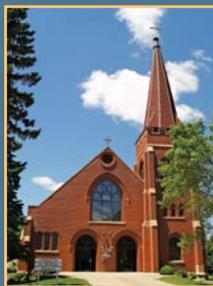


ST. ISIDORE THE FARMER AREA FAITH COMMUNITY



ST. BRIDGET



SACRED HEART



ST. FRANCIS



ST. MALACHY



VISITATION ORATORY



ST. JOHN

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FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION SET FOR OUR FAITH COMMUNITY YOUTH

With the arrival of spring, new life emerges and the air grows warm with beautiful promise. And, like that arrival of spring, 37 of our faith community's youth will be entering a new life as they receive their respective Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation.

Sixteen of our students will be confirmed by Bishop John M. LeVoire during the 10:30 a.m. Mass on March 31 in Murdock. They will be honored during a reception following Mass.

While most of the teens have been receiving instructions together for the past two years, the Appleton Area youth had their own sessions. However, all the teens being confirmed came together for the Confirmation Retreat in October.

"We've been doing the combined Confirmation for several years," says Charlotte Rosemeier, financial secretary for St. Isidore the Farmer. "We've alternated the ceremony between locations so each holds it every few years."



A total of 21 students, all in second grade, will receive First Communion on the weekend of April 27 and 28.

"The families have been given the option of their children making First Communion at their own location," Charlotte says. "At Murdock, it will be 5:00 p.m. Saturday, April 27. At Appleton, it will be 8:30 a.m., Sunday, April 28. In Benson, it's at 10:30 a.m., Sunday, April 28."

The youngsters making their First Communion have been studying for one year.

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Our interests and abilities are varied, and our volunteer options are endless, as we are called to give our talents back to God in loving service. Examine your heart and prayerfully discern your gifts, then direct those gifts towards serving the people of God.

GOT TALENT? BRING IT TO THE SPOTLIGHT!

The word “talent” often conjures up images of stage performers in the spotlight, captivating awestruck audiences with their impeccable musical or acting skills.

While these talented performers are certainly deserving of applause, the majority of the population sits hidden in the shadows, staring on in amazement while feeling overlooked — and perhaps wishing to possess such talents themselves. But even when we feel overlooked and untalented, God knows better. As Christians, we are all called to dig deep and trust that we are specially blessed with valuable talents and abilities, even if our talents aren’t so obvious or don’t garner applause and accolades.

Along with “time” and “treasure,” “talent” is one of the “three Ts” of stewardship. Exploring our natural inclinations and preferences, especially when guided by the intricacies of our unique personalities, can unearth God-given talents.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit,” writes St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians. “There are different forms of service, but the same Lord.”

Some people have the gift of working peacefully with children. Equipped with patience and gentleness, they are able to guide young souls to the Lord. Yet, others shudder at the thought of a classroom full of 5-year-olds, and instead seek

the quiet solace of behind-the-scenes tasks — cleaning the church, sewing altar cloths or stuffing envelopes.

Our interests and abilities are varied, and our volunteer options are endless, as we are called to give our talents back to God in loving service. Examine your heart and prayerfully discern your gifts, then direct those gifts towards serving the people of God.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr., author of *Life’s Little Instruction Book*, once said, “Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if it is going to be forwards, backwards, or sideways.”

If our gifts of talent are not guided by the discipline of prayer, just like an octopus on roller skates, we will get nowhere fast! Yet, if we keep our eyes on the goal of heaven and serve the Lord with joyfulness, our efforts will produce a bountiful harvest. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”

The next time you sit quietly in the shadows behind a glaring stage spotlight, rest assured that your talents are no less impressive in the eyes of God, and will always be “applauded” when directed to the service of His people.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Answering the Call for Lent

Dear Parishioners,

This month, as we proceed on our Lenten journey to Easter, every one of us should ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ and how well am I living that out each day?”

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops addressed what it means to be a disciple when they wrote their pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. “Who is a Christian disciple?” the USCCB asked and, in turn, they also provided the answer, “One who responds to Christ's call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ's” (9). So, as disciples of Jesus Christ, it is essential that we consider the true meaning of that answer.

