

SUMMER 2025

# The Way

Saint Ambrose Catholic Community, Woodbury, Minnesota



**IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD  
GENEROSITY AND HOSPITALITY AT CHURCH AND AT HOME**



# From Our Table to Yours



On this page and the cover: Our priests can now celebrate Mass in the rectory chapel on a beautiful altar from St. Joseph’s Hospital in Saint Paul. Photos courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography

## THE RECTORY ALTAR

The altar in our rectory chapel previously resided in the chapel of Saint Joseph’s Hospital in Saint Paul. For several decades, countless people prayed before this altar as they walked the uncertain path of healing or accompanied loved ones. It is made of solid stone and weighs more than 1,000 pounds—a sign of the Lord’s stable, enduring presence in our lives. When the hospital chapel closed a few years ago, the altar was secured, put into storage, and eventually made available for our Saint Raymond Chapel in the new rectory. It was the marble at the base of the altar’s legs, which identically matched the plinth on which the tabernacle resides, that inspired the acquisition.

I want to open this issue of *The Way* with an expression of gratitude. Fr. Sam, Fr. Sean, and I have lived in the new rectory for the past few months, and we feel blessed, honored, and loved. Our home has been so thoughtfully designed, and we love living there. It is both comfortable and restorative, not to mention geographically and spiritually close to the people God has called us to serve! Already it has afforded us an opportunity to exercise the virtue of hospitality together in new ways. More than 500 people came to the Open House; we have had tours for staff and students and an event in honor of the Building Committee; and we have hosted brother priests and our respective families.

The best definition of hospitality that I have seen in the past year is the generous welcoming of another on their own terms, out of the love that comes from God. When we host others at our new home, a deeper bond occurs as both host and guest become known as real people, dwelling in each other’s midst. This is a wonderful blessing, experienced in a particular way by sharing a meal together.

Family meals were very important for me and my siblings growing up in Stillwater. My parents had a bell on the screen porch that they would ring, and we knew we had 5-10 minutes to get our bikes and get home for dinner. I didn’t always appreciate it at the time, but with age and maturity I have come to see the offering entailed by the priority my parents placed on these regular family dinners. Everything that went into food preparation, and their insistence that we be together even when some of us would rather be elsewhere, reconnected us to each other every day. Even now, the smell of burning charcoal evokes memories of my dad grilling and the sense of gathering our disparate lives together around a table.

In the following pages, we explore this idea in a deeper way: What is it about eating together that is so fundamental to human relationships that the Lord rooted the sacrament of all sacraments, the Holy Eucharist, in a shared meal? Fr. Sam and Fr. Sean offer their thoughts on how gathering at table with you impacts their parish ministry. We also talk with families and staff about the importance of family dinners and hospitality in sharing the faith and building community.

None of us does it perfectly, but the more we break bread together, the more we find Jesus in our midst!

In Christ,

**Fr. Peter Williams**  
Pastor



Current and former Saint Ambrose priests gathered for a meal in the new rectory this spring—pictured left to right are past associates Fr. Ben Wittnebel and Fr. Nick Froehle, current pastor Fr. Peter Williams, and current associates Fr. Sean Mulcare and Fr. Sam Gilbertson.

## GET REAL: Our Associates Reflect on Shared Meals and Personal Encounters

When priests are new to a community, it is easy to feel disconnected or overwhelmed by so many new faces and families. For Fr. Sam Gilbertson and Fr. Sean Mulcare, the culture of invitation and hospitality at Saint Ambrose has made them quickly feel at home.

“I’m amazed at how welcoming the people of this parish are and how I’ve been invited into their lives, joys, and struggles, simply because I am a priest,” says Father Sean. “I love learning the stories of so many parishioners and being a small part of their journey of faith. What a gift and privileged place to be!”

