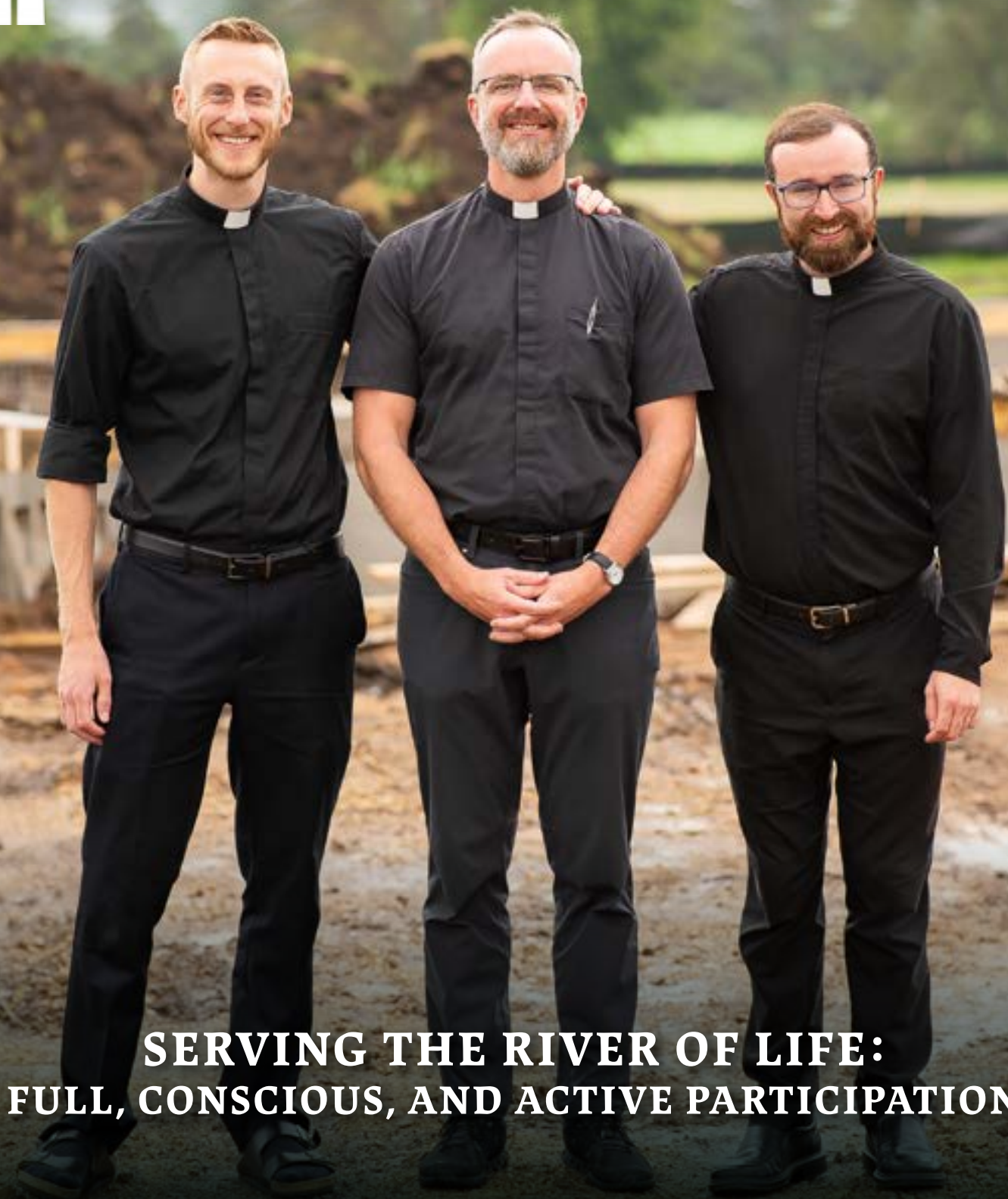


FALL 2024



The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



**SERVING THE RIVER OF LIFE:
FULL, CONSCIOUS, AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION**

A Community Alive in Christ

In my six years as your pastor, I have been drawn more and more to the Gospel accounts in which Jesus and his Apostles are in the midst of surging crowds of people who want to be close to the Lord, hear His words, and see His miraculous deeds. I'm drawn to these stories because I see the currents of life in Christ growing stronger and stronger here at Saint Ambrose. As a priest, it's tremendously satisfying—even exhilarating!

