



SPRING 2022

The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



SACRAMENTAL LIVING
RCIA AND THE EASTER VIGIL
CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD
STEPHEN MINISTRY

The Life of Grace Is Rooted in the Sacraments

At the Easter Vigil in April, we welcomed 24 people into full communion with the Catholic Church, including four catechumens who were baptized, confirmed, and received their first Holy Communion that evening. In late April, 115 youth were confirmed in the Catholic faith, and in May, 153 second-graders received their First Holy Communion. Our parish family is growing!

Why is it that the Church does not simply say welcome and count new members of the community as full members in Christ, just like that? Why so many rituals and sacred substances, the water and oil, the bread and wine, the light of candles and the laying on of hands?

First of all, we are not just flesh or just spirit, but a blend of the two. As embodied spirits, we struggle to embrace the life of the Spirit except through our bodies. The sound of bells and music, the sight of sacred art and firelight, the scent of incense and oils, the flavor of bread and wine, and the feeling of water and the touch of a hand lift our hearts to thoughts of heaven. God gave us our bodies and invites us into the life of grace through them.

Secondly, we believe that the seven sacraments affect, or do, what they signify. In other words, Baptism not only signifies our adoption into the family of God, but it provides us with the grace we need to live as His children. The sacrament of Reconciliation—speaking our sins aloud in the presence of a priest and hearing the words of absolution—not only signifies our repentance and God's forgiveness, but strengthens us to resist temptation and sin in the future.



Above: Fr. Peter instructs Saint Ambrose students in praying the rosary. **On the cover:** Early Childhood student Kendall Coury, daughter of Gerard and Christie Coury, works quietly in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium. Photos courtesy of Hilda Berdie Photography.

This issue of *The Way* highlights our RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) program, which prepares adults and teens to receive the sacraments; Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a hands-on approach to sharing the faith with children; and Stephen Ministry, which provides person-to-person care for community members in need or crisis. May these stories inspire in you the desire to touch the life of God and others through sacraments and service!

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Peter Williams
Pastor

Stephen Ministry: Caring for People Through People

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. – Galatians 6:2

During one of his homilies, Fr. Ben shared a touching story in which a parishioner interacted with a man, recently diagnosed with cancer, who had spent all night praying, asking for guidance and answers. The parishioner asked the man, “Do you believe in God?”—a simple question that shared God’s love and comforted another in his moment of need, truly embodying what it means to be a Catholic.

Moved by this story, another parishioner, Mike Regnier, proposed to establish the Stephen Ministry within Saint Ambrose to enable our community to serve each other through our Catholic faith.

Stephen Ministry is a lay caregiving ministry that supplements pastoral care by organizing, equipping, and supervising a team of congregation members—Stephen Ministers—to provide high-quality, one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people in the congregation and broader community who are experiencing life difficulties. Since its founding in 1975, more than 13,000 congregations have enrolled in Stephen Ministry, 75,000 pastors and lay leaders have been equipped as Stephen Leaders, and more than 600,000 lay people have received Stephen Minister training. The result: more than one and a half million people have had a Stephen Minister providing one-to-one Christian care during challenging times.

Caring is a hallmark in our Catholic faith. Our mission at Saint Ambrose is to “care for each other through one-to-one Christ-centered care.” Stephen Ministers serve our community more deeply by extending the spiritual and emotional support our pastors provide. They are the vessels connecting hurting people with Christ’s healing love, while providing emotional and spiritual care for range of life difficulties from grief, divorce, and long-term illness to professional crises, major life transitions, and more.

Stephen Leaders, who provide ongoing leadership for the ministry, are currently training the first group of Stephen Ministers in our community. Following their initial training, which will be completed by November, the ministers will be paired with potential Care Receivers—people in the congregation or community who are going through any difficulty in life. In Christ, they will meet once a week, one-to-one, offering a caring presence, listening ear, and comforting words while also maintaining the confidentiality of Care Receivers.



Stephen Ministry is life-transforming. We are caregivers, but God is the Curegiver. We recognize that our role is to respond to God’s call to serve, to focus on the process of serving and caring while leaving the outcome of growth, healing, and redemption to God. That is living in faith. We all are broken people, and only Christ can make us whole. It is through Him and His healing love that we can be truly restored.

For more information, to become a Stephen Minister, or to request care, contact Barbara Peña at 563-419-8698 or Mike Regnier at 952-454-5293. Visit saintambrosecatholic.org/ministries/stephen-ministry for details.