The first step in the Christian life is responding to Jesus' call. Jesus invites every person to develop a relationship with Him. But obviously, not every person is a Christian disciple. Some people are too busy to even hear that invitation or don't make the effort to recognize it. Others make a conscious decision to reject the call because it demands that they can no longer place themselves at the center of their lives.

On the other hand, for those of us who make an affirmative response to Christ's call, the most meaningful life possible awaits us, both now and into eternity. However, saying “yes” to Jesus has consequences that affect the rest of our lives.

The first consequence of becoming a disciple is that we now follow Jesus. The Gospel accounts record that when He called His disciples, they left what they were doing and followed Him. The same is true for us today. Becoming a Christian disciple does not necessarily mean that all of us will leave



our present job, or enter into the consecrated life, or serve as a missionary in another country — although that might be where the journey leads you. But it does mean that we offer our work — whether as a doctor, homemaker, mechanic, farmer or teacher — to build up the Kingdom of God.

In following Jesus as His disciples, we should strive to more fully absorb His teaching and then apply it to our daily lives. As we do, we find that we attempt to imitate Him, treating others with the same welcoming and generous spirit. St. Peter was direct when he described how Jesus acted: “He went about doing good... for

God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). That's the model for how we must live.

Discipleship leads naturally to stewardship as a way of life. The time we offer in prayer and worship will give us the strength and guidance for serving Christ. Using the skills and gifts we have to build the Kingdom will direct our offering of talent. The support of all these endeavors with our treasure will ensure that our lives as disciples and stewards are genuine.

As a Christian steward this Lent, I encourage you to reflect on the changes you can make in growing as a disciple of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Jeremy Kucera,
Pastor

HEALING PRAYER MINISTRY OFFERS FREEDOM

No matter who you are or what your particular story, the truth is we all need some form of healing in our life. We all bear wounds, oftentimes hidden deep under the surface. We carry wounds of anxiety, depression, shame or fear. We hold onto feelings of resentment, anger or insecurity. All of these inhibit our ability to receive and fully enter into God's love — sins of pride, vanity and selfishness prevent us from fully embracing a life of grace. This is part of our fallen condition.

Yet, thanks to Christ's unfailing mercy, these wounds are not our story's ending, for St. Peter tells us plainly, "By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). All we need to do is open ourselves up to that healing, utilizing ministries like the Diocese of New Ulm's Healing Prayer Ministry.

"Everybody is different," says Deacon Mike McKeown, Ministry Director. "They each deal with different lies that they feel about themselves. The purpose of the Healing Prayer Ministry is to help individuals identify those lies and spirits that are affecting their relationships, making them feel stuck. That's usually the sign, when they feel like there is something they can't get beyond — when



*Deacon Mike McKeown,
Director of the Diocese of New
Ulm Office of Healing Ministry.*

they think, 'I try to get close to God but I just feel this anger. I know God loves me but I just can't seem to feel it in my heart; just can't feel it personally.'"

The Diocese of New Ulm Healing Prayer Ministry consists of carefully chosen and trained priests, deacons and lay people, equipped to help lead people on a journey of healing. To do this, they use a healing and deliverance prayer model, based on the book *Unbound: A Practical Guide to Deliverance* by Neal Lozano. Sessions consist of an individual and two or more trained team members, centering on one of five key areas — repentance, forgiveness, renunciation, authority and, finally, the Father's blessing.

"During that time, we listen to where the person feels stuck in their relationships with God and others, and help them identify what's truly going on under the surface," Deacon Mike says. "What lies have they bought into about themselves? Lies like 'God doesn't love me,' 'I'm not deserving of His love' or 'I'm a failure.' And what spirits are impeding them — a spirit of bitterness or anxiety where they can't trust God."

Though it can be difficult to delve into and reopen these wounds, says Deacon Mike, facing and

"So many of the people who go through this process say, 'If I would have known it would have been this nice, I would have done this a long time ago.' It is truly a powerful and liberating experience. That's really the great blessing of this ministry, to witness people no longer be controlled by the anger, anxiety or sense of worthlessness that was holding them back before — the gift of helping someone truly recognize themselves as a child of God and be able to walk in that freedom." — Deacon Mike McKeown

DOM FROM THE BURDENS OF OUR WOUNDS

revealing them to the Great Healer is an amazingly, powerful experience. And the effects of such deep, spiritual healing are often much farther reaching than expected.

