



# Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

SWING INTO THE PARISH

## Valentine Dance!

*"I encourage families to come. It's a wonderful time to have fellowship with each other and get to know other families in the parish. And it's an opportunity to make creative Valentines for people in the community who'd really appreciate them."*

— Jessica Mattson, Director of Faith Formation

A sweetheart of an evening is slated for parish families and parishioners of all ages during the Second Annual Valentine Dance set for 4-6 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 10 in the Community Room.

The Family Faith Formation office, along with students and other volunteers, have a full evening of fellowship and fun planned. There is no charge to attend.

"Everyone is invited," says Jessica Mattson, Director of Faith Formation. "The focus is on families to make sure we include the spectrum of ages — including grandparents and everyone!"

While last year's premiere Valentine Dance featured square dancing, it's swing dance that will be hitting the dance floor this year.

"There will be instructors who will come in to do some lessons," Jessica says. "I thought with square dancing last year, this mixing it up with swing dance would be a good idea, and make it easier to get into."

A DJ will provide the music for the evening. Everyone can enjoy a light dinner and snacks.



February 2019

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# Church OF THE Ascension

## Highlights of Our 2018 Stewardship Renewal

Here at Ascension this past autumn, our parish leadership held our 2018 Stewardship Renewal. This was an opportunity for our parish community to once again commit to the stewardship way of life through ministry involvement, as well as sharing our gifts in service and gratitude to God and His Church.

This month, we are happy to share with you some of the highlights of our Ascension 2018 Stewardship Renewal.

- There were 353 Commitment Cards received from our adult parishioners, and 22 Commitment Cards received from our youth parishioners.
- There was a Commitment Card return rate of 46 percent from all active households.
- In prayer commitments — Stewardship of Time — there were 1,656 adult commitments and 82 youth commitments.
- Prayer commitments were made by 90 percent of participating households, with each household making an average of five prayer commitments.
- In ministry commitments — Stewardship of Talent — there were 1,222 adult commitments and 54 teen commitments, with 38 families not previously active in any ministry signing up to become involved in the life of the parish.
- There were 211 offertory commitments — Stewardship of Treasure — from 60 percent of participating households, with the average pledge of \$1,649.

We thank all of those who participated in the 2018 Stewardship Renewal. Your commitments of time, talent and treasure ensure that the stewardship way of life continues to grow in our Ascension community.

If you did not participate in the 2018 Stewardship Renewal by filling out and returning a Commitment Card, we ask that you consider the ways you might share your stewardship gifts with our parish community. You are invited to begin living the stewardship way of life!

### STEWARDSHIP A PATH TO HOLINESS

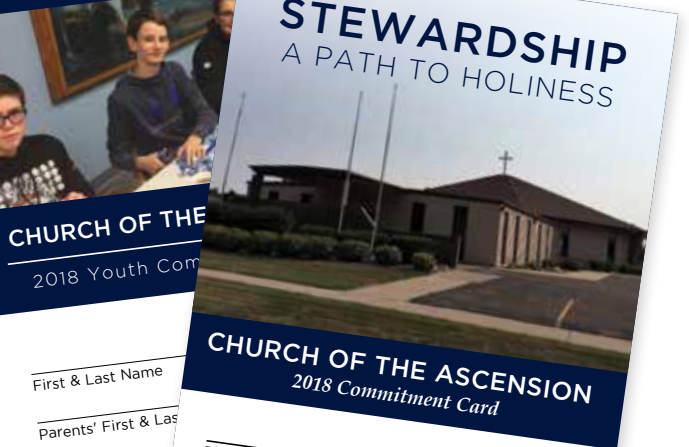


2018 Stewardship Renewal Handbook

### CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION



### STEWARDSHIP A PATH TO HOLINESS



### STEWARDSHIP A PATH TO HOLINESS

### CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION 2018 Commitment Card

First & Last Name

Parents' First & Last Name

Street Address

City

ZIP

Telephone

Family Email

Parent Signature

Disclaimer  
permission  
device

God bless  
we have  
to work

First & Last Name

Phone

Primary Email

Spouse: First & Last Name

Spouse: Phone

Spouse: Email

Address

City

State

ZIP

*A Letter from our Pastor*

## CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE

Dear Parishioners,

What is the most widely observed saint's day in February — the one that is kept even by those who aren't practicing Catholics? Undoubtedly, it would be St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