Of course, there are also moments when I feel overwhelmed by the scale of the spiritual hunger and need. But I take comfort knowing that the Apostles felt that, too. Like you and me, it took them awhile to recognize their giftedness.

It's part of the human condition to discount or disregard our own giftedness or to desire the gifts of others. But we are all children of God, created with a purpose, and each of us is essential to this community, no matter where we are in life. The enthusiasm and idealism of youth is a great gift that inspires and motivates the Church to remember its mission and change the world. The season of life in which we are raising our children may not afford as much time for prayer or service, but the sacrificial love of spouses and parents is a sign of Christ's love and the renewal of creation. In later years, we have more time to give, but more importantly, we bring experience, wisdom, stability, and patience—great gifts above and beyond whatever skills or abilities we can offer.

This issue of *The Way* is dedicated to serving the river of life—full, conscious, and active participation in the life of Christ here at Saint Ambrose. Of course, grace flows out from the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist at the Mass. But as Christians, we are conduits of that grace out into the world. Sometimes it's through specific ministries or service.



Above: Fr. Peter is greeted by parishioner Greg Vilendrer, son of Bill and Char: “Unfailingly, he seeks me out to embrace and affirm me with the purest love.” On the cover: Fr. Peter, Fr. Sam Gilbertson, and Fr. Sean Mulcare visit the construction site for the new rectory. Photos courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography.

Sometimes it's the way you walk in your sufferings. Sometimes it's your creativity. And often it's your simple kindness: the little connections you make and sustain with each other that the rest of us know nothing about.

As a spiritual father, when I hear about these things, my heart is content. Such acts of selflessness call to mind the boy who gives Jesus five loaves and two fish. It's natural to ask, “What good is this for so many?” But what if, instead, we take the risk and give whatever we have?

I see this happen every day, and it gives me strength to stand in the river's current, among the surging crowds longing to see Jesus. There is no place I would rather be.

Peace in Christ,
Fr. Peter Williams
Pastor

Hospitality Fosters Community

In a parish the size of Saint Ambrose, hospitality is essential! People need to feel a personal connection to their community, which requires intentionality among our staff and volunteers. This issue of the newsletter focuses on ministries that leverage volunteers and their gifts, especially at “milestone moments,” to engage others in parish life. But fostering community doesn't have to be hard—it starts with a smile!

Ushers and Greeters: At our two Days of Mercy each year (during Advent and Lent), parish staff greet and assist people as they arrive for Confession and prayer, as well as provide hospitality for the several priests hearing Confessions throughout the day. Since the pandemic, our ushers have primarily taken up the collection at Mass; however, our goal is to ramp up the role this fall, with ushers now serving as greeters, helping people find seats, directing parishioners and visitors during the reception of Holy Communion time, and more!

Lectors: Lectors (readers) share the word of God with parishioners attending Mass. Currently we have approximately



Deacon John Vomastek greets young parishioners at the New Parishioner event in July. Photo courtesy of Hilda Birdie Photography

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs): EMHCs are lay ministers trained and commissioned to distribute Holy Communion alongside the clergy at Mass. Our EMHCs are not scheduled in advance; instead, they sign up for a station when they arrive for Mass. We usually have plenty of volunteers but are expanding the ministry this fall.

We have seen a big increase in the number of people asking if someone can bring Holy Communion to them at home. We have several volunteers who serve as Homebound EMHCs, and their response has been immense gratitude for the opportunity to visit those who cannot come to Mass.

GET INVOLVED: Contact Nancy McGrew at 651-768-3023 or nmcgrew@saintambrosecatholic.org for more information or to volunteer.

COME TO FALLFEST SEPTEMBER 20-21!
More information and schedule at saintambrosecatholic.org/parish-festival



‘SOMETHING TO SING ABOUT’

Music ministers bring joy and connection to liturgy and each other

Bob and Jackie Harvey are familiar faces at Saint Ambrose: Since 1998, in the Woodbury High School auditorium, they have led music ministry for the parish three separate times. This time, however, feels different.

“In 2019, we were ministering at St. John the Evangelist in Little Canada,” Jackie says. “After nine years there, we had reached the point that it was time to empower new leaders who had emerged, and we were looking for a new opportunity. That’s when the Holy Spirit stepped in.”

