

CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Rome Beneath the Surface Join us for the Ascension Lenten Retreat on March 5

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On Sunday March 5th — the First Sunday of Lent — our parish will present our annual Lenten Retreat from 3 to 4:30 p.m. The presenter/speaker is Omar Gutiérrez, and his topic is *Rome Beneath the Surface*. A gifted presenter, Omar is the Special Assistant to the Archbishop of Omaha and the Manager of the Office of Missions and Justice for the archdiocese. In addition, Omar is the Director of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith, communicating and coordinating the mission appeals for dozens of mission orders and priests from around the world. He is the Diocesan Director for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, as well as the Director for Catholic Relief Services. His office oversees the Jail & Prison Ministry for the archdiocese. He also teaches Catholic Social Doctrine for the Permanent Diaconate program for the archdiocese.

A graduate of Franciscan University of Steubenville with a BA in Theology, Omar studied at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas in Rome (*Angelicum*) and



Omar Gutiérrez, our Lenten Retreat presenter/speaker

completed his master's degree in Theology from the University of Dallas. His master's thesis applied John Henry Cardinal Newman's marks of authentic development of doctrine to the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Liberty*.

While in Rome, he was fascinated by the Church history found there, and he has returned to Rome several times for research. The result is his presentation, *Rome Beneath the Surface*.

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Lenten Retreat

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Unfolding like a thriller, Omar will take us back in time and reveal the glory and wonder of our Catholic faith. Hear about the discovery of the catacombs, and the finding of the bones of St. Peter in the Scavi under St. Peter Basilica. The presentation is livened by media and pictures.

“Parishioners of all ages are invited to attend this special Lenten event,” says Beth Kathol, Director of Faith Formation, who is coordinating the retreat. “We encourage entire families to attend. Childcare will be offered, but please contact the parish office to reserve your children’s spots. In addition, following the talk, a delicious meal of meatballs, potatoes, salad, drinks, and desserts will be served in the parish Community Room. There is no cost to attend, but a free will offering will be taken up.”

Omar describes his presentation in part in this way: “There are innumerable treasures underneath Rome. From the Catacombs to the excavations under St. Peter itself to many other secret and unknown items that teach us about the beginnings of our faith and our Church, this is a way to make both history and our Church come alive. Travel with me back in time, to the time of Saints Peter and Paul, and those early days in the Church after the Resurrection of Jesus.”

The reactions to Omar’s talk have been reflective of the excitement he generates and the information he provides. Here are responses after a recent presentation:

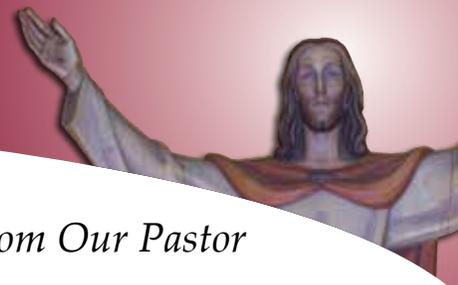
“Omar Gutiérrez is a talented and entertaining speaker. He presents his information with a huge passion, and in a way that is engaging and interesting. I love to learn about our Catholic faith, and Omar sets a fire in your heart and soul to learn more about your faith. His presentation was interesting, like a mystery novel.”

“I enjoyed the great stories told in a very engaging manner. Omar has the education and the experience that makes it wonderful.”

Omar has been published in a number of print and online magazines and newspapers including *The Catholic Answer*, *National Catholic Register*, *Catholic World Report*, *CatholicVote.com*, HLI’s Truth and Charity Forum, and he has a regular column, *Charity in Truth*, in the Archdiocese of Omaha’s paper, *The Catholic Voice*. His first book, *The Urging of Christ’s Love: The Saints and the Social Teaching of the Catholic Church*, was released in October of 2013. Omar’s writings and other information can be accessed through his website, omargutierrez.com.

“I hope people will find and make the time to be part of this,” Beth says. “It promises to be a wonderful experience.”

For more information, please contact Beth Kathol at 701-258-5692 or bkathol@ascensionbismarck.org.



A Letter from Our Pastor

The Word of God: How Do We Hear It? And How Do We Respond to It?