So who was St. Valentine? The saint we celebrate was a priest of Rome martyred in the late third century. But that doesn't explain how his feast came to be celebrated as the day for sending letters, cards and presents as expressions of romantic love.

The truth is that the custom of sending tokens of love comes not from any direct connection with St. Valentine, but from the ancient belief that birds begin to pair off on Feb. 14. And if courtship in the natural world occurred then, it must be appropriate for humans, as well. The association between St. Valentine and love notes is a later development.

Nevertheless, it's not wrong to connect the two. Love has many aspects, and our conception of it is richer if we keep more than one of them in mind. Martyrdom is the result of loving God more than our earthly life. St. Valentine was a martyr because of his love — his love for Jesus Christ and the Church. If he had not loved God so much, he could have repudiated his Lord and saved his life. We, in turn, express our love by sending cards and gifts on St. Valentine's Day.

But isn't that what stewardship as a way of life is, a little martyrdom? Not to push the image too far, but when we are faithful stewards, we give up a little portion of our lives out of our own love for Christ. Most Christians will not be called on to be martyrs, in the sense of forfeiting our physical lives for God. But we are called to give up some of our comforts, indulgences and riches because of our love for Him.

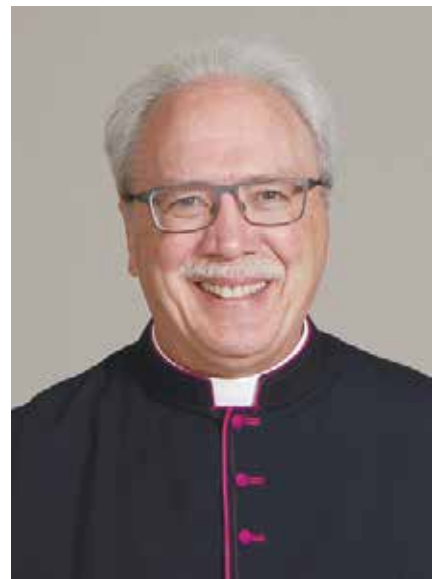
So then, as you prepare to celebrate and share your love with your valentine this month, remember St. Valentine and his love for Christ. As well, keep in mind that God loves us, and return that love with your own toward Him. Loving God will be reflected in how you prioritize your use of the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted to you. As St. John wrote (1 Jn 4:19), "We love because he first loved us."

Happy St. Valentine's Day!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Msgr. Jim Braaten  
Pastor



# Church OF THE Ascension

## THE SOCIAL CONCERNS *Radiating the Mercy of Christ*

When someone holds a prayer blanket made just for them and blessed by Mgr. Jim Braaten, they can't help but feel that the presence of Christ is with them, wrapping them with heavenly compassion, mercy and peace.

"Many people tell us that their prayer blanket makes them feel warm and peaceful, and that it really helps them to know someone has been praying for them," says Mary Neigum, who co-chairs the Social Concerns Ministry along with Joanie Schable "The blankets are made by a number of volunteers from our parish who dedicate their time and talent to helping others. As they work on each blanket, they pray for the one who will receive it. With the help of the Social Concerns Ministry, the blankets are distributed to anyone who feels a need for one — whether it is because they are sick, or lonely, or just in need of prayer."

The prayer blanket outreach is just one of the many beautiful ways that the Social Concerns Ministry radiates the infinite mercy of Christ on those in need in our parish family and local community.