“I’m a big believer in novenas,” says Bob. “I was with my son on the Philmont Boy Scout Camping Trip in the mountains of New Mexico and was just finishing a novena to St. Maximilian Kolbe. We were coming back down into cell phone range, and a *bling* came to my phone. I still have the message: It was from a friend and Saint Ambrose parishioner, David Fischer, saying the music ministry was about to go through a change in leadership. He thought that perhaps we could assist the parish through another transition as we had done in the past and gave our names to Father Peter. I knew in my heart that our prayers had been answered.”

NO CHALLENGE TOO BIG

Though the parish is large, the ministry started small, with Bob, Jackie, and roughly five veteran music ministers. Then, just as they were gaining momentum, COVID struck. Mass restrictions and concerns about the safety of singing negatively impacted music ministry throughout the Catholic Church, but even with these challenges, the Harveys felt strangely blessed.

“We held Mass outdoors: the Easter sunrise service at 6:30 in the morning, in the midst of a storm of four to six inches of snow. They set up an altar on a flatbed truck with a tent on it, complete with a sound system, and 300 cars in the parking lot with people listening through their car windows,” Bob recalls. “At the sign of peace, they all honked their horns. It was such



a pivotal moment, like, ‘OK, with God’s grace, we can do anything here.’”

“We also had the benefit of ‘households’ within the ministry,” says Jackie. “During COVID, households were not required to stand six feet apart. In the ministry, there were husband-and-wife teams, a mother-and-daughter team, and a son-and-daughter team. These households could share microphones, so a few more people could stay involved even through the pandemic.”

GROWING THE COMMUNITY

That ability to be creative and keep people engaged gave the ministry a solid base when the COVID restrictions were lifted. Today approximately 35 adults serve regularly in music ministry at Saint Ambrose, along with a large and vibrant children’s choir.

“The children’s choir includes 45 kids in 3rd through 8th grade who sing to the roof rafters and delight the congregation,” Jackie says.



Bob and Jackie Harvey (left) have lived the liturgical calendar together for more than 30 years and have five grown sons. They currently lead music ministry at Saint Ambrose, including the Children’s Choir (bottom left) and the Adult Choir (above). Music is their avocation; their family business is Edelweiss Design, a landscape design and architecture company.

Photos courtesy of Colleen Davis, Hilda Birdie Photography, and Michael Hamerlind Photography, respectively

“The choir commitment for the children is much less than for adult choir, and the hope is to form the children while they are young, offering lots of opportunity to them. That way, when it is time for us to pass the torch, there will hopefully be plenty of people enthusiastic for and interested in leading this ministry.”

The adult volunteer commitment is more substantial, but not meant to be daunting. The goal is to encompass a full range of vocal and instrumental talent from within the community, and they welcome and encourage everyone who is interested.

“The mission is to create an environment in which people have something to sing about,” Bob says. “The liturgy, especially the liturgy of the Eucharist, is source and summit. Whatever is done musically should enhance the absolute miracle in which we are participating. We are called to be vessels of the Holy Spirit to reach the people of Saint Ambrose through sung prayer. It is an expression of our joy, reverence, and gratitude.”

To that end, while the sacred music they employ encompasses everything from ancient chant to contemporary praise and worship, the emphasis is on praising God together, both as a ministry and as a parish community.

“There is an abundance of beautiful and appropriate music for each particular liturgy, and it can be a challenge to narrow it down,” Jackie says. “We are less interested in a choral performance. Rather, we spend considerable time thinking about, ‘Can the congregation sing with this? Is it the right range? Will it encourage participation and enhance the community’s prayer?’”

As a married couple, Bob and Jackie are constantly sharing ideas and inspiration. Their history together, and with the Saint Ambrose community, means the personal connections within the music ministry run deep.

“We make a point of being present in the community and are familiar with every ministry member’s story—whatever they’re comfortable sharing,” Bob says. “Within the ministry there have been people who have passed away, people who are cancer survivors, and people who have come through RCIA, whose first experience in a Catholic environment was here at Saint Ambrose. It is important for everyone to feel invited!”

Jackie agrees: “Music ministry is its own small group, a community within the community.”

COME MAKE MUSIC WITH US!

