

ADVENT 2023



The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



LOVE AND MERCY ISSUE

Where Mercy Meets Generosity

Archbishop Harry Flynn, who ordained me, once said that charity is expressed by the one willing to roll up his sleeves and get involved. His words stuck with me: Being charitable demands something of my whole person—body, mind, and soul. I can't outsource it or keep it at arm's length.

In fact, love flourishes where mercy meets generosity, and Saint Ambrose is that kind of place. One of my very first impressions of this parish was the number of people who wanted to positively impact those around them, especially those facing difficulties or burdens. In the years since, that impression has only deepened. The prayerfulness of this community has released a generosity that's more freely expressed in joyful sacrifice. It is a sign that we are on our way to becoming what St. John Paul II called *contemplatives in action*.

What does that mean? It means we are aware of our own gifts and weaknesses, our need for mercy, and our desire for love. As a result, we are free to be "in our gifts," to serve not out of guilt or compulsion, but to love as God loves, in a way that is creative and fruitful.

Why does that matter? If we don't give in a way that is reflective of the dignity of the other person and the life-giving love of Christ, it can actually be cold, condescending, or hurtful.

In this issue of *The Way*, our culture of mercy and generosity is on full display, highlighting the numerous ministries our parish supports that help people from all walks of life, in every situation. I hope it emboldens each of you to step out of your



Above: Fr. Peter leads an Advent reflection for families. On the cover: Jesus is present in the Blessed Sacrament in the Adoration Chapel. Photos courtesy of Hilda Birdie Photography and Michael Hamerlind Photography respectively

own lives and into another's—to roll up your sleeves and get involved.

Fundamentally, we all need mercy. We're all flawed and striving, living in the light, and trusting our sins to God, whose mercies are new every day. I want to be a missionary of His mercy. I want everyone I encounter to know that, no matter where they are in life or what they hold against themselves, they are loved by their Father in heaven and by me. I hope you desire the same.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Peter Williams
Pastor

BY OUR LOVE: Parishioners share God's mercy through acts of service

Shortly after his conversion to Christianity, Tertullian wrote of how pagan Rome most readily recognized early Christians:

It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See how they love one another, they say...how they are ready even to die for one another. – *Apologeticus*, chapter 39

Followers of "the Way," as the early Church was called, were so willing to serve and suffer for those in need that they stood out against a world that was often harsh and uncaring.

Eighteen centuries later, the world still knows we are Christians by our love. Here at Saint Ambrose, that means ministering to those in need in our community in every situation, across the lifespan. And while donating money or gifts to local organizations is a great way for families to begin practicing charity, we are blessed with many opportunities to go deeper.

TITHING AS A PARISH

As a church, Saint Ambrose provides regular financial support to charitable organizations and religious orders including:

- Church of Gichitwaa Kateri (Minneapolis)
- Franciscan Brothers of Peace (Saint Paul)
- Friends in Need Food Shelf (St. Paul Park)
- Hope for the Journey Home (Oakdale)
- Little Sisters of the Poor (Saint Paul)
- Open Cupboard (Oakdale)
- Woodbury Options for Women (Woodbury)
- Archdiocesan Venezuelan Mission (Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela)



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PRO-LIFE FOR THE WHOLE LIFE

We often say we are pro-life from conception to natural death, and that is certainly true. We support our local pregnancy center, **Woodbury Options for Women**, not only financially, but with leadership (Deacon John Vomastek and other parishioners have served on the Board of Directors), prayer, and donations of supplies for mothers, babies, and families. These contributions literally save lives by providing emotional, spiritual, and material support for women who might be considering an abortion.

Additionally, volunteers from Saint Ambrose regularly visit the residents at **St. Therese of Woodbury Senior Community** and provide gifts each Christmas. Parish staff member Nancy McGrew leads regular communion services there, as well; additionally, trained Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion bring the Eucharist to homebound Catholics who are unable to attend Mass.

These are beautiful ministries, but so much of life happens between the bookends of conception and passing away. Our parish supports a number of other ministries that walk with people



Religion teacher Melissa Schisler and the seventh-graders at Saint Ambrose Catholic School collected thousands of needed items and supplies for babies and families served by Woodbury Options for Women. Photos courtesy of Woodbury Options for Women

throughout their lives, no matter the challenges they face. In particular, **Stephen Ministry** trains parishioners to accompany community members in every state of life, whatever their cross or situation. (See the May 2022 issue of *The Way* on our website for a more complete overview of this important ministry.) And we do even more for those facing extraordinary difficulties.