“One of the most beautiful ways I have felt welcomed into the Saint Ambrose community is being invited into so many families’ homes to share a meal. It’s wonderful to sit at their table, learn about their lives, laugh, and share dinner together,” he says. “There’s something about sharing a meal that opens the door to deeper relationships. It’s not just about food or a night without cooking; it’s about relationship and the gift that it is to receive their hospitality. I always walk away from those meals grateful, encouraged, and humbled.”

“Saint Ambrose definitely has a culture of people inviting us priests into their homes,” says Father Sam. “You see family

pictures on their walls, you see their kids in their natural environment, and the guards go down.”

“For me, what changes is looking out on a Sunday Mass and seeing so many faces. These aren’t just random people; they are actually *my* people,” he says. “You relate differently after that. It feels less transactional, and that is a beautiful gift.”

Similarly, inviting parishioners into the new rectory deepens those connections, underscoring the reality that priests are people, too.

“It feels very human to be able to welcome people into our new home,” says Fr. Sam. “We are trying to demystify the priesthood, like, ‘Yeah, we have a home. That’s my bed; that’s where I sleep. Fr. Peter, Fr. Sean, and I live together and eat together here.’”



Both men recognize the profound connection between the gospel they preach and the communal life they live with each other and their parish family.



A print of Caravaggio's painting *Supper at Emmaus* hangs in the sacristy at Saint Ambrose, an important scriptural reference to knowing Jesus “in the breaking of the bread.”

“We see the significance of sharing meals together all throughout the scripture, as well as in the early Church,” Fr. Sean says. “They gathered not only to pray and worship, but also to share meals. This isn’t something only priests are called to, and I love to hear about parishioners inviting one another over to their homes. This strengthens the connection between them and helps a large parish like Saint Ambrose to feel smaller and more intimate.”

“Jesus went to Bethany, to the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and he was able just to *be*,” says Fr. Sam. “It is a gift for us priests to find places where we can just be ourselves and share in the lives of families. It’s an extension of the Incarnation: Jesus talked and ate with sinners, and that’s who we are. Nothing has to be off-limits. We can just be real because that’s what Jesus did!”

# Caring Through Sharing

My wife, Clare, and I love to host dinner parties. I know this may seem old-fashioned in today’s world of Door Dash and meal plans, but it is one of our biggest joys. Having a group of friends gathered around the table is a great way to show that you care. This is the same way Jesus cares for us each time we gather at the altar to receive the Eucharist.

Here at Saint Ambrose, your care extends far beyond the dinner table or the altar. Thanks to your spiritual support and financial generosity, our new rectory is finished, and the landscaping will be completed in the coming weeks.

At the beginning of this project, we had a three-part plan:

- to build an on-campus home for our shepherds
- to continue to expand the reach of our mission
- and to pay down our debt

To date, we have accomplished two of the three. The rectory will be a home for the priests who serve Saint Ambrose for the next 100 years. Our mission is growing and thriving in so many ways, through youth and family formation, numerous small groups, and dozens of adults entering the church through OCIA (the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults).

The final piece—which has been a goal since we broke ground in 1998—is our debt. The good news is that we are closer than ever to retiring our loan, and we have a real opportunity to do so by June 30, 2026. Why is this date important? We have an adjustable mortgage, and on July 1, 2026, that rate could be adjusted from our current 3.16 percent.

Wouldn’t it be a blessing to pay off our debt beforehand?

If you would like to help or want more information, please contact me at 651-768-3016 or [tschisler@saintambrosecatholic.org](mailto:tschisler@saintambrosecatholic.org). God bless your generosity toward Saint Ambrose and thank you for all that you do!

**Tom Schisler**  
Director of Stewardship  
& Advancement

# MEANINGFUL MEALS

Committing to dinner anchors our relationships with each other and with God

Whenever parents share their struggles in choosing a high school for their eight-graders, Saint Ambrose Catholic School Principal Betsy Osterhaus Hand shares some simple wisdom:

“One of my questions is always, ‘Which school will allow you to eat dinner together?’ As a veteran educator, I can tell you, go to the wall for family dinners! Some meals will be miserable, some forgettable, and others will shine, but the habit will form your children into people you’d love to invite over. We have a lot of high schools to choose from in this area, but if families spend all their time running back and forth to school and extracurriculars, they miss out on what really matters.”