Want to learn more about music ministry at Saint Ambrose? Click [Get Involved](#), then [Music Ministry](#), on the Saint Ambrose website, saintambrosecatholic.org. There is a place for everyone—veteran and new, young and young-at-heart, instrumentally gifted, vocally talented, and those who just like to sing!





MILESTONE MINISTRIES

Saint Ambrose supports families at life's most important and challenging moments

It's easy to get busy and just go through the motions when it comes to our faith. But in moments of great challenge or change—a death, an engagement, or the birth of a child—many people turn to the Church for wisdom, guidance, and comfort. Saint Ambrose strives to meet people at these milestones and draw them deeper into communion with Christ and each other.

Mike and Barb Baumann have been involved in Marriage preparation at Guardian Angels and Saint Ambrose for 28 years and in Baptism prep at Saint Ambrose for 20. In that time, they have ministered to hundreds of young couples and families at key moments in their lives and have consistently gained as much as they have given.

MARRIAGE MENTORS

Marriage preparation at Saint Ambrose is straightforward: Engaged couples are assigned a married mentor couple, like the Baumanns, that meets with them two or three times prior to their wedding.

“The couple takes an inventory, then we talk about goals and communication and problem-solving—things that will help them get started on the right track,” says Barb.

Often the young couples they work with are getting married in the Church due to family expectations, but the Baumanns try to call them to something more.

“We keep doing this because we believe that faith should be the third leg of the stool in a marriage,” Mike says. “But we

PARISH LIFE

Each year, we host approximately:

- 12-15 weddings
- 175-200 baptisms
- 30-35 funerals

also get a bounce in our own marriage, because these young couples are usually crazy in love. We spend a few sessions talking about sacrifice and seeing things from their spouse's perspective, and it certainly helps us keep our focus on the fundamentals.”

They are always looking for new mentors to join the ministry and connect with engaged couples.



Funerals at Saint Ambrose

When someone passes away in the parish community, Deacon John, Nancy McGrew, and Jackie Harvey meet with the family to prepare the liturgy, including readings and music, as well as to plan the funeral luncheon, which is served by volunteers.

Generally, the funeral home of the family's choice takes care of most of the setup for the visitation, and our sacristan takes care of setting up for the Mass. Our liturgy and music directors handle music for funerals, and we also have a small team of volunteers who can help in the absence of a funeral home.

For more information funerals at Saint Ambrose, please contact Deacon John Vomastek at 651-768-3008 or deaconjohn@saintambrosecatholic.org.

Pictured left: Mike and Barb Baumann have been involved in Marriage and Baptism preparation ministries at Saint Ambrose and other parishes for 20+ years.

Photo courtesy of the Baumanns; stock photos courtesy of Pixabay,



“When we were preparing for marriage, we worked with an older couple,” Mike says. “They were delightful and faithful, but we just didn’t connect with them. So we said if things are still going well in three years, we will get involved in marriage ministry. Now we’re the older ones, and we always challenge the couples we’re working with: In three years, join us in the ministry—we need you to do this, too!”

BUILDING ON BAPTISM

Baptism preparation is a one-session class of one to two hours, scheduled regularly by the parish. Anyone requesting Baptism for the first time at Saint Ambrose is required to take the class, and each class usually involves four or five couples or families.

“I love it because sometimes we get to see the same couples again, after they have their first child,” says Barb. “We share with them what the Church wants them to know about Baptism, but more importantly, they get a chance to meet and form connections with other couples in a similar situation. It helps make a really large church seem a little bit smaller.”

“Baptism prep is also an evangelization opportunity,” Mike says. “When you have a child and see that miracle and think about crafting a soul, returning to the faith comes to the forefront.”

To better incorporate these families into the life of the parish, Father Peter and Father Sam are now putting more focus on connecting those couples attending Baptism class with each other, so they can see and support each other in the faith.

“We’ve met with some spectacular young couples, and we’re evolving the program to be less content-driven and more of a welcome into the parish family: Your child receives the Holy Spirit, and you get to join a faith community that will support your family’s walk with Christ,” Mike says.

CALLED TO MORE

Both ministries require volunteers, and the Baumanns encourage and welcome couples who are interested in helping prepare others for Marriage and Baptism. Often young couples feel too busy, especially once they have children of their own, but Mike and Barb insist that time spent in ministry takes care of itself.

