

ADVENT 2021

The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



BEING THE HANDS AND FEET OF JESUS
SMALL GROUPS BUILD COMMUNITY
ADORATION CHAPEL OPENING SOON
SAINT JOSEPH STATUE



Pictured here: Fr. Peter spent time with his parents Dr. Gary and Mary Williams and newest nephew Nathaniel Joseph last summer. Photo courtesy of Fr. Peter. On the cover: Parishioner Anne Burt called Bingo at the Saint Ambrose Fall Fest, assisted by Saint Ambrose Catholic School first-graders Oliver Danielson and Layla Weber. Photo courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography, online at mhpho.com.

There Is Enough to Go Around

So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. – Matthew 6:31-33

Dear Friends,

Growing up with eight siblings, it was always clear my parents lived within a budget. We were certainly never scrounging, but when we kids would be lobbying for a dinner out, for example, it was clear it wasn’t always possible.

On the other hand, my parents always gave regularly to the church on Sundays and sponsored a girl through the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (now Unbound). On some level I realized that if they didn’t do that, there would be more money for us. On the other hand, they wrote letters to this girl and developed a

meaningful relationship with her, ultimately sponsoring her daughter, as well, and travelling to Guatemala to meet them. It made an impression on me, so that as a college student, I wanted to do the same thing—and when I got to visit the woman I sponsored for 18 years, it was one of the highlights of my life.

Choosing to give even while living on a shoestring budget, I came to a realization: There is enough. When I’m generous with what I have, I am immersed in the joy of the Lord, and He blesses me even more abundantly.

We all get stuck from time to time. We think that if we have a little more stability, a little more for our own needs, then we will be able to give. The problem is that we can always use a little more—and if we wait on that, we might never step out in faith to give back.

This issue of *The Way* highlights a number of ways people in our community give of themselves to Saint Ambrose, the broader community, and the world. I hope their stories inspire you to step out, more and more, in faith and gratitude, trusting in the Lord’s constant care. There is enough to go around.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Peter Williams
Pastor

Small Groups Build Community

Newcomers, and even long-time parishioners, can get lost in a large parish, surrounded by faces they don’t recognize and longing for a personal connection. When that happens, small groups can help.

Kellee and Joe Wren joined Saint Ambrose 12 years ago. Outside of the school, where their children were enrolled, Kellee felt disconnected from parish life. Instead, her spirit was sustained by an ecumenical Bible study with her high-school girlfriends.

Over the past decade, she was asked to join a women’s small group at Saint Ambrose—when she was asked a third time two years ago, she took the plunge.

“It keeps me accountable to being in the Word, and it’s an inspiration to see how other women are living out their Catholic faith,” Wren said. “It’s deeper than just a friendship; it’s a fellowship, because it brings in God. Whatever I’m going through, whatever I need, I know I can count on those women. If I need prayer warriors, I can just send out a text, and the same goes for them!”

When Ben and Samantha Peterson moved to the parish five years ago, they were already a part of a couples’ group through the Community of Christ the Redeemer in West Saint Paul. At Saint Ambrose, Ben joined Impact 133, the monthly men’s ministry. His men’s small group has formed a tight-knit community within the larger parish.

“We usually meet three out of four weeks a month,” Ben said. “Typically, we find a series or study to provide some structure, but the relational and accountability aspects are more meaningful. There are few better ways to build community: We’re not just meeting new people, but creating depth and sharing human relationships.”

The group of four men has become a group of four families at similar life stages, attending the same Masses and sharing meals together.

“You can try as hard as you want, but you will never know everyone’s names in a parish this big,” Peterson said. “But you can get to know a few families really well, and you can build an amazing parish community on top of those relationships.”

The Archdiocesan Synod process provided a natural opportunity to introduce people to small groups and address preconceptions. Synod groups included whoever sat down at a table for a particular session. Table leaders like Peterson and Judy Rys facilitated the discussion and put participants at ease so they enjoyed the experience.

Rys and her husband John have been parishioners for 19 years. Judy is a member of the Ambrosians (55+ group) and participated in a Bible study before the pandemic. She was impressed with the diversity of ages and viewpoints at the synod sessions and is a firm believer in the power of small groups.

“It is a great way for people to find support and connection in a secular world that is becoming more divisive than many of us could have ever imagined,” she said.



Judy Rys, Bill Vilendrer, Barbara Pena-Vaquero, and Charlene Vilendrer at the Archdiocesan Synod small group sessions.

HANDS AND FEET OF JESUS: PARISHIONERS SERVE, ABROAD AND AT HOME

Saint Ambrose families manifest God's love in countless ways. These include providing healthcare abroad, feeding the hungry in our local community, assisting at Mass, and sharing the faith. Opportunities abound to serve our neighbors.

GLOBAL MEDICAL MISSIONARIES

John and Kristine Llena immigrated to Minnesota from the Philippines in 2003. Today they have three children in Saint Ambrose Catholic School. Kristine is a dentist and John is a surgical nurse. They describe living in the United States as a "tremendous blessing."

