



Ascension

CATHOLIC CHURCH

A Rich Tradition of Faith and Hospitality: A History of Church of the Ascension

When the Church of the Ascension celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1999, Jan Sitter, who had recently moved to the area with her family, sat in the pews engaging in the liturgy and praying for new employment. Little did she know that she would participate in the stewardship of our parish.

“I had moved back to Bismarck and would soon be hired as the Parish Administrator at Ascension,” says Jan, now the Parish Bookkeeper. “I was hired shortly after we began the major renovation project and have been here since.”

The Church of the Ascension was founded in 1974 during an area of growth and development in south Bismarck following the construction of the Garrison Dam.

“The diocese needed another church to serve the people of this area,” Jan says. “When the parish was established, they had Mass in the Kirkwood Plaza Twin Theater until the church was constructed in 1979.”

In 1984, the rectory and educational building were constructed south of the church. The education building consists of a community room, offices and classrooms.

A major renovation project took place from 1999 to 2000 during which the entire inside of the church was essentially remodeled. The parish worked with an architect from St. Paul, Minn. on the renovations, which included putting

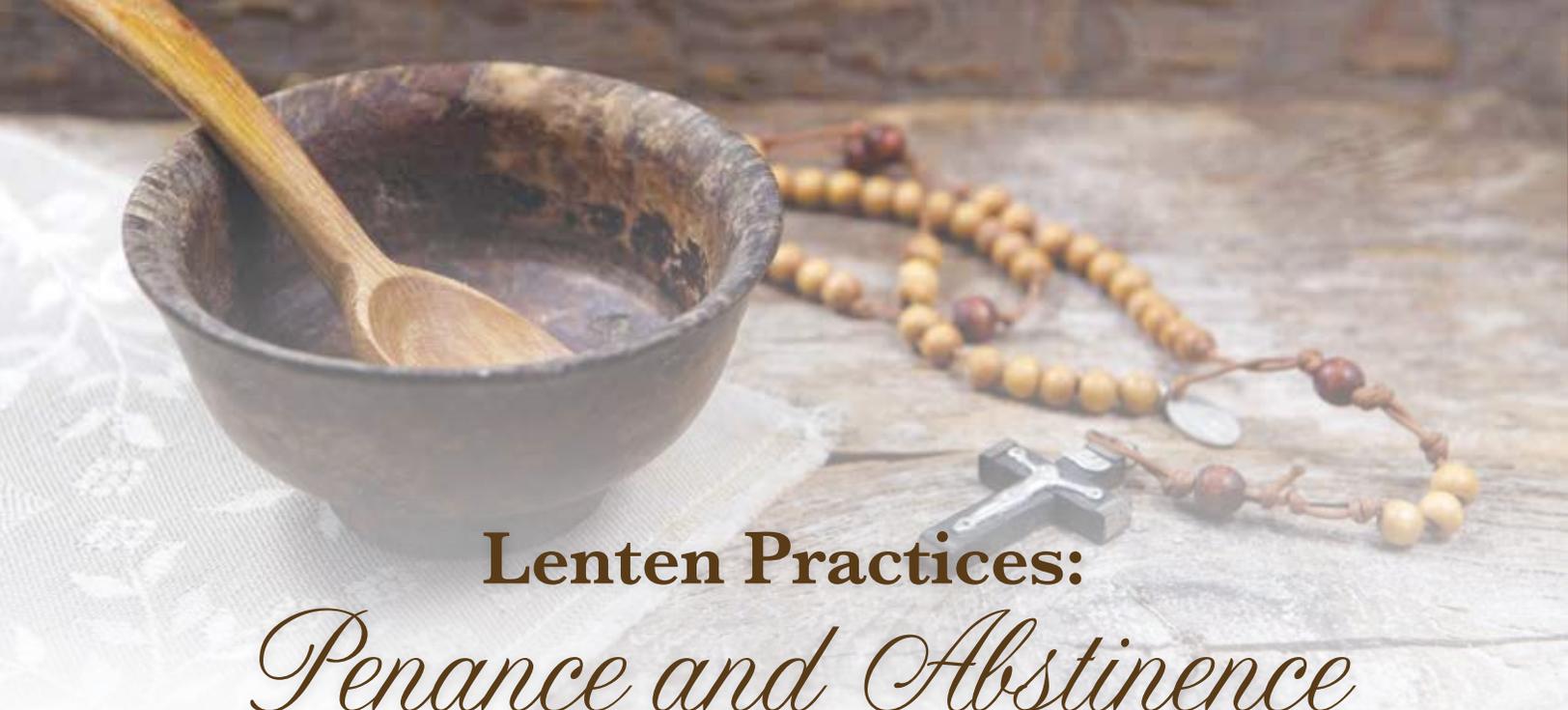


The future site of the Church of the Ascension

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Lenten Practices: *Penance and Abstinence*

For many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say "goodbye" to meat on Fridays and "hello" to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hard-wired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing that Catholics definitely understand, it's adhering to the laws of tradition. Indeed, the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the Scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence, and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence.