STUDENTS OF MERCY

Our **Social Outreach Committee** recently completed a six-week study of the book *What to Do When Jesus Is Hungry: A Practical Guide to the Works of Mercy* by Fr. Andrew Apostoli, CFR, (available at ignatius.com) and discussed as a group how to put it into practice in their lives and ministries. According to Susan Kubat, the goal of the book is not only to enlighten readers about each of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy (see below), but also the disposition of heart that makes them more fruitful, using examples from Jesus' own life. The committee hopes to share this book with the entire parish during the Lenten season.

CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

Feed the hungry
Give water to the thirsty
Clothe the naked
Shelter the homeless
Visit the sick
Ransom the captive
Bury the dead

SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

Instruct the ignorant
Counsel the doubtful
Admonish the sinner
Bear wrongs patiently
Forgive offenses willingly
Comfort the afflicted
Pray for the living and the dead



MERCY AT THE MARGINS

The Catholic Church has a long history of worldwide service, but even here in Woodbury, we're in mission territory. Numerous Saint Ambrose volunteers provide food, water, clothing, shelter, attention, and fellowship to the homeless and those in need here in our own community.

Parishioner Amy Brown has served on the Board of Directors for **Open Cupboard**, a food shelf based in Oakdale, for the past five years.

"I feel called to serve God's people," Amy says. "I feel strongly that food is a basic human right, and I can make a difference easily by sharing my time and resources. At Open Cupboard, we are committed providing food distribution and support services with dignity and respect. I would guess we have between 75 and 100 volunteers from Saint Ambrose who regularly pack, sort, and serve food to our community. The Ambrosians, in particular, are regular volunteers at one of the seven mobile sites in Woodbury."

Getting involved with Open Cupboard is simple: Visit opencupboard.org and click VOLUNTEER or DONATE.

Another parishioner, Peter Smith, helps to lead the parish's **Clothing Plus Program**. This ministry offers immediate assistance with clothing, food, and fuel by providing gift cards to those who stop by the parish asking for help.

"We fill the gap for short-term financial issues," says Peter. "Our team identified the need for a fast and easy qualification process to provide for emergency needs. Many other support services, while extremely well done, cannot respond as quickly as we can. After a short interview, parish clergy issue gift cards on the spot to meet the identified needs."

Parishioners contribute to the Clothing Plus Program with their free-will donations during the Men's Club Pancake Breakfast.



Families help prepare gifts during the annual Christmas Box drive at Saint Ambrose. Photo courtesy of Hilda Birdie Photography

Donations of gift cards or cash for Clothing Plus are always appreciated in the parish office.

Molly Heisler is a parishioner at Saint Ambrose but works for Guardian Angels Catholic Church in Oakdale, which oversees **Hope for the Journey Home**, a hospitality ministry providing families with a safe, supportive, family-friendly environment as they work toward finding stable housing. As volunteer coordinator, Molly recruits people to serve dinner seven days a week to the families staying in the shelter, as well as overnight volunteers who stay onsite in a private bedroom, lock up at curfew, and help provide a light breakfast each morning.

"Dinner volunteers help prepare a pre-made, donated meal and assist in serving and general clean-up after the meal; they also partake in the meal with our families," she says. "Both roles are needed seven days a week. Many of our volunteers become regulars here and say how much they get out of the experience."



Photo courtesy of Hilda Birdie Photography

More information about Hope for the Journey Home is available online at guardian-angels.org/hope. You can also reach out to Saint Ambrose parishioners Amy Brown or Rana Khoury with questions or to volunteer

SEEING THE NEED

In 2021, parishioner Kellee Wren and her husband Joe joined a new ministry at Saint Ambrose called **To Be Truly Seen** (TBTS). TBTS provides the opportunity for up to 15 people (parishioners and friends of parishioners) to volunteer at the Dorothy Day Center in Saint Paul. They visit and play Bingo with local people who are homeless, as well as supplying personal hygiene items, clothing, seasonal necessities, and snacks.

