

Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

GET TO KNOW PARISHIONER **Blaise Kathol**

Serving and Fostering a Life to Devoted to the Faith

In an address to Catholic youth, Pope Francis asked this question: “Dear young people, you have many plans and dreams for the future. But is Christ at the center of each of your plans and dreams?”

In our culture, high school is a busy time for teenagers. There is a big focus on academics, sports, activities and extracurriculars, and planning for the future. For many of the youth in our parish, it can be easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of activities that they are pulled into and away from the church. But for parishioner Blaise Kathol, finding time to be involved in the parish has been an important part of keeping his life centered on God.

Blaise is a junior at St. Mary’s High School. For him, being involved with the stewardship of the parish started when he became an altar server in the fourth grade.

“I am still an altar server but now I also do hospitality, help with the video and I am an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion,” Blaise says.

Having followed the example of his parents, Blaise has been encouraged by them as he has found that the stewardship way of life, sharing his time, talent and treasure, has become more and more important to him.

“My mom is really the one who got me involved in the parish,” he says. “She does so many things for the church and my dad is active in the Hospitality Ministry, as well as being an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.”

Blaise has also been involved with other projects in the parish including helping with landscaping and working the Christmas dinners.



Blaise helps with grounds clean-up this past fall.

JANUARY 2023

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Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Hospitality

Extends to Our Family at Home and in Our Parish

As Catholics, we are members of two very important family units. First, there are our own families, which may include our spouses, children and grandchildren. And as a parish community, we are members of a larger “family of faith,” along with our clergy and fellow parishioners. Of course, both types of units share in the Catholic faith, as we gather to celebrate Mass each Sunday.

Yet, all does not appear to be well. The modern media unfortunately seems to place a heavy emphasis on the destruction of both types of family units. Indeed, every day, we are bombarded with disconcerting stories about the various issues that threaten the vital bonds of the family — divorce, abuse, gay marriage, and abortion, just to name a few. At the same time, the “families of faith” in our own parishes have also been threatened by several issues, from scandals and mismanagement of resources to drops in Mass attendance and school enrollment.

All of these threats and issues most certainly promote a hostile environment for today’s American Catholics. In turn, we may feel that there is little we can do to counter the negativity that is so pervasive within our country towards those practicing the Catholic faith.

The good news is that finding the solution to such seemingly insurmountable problems often begins in the most simple and basic of places — at home. In this particular case, it begins in two homes — that of our own family, and in the parish

home of our “family of faith.”

Certainly, we would like visitors in our own homes to feel welcome, whether they are extended family, familiar friends, or new acquaintances. Therefore, we do whatever we can to make these visitors feel appreciated — we might prepare a homemade meal for our guests, or serve them a fresh cup of coffee, all while we initiate a friendly and insightful conversation.

Of course, this effort to make visitors to our home feel welcome is a wonderful example of providing Hospitality, the first of the Four Pillars of Parish Stewardship.

So, if we consider our other family unit — the “family of faith” in our own parish — the same can be applied to those entering our church for worship and fellowship. Whether we try to get to know some of the familiar faces we see at church each Sunday, reach out to someone new to the community, or extend a warm welcome to those visiting our parish, we are following Jesus’ example of hospitality at its most foundational and engaging level.

Of course, while hospitality serves to enhance worship and fellowship for the entire parish family, it also impacts our community on a day-to-day basis. If we foster a welcoming environment in our parish home and present the many opportunities to minister and serve, involvement will only increase throughout the community! Therefore, if hospitality continues to flourish throughout the parish and its many ministries, so will the stewardship way of life!



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A Letter from our Pastor

A New Year, New Challenges, New Opportunities

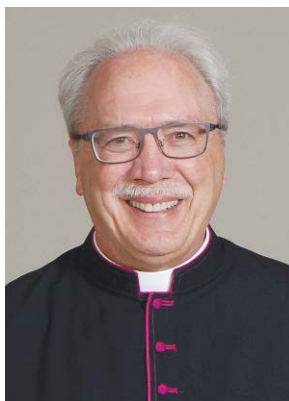
Dear Parishioners,

It is a new year, and it is my prayer for all of you — and for me, as well — that we can take new steps on our faith journeys and seek new ways to live out discipleship and stewardship.

Pope Francis once commented on his perspective of our modern approach to life. He said, “Certainly, possessions, money, and power can give a momentary thrill, the illusion of being happy, but they end up possessing us and making us always want more, never satisfied. I have learned that the most important thing is to put on Christ in your life, place your trust in Him, and you will never be disappointed.”

The pope has been called “the world’s parish priest.” As we pray for one another in this New Year, may we all ask the Lord to help us appreciate Pope Francis’ approach to life, his simple way of seeing things, and his very basic way of appreciating things. I would hope that we see this year as a time for opportunity, a time to deepen our relationship to Christ, and for that matter to one another.