First, all humans are sinners. Second, penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God. Third, the Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance. And finally, Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.

The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ — they are not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence

and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent.

Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.

But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others — just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind — "by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own" (*Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence*, 15).

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time, talent and treasure. The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.



A Letter from our Pastor

CELEBRATING EASTER WITH GRATITUDE

Dear Parishioners,

Easter Sunday arrives later this year — April 21. The method for determining the date of Easter was settled by the ancient Church according to a complicated formula that allows it to fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25. However, most of us are content simply to look it up on a liturgical calendar!

One feature at this year's Easter celebration will be a dramatic contrast from what we have experienced in the winter months — the days will be noticeably longer.

As a matter of fact, the English word "Lent" is related to the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "to lengthen," for spring is the season when the days grow longer. Even though most Americans do not live in rural settings or agricultural environments like our ancestors did, we still find joy in the longer days that contrast with the early nightfall that we experienced at Christmas. So when Lent is over and Easter arrives, our spirits naturally delight as we leave the winter behind.

Don't get me wrong — I am not saying that Easter is some sort of spring festival. The central theme of the Christian festival of Easter is clear. It celebrates what happened once for all over 2,000 years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross and was raised back to life on the third day by God the Father. This event took place during the Jewish observance of Passover, which comes during the spring, which is why we celebrate Easter then.

So, then, we have two reasons to celebrate at Easter. Primary, of course, is our yearly remembrance of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, Satan and death. But we can also rejoice in the coming of spring, which melts the snows of winter and brings us beautiful flowers in bloom.

In its pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops gives a definition of who a Christian steward is. It has several parts, but the first noted aspect is that

a Christian steward is "one who receives God's gifts gratefully" (9). The bishops don't distinguish between gifts from God that are spiritual and ones that are material.

After all, "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). The first step in becoming a good steward is to receive what

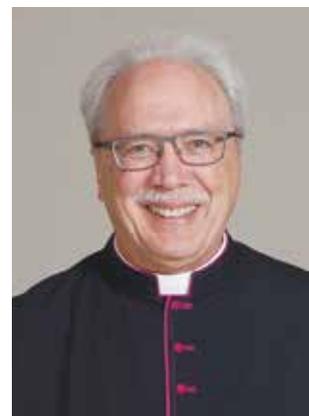
God gives, to recognize that these gifts come from God, and to be grateful for them.

So then, as we celebrate Easter with gratitude for what God continues to do for us in both the material and spiritual spheres, we can resolve to use all we have received — the time, the talent and the treasure entrusted to us, the beauty of the natural world, and the hope of eternal life — as stewards who use them for God's glory and the welfare of His people.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor

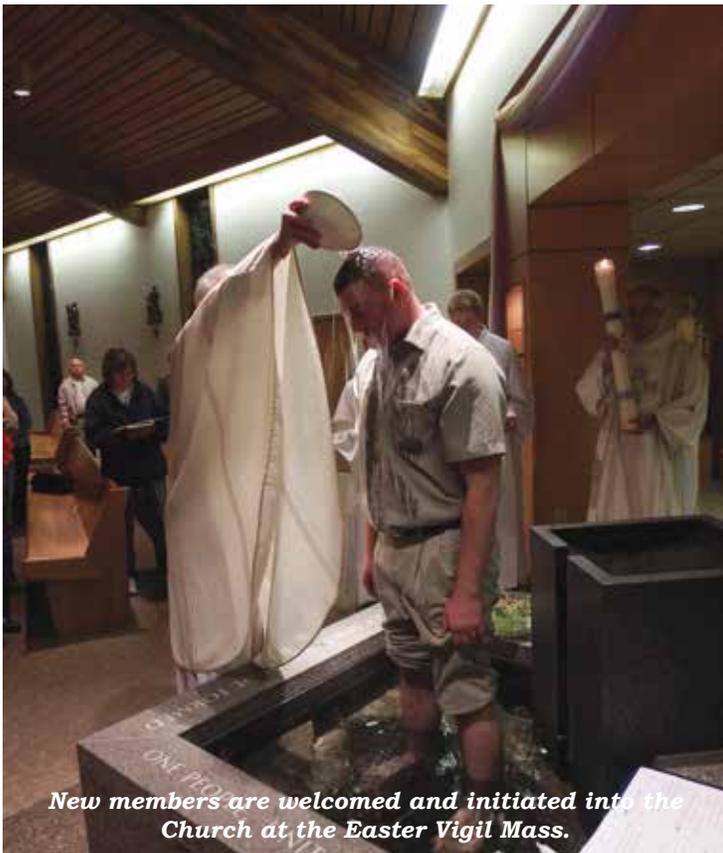


Church OF THE Ascension

He Is Risen: CELEBRATING



The Easter Vigil is a rich liturgy, full of symbols and sacraments



New members are welcomed and initiated into the Church at the Easter Vigil Mass.