Dear Parishioners,

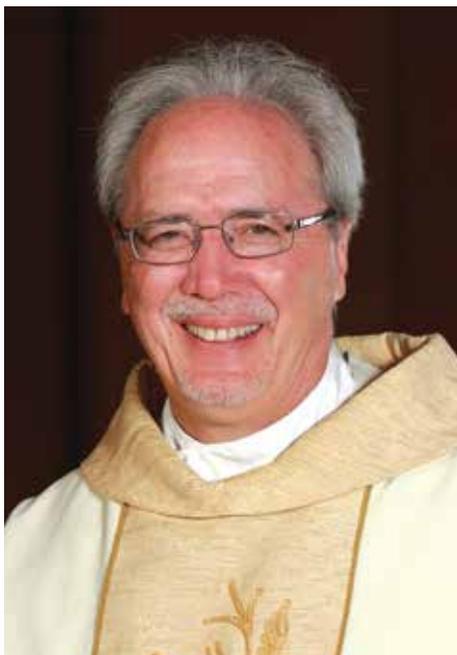
A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time – but before long, we will begin Lent. This is one of those rare years when Ash Wednesday is in March – so, Lent does not, of course, begin in February this year.

The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part – the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider that these readings are about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do

we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets of how we approach the Word of God.



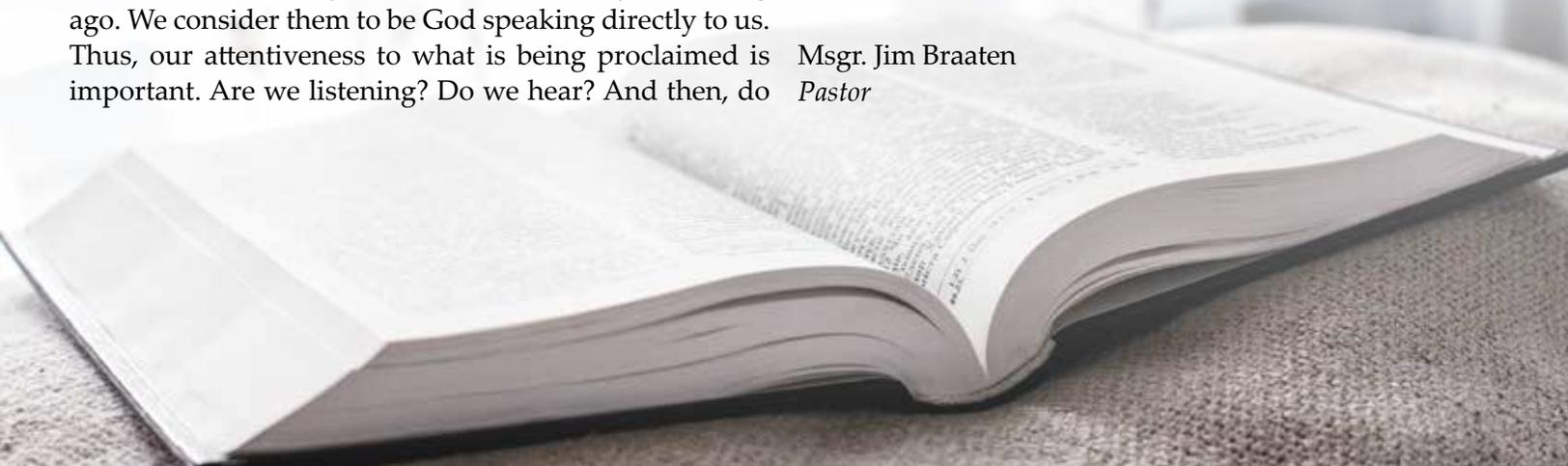
For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God’s Word.

However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act

requires time, practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us – that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor





Ministering to the Homebound Member

As Kathy Lewis points out, bringing Communion to the sick and infirm “is the oldest ministry we have.”

“When [the Church] was just getting started, after they met, the deacons took the remains [of Communion] and brought them to those who couldn’t get there because they were sick or infirm,” says Kathy, our Music/Liturgy Coordinator. “This is something we have continued for over 2,000 years.”

Here at Ascension, this ministry began with the work of a deacon, as well. For years, Deacon Ray Grabar has worked to coordinate the team of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, or EMHCs, who bring the Eucharist to those who are homebound, within our community.

“This is a ministry that he has established and been the backbone of for so long,” says Kathy, who is currently coordinating the ministry as Deacon Ray recovers from health challenges.