“So many of the people who go through this process say, ‘If I would have known it would have been this nice, I would have done this a long time ago,’” says Deacon Mike. “It is truly a powerful and liberating experience. That’s really the great blessing of this ministry, to witness people no longer being controlled by the anger, anxiety or sense of worthlessness that was holding them back before — the gift of helping someone truly recognize themselves as a child of God and be able to walk in that freedom.”

Those seeking healing can come to the ministry confident that they will be met in a compassionate, non-judgmental environment where their

confidentiality will be respected and protected. And what better way to enter into the season of Lent than to perform what Deacon Mike refers to as “good housekeeping,” removing the spiritual baggage and negativity that has been keeping us from the Lord.

“That’s what Lent is truly all about — bringing healing to our relationships so that we can experience what God has in store for us, so that we can open our hearts to what He has for us,” says Deacon Mike.

For more info on the Healing Prayer Ministry or to schedule a prayer session, please contact Deacon Mike McKeown at 507-430-1690 or mmckeown@dnu.org. Also, visit the ministry website at www.dnu.org/healing-ministry.

FIRST COMMUNION AND CONFIRMATION SET FOR OUR FAITH COMMUNITY YOUTH *continued from front cover*

Undoubtedly these youngsters are looking forward to their day with excitement.

“Receiving the Eucharist for the first time is a big deal that’s our source and summit of our faith,” Charlotte says. “Maybe they don’t really have a complete understanding — Jesus is coming to them at such an innocent age. They are taking Jesus to other people, and they probably do a better job than we do. For them, it’s maybe a little easier to take the Eucharist and give the light of Jesus.”

The teens receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation will experience something much deeper, with their increased maturity.

“When Confirmation comes into play, it gives the teens a chance to clear the clutter from their hearts and rejuvenate their faith,” Charlotte says. “Confirmation is like the completion of Baptism — the parents make the promise at Baptism, but Confirmation is taking

that promise further on with the grace of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit. It’s their turn.”

There will be Confirmation practice on the evening of March 27.

The youngsters receiving First Communion will be working with their individual teachers.

“I’d like to say ‘thank you’ to the teachers who’ve been working with the kids,” Charlotte says. “We wouldn’t have this without these committed adults giving of themselves.”

Anyone with questions about either First Communion or Confirmation may call Charlotte Rosemeier at 320-842-4021.

THE BLESSINGS OF THE CATHOLIC MASS

Imagine our Lord and Savior dying on the cross for us right up the street. Imagine knowing that Mary is sitting at the foot of the cross with St. John, witnessing her Son giving Himself to the Father for the sake of all of us. Would we not run to be there? Would we not desire to share in His sacrifice, just as Mary did?

It is ironic that today, with all of the freedom of religion that we enjoy in the United States, many of us wonder why we must go to Mass on Sunday.

However, if we really understood what the Mass is and how we participate in the celebration, we would instead be asking why we are, as sinful human beings, blessed with the opportunity to participate in the holy Mass. If we simply understood and recognized that God's infinite goodness allows us to do so, we would be eager to go to Mass on Sunday and every other day of the week.

It is true, however, that all Catholics are obliged to "Keep holy the Lord's Day" by sharing in the Mass. But why are we obliged?

The Eucharistic Liturgy is the center of our faith. It is "the summit toward which all activity of the Church is directed" and it is "the font from which all her power flows" (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* 10). It does not exhaust the activity of the Church, but is most certainly her greatest work.

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is literally re-presented to the Father during Mass, and Christ allows us to join with Him in offering that sacrifice. Imagine our Lord and Savior dying on the cross for us right up the street. Imagine knowing that Mary is sitting at the foot of the cross with St. John, witnessing her Son giving Himself to the Father for the sake of all of us. Would we not run to be there? Would we not desire to share in His sacrifice, just as Mary did?

Believe it or not, the sacrifice of Calvary is really, truly happening at our parish, every time the Mass is offered.

Our participation in Mass gives us the strength and the graces we need to live our lives as Christ's

disciples. So, what does this mean for us?

This means we have a front row seat to the sacrifice of Calvary. Given such a gift, how can we not accept it?