Each year, at one of our most beautiful Masses, Church of the Ascension recalls the story of salvation history, celebrates the victory of our Risen Lord, and welcomes new members into our Church family. The Easter Vigil is an incredible celebration, not only for those who are receiving sacraments, but also for all of us, welcomed to share their joy and the triumph of our Savior.

“It begins a time of joy and celebration — it sets the perfect tone for the Easter season,” says Deacon Tony Finneman. “At Easter Vigil Mass, the Church ‘keeps watch.’ It begins the celebration of the resurrection of Christ and is the turning point of the Triduum.”

There are a number of ways that the celebration of the Easter Vigil is unique from a “typical” Sunday Mass. The liturgy begins with the lighting of a small fire outside of the church, from which lighted candles are processed inside the darkened church, signifying the Light coming into the world, in Christ. The Liturgy of the Word is also unique, with seven Old Testament readings and Psalms, sharing the story of our faith, leading to the coming of Christ, Whose resurrection is proclaimed in the Gospel.

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of this Mass is the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation for those who are entering the Church. Some are baptized and embraced into the family of God for the first time, while others, having been baptized, become fully initiated into the Catholic Church, receiving the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist.

“It is at Easter Vigil that those who have been preparing for full admittance into the Catholic Church may be baptized and brought into full communion with the Church,” Deacon Tony says.

“The Easter Vigil is the Mass celebrating the Lord’s resurrection, and was chosen by the Church as the perfect time to welcome new members,” adds Deacon Doyle Schulz, who works with those preparing to enter the Church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process (RCIA).

Following the Mass, people are invited to



GOING TO THE EASTER VIGIL LITURGY

continue the celebration of the Easter feast with a time of fellowship, gathering for a light meal in the Parish Education Building.

“While it is generally a very spiritual time, this is also a social time — a time for parishioners to enjoy each other’s company and reflect on the service just ended,” Deacon Tony says.

Deacon Tony encourages parishioners who have not yet experienced an Easter Vigil liturgy to consider attending this year.

“Easter Vigil is a very different experience from a normal weekend Mass,” Deacon Tony says. “Each part of the service is deeply rooted in Scripture and is intended to create a more spiritual environment leading into the Easter season.”

“The Easter Vigil sets the perfect tone for the Easter season,” he adds. “It speaks clearly to the resurrection of our Lord and gives all Christians hope for their own resurrection. It begins a time of joy and celebration.”

The Easter Vigil Mass begins at 9 p.m. on Saturday, April 20, at Ascension Church. Please see the bulletin or contact the parish office for further details, 701-223-3606. If you would like to volunteer to help with the meal following the Easter Vigil, please contact our Parish Business Manager, Beth Kathol at 701-223-3606 or bkathol@ascensionbismarck.org.

History of Church of the Ascension *continued from front cover*

in new pews, lighting, carpeting, paneling, paint, a permanent baptismal font and even a central aisle.

“It was really fun doing the renovation and learning the different things involved in the process, from deciding on sanctuary furniture to having a rededication celebration,” Jan says.

After the renovation was completed in 2000, a rededication Mass was celebrated with Bishop Zipfel presiding. Following the Mass, a time capsule was buried in front of the church.

Jan describes Ascension’s worship environment as “modern but simple.” She believes the warm and inviting nature of the space is caused both by the structure’s design, as well as by the people.

“The renovation definitely made the church more inviting and appealing to people who come to pray with us,” Jan says. “The building doesn’t do everything, though. Hospitality comes from the people of the parish, and we work hard at that.”

As our parish nears its 45th anniversary, we might remember that one interesting facet of our history is that we have only had three pastors — Fr. E. J. Becwar, Fr. Marvin J. Klemmer and Msgr. Jim Braaten.

“Monsignor is only our third pastor,” says Jan, who joined the parish staff when Fr. Klemmer was still the pastor.

Ascension’s parish family has grown exponentially since the first few hundred families gathered in the Kirkwood Plaza Twin Theater to celebrate the liturgy. From the beginning, our parishioners have given of their time, talent and treasure to care for our parish and look toward its future.

“We did a capital campaign for the renovation, and we were amazed at the generosity of parishioners,” Jan says. “They are excellent stewards and support the parish in many ways. New parishioners are always welcome to be part of our parish family.”