Regular, sit-down meals together bind families to each other and to the Lord, as many Saint Ambrose parishioners can attest. Is it any wonder that the sacrament of Holy Eucharist comes to us in the context of a shared meal?

Brian and Natalie Danaher have been parishioners for nearly 20 years and have two children who have attended Saint Ambrose through 8th grade: Matthew, a junior at Hill-Murray, and Lauren, who is graduating 8th grade this spring. They have grown up here, beginning in the Early Childhood Center, and the parish has been the cornerstone of the Danahers’ marriage and family life.

“The church and school are anchors for our family,” Natalie says. “First and foremost, they provide spiritual fulfillment: Our faith gives purpose to our life and the framework that we need to navigate difficult challenges. Second is community: We both

grew up as ‘One Body’ in the Catholic Church, and this gives us a sense of belonging. Third, our Catholic faith provides guidance, helping us navigate complex decisions and giving us a moral compass, which is essential for us to pass on to our children. And finally, there are the traditions and rituals: Mass, the sacraments, and prayer, which provide regular connections to God and to each other.”

“Faith is our framework. It influences what we do, how we see ourselves and others, and how we approach difficult moments,” says Brian. “We go to Mass every Sunday and for the liturgical holidays and sacraments, like First Communion and Confirmation. These are family celebrations, and even though my family doesn’t live around here, they come up to join us.”

“No matter what the day has been like, we always come together and carve out some sort of meaningful time together,” says Natalie. “It fosters a sense of belonging and provides time for us to model behavior and teach life lessons.”





When the kids were little, we used mealtime to teach them etiquette and contribution: how to help with meal prep, do dishes, and things like that. Now that they are older, it's a time for us to be present and listen to what's going on in their live, for shared discussion, advice, and family or personal decision-making."

Brian makes sure they begin in prayer, so their time together is offered to God.

"Given our busy work, school, and travel sports schedules, some nights it's, 'OK, we gotta hurry up and eat quick to get to practice,'" he says. "Not every meal is a nice, leisurely dinner where we sit and have a meaningful discussion. But we try to make a point of being together every day."



# Questions & Conversations

Family dinners did not happen every night when my children all lived at home, but we prioritized this important time to look at each other, hear each other, and to stop all of the other activity to share food and conversation with one another.

I wanted my children to build confidence in talking to anyone, listening well, learning from others, and engaging in discourse that was not all about them. Additionally, I didn't want our family dinners to only feature complaints about teachers or which students were cheating during foursquare. Thus, our dinnertime "question game" began. My rules were that each person had to ask a question that everyone answered, and it could not be a yes-or-no question. Some nights were brutal, featuring eye-rolling at inane questions from a little sister, or "I have so much homework...this takes forever...please, Mom, no!"

# HOME FOR SUPPER

My parents owned a small business that closed at 6:00 each evening, so dinner (or supper, as it was called in the country) was served between 6:15 and 6:30 most days. I learned a lot at the dinner table, and my wife and I continued this tradition when we had children. A meal together is important, and I would plan my day around dinner with my family.

Tom Schisler

But there were also incredible nights. We howled with laughter at silly questions, shared deep fears, and explained our dreams of extravagant vacations. When their friends started coming over, the visitors refreshed the game, and repeat visitors always looked forward to it.

It was a wonderful, worthwhile family practice that gave us the space to model how to listen well, exercise curiosity, and spread out the airtime instead of allowing one child (or parent) to dominate the conversation.

Betsy Osterhaus Hand



Though most of the Walz family tries to gather for dinner once a week, it's rare that they are all in the same place at the same time. Parents Wes and Kerry-Anne (center) say regular Mass attendance, Adoration, prayer, and even Catholic pilgrimages help to keep the family grounded in the Lord and connected to each other.

