

LENT 2022



The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



A HOME FOR ALL GOD'S CHILDREN
SUMMERTIME YOUTH PROGRAMS
ANSWERING THE CALL
PRAYER NICHES



Fr. Peter Williams (far right) and his family gather for a photo following the January 25th episcopal ordination of his brother, Bishop Joseph Williams. Photo courtesy of David Hrbacek at The Catholic Spirit. On the cover: Fr. Ben Wittnebel greets parishioner Pat Buckett after Mass. Photo courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography, online at mhpho.com.

We’re Made for Each Other

One of the first and most delightful surprises when I arrived at Saint Ambrose three years ago was how many different cultures are represented in our parish. It is truly beautiful to look out from the altar on Sunday morning and see the catholicity of our Church and the uniqueness of experience in the faces of God’s family gathered together to worship.

As one of nine children, I learned early in life that, despite having the same parents, my siblings and I are each unique. Today we are all still practicing Catholics, but differences in temperament and approach mean that we live out our faith in our own ways. It’s our choice to regard these differences as an obstacle—or an adventure!

Pope Francis speaks of a “culture of encounter” in the Church, in which we recognize our complementarity and engage in mutual learning. The truth is, we need each other:

These differences belong to God’s plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular “talents” share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures.

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1937

Life in Christ means that we love and serve one another out of reverence for the One in whose image we are created. His Cross impels me to do as He did, to extend myself, to encounter others where they are, and to generously offer and graciously receive love as best I can in every situation. This involves putting out into the deep and trusting the Lord to provide what we lack.

This issue of *The Way* includes stories of God’s love for all His children, manifested in the lives of parish families, local teens, and beloved saints. I hope it inspires you to step outside yourself this Lent to love your neighbor in new and deeper ways.

Jesus equips the called, not the other way around. We won’t know what we can achieve for His kingdom until we step out of ourselves and into His grace.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Peter Williams
Pastor

Your Servant Is Listening

Recently, my grandson Oliver was baptized. It was a great day, and he had a great smile throughout this wonderful sacrament. One of my favorite parts was when Monsignor Steven Kachel (Diocese of La Crosse) was blessing Oliver’s father, Matt. Oliver chose that moment to reach over to pat his dad’s arm. Maybe it was just a reflex of a small child, but from where I stood, it looked like he was thanking his dad for being there. Monsignor commented on how he looked happy to be joining the Church.

God is calling each of us to be a part of His family. How do we hear that call, and how do we respond? On January 7, 2021, Father Peter asked me to go for a walk with him. By the end of the walk, I was leaving a career that I had been in for almost 34 years to do something completely different at Saint Ambrose.

Was this God’s call? I believe it was.

I have been fortunate to have been promoted throughout my career, and all of them came because I was asked—I never applied for a new position.

“Why is this call any different?” my wife Clare asked. “God has been good to us in the past, and this is where He wants you to be now.”

Clare and I believe that we are here for a reason—and so are each of you!

The stewardship drive that began in November 2021 was a success. More individuals pledged more dollars than we had in 2021, and we are grateful for the more than 500 families that returned a pledge form. Did they feel “called” to do so? Do they believe they are here for a reason?

And what about those who did not respond: How can we invite them further into the life of the parish, so they, too, might hear the call to support their spiritual home here at Saint Ambrose?

God willing, the joy Monsignor perceived at Oliver’s baptism will last his entire life, as he continues to say yes to the Lord’s call to be Catholic, to be generous, to be fruitful, to be light to the world. His call is our call: to share the love of Jesus Christ in such a way that all people respond, “Speak, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10).

Tom Schisler
Director of Stewardship and Advancement

WHY WE GIVE

“We give our time, talents and treasure because we want to support our church community. One of my favorite passages in the Bible is in Acts 4 where it talks about the early Church: ‘The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common’ (Acts 4:32). I think about how peaceful that must have been and how we can model that in our lives today.”



“We also give out of gratitude. Saint Ambrose has been a huge part of our lives, and we are so grateful for that. Most of the friends we have today are people we met at church. Had we not gotten involved, we probably never would have met them. The building itself has become a second home and a quiet, comfortable place to pray and reflect when we’re struggling with something.”

“As we were raising our kids, having friends with the same faith and values made it that much easier to make the tougher parenting decisions instead of caving in to peer pressure. For our kids, having friends with the same faith and values made it easier to not cave into peer pressure also. Had we not been involved at Saint Ambrose, we would have been parenting alone and without the strong support system we found at church.”