We also have a chance to join in Jesus' sacrifice by offering our own prayers and petitions. As an example, what better gift could we give deceased loved ones than the offering of prayers for their souls in purgatory?

Most importantly, we have the opportunity to receive the Eucharist, followed by quiet time, when we offer sincere thanks and allow God's graces to fill us. Think of all you are missing when you do not properly prepare yourself to receive the Holy Eucharist.

We ought to joyfully head to Church each Sunday, eager to give God glory in the greatest way we can! Attending and actively participating in Mass every Sunday is our obligation as Catholics. But we should not allow the fact that our attendance is "required" to stop us from going. Nor should we allow our laziness to overshadow the amazing privilege and the many blessings that lay before us in the Mass.

The pope and the bishops direct us to participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy every Sunday because they know there is no better way to keep holy the Lord's day — giving God thanks for all He has done for us in the most powerful way possible. They know that, through the Mass, we gain the graces necessary to live our lives in this world.

Our ability to participate in the Mass is a wonderful gift, not a great burden. May Christ enlighten our minds and hearts to clearly see the wonders of the celebration, and give us great enthusiasm and eagerness to participate.

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT AND SISTERHOOD: *Our New Mom's Group*

“Mommy wars.” If you’re a mom who’s dared to wander into an online community of mothers, or maybe even a real-life mom’s group, you’ve likely heard the expression. Maybe you’ve even experienced the bickering that has become an unfortunate norm in interactions amongst mothers.

Here in our Area Faith Community parishes, we have a different view of what a community of women and how mothers should be.

“In our culture, it always seems like you’re trying to one-up everyone,” says parishioner and mom, Jessie Collins. “There’s jealousy and it makes it really hard. Rather than competing with one another, we should be helping one another and lifting each other up. That’s my hope for this group, that we can really support each other.”

This past fall, Jessie and other local moms decided to start a group that gave moms an opportunity to get connected with other Catholic women, to share the adventure of motherhood.

“I have been part of other groups, but I missed the Catholic aspect,” Jessie says. “It just feels like there’s a lot that we should be talking about as Catholic moms and I wanted more. I love my faith and I want to be a part of a mom’s group that includes that, too.”

The group began meeting regularly in February and is using the *Momnipotent* study by Danielle Bean — www.momnipotentstudy.com — in hopes of helping mothers better embrace their vocations and growth in holiness.

“I hope that through the studies we do, they’ll grow in their faith and live their faith within their families,” Jessie says. “We have to keep learning and growing — otherwise, spiritually, you’ll die. God’s always pursuing you, but it’s a two-way street. Also, it’s about showing your kids that it is important to you to keep learning and growing.”

The group is designed to help women make connections with other like-minded Catholic moms.

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Our Mom's Group is an opportunity for women to grow in faith while finding support and fellowship.

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WEEKEND MASS TIMES:

MARCH - JUNE

Saturday

7:00 p.m.

*Sacred Heart in Murdock
(Bilingual Mass)*

Sunday

8:30 a.m.

St. John, Appleton

10:30 a.m.

St. Francis in Benson

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT AND SISTERHOOD:

Our New Mom's Group continued from page 7

“Growing up, my mom didn’t believe in God and we never went to church, so I kind of feel like I’m doing this family thing blindly because I didn’t have that example,” Jessie says. “I’ve learned a lot on how to raise kids from my husband’s sisters and mom. The older people in my life have been good examples.”

Not only is the group designed to support young mothers, planning to provide childcare during busy farming seasons, but Jessie also hopes that more seasoned moms, as well as women who embrace the call to “spiritual motherhood,” will become part of the community.

“I think every mom can benefit from this group,” Jessie says. “It’s not just for moms with young kids, it’s for any mom. It’s just supporting women in our community and our Church, and being there and helping each other out. We’re open to grandmothers,

spiritual mothers — I know women in our parish who don’t have any kids and I hope they would want to come too, to pray with us, if nothing else. I think any woman could be a part of this and benefit from it.”

If you would like more information on the new Mom's Group, please contact Jessie Collins at 320-220-0016 or jcollins4520@gmail.com. The ladies will be meeting twice a month on Tuesday nights at Sacred Heart in Murdock.