If we wish to change our lives and the lives of others, there are two easy ways to do it. We are blessed with many opportunities in this parish to pray, but as much as we need to take advantage of those, we also need to develop a strong personal



prayer life. Recall the young Samuel, who was not quite sure what to do with his life, or what direction to go. When he finally settled on that one important prayer, “Speak, Lord, for I am listening,” Samuel gave us the hint as to what we need to do. Prayer is a two-way street, and part of that is taking the time to listen to God.

The second important way is to exude joy. Christ certainly called us to do that. Pope Francis has had much to say about joy, as well. The Holy Father says, “Joy cannot be held at heel; it must be let go. Joy is a pilgrim virtue. It is a gift that walks — walks on the path of life, that walks with Jesus... proclaiming joy, lengthens and widens that path.” We must seek that joy and then we need to share it. That is truly our call. Joy translates quite easily into “love your neighbor.”

Yes, there may be challenges ahead in 2023, but we must focus on the opportunities, and then exert the effort to benefit from those opportunities. Happy New Year!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor



SM CARNIVAL

Annual Event Filled With Fun and Fellowship to Support Catholic Education Set for Feb. 2-4

Mark your calendar — the Annual St. Mary's Carnival is coming soon!

Scheduled for Feb. 2-4, this favorite tradition has been celebrated for the past 72 years and once again, the Catholic community of Bismarck is coming together to make this event a huge success.

Coming on the tail of Catholic Schools Week, the St. Mary's Carnival is truly a testament to the faith and support of parishioners from all the Catholic churches in the area. The Carnival benefits the Light of Christ Schools, which many of our parish students attend. Jake Markel, Director of Mission and Advancement and a Light of Christ graduate, is in a prime position to see how the community works together.

"While Ascension doesn't specifically have a school attached to it, they show up and take responsibility for coordinating huge parts of the carnival," Mr. Markel says. "It shows the community support of Catholic education in our community and diocese. People see the benefit of the schools and are willing to give their time, talent, and treasure and are willing to rally around them."

The St. Mary's Carnival highlights include a raffle for a new car and cash prizes, as well as delicious food and many, many carnival games. Volunteers from Ascension will be running games and helping out all over the Carnival. Carrie Meyer

coordinates the volunteers from Ascension. She has been attending committee meetings for months in advance and will be coordinating Ascension's carnival games. For Carrie, the Carnival is a chance to see many faces, old and new, come together for fun and fellowship.

"I like being involved on the back side and having something to do when I'm there," Carrie says. "You see people you don't see on a regular basis — people from work, church, and the schools. Last year was my first year in this role and I was running into people I knew all the time."

The annual Carnival comes together through the dedicated efforts of volunteers. Some volunteers have been giving their time every year for decades.

"It takes a huge amount of people to accomplish it," Carrie says. "We've tried to make volunteering as easy as we can. There's a SignUpGenius website with every volunteer position available."

The Carnival is critical to the Light of Christ Schools. Every year, it helps ensure that tuition stays low and affordable for families.

"Twenty percent of what we need to run as a school comes from fundraising," Mr. Markel says. "We keep tuition low by doing this. We really need everyone's help. We have a great mission, and we can't do it without the faithful of our city stepping up and helping us do it."

If you would like to volunteer to help with the St. Mary's Carnival, please contact Carrie Meyer at 320-766-7317 or carriemeyer@midco.net. To learn more about the Carnival, please visit www.lightofchristschools.org/carnival.

A Look Back at Recent Parish Events



Adults getting a refresher on the Catholic faith from Fr. Doug Krebs



Families in Faith fun!



Families honoring their loved ones at our Mass of Remembrance on Nov. 2



Our amazing cooks for Octoberfest!



Ladies of Ascension group listening attentively at their November meeting.

Upcoming Events

Thursday, Jan. 5 — Circle of Friends at Lucky's Restaurant, 11:30 a.m.

Friday, Jan. 6 — First Friday Fellowship, after 8 a.m. Mass

Tuesday, Jan. 10 — Knights of Columbus Meeting, at 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 11 — Ladies of Ascension meeting, at 8:30 a.m.

Saturday, Jan. 14 and Sunday, Jan. 15 — Knights of Columbus Caramel Roll Sale, after Masses

Wednesday, Jan. 18 — Dining in Faith meal, from 4:45-6:45 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 19 — Families in Faith Speaker for Parents, Social at 6:30 p.m. with Speaker at 7 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 21 — Parish Staff and Clergy Soup Cookoff, at 6 p.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 25 — Catechist Retreat, from 6-8 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 29 — Knights of Columbus Breakfast, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

CHRISTMAS:

A Time for Us to See the *Living* God

BY JOE SCHON, SEMINARIAN

Hello again from Washington, D.C. I've had a pretty difficult end to my academic semester, but it will be good to be back home for Christmas.