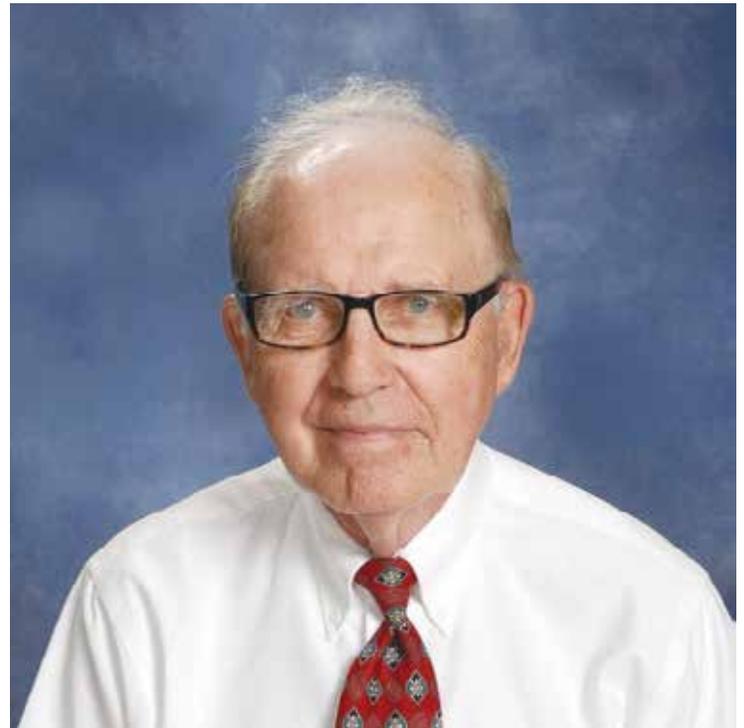
“Deacon Ray is an inspiration to us – he’s so caring,” says Rosie Dingus, who has served in this ministry for the past two and a half years.

For Rosie, one of the most important things that Deacon Ray passed on to her was the importance of honoring the special responsibility of this ministry.

“You show respect for the folks you’re visiting, as well as the Eucharist – respect for the dignity of both,” she says.

Kathy agrees that this is one of the most fulfilling ministries in the parish, honoring the Lord and our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“To bring Communion to those who are unable to come to church, I think it’s the most rewarding thing a person can do,” Kathy says. “It deepens your own faith in the power of the Eucharist. Bringing Communion to



For years, Deacon Ray Grabar has not only trained those who serve as EMHCs, visiting the homebound, but has also personally visited countless parishioners over the years.

the sick, we bring God’s presence with us – if anyone needs it, it’s these people who are ill.”

Rosie, who serves as an EMHC at Mass, has two people that she visits each week during her long lunch each Friday afternoon. Rosie reads Scripture and prays with them, along with bringing them Communion.

“I love the feeling that I’m helping others,” Rosie says.

Both Kathy and Rosie have been struck by the way that homebound parishioners look forward to receiving the Eucharist.

“I love how the folks I go to visit so look forward to seeing me. You start building a relationship because you visit them once a week. They’re definitely grateful that when they aren’t able to join the parish family, the parish family is still looking out for them.” – Rosie Dingus



Members of Our Parish Community



Rosie Dingus has served as an EMHC bringing Communion to the homebound for the past two and a half years.

“These people are so grateful and eager,” Kathy says. “There’s a peacefulness that comes after receiving the Sacrament.”

“[Receiving Communion] is like a beacon in your suffering,” Rosie adds.

For EMHCs who visit the homebound, it often serves as a reminder to them about the great gift of being able to receive Holy Communion.

“Seeing them homebound makes you so much more grateful for your health and your faith,” Rosie says. “It makes you so much more grateful for the blessings you’ve received.”

Not only do the visits strengthen those who are sick or homebound as they receive Communion, but they are also reminded that their parish community does not forget them.

“The idea that someone is coming in from the Church community shows them that we have not

forgotten them, and I think that’s huge,” Kathy says. “It’s so discouraging when someone cannot do what they’re used to doing, and to have the community say, ‘you’re still important to us,’ that’s so important.”

“I love how the folks I go to visit so look forward to seeing me,” Rosie adds. “You start building a relationship because you visit them once a week. They’re definitely grateful that when they aren’t able to join the parish family, the parish family is still looking out for them.”

Kathy and Rosie encourage others to consider serving in this ministry. Whether you’re already serving as an EMHC at Mass, or you simply would like to become trained and commissioned as an EMHC to bring Communion to one of your family or friends, this is an important and valuable way to serve.

“The privilege of bringing Christ to someone, there’s no higher calling,” Kathy says. “I honestly believe it strengthens the minister, as well. Your personal faith and strength are deepened through the grace you receive by sharing the Blessed Sacrament.”

“It’s a great way to show your gratitude to God for the blessings you have,” Rosie adds.

What an honor to join the ranks of those who have been bringing the Eucharist to those in need for the past two millennia.