Barb Vanags serves on the Stewardship Team with fellow parishioners Jason Englebreton, Larry Lynott, and Robb Turner.

A Spiritual Home for All God's Children

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community invites everyone into the Lord's loving care

In a large, suburban parish, each day brings new opportunities to love our neighbors, whatever their age, stage, or background. Below, three parish families share how they came to find a spiritual home at Saint Ambrose and why they feel blessed to be here.

A LONG ROAD

Carlos Pedevila and Claudia Swett came to Saint Ambrose in 2016, via Wisconsin, Mexico, and Chile—bringing with them their four children: Valentina (age 21), Isabel (17), Juan Diego (12), and Agustin (9). They arrived in Minnesota looking for a large and vibrant community like the one they left behind, with opportunities for the entire family to grow in faith.

“We love Saint Ambrose for the people, the priests, the families, for how everybody loves God in their own original way and can grow in that love,” said Claudia. “We have a great faith community that is walking, praying, and growing with us.”

Today, Claudia participates in a Bible study, Adoration, praying the rosary, and bringing communion to the Woodbury Health Care Center. Valentina helps with Edge, the Youth Ministry program for students in grades 6-8, and Isabel volunteers with Vacation Bible School for children age 3 through grade 5. Agustin is enrolled in Faith Formation, and Juan Diego, who has developmental challenges, recently received the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation.

Claudia said that she and Carlos were not sure if Juan Diego could receive the sacraments given his disabilities—or even if he needed them, since he cannot commit sin like most people do.

“Since Juan Diego has severe special needs, he can be seen as one who needs all the help, when in reality, we believe he will go straight to heaven and that we need his help!” Claudia said. “We talked with Fr. Peter, and he was very happy to administer both sacraments. Juan Diego received his First Communion and Confirmation on November 1, All Saints Day, and he kept his own name for Confirmation, because St. Juan Diego is such a great saint.”

IT'S ONLY NATURAL

Brian and Tammy Nerison have lived in Woodbury since 1990 and joined Saint Ambrose in 2001, when their oldest daughter started preschool. The Nerisons have four adopted children: Alysha (age 25) and Tanner (23), from South Korea, and Anitha (15) and Bhavani (13), from India. While Alysha and Tanner were adopted as infants, Anitha and Bhavani were older; they had little education before arriving in the U.S. and needed additional learning support. The desire for a faithfully Catholic education was the initial motivation for coming to Saint Ambrose, but the community has become the reason for staying.

“Saint Ambrose is so young, with so many kids,” said Tammy. “I think when



Pictured from top: the Theo and Abena Sosu family, the Carlos Pedvila and Claudia Swett family, and the Brian and Tammy Nerison family. Photos courtesy of the families.



we started here, the average age of parishioners was something like seven! That gives people something in common to talk about.”

“It makes everybody more relatable,” Brian agreed. “It just kind of naturally happened that way. It’s the people who happened to be out here and were drawn to the parish. I don’t think there was any specific effort or idea to be more welcoming to different people. It just came together, and that was that!”

Both said that Saint Ambrose has been blessed with priests who have made the parish a comfortable place to worship and grow in faith.

“I used to go to Adoration and think, ‘How many Our Fathers can I get in?’” Tammy said. “But there is so much more to it. We are all journeying, and our priests help us to see that you don’t have to be a teacher of theology to worship here.”

“I’ve definitely been drawn in to do more by the pastors we’ve had,” said Brian. “They invite us in and make us want to get involved.”

INVITED TO BELONG

Theo Sosu experienced a priest’s invitation to get involved in parish life firsthand. He and his wife Abena joined Saint Ambrose in 2008. Originally from Ghana, Theo came to the U.S. to attend college at St. Cloud State University and went to work in Saint Paul after graduation. They settled in Woodbury because it was closer to Saint Paul and had one of the best school districts in the Twin Cities. Their three children, Emma (9th grade), Christopher (8th), and Jeremiah (5th), have attended Saint Ambrose Catholic School from pre-K through middle school.

“The kids are involved in church activities and serve at Mass and anything youth-related,” said Theo.

“Abena was also involved as Eucharistic minister before COVID. I was part of the drama ministry that performed at Christmas and Easter.”

Fr. Stan Mader, the previous pastor, approached the Sosu family a couple of times to get involved in the church’s ministries.

“At the time I would come to church on Sunday and then go home,” said Theo. “So, when I was invited to be part of the drama ministry, I thought about Fr. Stan’s call and decided to accept the invitation.”

Theo said Fr. Peter has continued Fr. Stan’s desire to see broader participation in the church’s liturgies and ministries. His leadership provides more openings for diverse cultures, ideas, and thinking in the life of the parish.