Near the end of November and the beginning of December, I was hard at work writing many papers and preparing for final exams. Throughout the whole semester, I wrote nine papers and took 10 exams. Many of these were due near the end of the semester, so I spent much of my November researching, writing and studying. However, I got a well-needed break during Thanksgiving. As has been tradition for us Bismarck seminarians, we all drove up to Rhode Island to visit a priest for Thanksgiving. We were able to drive around the ocean side of the state and even took a ferry to an island for a day trip. It was a relaxing break for me and for my brother seminarians.

The next weekend, the seminary invited parents of seminarians to visit for Mass. After Mass we had a small social in which we sang Christmas carols. The parents also got to tour the seminary and see some new additions that will be made to the seminary building. Later that week, we celebrated the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Classes were canceled for the day, so I was able to spend some time with my brothers and prepare for finals. The last week of the semester was set aside for taking finals, and on that Saturday, we had our final party of the semester.

At the beginning of the semester, our head

spiritual director had a prayer workshop for the returning seminarians. In it, he talked about the contemplative life of the Christian. He said that every Christian is called to a life of contemplation here on earth. It is not only for the most holy or for the canonized saints, but for **all** Christians here on earth. I have thought of this talk for a few months now and have often desired this union with God. We are called to a union with a living and relational God. Advent helps us to see this longing for God, but the Christmas season is a time for us to see the living God. Sometimes we just have to allow Him, we have to give Him permission, to enter into our lives and let Him change us. I pray that we may all be able to recognize our own deep longing to be with God, and to ask Him to so change us that we may know and experience His unfathomable desire to be with us for eternity. God Bless.



THE MARCH FOR LIFE:

Young Parishioners *Stand up* for the Sanctity of Life

On June 24, 2022, pro-life advocates received news for which they have long prayed — the Supreme Court removed the constitutional right to abortion through the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case. The ruling overturned the *Roe v. Wade* decision that had been law for nearly 50 years. The Supreme Court ruling gave the power to rule on abortion back to the states. But the work of the pro-life cause isn't done.

Margaret Kathol, Ascension member and senior at St. Mary's Central High School, attended her first March for Life in Washington, D.C., in 2022. Margaret is a member of the Saints for Life group. She was amazed by the sheer number of people at the march.

"During the march itself, our group was towards the front," she says. "When we got to the end, I looked back, and there were still thousands of people marching as far as I could see. It was freezing outside, but that didn't faze anyone. Also, no one was protesting against the march because it was probably too intimidating, given how passionate everyone was."

Margaret learned that there are a lot of people in the United States working for the pro-life cause. Even though *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, there is still work to be done to promote the protection of life at all stages.

"I take a stand for life because I believe it's logical to be pro-life," Margaret says. "First, it's part of my faith, and second, science says life begins at conception."

Neil Albana is the Director of Catechesis and Youth for the Diocese of Bismarck. He attended his first March for Life in Washington, D.C., in 2022 and found it very inspiring. Neil found the prayer on the nearly two-day bus ride to be the



St. Mary's High School leading the March

most powerful part of the pilgrimage.

"Students were so committed to praying for life and many other intentions," he says.

A total of eight buses transports 300 pilgrims just from the Diocese of Bismarck — the diocese takes one bus, St. Mary's Central High School in Bismarck takes two buses, Trinity High School in Dickinson and Bishop Ryan High School in Minot each take one bus, and University of Mary takes three buses.

The march was also a very energizing experience for Neil.

"When we got to the march, I was surprised by the sheer number of people there and their vigor for life," he says.

The diocese is also looking at ways to not only advocate for life but also support mothers and fathers in difficult situations. Neil asks everyone throughout the diocese to find ways to advocate for all life. Consider getting involved by advocating for life or supporting parents and families facing difficult circumstances.



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Parishioner Blaise Kathol continued from front cover



Blaise Kathol

“I am able to give the gift of time and talent by assisting at the Sunday Masses and helping out with the many activities that are put on by Ascension,” he says. “Being an active member keeps me close to God. Every Sunday, I don’t just go to church for an hour and go through the motions. I fully participate and I am actively involved during the Mass.”

For teenagers, keeping their life focused on Christ is a vital part of their development.

“The most important part of my faith is loving God and learning more about Him,” Blaise says. “I am blessed to go to a Catholic school and I have been educated a lot about my faith. This is so important because kids

like me are going to be the future generation of our country and our church. We need teens to lead the way for others and be someone that others can depend on when we get older. It is best for us to start young. Being involved and a part of our parish family helps prepare us to lead as we get older.”

Having the different areas of his life all focused on Christ has helped Blaise stay centered on what is most important — God. By being involved in the parish, by attending a Catholic school with Christ-centered academics, and by having the example of a faithful family, Blaise has found the importance of his life being rooted in the Church.

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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.

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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.