

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Parish Office Helpers

Lifting a Burden Through Loving Service

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Though the Church is always first and foremost the house of God, there are countless administrative and office responsibilities required daily in the maintenance of parish life. There are phone calls to be returned, letters to be mailed out, and bulletins to be assembled – all with the single purpose of creating a more unified parish family. Here at Church of the Ascension, the Office Helpers play a key role in making sure that all of these duties are performed each week in an efficient and cheerful manner.

"We rely on volunteers from our parish to assist in preparing the monthly newsletter for mailing, stuffing letters and labeling envelopes parish mailings, assembling bulletins on a weekly

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Some of our parish Office Helpers joyfully assisting parish staff members

"The work is done in a positive, uplifting environment. And for me personally, this has been a great way to meet our parishioners and to provide them with something to do for a few hours. For some volunteers, it has become a social event! It is truly a benefit for both the office staff and the individuals who volunteer." – Rita Ritter

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Questions and Answers

About Our Annual Stewardship Renewal

Periodically, we need to re-examine the ways in which we'll answer the call to discipleship – to stewardship – which is the reason for this Stewardship Renewal. You will be receiving in the mail your Stewardship Renewal packet. Enclosed in this packet is a brochure that will lead you through that self-examination. It is a time to ask how we can better use our time, talent, and treasure.

- Do I make time for prayer... by myself and with my family?
- Is my talent at work in our parish, actively building the Church?
- Do I give a proportionate amount of my treasure to the weekly offertory?

Commitment Weekend is October 7-8. Don't forget to bring your Commitment Card to Mass!

How do I use my Commitment Card?

Your Commitment Card allows you to make commitments to prayer, parish ministries, and offertory giving. It is designed to be used by the whole family.

Time Section: Except for the ill and homebound, everyone should be able to check "Come to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days." Try to check at least a few other items. Daily prayer should be a priority for every person trying to grow closer to God.

Talent Section: You can either sign up for new ministries or re-commit to your current ministries. Be sure to write your first name next to the ministry! This is especially important if more than one person is using the card.

Treasure Section: Clearly print how much money you plan to give each week or month to our parish. Try to take a step toward giving five percent of your income to Ascension.

Is your prayer life in need of a tune-up?

Honestly ask yourself, "How much time do I spend in prayer each week?" The answer is probably a bit embarrassing. Everyone wants to spend more time in prayer, but there's just never enough time to do everything we want to do. Good intentions are just that: intentions. This year, as you're discerning how you will offer your time to God,

resolve to follow through with your commitments. Consider each moment you spend in prayer as nourishment for your soul. The spiritual health of our parish is only as strong as the sum of its parts (individual parishioners).

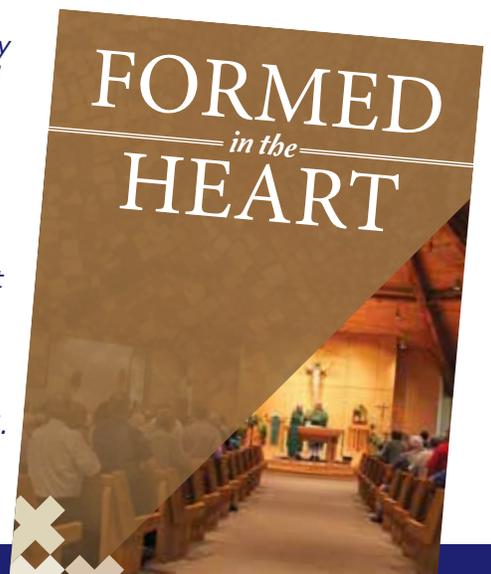
Is your level of parish involvement in need of a boost?

With a host of ministries to choose from, there's something for everyone. Sure, ministries give parishioners opportunities to serve others in the community, but they also benefit those in the ministry itself. Ask anyone who actively participates in a ministry at Ascension, "Why do you enjoy serving in this way?" They'll probably say, "I get more out of the ministry than the people I serve." This year, as you're discerning how you will offer your talents to God, considering signing up for a ministry that may benefit you, like a Bible study, prayer group, or retreat. Or, contribute to an outreach ministry, where your good deeds not only help others in the community, but also give you feelings of satisfaction and thankfulness.

Do you give a percentage of your income to the offertory?