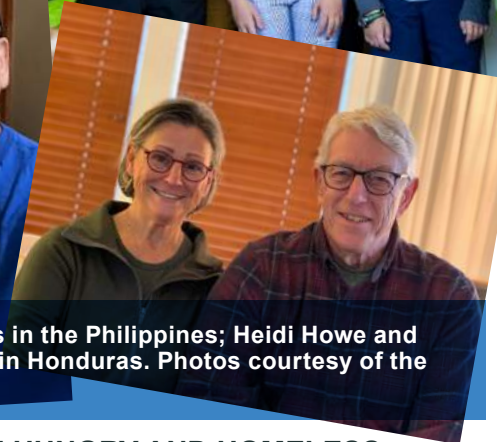
Several years ago, they began looking for ways to give back. Kristine sent financial support and dental supplies abroad to countries like Haiti and Honduras and provided free dental care to young people in Minneapolis through Team Smile. Then, in 2018, the two of them joined a medical mission in partnership with the Foundation for Philippine Medical Missions, traveling to their home province with their three young children in tow. In a single week, 100+ missionaries provided medical, dental, surgical, and eye services in two cities and three nearby towns, serving nearly 18,000 people and providing fluoride treatments and toothbrushes to another 12,000 school children. They also left supplies and equipment including two anesthesia machines and 8,000+ pairs of glasses.

"I feel this need in my heart to give back—to walk the talk," Kristine said. "Hearing and reading the words of Jesus in the Bible, we have to act it out."

"We wanted the kids to see that no matter how dire the situation, there are still people who care in the world," said John. "We have an amazing God—we have to breathe out what we breathe in!"

Parishioner Tom Losasso is an anesthesiologist; his wife Jane is a nurse, and all three of his children are in healthcare fields. They joined Saint Ambrose in 2002. Tom never aspired to be a world traveler, but a colleague, Dr. Peter Daly, encouraged him to come to Honduras with One World Surgery, a faith-based organization building a state-of-the-art medical center to serve to the poorest of the poor.

"I was a reluctant participant for the first couple years, but this thing has just grown and grown," Tom said.



Clockwise from top left: John (far right) and Kristine Llena (third from right) and teammates in the Philippines; Heidi Howe and family; Tony and Kathy Reber; Joe and Mary Beth Gillis; Tom Losasso and his son Michael in Honduras. Photos courtesy of the Llena, Howe, Reber, Gillis and Losasso families.

Losasso traveled to Central America for the first time in 2009, and he and his wife and children have returned nearly every year since. Today the facility includes a first-class surgical center, dental and ophthalmology clinics, visitor's center, and chapel, built from locally hewn stone. The primary care clinic is staffed on a day-to-day basis by locals, and surgical brigades of 10 to 70 people, usually two teams a week, who travel from across the United States to provide world-class surgical care.

According to Losasso, the problems addressed most often are straightforward, but life-changing. For example, if a young person tears an ACL (anterior cruciate ligament, which stabilizes the knee), he or she is out of work. Without a government healthcare system or insurance, most can't afford surgery to repair it. One World Surgery is their only shot.

"I call it God's miracle-making machine—but He's not going to do the heavy lifting by Himself," Losasso says. "If you want to see miracles, just participate in something bigger than you. Do a little bit and see how the Lord magnifies whatever you give!"

HELP FOR THE HUNGRY AND HOMELESS

Joe Gillis joined Saint Ambrose in 2014 and is involved in parish life, but he has also answered the call to serve the poor in the Twin Cities. He began by volunteering with Dorothy Day Center in Saint Paul decades ago, which led to the formation of Friends of Dorothy Day in 2018. He currently serves on its Board of Directors.

"Our organization provides volunteers to serve dinner each night to resident guests in the Pay For Stay wing of the campus. We have a group of volunteers from Saint Ambrose who serve on the fourth Wednesday of the month," said Joe. "Additionally, my wife and I began volunteering together at the Christian Cupboard Emergency Food Shelf in March 2020. We wanted a way to help others and stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic."

"For Mary Beth and I, our commitment to serve is one of the ways we try to follow Jesus in all that we say, do, and think," he said. "By focusing on others, we can develop a deeper and more loving relationship with God."

TEACHING—AND LEARNING—THE FAITH

Heidi Howe and her husband Matt have been members of Saint Ambrose since 2007. After her youngest child was born, Heidi volunteered as a middle-school catechist. As a former teacher, it seemed like a good way to put her professional experience to work while answering the call to serve the church. Before long, she was rotating between her children's classes each year and has now shared her faith with children at every level from pre-K to middle school.

Even with teaching experience, Heidi said she was intimidated to share her faith, because she is still learning and growing herself. But the Faith Formation program and staff made it easy—and the kids minister to her even as she teaches them.

"Kids genuinely speak from the heart, and sometimes that's what I need to hear," she said. "I love being in that moment when kids discover they have God with them always. That's what keeps me coming back."

BLESSED TO BRING JESUS TO OTHERS

Tony and Kathy Reber have been parishioners since 2004. Kathy is an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion—one of the laity who distribute Communion to the faithful—while Tony serves as a lector (reader) and an Extraordinary Minister.