Barbara Peña serves on the Stephen Ministry Leadership Team at Saint Ambrose with Amy Brown, Margie Motzel, and Mike and Mary Regnier.

New Approach to RCIA Is

Word and sacrament, water and flame—the Easter Vigil Mass is one of the most beautiful liturgies of the year, filled with ancient traditions that recall salvation history and initiate Christians fully into the life of the Catholic Church. This spring, 24 adults and teens completed the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist at the Vigil. Their journey began last fall, via an RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) process that focuses on conversion of hearts and the habits of discipleship.

HEART FIRST

Fr. Ben Wittnebel and Nancy McGrew co-lead RCIA for Saint Ambrose, but the team includes small-group table leaders and sponsors, and welcomes spouses along with the candidates and catechumens themselves. The program runs from late September through Pentecost, on Sundays from 9:45 to 10:45 am. This enables participants to attend Mass before or after the session. The first half of each session is dedicated to the life of prayer and discipleship; the second half is spent in small groups. The discussions are facilitated by table leaders, but open to any topic the group chooses.

“Our focus is helping people become disciples of Jesus,” explained Fr. Ben. “A disciple is a student of Jesus and a lifelong learner, someone who has heard the Good News and responded to it with faith, hope, and love.”

Their response entails turning away from sin and conversion of heart; that conversion involves three parts: knowledge of the Catholic faith, habits of weekly worship and daily prayer, and living and serving as part of a community. The knowledge component is delivered by way of two video series on **FORMED.org**: *Symbolon*, which explains the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church, and *Lectio*, which explores scripture, tradition, and prayer. Because the videos are online, participants dig into the content on their own time, at their own pace. It also enables the RCIA team to spend more time cultivating habits of discipleship among the candidates and catechumens. The new process is already bearing fruit.

“Often the small group discussions continue past the end of the hour,” Fr. Ben said. “They start to belong,



Pictured left to right: Jeff Tousignant is anointed by Fr. Ben during the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults. Jeff is then baptized, and Fr. Ben is anointed as he emerges from the water during the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults.

to be part of a community...I have never seen this much conversion of heart in RCIA!”

MANY ROADS, ONE HOME

Saint Ambrose is often blessed with large RCIA cohorts. This year’s group included four catechumens (unbaptized persons preparing to enter the Catholic Church through Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist) and 20 candidates (baptized Christians preparing to receive the remaining sacraments of initiation—Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, or both). Nancy and Fr. Ben assign small groups based on personal similarities or affinities, but in truth, they see as many paths into the program and the Church as there are individual seekers.

“When I became pregnant with my first child, I decided to join Saint Ambrose because I want to raise my sons in the Catholic faith,” said newly confirmed parishioner Nallem Zuradelli. “I want them to grow up knowing and loving God and for them to become godly men.”

Drawing Souls to Christ



ng the Rite of Confirmation at the Easter Vigil Mass; Olivia Bunge is assisted from the baptismal font; and Harlan Hayward of Baptism. Photos courtesy of Hilda Berdie Photography.

Olivia and Garrett Bunge began RCIA together a month before they married. Garrett was Olivia's Confirmation sponsor, and his parents served as her godparents.

"The best part of RCIA is the tremendous love, support, encouragement, and sense of community that we received, not only from the RCIA group, but the parish as a whole, especially at the Easter Vigil," Olivia said. "We truly have never felt closer to God, and to each other for that matter, as a result of my beautiful journey to Catholicism and the immense strengthening of Garrett's existing Catholic faith."

"God meets you where you are," said Fr. Ben. "We had a teen who was not ready to be confirmed with the other teens, then decided now was the time. We had a snowbird who began the process here at Saint Ambrose and finished up in Florida. We had a woman who has self-identified as Catholic for years, but finally decided to receive the sacraments. God is working, and people are responding by His grace!"

"I loved meeting weekly in small groups; getting to know one another and discussing our faith," said Jeff Tousignant. "RCIA also inspired me to do more: I signed up for Adoration, joined the Impact 133 men's group, watched *The Chosen* TV series, and began *The Bible in a Year* podcast. I am inspired to learn more and grow my faith!"

To sustain this momentum, sessions after Easter help the new disciples continue their journey and find their place in the Saint Ambrose community. A celebration is scheduled for early June, then Fr. Ben and Nancy will begin looking forward to fall and walking with a new group God is drawing to the sacraments.