"The mission of the Social Concerns Ministry is to create awareness of the needs of both the parish and larger community within the parishioners of Ascension Church," Mary says. "Its objectives are to promote social justice, create a strong sense of belonging to the parish community, and provide an avenue for the members of the parish to reach out to the community at large."

All throughout the year, the Social Concerns Ministry exemplifies the love and mercy of Christ in a rich variety of ways. For example, they take up collections to benefit various ministries in town, by means of a donation area in the back of our church. For example, in January they usually have a diaper drive for First Choice Clinic, and from time to time, they gather items for Ministry on the Margins, an outreach for those who are getting back on their feet after being released from prison. Several times per year, they serve alongside our Confirmation students at a daily banquet offered to the homeless through Trinity Lutheran Church. Last year, ministry members collected spices and paper products for Heaven's Helpers, a soup kitchen that serves the homeless. Furthermore, the Social Concerns Ministry coordinates the Giving Tree, an outreach through which parishioners can donate suggested gifts for students in need at local schools.

"This year, we made up about 225 tags with gift-giving information, and we distributed the gifts to students at eight schools in the area," Mary says.

The Social Concerns Ministry currently has about 12 deeply dedicated members who have experienced a profound encounter with Christ through their service.

"I joined this ministry about 12 years ago because I wanted to give back to the community," Mary says. "Looking back, I can see how it has really helped me to grow in my faith, and be non-judgmental and accepting of others in difficult life situations. Now I see that there is always another side to their story. The ministry is very

# SOCIAL CONCERNS MINISTRY

## *Christ on Those in Need*

active, and its members really know how to get involved and give of themselves. I have also found that it is rewarding to reach out to others. When you are doing something for someone else, you are being rewarded just as much as you are giving.”

The Social Concerns Ministry meets on the first Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. from September through May, in our parish education building.

*If you would like more information on this beautiful ministry of Christ's mercy, please contact Mary Neigum at 701-527-1648 or Joanie Schable at 701-751-0210.*



## SWING INTO THE PARISH VALENTINE DANCE!

*continued from front cover*

“As for attire, wear something festive,” Jessica says. “Make it comfortable and casual, but with added Valentine touches — something red, with hearts, and so on.”

With the success of last year’s dance, Jessica wanted to keep the event going this year.

“I felt like it was an opportunity for families to do something a little different but fun,” she says. “It is a chance for them to have fellowship and get to know others from the parish in a relaxed environment. Younger kids don’t have a chance to learn some of the dances — for example, swing — and this is an opportunity to get formal instructions and practice it in a fun way.”

There also will be an opportunity for those attending to make Valentine crafts.

“Last year, we had a list of parishioners who are homebound or in need of extra ‘care’ around Valentine’s Day,” Jessica says. “So the kids made Valentines for these specific folks and we’ll do it again, so there is a lot more purpose to the event and a larger outreach to the parish.”

Although reservations are not required, Jessica asks that those planning to attend let her know so she can make plans for enough food.

“I encourage families to come,” Jessica says. “It’s a wonderful time to have fellowship with each other and get to know other families in the parish. And it’s an opportunity to make creative Valentines for people in the community who’d really appreciate them.”

Additional volunteers are welcome for the evening!

*To contact Jessica Mattson to volunteer, or to let her know about attendance, please call 701-223-3606.*

# Church OF THE Ascension

## A Look Back at Our Christmas Eve Dinner and Our Lady of Guadalupe Party

*This past Christmas Eve, we held our 12th Annual Free Christmas Dinner for those in need, all alone or with no place else to go. It was a very joyful event, and we served over 425 guests! Thank you to the 100-plus volunteers who helped wrapped gifts, fill treat bags, setup, serve the meal, clean up and to all those who donated gifts to help make this evening one that illuminated Christ's love to all who attended. Thank you to all who attended!*



*Faith Formation students with their completed images of Our Lady of Guadalupe at a special lesson celebrating her feast day! (Not pictured — Faith Formation grades 7-9 listened to guest speaker Mark Armstrong's talk on Our Lady and her important intercession in our world today.)*