“It’s another way of living out our baptismal calling to serve others in need,” she says. “Originally, Joe asked our former associate Fr. Ben about donating items that we had for people in need. Fr. Ben mentioned the start of this new ministry, and it seemed like a good fit for us.”

For the Wrens, sharing God’s love and mercy is a family affair.

“When my kids were younger, they would always ask to give money to people on the street corners—so instead of money, we would try to keep an extra water bottle and snack in the car that we could give,” Kellee says. “TBTS allows us to do something similar on a larger scale and, more importantly, connect with people on a deeper level. We recognize the dignity of the people and meet them right where they are in life, be it with a smile, water, snack, or conversation. We convey that they are seen, cared about, and have not been forgotten.”

Parishioners can email Kellee at wrenfamily94@gmail.com to register as volunteers or join the TBTS email distribution list. You can also donate gift cards or new items including cold weather gear and nonperishable snacks. Contact Kellee for specific needs.

HUMANITARIAN OUTREACH

Parishioner Katie Bratland is leading a new group within the Social Outreach Committee called the **Saint Ambrose Humanitarian Committee** that is sponsoring a family displaced by the war in Ukraine to come to the US. With the US State Department and Uniting for Ukraine (U4U), the team is working to find housing for the family of five, schools for three children, and all of the other things a family that is coming to this country with very little will need to thrive. In the near future, the group will be seeking donated furniture and household items, as well as transportation to healthcare appointments, grocery shopping, job interviews, and more. Watch for more on this effort and family in a future issue of *The Way!*

NEVER TOO YOUNG ‘Veteran server’ gains as much as she gives

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are sometimes overlooked in favor of the more immediate needs of the body, but prayer, praise, and worship are essential for our souls. High-school junior Caroline Jude has attended Saint Ambrose with her parents and younger sister for as long as she can remember—but she became an altar server in 5th grade, and that changed everything.

“If I’m being honest, 10-year-old me most certainly did not attend the altar server training session by choice,” she says, “but the experience and knowledge I’ve gathered is awe- and faith-inspiring. I mean, I’ve grown closer to the Lord in these last six years than I thought possible. And you get to be part of the Mass. I mean, watching it is one thing; helping out and actually being a part of it is on a whole other level.

“Especially the Easter Vigil. As a younger server, that was a milestone I always looked forward to. And when I finally got to serve at that Mass? Mind. Blown. The amount of thought, work, and effort that goes into making sure that this three hour Mass runs smoothly is crazy.”



Altar server Caroline Jude enjoys Christmas at Saint Ambrose.
Photo courtesy of the family

Early on, Caroline was one of only a few girls who served, and she’s proud that many more girls have stepped forward now. As more younger servers get involved, she serves less frequently at regular Sunday Masses, but is always ready to step up when called.

“Usually I serve when we need incense on any Holy Days, or the big Masses like Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil, or Christmas,” she says. “Nancy [McGrew] and Father Peter have some of us categorized as *veteran servers*, since we are the oldest with the most experience. There is a LOT of ‘going with the flow’ happening at these Masses.”

Caroline is a junior at East Ridge High School. Outside of parish life, you can find her at home, reading (and writing!) books—but she tends to spend a lot of time at church, serving and helping out with the Children’s Choir.

“Being a server is easily one of the top decisions I’ve ever made,” she says. “It’s truly been a life-changing experience!”

INTERESTED IN SERVING?

Contact Nancy McGrew at nmcgrew@saintambrosecatholic.org to ask questions or volunteer.

NEW STATUE PORTRAYS PREGNANT VIRGIN MARY

Just in time for Christmas, we are welcoming a new image of Our Blessed Mother as a young woman expecting the birth of her son, Jesus.

As we wait in anticipation of the Lord’s coming, let us pray and ask: *Holy Spirit, how would you like me to conceive and bear Christ to the waiting world in the new year?* And may we, like Mary, say yes!





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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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ADVENT & CHRISTMAS AT SAINT AMBROSE

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

December 24th, 8:30 & 11:00 am

CHRISTMAS EVE

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

CHRISTMAS DAY

December 25th, 10:00 am

HOLY FAMILY

December 30th, 4:00 pm

December 31st, 8:30 & 11:00 am

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

December 31st, 5:00 pm

January 1st, 10:00 am

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