

Spirit of Life

Roman Catholic Church

EMBRACING THE POWER OF

Sacramentals

When you walk into our parish and see the icon of the Holy Family, are you aware of the incredible spiritual power it emanates? When you bless yourself with holy water, do you take a moment to appreciate how God wants to bless you through it?

The truth is, all of us could take some time to learn more about sacramentals, and savor what an amazing difference they can make in our spiritual life, and in the spiritual lives of those we love. God is just waiting to shower His mercy upon each one of us in countless ways through the sacramentals of the Church, and we should take Him up on His generous offer.

According to Fr. Nick Schneider, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese of Bismarck, Pastor of Christ the King, sacramentals are a very effective means to receive grace from God.

“Sacramentals are related to the sacraments, but the difference is that sacraments were instituted by Christ Himself, where the Church, by reflecting on the mysteries of the Christian life and the way Christ is present to us, has instituted sacramentals,” he says. “They prepare us to receive the sacraments and bring us closer to God.”

And, according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, sacramentals can be defined as: “An observance analogous to but not reckoned among the sacraments, such as Holy Water and the Sign of the Cross.”

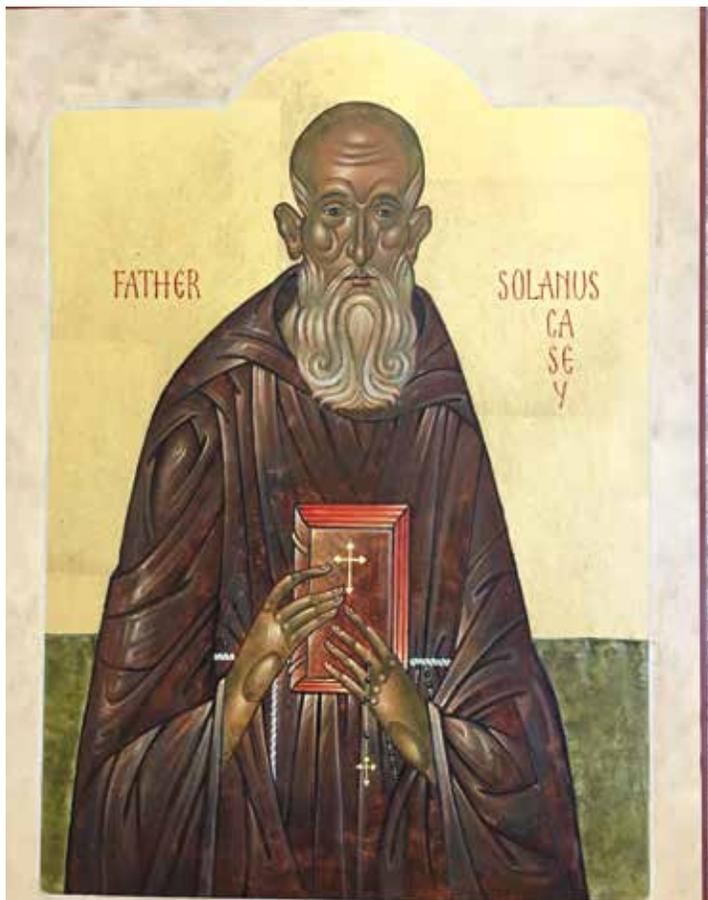
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The icon of St. Teresa of Calcutta stands in the entry of Spirit of Life, reminding all of the love God has for the poor, the lonely and the outcast.

EMBRACING THE POWER OF SACRAMENTALS

continued from front cover



The icon of Venerable Fr. Solanus Casey. Fr. Casey was known for his miraculous healings. He served as the greeter for his community and now his icon greets all who visit Spirit of Life.

“Other examples of sacramentals would be the crucifix, rosaries, pieces of sacred art, incense, and holy cards,” Fr. Schneider says. “Unfortunately, jellybeans and Easter bunnies are not sacramentals! One of the key reasons that we use sacramentals is that they help us to sanctify different aspects of our life. For example, when we bless our homes with holy water, our homes become holy. And when we begin a meal with the

“From long experience I have learned that there is nothing like holy water to put devils to flight and prevent them from coming back again.”

— St. Teresa of Avila

sign of the cross and pray the grace before meals, our meal is sanctified.”

Thankfully, our parish has been abundantly enriched by the presence of icons, which are a unique form of sacramentals that carry a certain heavenly richness within them.

