confirmation classes, we've learned that everyone has different abilities and gifts that God has given us to share," she says. "I'm excited to

receive Confirmation — I'm really looking forward to just getting even more into my faith and just exploring [what I can do to serve]. A lot of parents stop bringing their kids to Mass after Confirmation, but it's better to keep it going while it's already in motion. That way, you'll want to continue to go in the future. It will definitely continue to be a priority for me to be a part of the Church."

Milla feels thankful to belong to our parish, where she has found the people to be "amazing, sweet, and understanding." And we at Ascension are certainly blessed to have a dynamic young person like Milla in our midst — she is truly the witness of Christ's love and light that Pope Francis exhorts all of our youth to be!

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday, 5:00 p.m. | **Sunday**, 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m.
Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. | **Holy Days**: 8:00 a.m., 7:00 p.m.

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.