Even the savviest businessperson worries about his or her personal finances from time to time. Adding a weekly offertory check to the list of monthly bills may seem crazy but, ultimately, sacrificial giving forces us to cut unnecessary spending, create a budget and have faith that God will help us make it through the month. All of these are good things for each of us, individually. After faithfully giving to the offertory for a few months, many Catholics find that it's not only possible to give a weekly offering, but that the fruits of their gift far outweigh the expense.

Every parish family receives a special "Stewardship Package" in the mail that further explains our parish's vision of stewardship. It includes a booklet that describes every ministry in the parish, as well as your Commitment Card.





A Letter from Our Pastor

“Here I Am, Lord.” But Are You Really There? Are You Responding to God’s Call?

Dear Parishioners,

Throughout the Bible we hear people say, “Here I am, Lord,” or something similar. Normally, it is a response to a communication, a call, from God. In the Old Testament Book of Exodus, for example, it states, “God called out to him from the bush: ‘Moses! Moses!’ He answered, ‘Here I am!’” (Exodus 3:4) We often speak in the Church about the fact that we have each received a calling from God. We also regularly say that one way to respond to that call is to live a life of stewardship.

Of course, the truth is that many do not hear God’s call because they are either not listening or they do not want to hear it. Of course, that is not how we should feel. I could write about my own call, but right now, I would rather address your call.

This is a time of year when there are calls from those in need all around us. Some of those calling are ministries right here in our parish. Before I address our response, it is important to emphasize that we need to hear the call. To hear something, we have to be listening.

The second issue is our response to the call. Do we indeed say, “Here I am?” Or, do we choose to say and do nothing? Stewardship is a call to action, a call to do something to share with and to help others. In the Old Testament passage cited above, Moses responds, “Who am I?” (Exodus 3:11) – meaning he feels unworthy and unable to fulfill this call from the Lord. God’s answer is everything, as He says to Moses simply, “I will be with you.” (Exodus 3:12) Thus, we receive the call; we are to respond to God making it clear that we are ready. We may quite likely feel (as Moses did) that we are unprepared for what God may be asking us to do, but His response to Moses was the same as His response to us – “I will be with you.”

That is enough to empower us and strengthen us to try to serve God and fulfill His desires for us.



Of course, there is one other call to which we need to respond. It is, as Christ said many times, “Come follow Me.”

As we enter this part of our personal year, this part of our calendar year, and this part of our Church year, may we be ready to listen, to respond, and then to do – full with the knowledge that the Lord is with us always!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor

Sharing God's Mercy with Others

In 2012, Tammie Johnson felt the Holy Spirit tugging on her heart, and years later, she's grateful she listened to His promptings, and helped to start the Compassion Ministry. God only knows how many people have been touched – and will be touched – by this beautiful outreach of charity.

"There are always opportunities to serve God in life, and this was one of those opportunities," Tammie says. "I am so glad I took advantage of it. It has been such a gift to me and others!"

It all began when Deacon Doyle Schulz was visiting his daughter, Susanne Hiscock, in Virginia,

and learned she had started a ministry for grieving families. Soon, he and Deacon Tony Finneman brought the idea of having one at Ascension to our Social Concerns Committee.

"I am a member of the Social Concerns Committee and a licensed social worker, so I felt I could help bring a similar ministry at our parish to fruition," says Tammie, who now serves as Coordinator of the Compassion Ministry.

And with the help of God's grace, the Compassion Ministry, which Tammie currently coordinates, was soon born. Basically, the purpose of the Compassion



Compassion Ministry group members – (back row, from left) Margie Frank, Compassion Ministry Coordinator Tammie Johnson; (front row, from left) Deacon Tony Finneman, Val Frank, Julie and Mike Luger.



Through the Compassion Ministry

Ministry is to make the church present to members during a time of suffering and grief.

"It has been such a wonderful ministry to have at our parish," Tammie says. "Because our parish is big, it has meant so much to people to have their fellow parishioners come to them, pray with them and say, 'God is with you during this time, we care about you and you are part of our parish family.'"

The Compassion Ministry consists of seven teams – on each team, there are about five to six people, including group leaders. When there has been a death in our parish community, the parish office notifies Tammie, who in turn makes a Compassion Ministry group aware of the bereaved family's need. The group then immediately responds to the family by calling them and setting up a time to visit. They offer to cook a meal, prepare a food tray for company, run errands, or do whatever may be helpful for the family during their time of grief. Typically, ministry members also bring a fruit basket and a "paper goods box" which includes things such as paper plates, towels and cups.