“Icons make a space sacred – they remind us of God’s presence,” Fr. Schneider says. “They are known to be ‘windows into eternity.’ There is a rich theology of icons in a recognized canon in most of the Eastern Rite churches. There is, similarly, a canon of theology for sacred art and icons in the Roman Rite, which you can find in the ancient churches of Rome and other parts of Italy. There is an enormous amount of theology written into each icon. They are truly an expression of faith in the Incarnation of Christ. Because Jesus took on our human flesh, we are able to depict His face. Those who traditionally write icons undergo a rich program of prayer and fasting as they work.”

“One of the key reasons that we use sacramentals is that they help us to sanctify different aspects of our life. For example, when we bless our homes with holy water, our homes become holy. And when we begin a meal with the sign of the cross and pray the grace before meals, our meal is sanctified.” – Fr. Nick Schneider, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese of Bismarck, Pastor of Christ the King

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD, IT IS RIGHT AND JUST

Dear Parishioners,

Every time I prepare my monthly letter to you in this newsletter, I am reminded how blessed I am. Being a priest truly is a blessing. While the job is not always easy — a pastor has many responsibilities — the rewards are equally humbling.

As we complete our preparations and then share in our celebrations of the Triduum and Easter, I am also prompted to think about the holiest things I do. By far, the holiest is celebrating Mass, and especially consecrating the holy bread and wine so Christ is present among us. The very word “consecration” literally means “association with the sacred.” To have that duty is incredible. I have never taken it for granted, and although it may appear at times to be somewhat automatic, it never is for me.

Almost all of us are familiar with the Mass, and with what we do and say leading up to the high point — the Eucharist. But I think we must guard against becoming too casual in our responses and what we say. That is what I work to avoid, but I believe you need to work just as diligently to make sure that you are listening, hearing, and being aware of what you are saying. For us as Catholics, the Mass is the most important sacred act in the Church.

I suppose I could write a whole series of letters or articles on the meaning of everything we say and do at Mass, but I was thinking of one exchange in



particular during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is something we may say in sort of a habitual way, but I firmly believe each of us must truly consider what we are saying.

I say to you, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and you respond, “It is right and just.” Think about what that means, because it is very much at the heart of stewardship. I am saying we need to thank God, show gratitude for everything we are and everything with which we are gifted — and you, at least in

words, acknowledge that doing that is exactly what we need to do. The Mass is filled with statements and exchanges of that sort, and I would ask that we really think about what they truly mean.

Even the simple exchange between the Eucharistic Minister and you at the actual reception of the Host is heavy with meaning. We say, “The Body of Christ,” and you reply “Amen.” In that instance, “Amen” means “Yes, I do believe this is Jesus.” Like myself, you are blessed. Sometimes we just need to realize it. Happy Easter!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Msgr. Chad Gion". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Msgr. Chad Gion,
Pastor

GIVE THANKS

GROWING ALONG KEVIN AND DIANE

Sometimes you don't realize how far you've come on your journey – until something happens that causes everything in your life to stop. Often, it's in those moments when everything has slowed that you realize the journey you've taken, and how far you've come.

For parishioners Kevin and Diane Leingang, that moment happened several years ago – but let's start at the beginning.

Both Kevin and Diane were raised in Catholic families. Kevin grew up in Mandan, and Diane, originally from St. Paul, spent some time in Bismarck, before her family also moved to the area. While they were active in their faith as children, in their young adult years, and into their early marriage, their relationship with God became less of a priority.

“My family were strong Catholics, I was an altar boy and we would go to church events,” Kevin says. “But when we got out on our own, I tested like, do I need to go to Mass every week? Inside, I knew that at some point I would come back. The spark was always there.”