# WHEN DINNER WON'T WORK

The Walz family leans into Mass and daily devotions to stay grounded in God

Not every family can swing daily dinners. Wes and Kerry-Anne Walz have been Saint Ambrose parishioners since moving to Woodbury in 2000, and all their children—Kelvin, Jaedyn, Brehna, Cheyne, and Wrexyn—attended Saint Ambrose Catholic School through 8th grade.

Kerry-Anne and Wes grew up as cradle Catholics in Calgary, Canada, and went to the same high school, but did not date until they were 20. They married two years later and have lived in numerous cities in three different countries during Wes's professional hockey career. Saint Ambrose is essential for their marriage and family, especially when work and family life make shared meals nearly impossible.

"To be honest, we don't have a lot of meals together," says Kerry-Anne. "Our large family and our schedules make it very difficult to accomplish. We try to get together once a week for dinner—sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't."

Wes and Kerry-Anne always worked to bring their children to Mass on Sundays and discussed their faith and values openly at home, but Kerry-Anne sees that, early on, they were giving the bare minimum to God.

"I don't believe we were genuinely living our faith, and the busyness in our lives with sports, school events, traveling, etc., was not helping," she says. "Our faith was not growing—it was

We don't go to Mass or Adoration because we are perfect—we go because we are sinners. We offer up all glory to God! We are just a bunch of imperfect people trying to get each other to heaven.

Wes & Kerry-Anne Walz

probably even stagnant. It wasn't until I joined my Bible Study back in 2005 that I realized there was so much information to take in, and I was on fire for the Lord. It changed my life!"

Wes began to grow in his faith when he retired from playing hockey, especially after being invited to speak at a Catholic men's conference.

"I begrudgingly agreed, and it was the beginning of God opening up my

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# SHARED FOOD, SHARED LIFE

## Two Saint Ambrose couples are building connections one meal at a time

The practice of hospitality is one of the essential ways a large faith community begins to feel smaller. For the Matenaers and the Pauls, asking strangers over for dinner has become a way of life—and although they have different approaches, their dinner-time gatherings are bearing fruit that lasts for Saint Ambrose.

### Low-Key and Pressure-Free

When Peter and Elise Matenaer moved here seven years ago, they didn't know a soul, so they set out to build a community around their marriage and family life.

“Peter is extremely extroverted,” Elise laughs. “He will just see somebody with kids and walk up to them like, ‘Hey, I’m Peter. Can I get your phone number?’”

“Everybody loves to be invited, but it’s not often that people do the inviting,” says Peter. “So we were really intentional about extending the invitation and just having people over. The biggest thing is not to put up barriers to that invitation, like, ‘Oh, my house isn’t good for hosting’ or ‘It’s just too messy.’ I feel comfortable when I walk into someone’s house and there is laundry tucked away in the corner, because it doesn’t feel like they put on a big show. It’s like, this is our life, and you’re welcome to be a part of it.”

The Matenaers have five children, age 9 and under—Genevieve, Sebastian, Sylvie, Dominic, and Juliet—so their focus is on families at a similar stage of life, with similar interests, concerns, and expectations. Usually, they invite one family at a time to share a meal with them, then send the kids downstairs to play while the grownups enjoy a drink, dessert, and conversation. Disruptions happen, but since they are all parents, they know what to expect and support each other through it.



**Peter and Elise Matenaer host other families for casual evening meals that build community and support for parents and their kids.**

Photo courtesy of the Matenaers

“It’s important not to feel like the kids need to tiptoe or be on their best behavior,” says Peter. “It’s nice when they are, but that’s not real life. The more you share life with other families, the more natural and comfortable it becomes. We have grown a good community here and have developed deep friendships, but we’re also still making those first-time invitations.”