BE OPEN

In a large parish, a willingness to invite and an openness to accept an invitation are essential.

“Don’t be intimidated by the size of the parish,” said Tammy. “People are tempted to say, ‘It’s so impersonal,’ but it’s not!”

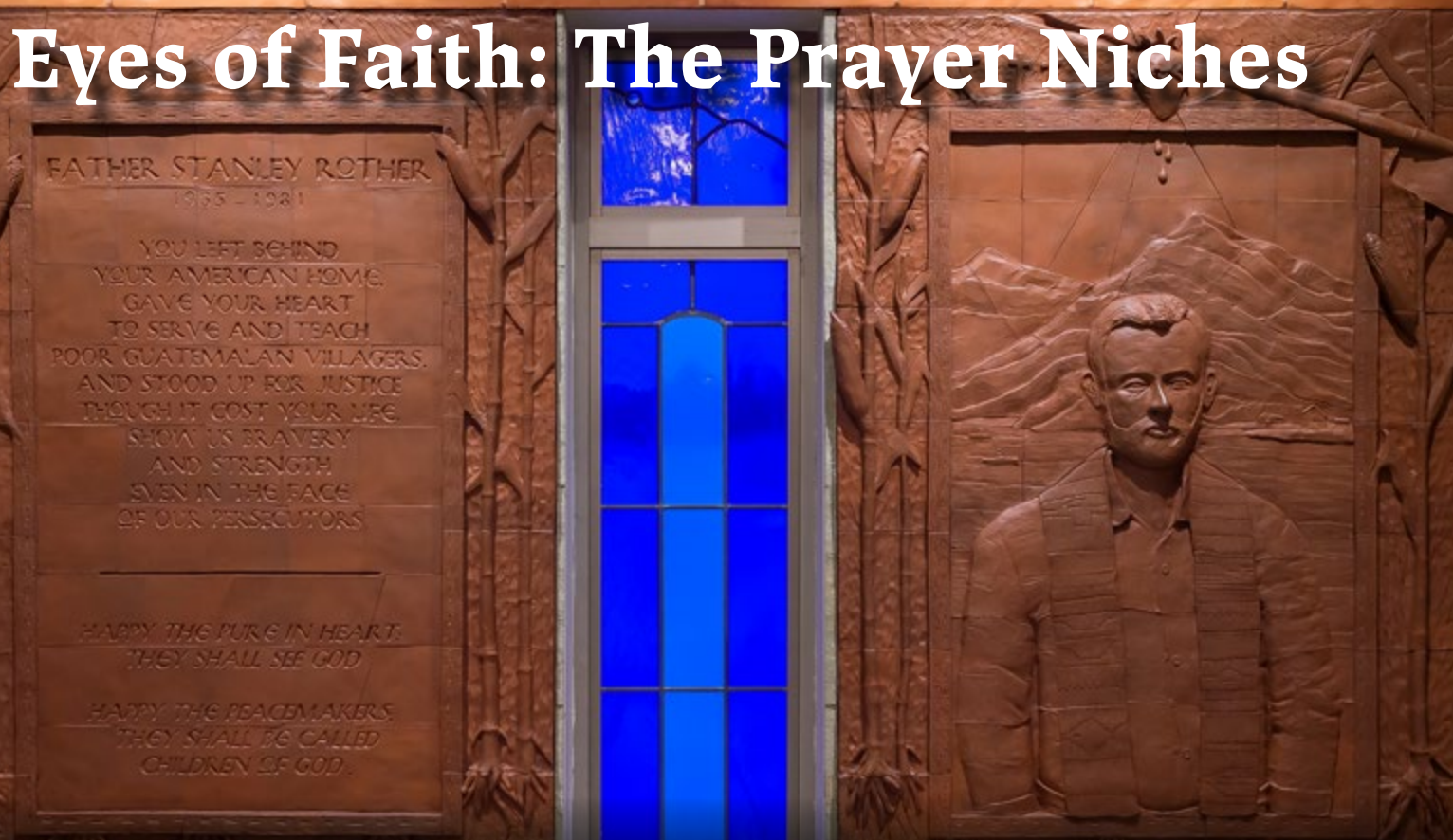
Claudia agreed: “At first it might be a little overwhelming, but if you start getting involved in different activities, you will start to know people, and pretty soon it will feel like home.”

GET INVOLVED WITH FALLFEST!