"Parishioners can help with RCIA in several ways," Fr. Ben said. "Pray for our new members and the next steps of their journey. Pray for our next class of candidates and catechumens and continue to invite and connect people into our faith community. And of course, if you feel called, please contact us about serving as a table leader or sponsor."

WHY WE GIVE: ROBB TURNER

We support Saint Ambrose with time and treasure because a strong faith community is a *pearl of great price* (Matthew 13:45-46). Sarah and I first experienced this in 2003 when we first moved to Woodbury as a newly married couple and joined the parish.



As new parishioners we were dazzled by a sea of movement in the pews from the many young children at Mass. Archbishop Flynn visited Saint Ambrose a few years later and praised God for the joyful noise of children at Mass. Newly married, we wanted to be just like the many dedicated parents we saw at church each Sunday.

When the pandemic struck, we thanked God that our daughters were in the care of problem-solving leaders like Father Peter and Father Ben, Nancy, Betsy, and the entire staff at Saint Ambrose. When blessed enough to find something of immense value, we are not called to treat it like an earthly treasure by keeping it to ourselves or guarding it from others. Instead, we are called to grow and share it. Sometimes that means pitching in with volunteer hours for important parish events like the Fall Festival or a key vocation like the Music Ministry. Other times it means hearing the call for additional financial giving that helps our parish grow in outreach and service to the community. In any case, and in many ways, it is a joy for the Turners to help how we can.

Robb Turner serves on the Stewardship Team at Saint Ambrose with Jason Englebreton, Larry Lynott, and Barb Vanags.

Catechesis of the A Hands-On Ap

In just two years, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is deepening the faith of the parish's children. CGS is a Montessori approach to sharing the Catholic faith, in which children as young as three encounter the love of the Good Shepherd through presentations on Scripture and liturgy, and works that they first witness and then work with on their own, as often as they like. Sessions take place in a dedicated space called the atrium, furnished with child-size re-creations of sanctuary furnishings like the altar, sacred vessels, vestments; and simple representations of figures, animals, and places from key Bible stories. The atmosphere is hushed and reverent—and the students can't get enough!

"Kids being kids, what I hear about their day depends on what they think was most interesting," says Sarah Foote, mother of two preschoolers who attend CGS through Early Childhood. "I always hear about the atrium! Alex often comes home able to elaborate on faith points that I wouldn't expect at his age. He spied a take-home sheet for the week and excitedly told me that the top picture was of the 'paschal candle.' I love that he can just whip out words like paschal."

Catechist Brittany McGurran's daughter attends, too.

"Katelyn loves the works! They are so beautiful and really give the child a hands-on way to experience the stories of our faith," Brittany says. "She has internalized it in such a beautiful way—she gets so excited in Mass when she hears something she heard at CGS or when she sees Father doing something she learned about."

Last year Saint Ambrose launched a Level 1 section (ages 3-6) through Early Childhood. The school and parish collaborated to find dedicated space for the atrium, and staff and parishioners combined to make or provide the furnishings and materials. This year, Saint Ambrose offered 15 sessions total: 14 sessions for Early Childhood and one for the parish in general. The growth bodes well, but it's not just the numbers that are increasing. Kathleen Dierberger, who is in her first year leading CGS, says the spiritual growth is even more remarkable.

The Good Shepherd: Approach to Forming Hearts



Above: CGS catechist Brittany McGurran works with her daughter Katelyn on the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Below: Alex Foote works at the model altar. Photos courtesy of Hilda Berdie Photography.



“The children come to an understanding of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, learn to listen to His voice, and fall in love with their faith,” says Kathleen. “It’s a delight to see them making connections from Advent to the Baptism work this Easter: that the ‘Great Light’ from Isaiah’s prophecy is Jesus, whose light we receive at Baptism!”

“I’m also amazed by how much the children have grown in prayer. We sometimes run over our time, because hands just keep going up with prayers they want to bring to God! It’s really beautiful to witness and experience.”

LEARN MORE AND LEND A HAND

CGS needs people who sew, work with wood, clay, or paint, or have similar gifts, as well as those willing to train as catechists. Call 651-768-3065 or email kdierberger@saintambrosecatholic.org to learn more or volunteer.



4125 Woodbury Drive | Woodbury, MN 55129

saintambrosecatholic.org

651-768-3030

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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Join us for our fifth fall festival at Saint Ambrose. FALLFEST is scheduled for September 23rd and 24th. We need businesses and families in our community to sponsor the event, donate items and services, and volunteer to help make the event successful. Go to saintambrosecatholic.org under "News and Events" and select "Festival" for more information. **We hope to see you there!**