“Taking part in something that has been established for so long is a fulfilling thing,” Kathy says. “Our homebound ministers are definitely passing on this tradition.”

If you have a loved one who is unable to attend Mass and would like to have Communion brought to their home, or if you are interested in serving the parish as an EMHC to the homebound, please contact the parish office at 701-223-3606.



Valentine's Day

The Feast of a Christian Martyr

Candy, flowers, romantic dinners, and excuses for wooing are the common traditions we associate with the once-pagan holiday known as Valentine's Day.

Dangling cupids, candy "message" hearts, and faux long-stemmed roses clutter every card store, waiting for that last-minute purchase.

The question is – how did this over-commercialized holiday really begin?

There are a few stories surrounding the history of Feb. 14 and St. Valentine himself, all dating back to the Roman Empire. The 14th day of February was a day set aside to honor the goddess Juno, queen of the Roman gods and goddesses. The following day, Feb. 15, began the feast of Lupercalia – a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

As part of the festival traditions, there was a name drawing among the young people. The names of young Roman women were written on slips of paper and placed into a jar. Each young man would draw a young woman's name from the jar, and the two would be partners for the duration of the festival. Sometimes the pairing lasted an entire year, and often, the couple would fall in love and later marry.

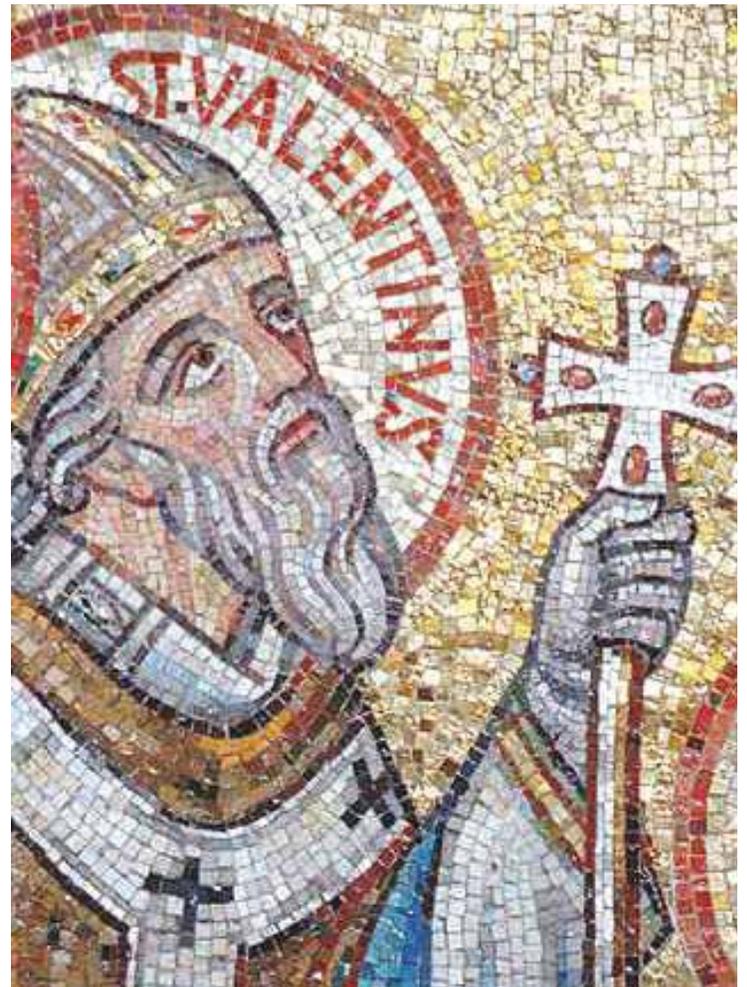
At the time, Emperor Claudius II was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns, and he was having a difficult time recruiting soldiers to join his military leagues. Claudius believed that soldiers were reluctant to join because they did not want to leave their loves or families.

With this in mind, Claudius decreed all marriages and engagements cancelled in Rome. During this time, St. Valentine was a priest in Rome, and he and St. Marius secretly married young couples. For this, St. Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who sentenced him to be beaten and then executed by beheading. He suffered this martyrdom on Feb. 14, around the year 270 AD.

Before his death, it is said that St. Valentine left a note for the jailer's daughter, who had become his friend, and signed it "From Your Valentine." Although the truth

behind the St. Valentine's legend is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and, most importantly, romantic figure. It is no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

Over time, Feb. 14 became a time for lovers to exchange sweet messages, making St. Valentine the patron saint of lovers. The date was often commemorated with the sending of poems and simple gifts. During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that Feb. 14 was the beginning of the avian mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of February – Valentine's Day – should be a day for romance.