Tony began lecturing in the mid-1980s, in part because he was used to presenting to groups. Over the years he has grown into the role and reading at Mass has become a privilege.

"I always say a little prayer to the Holy Spirit on the way to the ambo to be able to bring His message to the congregation the way He would want it," he said. "I feel a little bit like I'm just a trumpet; somebody else has written the music, and somebody else is providing the air."

Like many mothers, Kathy waited until their youngest child could be left unattended in the pew before becoming a Eucharistic minister.

"It's something very dear to me to be able to give the Body and Blood to the community," she said. "With all the things that are going on in the world, we need community, need the Church, need Jesus at the front of it all."

Eyes of Faith: Saint Joseph Statue

Everyone needs a father figure, and our Lord was no exception. So in this Year of Saint Joseph, with an open niche in the worship space, it made sense to add Jesus’ earthly father to the mix of sacred art at Saint Ambrose.

“It was a surprise that both Archbishop Hebda and Pope Francis proclaimed this the Year of Saint Joseph,” said Fr. Peter. “So it took a little time to decide just how we wanted to hold up and honor the man who raised Jesus and cared for our Blessed Mother.”

The church’s statue of Mary had recently moved to a larger space, so Father proposed a statue of Joseph where she used to be.

“A really generous parishioner stepped forward with the full amount of money it would take to commission something unique for our space,” he said. “When I talked with our benefactress and staff about what we wanted to emphasize—Saint Joseph the worker or the father of Jesus—the answer was very clear.”

The new statue is the work of sculptor Gregor Mussner, a master artisan from Northern Italy, who also has work displayed at the Saint Paul Seminary and Maternity of Mary Catholic Church in Saint Paul. It portrays Joseph holding the child Jesus, with Jesus leaning on his shoulder and their hands touching on a bouquet of white lilies, symbolizing Joseph’s purity and integrity as Our Lady’s spouse.

Parishioners can light prayer candles for the intercession of St. Joseph. The statue also includes these words from sacred scripture: “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20).

“This beautiful image really emphasizes physical presence, tenderness, and protection of Saint Joseph,” Fr. Peter said. “We continue to point people to the Holy’s Father’s letter on Saint Joseph, *Patris Corde*. We keep copies at the statue, and it is already inspiring greater devotion.”



Even a Little Goes a Long Way

Gratitude to God for what He has given us is the call of every believer. In recent weeks, Father Peter’s homilies and bulletin articles have focused on a single idea: giving back to your Catholic community through prayer, ministry, and financial giving.

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community was built from the ground up in the year 2000. We have been in debt from the beginning, but what we have to show for it is incredible:

- a school with over 600 enrolled
- a religious education program that serves almost 800
- an early childhood program with almost 170 children
- and 3,400 parish families total

Many Saint Ambrose parishioners give generously to help keep our lights on and our programs happening. If you already fall into this group, thank you—please continue and consider extending your giving this year. If you are not yet a regular contributor, prayerfully consider a consistent amount you could begin to give.

A consistent gift helps us because we can more easily budget and pay our bills month to month. But consistently giving helps you, as well, by cultivating a spirit of generosity, gratitude, and trust in God. A small amount each month is not a daunting as you may think, and the Lord Himself assures us that God will take care of you:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So, don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. – Matthew 10:29-31

We have also sent each household a stewardship packet. Please prayerfully consider what your family can do to financially support our great parish. When we take time to discern and give from the heart, no amount is too small. The important thing is to start, then to discern whether you are able to stretch your giving.

We are grateful for your prayers, your service, and your financial support of Saint Ambrose. Giving thanks to God that you are here!

Tom Schisler
Director of Stewardship and Advancement



Generosity Made Easy
Saint Ambrose relies on the prayers and financial support of people like you. For more on how you can help, scan this QR Code or visit saintambroseofwoodbury.weshareonline.org.





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SUNDAY MASS

Saturday Vigil 4:00 pm

Sunday 8:30 am (livestream), 11:00 am, 5:00 pm

WEEKDAY MASS

Monday-Friday 8:00 am (livestream)

Saturday 8:00 am

RECONCILIATION

Monday-Friday 7:30-7:55 am

Tuesday 4:45-5:30 pm

Thursday 4:45-5:30 pm

Saturday 2:30-3:30 pm

Sunday 4:00-4:45 pm

The Way newsletter, content, and photos are created by Saint Ambrose Catholic Community and Archangel Stomp, LLC, unless otherwise noted.

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Advent and Christmas at Saint Ambrose

Day of Mercy: December 1st, 10:00 am-8:00 pm

Immaculate Conception (Vigil): December 7th, 5:30 pm

Immaculate Conception: December 8th, 8:00 am & 6:30 pm

Christmas Eve: December 24th, 3:00, 5:00 & 10:00 pm

Christmas Day: December 25th, 10:00 am

Mary, Mother of God (Vigil): December 31st, 4:00 pm

Mary, Mother of God, January 1st, 9:00 am

For more information, email parishinfo@saintambrosecatholic.org or call 651-768-3030.
May God bless you abundantly this season and always!