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**February 1-3**

*St. Mary's Central High School Carnival  
[www.stmaryscarnival.org](http://www.stmaryscarnival.org)*

**February 10**

*St. Valentine's Family Dance 4-6 p.m.  
in Community Room*

**February 13**

*Grade 7-8 Retreat  
6-9 p.m. in Community Room*

**February 17**

*KofC Breakfast 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.  
in Community Room*

**February 27**

*Grade 6-9 Reconciliation at 7 p.m. in Church*

## Finding a Parish Family: *Meet Bob and Loretta Scherr*

**F**or Bob and Loretta Scherr, hospitality has truly made all the difference.

“We moved here from Illinois and we went to a parish there,” Loretta says. “It was a very small town and the people there were in a circle on their own, and they didn’t really invite us in. Sometimes, after church on Sunday, Bob and I went to breakfast, and all those people sat at great big tables and we sat alone.

“Ascension is so different, you get invited and included and somebody’s always asking how you are,” she adds. “It’s so nice.”

Originally from North Dakota, Loretta and Bob moved back to Bismarck nearly two decades ago and decided to join Ascension. Although they had both been Catholic their whole lives, it wasn’t until they joined Ascension that they really started becoming involved in the life of the parish.

“We have more relationships here,” Bob says. “I went to church while I was traveling, but I wasn’t involved in it at all.”

After retiring from a career with John Deere, Bob decided to use his skills and experience to serve. From building cabinets for the Knights of Columbus to doing painting, plumbing and woodwork in the parish rectory, Bob enjoys giving back to the parish. He is also involved with the Knights of Columbus and cooks for the Spring and Christmas Eve dinners, fish fries and spaghetti dinners.

Loretta serves the funeral dinners and is also part of the parish prayer line, interceding for those in need. The couple also frequently attends daily Mass. They both serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and Bob is also a lector and an altar server for daily Mass and funeral Masses.

“I understand the Mass more now,” says Bob of how his experience of Mass has changed since beginning to serve. “When I was young going to church, I was daydreaming, and now I know



*Bob and Loretta Scherr love serving and being involved in the parish community.*

what’s happening and what’s being done. I pay more attention to it.”

Several years after joining the parish, the couple experienced terrible tragedy, losing their son, who was working in the south, to a hurricane.

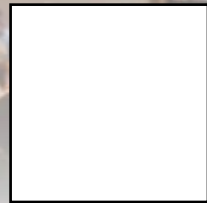
“Our son passed away — he was our only child,” Loretta says. “When we had our reception for his funeral, the ladies serving the reception asked me to join their Circle of Friends group. I am still with their group and I have met so many friends. They are such friendly people.

“Usually, when something like that happens, people kind of shy away because they don’t know what to say to you, but all of those women have gone through that and so they just took me under their wings,” she adds. “We just bonded

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# Church OF THE Ascension

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## *Bob and Loretta Scherr* continued from page 7

and talked through our grief.”

Today, the couple’s experience of a parish is a community of support of which they love being a part.

“When you work with people, see them every day, talk to them every day, it gets to be a family,” Bob says. “Especially at Mass every day, you get to know people really well.”

“I’m thinking it was my son’s death that got me more involved, because people were there for me,” Loretta adds. “I got more and more involved because I got to know more and more people.”

The Scherrs encourage other parishioners to find ways to become more involved in the parish.

“When we moved here, I went right away to the kitchen where the ladies were preparing for a funeral and I told them, ‘I’d like to get involved in things and if they could use me, I’d be willing to help,’” Loretta says. “Get involved. You’ll make friends and you won’t be alone.”

*“Our son passed away — he was our only child. When we had our reception for his funeral, the ladies from the kitchen came out and asked me to join their group. I am still with their group and I have met so many friends. They are such friendly people.”*

— Loretta Scherr

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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.