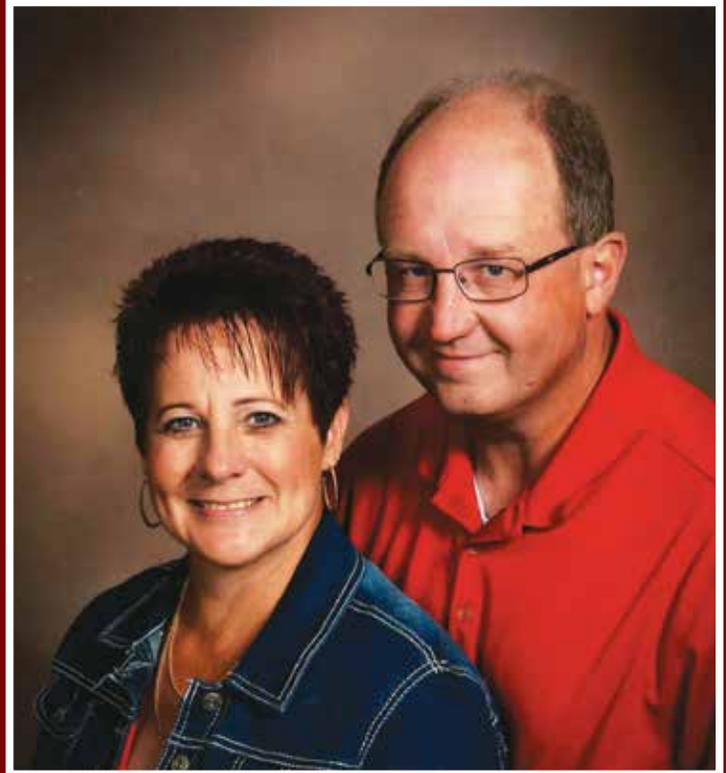
The couple, who met through friends and were each other's “first loves,” will celebrate 30 years of marriage this June. They were married at Kevin's childhood parish, St. Joe's, but never really became involved in the community.

However, 21 years ago, after moving to the south part of town, they joined the community of Spirit of Life and, maybe, without even realizing it, began a journey – closer to God and His family, the Church.

It wasn't long after joining that they decided to become part of the Hospitality Ministry in the parish, serving as greeters and occasionally ushers at the 5 p.m. Saturday Mass.

“We did that because we wanted to get to know people and it seemed like the best way,” Kevin says with a smile.

“I like getting to know people and talking to people, and feeling like we were part of the church,” Diane says. “I've made so many new



Kevin and Diane Leingang have been parishioners at Spirit of Life for the past 21 years, and have found themselves greatly blessed in becoming involved with the parish community.

friends and gotten to know so many new people. I really enjoy that.”

Since taking that first step, the Leingangs' love for God and their parish family has continued to grow. They've served in the Marriage Preparation program, with the Rosary Guild, been involved as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and were on the parish Stewardship Committee for several years.

In addition to service, they have also come to realize the importance of prioritizing their relationship with God, in prayer. Kevin and Diane have a weekly adoration hour, and do their best to attend daily Mass whenever possible.

THE JOURNEY

KEVIN AND DIANE LEINGANG

“Adoration has really changed my life,” Kevin says. “We spend that hour together and it strengthens our marriage. When you have that experience with God, you just know He’s talking to you and helping you through, it’s amazing.”

“You could be so frustrated when you go in, but you just feel so relaxed and relieved when you come out, you’re like, ‘Wow, I really needed that!’” Diane adds.

The Leingangs also find that growing in knowledge of their faith has been an important part of their journey, from Bible studies and other classes, to attending retreats.

“I wanted a deeper faith in God,” Diane says. “I was thinking, ‘What more can I learn? How can I learn it?’ You think you know everything, and then you’re like ‘Oh! I didn’t know that!’ You’re never too old to learn.”

For Kevin and Diane, their faith progressed, little by little, in many different ways, over the past 20 years.

And in 2013, when their son was diagnosed with a serious kidney disease, and in need of a transplant, things slowed down. The journey they had been on became very clear, and they realized how far they’d come – both in their relationships with God and their parish community.

“The parish was unbelievable, praying for him,” Kevin says. “They were there, and it was just amazing. I don’t know how we were calm, but we were. We knew God was going to help us through it. The parishioners’ prayers were really working. In tough times, the parish was really there for us.”

Diane donated a kidney to their son, who is now fully recovered and doing well.

“Just last weekend, I had someone come up to me asking, ‘How is your son doing?’ Diane says. “[Their prayers and support] gave us strength and courage to carry on.”

Little by little, over the years, everything had changed. Far from being the “obligation” of their young adult life, their relationship with God and their community had become the greatest source of comfort, in a difficult time.

“We feel that God is with us and helping us,” Kevin says. “It’s evolved from going to church because we were taught we needed to go, to now we want to go.”

Kevin and Diane encourage their fellow parishioners to find a way to become involved in the church and grow in their faith, even if it’s starting with something small or behind the scenes.

“If you just get involved and become part of the community, it’s amazing how it grows and effects everything in your life,” Kevin says. “The more we talk to God and become involved, it seems like we’re even more blessed. Just pick something you feel comfortable with and join that. It’s amazing how you join up with other people and it keeps on evolving.”