FALLFEST 2022 is scheduled for **Friday and Saturday, September 23-24**. We are always in need of sponsorships and other support from both businesses and families. Please select “Parish Festival” under the News and Events menu at saintambrosecatholic.org for more information. We look forward to another great community-building event in 2022!



Eyes of Faith: The Prayer Niches



Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother is featured as a bas-relief image in one of four prayer niches in Saint Ambrose Catholic Church. Photo courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography, online at mhpho.com.

In the ambulatory encircling the worship space at Saint Ambrose are four prayer niches featuring Catholic men and women meant to inspire us to holiness and charity. Our former pastor, Monsignor Richard Pates (now a retired bishop), commissioned the four bas-relief sculptures in 1999 after a parish-wide process to solicit suggestions and final selections by a committee of four parish youth.

The guidelines were to select two men and two women from the 20th century whose holy lives combined contemplation and action. The extensive initial list was narrowed to the four we see today:

- **St. Teresa of Calcutta:** Albanian religious sister and founder of the Missionaries of Charity
- **Dorothy Day:** American convert to Catholicism and founder of the Catholic Worker Movement
- **St. Maximilian Kolbe:** Polish priest and martyr who gave his life for another man at Auschwitz
- **Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother:** American priest killed while serving the poor in Guatemala

Bas-relief or low relief is a method of sculpture in which an image is cut from or bonded to a background of the same material. In bas-relief or low relief sculptures, the image emerges only

partially from the background, and no elements are undercut to project fully in three dimensions. Fr. Rother is probably the least known of the four; here is a portion of what committee member Jennifer Leslie shared about his life and death:

In 1968, Father Rother went to Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala, as a missionary to a village of about 30,000 Tzutuhil Indians. Before 1980, the village in which he lived experienced little of the political chaos from which the country was suffering. In the summer of 1980, however, his village faced countless cases of murder, torture, and kidnapping. During this terrible time of persecution, Father Rother did all he could to comfort and protect the people in his village. Never did he abandon them for his own safety, but instead said, “At the first sign of danger, a shepherd cannot run and leave his sheep to fend for themselves.” Father Rother, the shepherd, did not run, and it cost him his life. On July 29, 1982, Father Stanley Rother was shot and killed in his rectory.

May the lives of St. Teresa of Calcutta, Dorothy Day, St. Maximilian Kolbe, and Blessed Fr. Stanley Rother continue to inspire us to sacrificial love and selfless service for all of God’s children.

Get Ready for Faith and Fun This Summer!

Vacation Bible School (PreK-Grade 5)

Vacation Bible School (VBS) will take place at Saint Ambrose the week of June 13-17. This year’s theme is “Monumental, Celebrating God’s Love.” Open to children age 3 through grade 5; adults and students in grades 6-12 are encouraged to help as volunteers.

“I loved VBS as a child because of the way they were able to turn the Bible into something easy for smaller children to digest. I also loved the people and the Bible skits the older kids put on.”
– Cormac O’Connor

“I remember loving spending time with the other kids my age and playing games. The enthusiasm of my group leader was really inspiring to me.”
– Katie Weber

Extreme Faith Camp (Grades 6-8)

Extreme Faith Camp will take place July 18-22 at CrossWoods Adventure Camp in Wisconsin. Teens in grades 6-8 are invited to a week of fun, great speakers, small groups, Adoration, and much more!

“I was a camper back in middle school, and it was definitely the turning point of my faith life. We had small groups, water activities, skits, praise and worship music, talks and testimonies, Adoration, and ate great food with good conversation. I came home on fire for my faith like never before!”
– Katie Weber

“EFC opened my eyes to how the Lord is truly present in our lives and how He can work beautifully to help impact others around us.”
– Cormac O’Connor

Registration opens in mid-March. Watch saintambrosecatholic.org and the parish bulletin for details!

Middle-school campers participate in Color Wars at Extreme Faith Camp in Summer 2021. Photo courtesy of Lydia Linn.





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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

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Lent & Easter at Saint Ambrose

Stations of the Cross

Fridays at 5:30 pm: March 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th, April 1st, 8th

Good Friday, April 15th, at noon

Lenten Day of Mercy

March 30th, 10:00 am - 8:00 pm

Holy Week Triduum

Holy Thursday, April 14th, at 7:00 pm

Good Friday, April 15th, at 3:00 pm

Easter Vigil, April 16th, at 8:00 pm

Easter Sunday

April 17th, at 7:30 am, 9:30 am, 11:30 am



"God cannot deny himself, but continues to be rich in goodness and mercy, and is always ready to forgive and start afresh. So with confidence, let us set out on the journey!" - Pope Francis