For the next several months, the assigned ministry members continue to support the family and contact them often to see how they are doing. They do not offer formal grief counseling, but they do share

helpful information with the families, such as about Circle of Friends, a support group at our parish for anyone who has lost a loved one.

Tammie has found coordinating the ministry to be simple, thanks to the generosity of our parishioners.

"It has been easy to get started and to maintain,"

she says. "People have been so willing to help, and they have really invested themselves in this ministry. There are even some volunteers that joined the ministry after they were touched by it themselves in their time of grief. The ministry's volunteers are taking their gifts and sharing them with others – the gifts of their time and talent."

Ultimately, the Compassion Ministry has been a powerful way to bring both volunteers and grieving persons the

merciful love of Christ, and draw them nearer to His heart.

"During a time of grief especially, people are open to someone reaching out to them, and it can bring them to God in a special way," Tammie says. "It has also built up my faith to be involved with this ministry. You have to reach out to people you don't know personally, but you feel God's hand guiding you. I believe most of our volunteers feel the same way, as well."

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**– Tammie Johnson,
Compassion Ministry Coordinator**

If you would like more information on the Compassion Ministry, please contact Tammie Johnson at 701-258-5380.



Join the Ranks and Honor the Dignity of Life in October

All Catholics are summoned to action. However, not all of them respond.

Pope Benedict XVI's homily during the April 2008 Papal Mass, held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York, directed all Catholics to respond when they are called to action:

"The Church ... is called to proclaim the gift of life, to serve life and to promote a culture of life ... this is the message of hope we are called to proclaim and embody in a world where self-centeredness, greed, violence, and cynicism so often seem to choke the fragile growth of grace in people's hearts."

October is Respect Life Month. Respect Life Sunday, as designated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is celebrated each year on the first Sunday of October.

And as we face the looming culture of death, we are all summoned to action. An apostolic exhortation by Pope St. John Paul II, titled *Ecclesia in America*, described this culture of death's effects on the "powerless" within American society:

"I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and the incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism. Nor can I fail to mention the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty ... Faced with this distressing reality, the Church community intends to commit itself all the more to the defense of the culture of life." (*Ecclesia in America* 63)

Pope St. John Paul II's Prayer for the Revitalization of the Culture of Life

O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world, Mother
of the living, to you do we entrust the
cause of life
Look down, O Mother, upon the vast
numbers of babies not allowed to be
born, of the poor whose lives are made
difficult, of men and women who are
victims of brutal violence, of the elderly
and the sick killed by indifference or
out of misguided mercy.
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life with

honesty and love to the people of
our time.

Obtain for them the grace to accept that
Gospel as a gift ever new, the joy of
celebrating it with gratitude throughout
their lives and the courage to bear
witness to it resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love, to the
praise and glory of God, the Creator and
lover of life.

—Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*

Respect Life Month is the perfect time to prayerfully examine our consciences in light of these critical issues, which directly violate the dignity of the human person. This includes not only the evil of abortion, but also euthanasia, stem cell research, capital punishment, and contraception – all of which are vital contributors to the pervasive culture of death.

So we must individually ask ourselves, "Do I, in my personal, day-to-day choices, respect life? If so, do I boldly proclaim this belief or merely stand idle? Do I exercise my right to vote and support candidates who promote a culture of life? Am I known within my home, family, and/or workplace as someone that respects life?"

As with every movement of a Christian heart towards goodness, it is imperative that our efforts issue forth from a prayerful foundation. The work of the Holy Spirit allows us to receive the zeal necessary to promote the sanctity of human life, even in the face of suffering.

This October, please pray for a revitalization of the culture of life. Every night, as a family, meditate on the prayer from John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. As you pray, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with apostolic boldness, and ask the Lord to guide your heart towards ways in which you can personally contribute to the culture of life.

The call is clear, the stakes are set, and all Catholics are summoned to action. How will you respond?



Cemetery Board Members Serve as Stewards of Remembrance and History

When members of our parish serve on the St. Mary's Cemetery Board, they are taking an active role in maintaining what is not only a place vitally important to our Catholic life, but also an important piece in the history of our city.