Celebrating the Liturgy Together Through Song

For Katie Kraft, a senior at Legacy High School, singing and music is a big part of life, one that she enjoys combining with the biggest part of her life – her faith.

“In my opinion, Mass music is some of the most moving and beautiful music that there is,” says Katie, who began serving as a cantor/song leader at Ascension a year ago.

Although you may first think of the priest, lector or altar server when you think of serving the liturgy, there is another important role that further helps parishioners become engaged in the Mass.

“The role of the ministers at Mass is to enable the people to best and most fully communicate with God – someone who can get the whole congregation singing just helps further that communication with God,” says Kathy Lewis, our Music/Liturgy Director, explaining the significant role of music within the Mass. “A good song leader is invaluable for setting the mood of the liturgy.

“We want full active and conscious participation, and a good song leader can get others to come along with them, enabling parishioners to have that kind of participation,” she continues.

The role of the cantor/song leader is to lead the congregation together in song to worship God, together as one voice.

“I’ve heard singing described as the most unified prayer of the congregation, because the music and rhythm is measured, everyone is singing the same thing at the exact same time,” Kathy says.

“Music brings everyone together in Mass,” Katie adds. “Music allows everyone to join together in prayer in the most beautiful way.”

For Katie, who is involved in various other musical endeavors, there is nothing that can compare with using her talents to lead others in prayer.

“I love sharing the talents that God gave me,” she says. “I love that my singing is bringing people together in prayer in the church.”

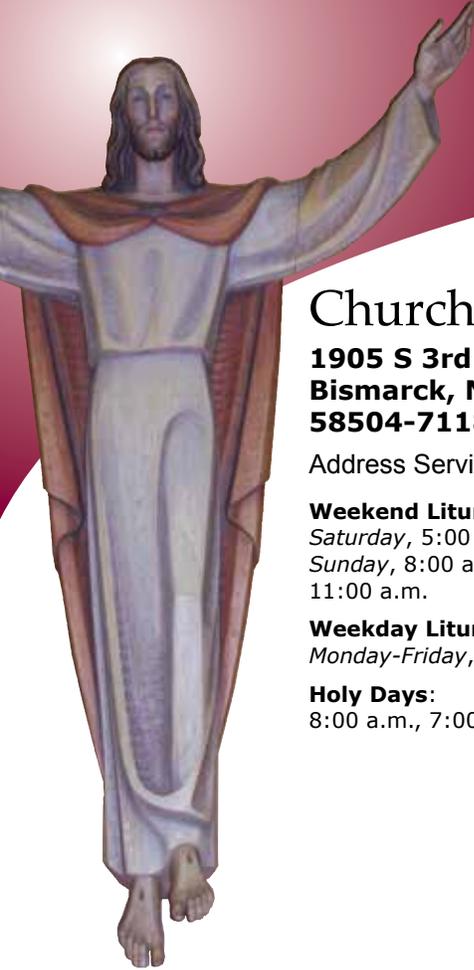


Katie Kraft serves as one of our cantor/song leaders, leading the congregation in song at Mass.

Katie has also found that serving as a cantor has also helped her grow in her relationship with God, as well as deepened her appreciation of the Mass.

“Being a cantor has helped me to realize that everything we do can be done to glorify God,” she says. “I look at it as a way to use the talents that He gave me to glorify Him. Cantoring is a very rewarding experience – it gives you a whole new perspective on Mass. You can learn more about *why* we sing what we sing and when we sing it. It also is a powerful experience to be able to lead the prayers through song.”

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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.

Celebrating the Liturgy Together Through Song

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Katie encourages others with musical talents to consider serving as cantors/song leaders.

"We are all blessed with different talents and gifts," she says. "Our lives are geared toward glorifying God. When I sing for Mass, I offer the talent He gave me back to Him as a prayer of thanks."

"God gives everyone gifts or talents, and they're given for the purpose of using them for the good of others," Kathy adds.

And what better way to serve the good of others than to help them grow closer to God in prayer, through song?

"We are all blessed with different talents and gifts. Our lives are geared toward glorifying God. When I sing for Mass, I offer the talent He gave me back to Him as a prayer of thanks." – Katie Kraft

For more information on sharing your gifts as a cantor/song leader at Ascension, please contact Music/Liturgy Director Kathy Lewis at 701-223-3606 or kewis@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.