“I was very reluctant until I tried it,” Diane says. “There’s so many opportunities, so if you don’t like one, try another! You never know.”

Thank you, Kevin and Diane, for your witness to the faith! We’re glad to be on the journey with you.

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HANNAH

THE GOOD STEWARD

What should we do when our prayers are answered?

Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead, God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The

Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her faithfulness, God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”



FIRST SACRAMENTS: AN OPPORTUNITY OF REBIRTH FOR US ALL



Last year's First Communion class during the liturgy.



Young second-graders waiting to receive the Precious Blood for the first time.

Spring is a time for rebirth—flowers bloom from the ground, newly hatched birds chirp from their nests, and an overall feeling of the world “coming back to life” surrounds us. For the second-graders preparing for their first sacraments, this spring holds special meaning as they receive God’s merciful forgiveness through Reconciliation, and then prepare to receive Him bodily through Holy Communion.

“You always see some nervousness, especially when it comes to First Confession,” says Director of Religious Education Karen Eggers. “But then they come out from the confessional so glad that they went and saying things like ‘God loves me.’ And when it comes to their First Communion the kids are all very excited. Many of them have been asking for years why they couldn’t receive. Many are also inspired to become altar servers afterward.”

Though each of the children has already been baptized, these sacraments are typically the first ones received where the child plays an active role. Seeking to help prepare them for this important step, the children meet weekly on Wednesday nights for lessons about the sacraments themselves, morality, and the practicalities of going to Confession or receiving the Eucharist. Because parents play such an integral part in a child’s religious education, periodic parent meetings are also hosted by Msgr. Chad Gion.

“We want the parents to play an integral part in their formation,” Karen says. “At the First Confession, for example, the parents also go with them. This allows the parents to really model the faith to their children.”

As a parish family, we also play an important role in this faith journey. That is why here at Spirit of Life, the First Communion

liturgy always takes place during a Sunday Mass. This emphasizes the fact that through these sacraments, the child is also becoming more deeply connected to us, the Body of Christ.

“We purposefully have the First Communion during a Sunday liturgy, because we want the entire parish family to be part of it, rather than it being something separate,” Karen says. “It is something for us all to be excited about and to be eager to participate in.”

And in the process of witnessing this transformation in our parish youth, we are each invited to participate in our own spiritual rebirth by imitating the excitement and enthusiasm radiating from these little ones.

“It’s a reminder to have that childlike excitement and faith in God,” Karen says. “It reminds me personally of how tremendous of a gift the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, truly are.”

This year's students have already received their First Reconciliation on Jan. 26 and will soon be receiving their First Holy Communion on Sunday, May 7, during the 11 a.m. Mass. We invite all parishioners to pray for the students as they complete their final preparations and to join the celebration if possible. For more information on Spirit of Life's Sacramental Preparation program, please contact Karen Eggers at 701-663-1660 or karen@myspiritoflife.com.

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Change Service Requested

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Spirit of Life

Monday: 8 a.m.

Tuesday - Thursday: 7 a.m., 9 a.m.

Friday: 7 a.m., 9 a.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m., 5 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m., 11 a.m., 6 p.m.

CONFESSIONS: Sunday: 8-8:30 a.m.

Saturday: 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Wednesday: 7-8:30 p.m., and 20 min. before
weekday Masses except Mondays

St. Martin's Parish

Even Months: 9 a.m.

Odd Months: 11 a.m.

St. Anthony's Parish

Even Months: 11 a.m.

Odd Months: 9 a.m.

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

APRIL 11, TUESDAY

Communal Penance Service at Spirit of Life Church — 7 p.m.

APRIL 13, HOLY THURSDAY

Mass at Spirit of Life Church — 7 p.m.

Mass at St. Anthony Church — 8 p.m.

APRIL 14, GOOD FRIDAY

Stations of the Cross at Spirit of Life Church — 3 p.m.

Mass at Spirit of Life Church — 5:30 p.m.

Mass at St. Anthony Church — 3 p.m.

APRIL 15, SATURDAY, EASTER VIGIL MASS

Mass at Spirit of Life Church — 9 p.m.

Mass at St. Anthony Church — 9 p.m.

APRIL 16, EASTER SUNDAY

Mass at Spirit of Life Church — 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. only

Mass at St. Martin Church — 10 a.m.