The cemetery was established in 1878, just six years after Bismarck was founded, and it pre-dates the establishment of North Dakota as a state in 1889.

The St. Mary's Cemetery Board consists of representatives of each of the five parishes of Bismarck and is considered the major Catholic cemetery in the city.

"All five parishes contribute money each year, and there is a fund drive around May every year to help support it," acting Parish Manager Jan Sitter explained. "Within the last year, the cemetery did get a new section added for 988 new burial lots as a result of the contributions made last year."

The Cemetery Board, which meets annually, provides oversight for the general operation of the facility. Deacon Rex McDowall serves as Manager, overseeing the day-to-day operation. Ascension's parish representative on the board is Bill Wolff.

"The board gives him insights and reports any issues they've received from their respective parishes," Jan says.

Keeping the cemetery in good shape is important for a number of reasons.

"It is important to honor the lives of our loved ones and it's important for people to know that their family members are in a secure and beautiful location," Jan noted.

Those with loved ones interred at St. Mary's Cemetery have an opportunity to take part each May in the Service of Remembrance at the cemetery, when prayers are offered for the deceased. It is typically held to coincide with Memorial Day weekend.

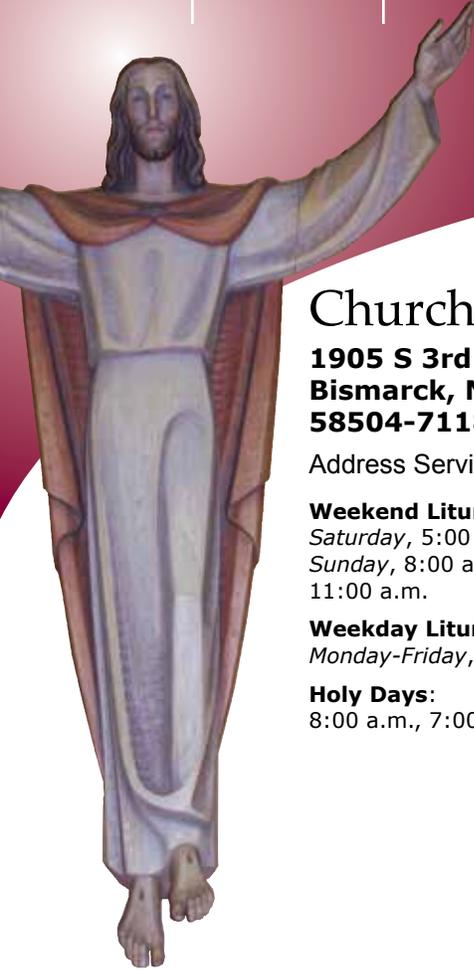
Although the board does not meet often, the members do get to know each other and work in fellowship.

"In serving on the Cemetery Board, it helps the members get a more holistic view of what the Church does," Jan pointed out. "You go to church on a weekend, and participate in the Mass, but there isn't much thought about all of the things that go on behind the scenes to keep the parish running and the services the parish provides. The cemetery is a prime example. You don't think about the services that are an important function of the Catholic Church, and like all such facilities, it does require upkeep. Those who are involved get a better understanding to the aspects of church management that one doesn't give a whole lot of thought to, otherwise."



"In serving on the Cemetery Board, it helps the members get a more holistic view of what the Church does."

—Acting Parish Manager Jan Sitter



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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.

Parish Office Helpers *continued from front cover*

basis and other office duties as needed," says Rita Ritter, Parish Secretary.

The men and women of this ministry generously give of their time regularly to assist with parish operations that would ordinarily take up a significant amount of parish staff's time. By using their time to "lift the burden from someone else's shoulder," says Rita, these volunteers are able to make a great difference in parish life while also forming lifelong friendships with staff members and other parishioners.

"It is a simple way to give and know that you are making a difference in the parish community," Rita says. "It's also a way to get to know others in our parish community. The work is done in a positive, uplifting environment. And for me personally, this has been a great way to meet our parishioners and to provide them with something to do for a few hours. For some volunteers, it has become a social event! It is truly a benefit for both the office staff and the individuals who volunteer."

Any parishioner available during regular office hours is invited to join this ministry on either a weekly or monthly basis. If you would like more information on the Office Helpers, or to begin volunteering, parishioners may sign up during the annual Stewardship Renewal this fall or contact Rita Ritter directly at 701-223-3606.

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.