“We’re crazy busy, too!” Barb says. “We were both working full-time and raising kids; now we have aging parents we need to care for. You make time, and then you can’t imagine your life without it.”

“For a long time, we did most of our Marriage and Baptism meetings at our house, because the kids were young and we didn’t want to pay for a babysitter,” Mike says. “The collateral benefit was that our girls saw us volunteering. Plus, when you get involved in ministry, it shrinks the parish. You look forward to seeing people, and your kids see that enthusiasm for your place or worship and your community. It draws them in, too!”

GET INVOLVED
Interested in Marriage or Baptism preparation? Contact the Parish Office at 651-768-3030 for more information and training.

Light is sweet! and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun. – Ecclesiastes 11:7

Spring and summer photo highlights at Saint Ambrose include (clockwise from top) the annual Faith Formation Rosary in May,

a New Parishioner welcome event in July, and Vacation Bible School in June.

Photos courtesy of Hilda Birdie Photography





Campers Surrounded by Volunteer Support at EFC

Saint Ambrose attended Extreme Faith Camp (EFC) this year with six other parishes on our week. We brought 75 middle-school campers, along with 15 Prayer Team members and 17 Extreme Team members. Prayer Teamers are rising 10th- or 11th-grade students who experience an intense week of prayer formation, cloistered from the rest of camp. They spend time in front of the Blessed Sacrament in Adoration, praying for camp. Extreme Team includes high-schoolers who have already experienced Prayer Team, who serve as small-group leaders for the campers. We also had 13 adult volunteers, for a total of 120 people from Saint Ambrose. It was a blessed week of fun, healing, and conversion for our teens.

VOLUNTEER REFLECTIONS

Coming back to camp as an adult every year is truly a blessing for my own spiritual life. Getting to walk with teens from the parish as they encounter Jesus reminds me just how much the Lord is still working and how good He is. — Katie Weber

Going back to camp and the place I encountered the Lord for the first time as an adult is no less transformative for me. I get to witness the middle- and high-schoolers of our parish having their own encounters, and that breathes life into my own faith. It shows me time and again that God is moving, and He has more to do. — Maria Grismer

It is great to be a leader who is from the community; it feels like it strengthens the community. I go back to EFC for these reasons as well as my own desire for belonging and participation in God's will. — Tomas Kozdroj



Fr. Sean leads Eucharistic Adoration at Extreme Faith Camp (EFC). He was ordained a priest and assigned to Saint Ambrose Catholic Community this spring and served at EFC this summer.

EFC photos courtesy of parishioner Tomas Kozdroj

Meet Fr. Sean Mulcare

I am an only child and was raised Catholic by my wonderful parents, Tim and Cheryl, in Forest Lake. My faith came alive at Extreme Faith Camp (EFC), where I encountered the personal love of God and first sensed his potential calling to the priesthood. After high school, I served for a year on NET Ministries, then began the journey to priesthood in seminary. Nine years later, I am overjoyed to be a priest at Saint Ambrose. I have been touched by the overwhelming welcome I have received. You are so kind, warm, and supportive. It's hard to imagine a more welcoming community for a new priest.

EFC this summer was such a joy! It was especially powerful for me because it is one of the biggest factors that helped my relationship with God to grow. Coming back as a priest was very powerful for me, especially as I brought Jesus in the monstrance around the room to each of the kids individually, as I remembered what Jesus did in my soul all those years ago.

I have been in the Companions of Christ [a fraternal community of archdiocesan priests] for about a year now. Being in a Companions household with Fr. Peter and Fr. Sam has shown me more clearly than ever the great value of priestly fraternity. There are many ways to live as a priest, and having a unifying rule of life with those you are living with has been a great blessing.



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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)

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 5:00 pm

Saturday 8:00 am

RECONCILIATION

Monday-Friday 7:30-7:55 am

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 4:15-4:55 pm

Saturday 8:30-9:30 am, 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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The new rectory is underway! We began planning this project in Spring 2023 and have had many people donate or pledge their support. To all our benefactors: Thank you!

You can join them and help us build a new rectory, reduce debt, and strengthen our mission. If you have not made a pledge or a donation, now is the time. Drop a check in the collection on Sunday, use your credit card with the WeShare app or the QR Code below, or arrange other donations with Tom Schisler. God bless you!

DONATE