If you would like more information about Ascension’s parish history, please reach out to Jan Sitter at 701-223-3606.

Church OF THE Ascension

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fish Fry

April 5 & April 12 from 5-7 p.m.

Stations of the Cross

April 5 & April 12 at 5:30 p.m.

Bake Sale

April 6 & 7 after all weekend Masses

Faith Formation Grill Out

April 24 from 4:45-6:45 p.m.

Parish Spring Dinner

April 28 from 4-7 p.m.

Communal Penance Services

April 14 at 3:00 p.m. – Ascension Church

April 15 at 7:00 p.m. – St. Mary's Church

April 16 at 7:00 p.m. – Corpus Christi Church

April 17 at 7:00 p.m. – St. Anne's Church

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

PALM SUNDAY — April 14

Blessing of Palms & Procession at 5:00 p.m. Mass;
Sunday Masses at 8:00, 9:30
& 11:00 a.m.

HOLY THURSDAY — April 18

Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7:00 p.m. followed by
Eucharistic Exposition & Adoration
until 10:00 p.m.

GOOD FRIDAY — April 19

Commemoration of the Lord's Passion at Noon;
Stations of the Cross at 5:30 p.m.

HOLY SATURDAY — April 20

Easter Vigil at 9:00 p.m. with an Easter Breakfast
to follow in the Community Room

EASTER SUNDAY — April 21

Mass at 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 a.m.

Ascension Assists "Ministry on the Margins"

Serving with Ministry on the Margins, Ascension Parish Staff recently helped serve coffee and breakfast to those in need, and assisted them the food pantry and clothes pantry. Ascension Parish supports Ministry on the Margins with our monthly Special Needs collection and with our ongoing food drive collection. For more information on Ministry on the Margins and to volunteer, visit www.ministryonthemargins.com.



From left, Sr. Kathleen Atkinson (founder of Ministry on the Margins), Deacon Doyle Schulz, Rita Ritter, Bob Urlacher, Julie Luger, Beth Kathol, Julie Ternes, Deacon John Paul Martin, Jan Sitter, and Austin Martin (son of Deacon JP)

MEET PARISHIONER BRENT FREESE

Strives to Become a “Vigilant Servant” in Everyday Life

Though Ascension parishioner Brent Freese was born and raised Catholic, it wasn't until his college years that the faith truly became his own. Thanks largely to the University of North Dakota's Newman Center, Brent began to realize how truly blessed he was. And with that realization came an increasing conviction of the need to share those blessings with others.

“Throughout my time there, the priests would say or hand out various saints' sayings and Bible quotes,” Brent says. “And one that just really struck me was, ‘Those to whom much is given, much is expected’ (Luke 12:48). I really do feel like I've been given a lot in life, whether it's my good health, material things or my family. It's kind of foolish for me to think that I've been given all of these things just by chance. And so I've just had this conviction ever since that I need to give it back in some way.”

In college, this belief led Brent to become a Peer Minister, working closely with FOCUS missionaries to help evangelize his fellow college students. And as he became increasingly surrounded by people of likeminded faith, Brent witnessed his own faith life dramatically deepen.

“I was just at the church so often physically and surrounded by these people whose deep faith was such a part of their life,” Brent says. “That's kind of what

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As a single young man, parishioner Brent Freese feels that it is important for him to give of his time and lend a ready hand whenever needed.



Brent Freese with some of his fellow members of the North Dakota National Guard.

Church OF THE Ascension

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Parishioner Brent Freese *continued from page 7*

made it become a bigger part of my life, too.”

A few years later, Brent was led here to Bismarck through his job with the North Dakota National Guard. Knowing that he needed to remain connected with a Church community, Brent chose Ascension Parish because of its close proximity to his home. And when he unexpectedly ended up sitting next to former college friends at his very first Ascension Mass, Brent felt certain he was where God wanted him to be.

As a single man, Brent feels that he has more time to give than the average person. So an important part of stewardship for him has just been pitching in and serving “as the muscle” whenever needed. Brent has also become a committed member of the Knights of Columbus and lectors regularly for weekend Masses. He also

partakes in a Bible study with other young men in the area and has previously attended RCIA classes as a way to further delve into the faith.

Not only do these ministries allow Brent to give back to the Lord, but they also further connect him to Christ and the faith community. This, says Brent, helps keep him grounded during everyday living so that he can become the vigilant servant (Luke 12:37) described by Christ in the Gospels.

“I think getting involved in things like this helps make your faith more than simply going to church on Sunday,” Brent says. “It takes your faith beyond merely that one hour of time in church each week. It makes the faith more a part of your life — helps you expand your horizons, per se, and find new ways to incorporate faith into your day to day living.”

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.