“We try to not make it stressful for our guests or ourselves,” Elise says. “Your whole family shouldn’t hate when you’re having people over because your kids are scrubbing the baseboards. Be realistic: If this is the season of your life that the best you can do is Costco pizza on paper plates, invite people. If what you can manage is donuts and Starbucks after Mass, still invite people. And if you’re in a season where you can serve a six-course meal with appetizers, please, invite me!”

Peter and Elise do what they can to keep it simple, but even after years of inviting people, it can still get to be a little much.

“There was one time when somebody was walking up our doorstep. I said to Peter, ‘Wait, who’s coming over?’ and he said, ‘I don’t actually know,’” laughs Elise. “Sometimes there might still be a scramble to get ready, and I remember a time I planned too elaborate of a meal. Afterward, I felt like I had spent the entire time in the kitchen. The meal is important, but it’s really just the means to connection and relationship.”

### Inspired Hosting

Unlike the Matenaers, Sanjai and Reena Paul did not have a community-building goal in mind when they extended their first invitations—they simply wanted to make dinner for their priests. The Pauls are originally from India and moved to Minnesota eight years ago, after living in Dubai and England, among other places. They settled in Woodbury and got involved at Saint Ambrose right away: men’s ministries, small groups, the parish school, and, especially, music ministry. Reena, their daughter Riya (a college freshman), and their son Ryan (a sixth-grader) all sing in the choir, and the children have also served as cantors.



**Above: Sanjai and Reena Paul and their children, Riya and Ryan, have hosted gatherings of 20 or more couples along with clergy and staff, making connections that build trust and bear spiritual fruit.** Photo courtesy of the Pauls





## Saint Ambrose Inaugural Golf Tournament

This May, our first golf tournament attracted 34 teams (136 players) and raised more than \$30,000 for Saint Ambrose Catholic School. Special thanks to our golfers, volunteers, clergy, and staff for making this such a special event!

Photos courtesy of Michael Hamerlind Photography



“We lived in England for many years and did not have even one friend from church,” Sanjai recalls. “But Saint Ambrose is so welcoming. It’s a big parish, but there are so many things happening that hook you in! So, many years ago, when Fr. Peter joined the parish, we wanted to get to know him as a family. At that point, Fr. Froehle was his associate, and we invited them both over.”

“The next time, we invited them and a couple of families from church, and that was great. Then we invited five or six families, and that was even better. So each time it has grown. This year we had around 20 couples, probably 40 to 45 people!”

“I don’t tell Fr. Peter who is coming, and I don’t tell the others that Fr. Peter is coming. It just organically happens: the Holy Spirit guides who we invite; we go with the flow and God takes care of it!”

The Lord may take care of the invitations, but food and preparations are a family affair.

“Reena’s a big extrovert and I’m a huge introvert, but we both love hosting people from church in our home,” Sanjai says. “We make a lot of Indian dishes, and I cook most of that—not spicy, because a lot of people prefer it that way. Reena does the cleaning and other preparations, and we order pizzas for those who would rather have that. Usually the focus is on couples, but sometimes children come, too, if they don’t have childcare. If my daughter is home, she will help to watch them.”

They often invite other parish staff along with the clergy, but aside from a handful of “regulars,” most invitations are left to providence, and the fruit is often surprising.

“I think the fun for Fr. Peter and others is not knowing who you’re going to bump into,” Sanjai says. “It’s a big parish, so for Fr. Peter to come and see 20 couples—diverse people of different ages—and spend time with them is what makes this so special. I’ve seen parishioners who meet for the first time and become good friends, and I’ve seen the ways God has touched some of my personal friends through their interactions with Father and others. It’s the Holy Spirit moving us to invite people; that’s the pattern, and it’s perfect!”

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heart and soul. Later, I joined a couple of men’s small groups. Currently I meet once every two weeks with other men to discuss various scripture topics and how they relate to our daily lives.”

Wes refers to these men as his “new teammates.” Kerry-Anne’s group of women meet weekly to discuss scripture and share prayer intentions. “They are truly my prayer warriors and trusted friends,” she says.

Wes, Kerry-Anne, and their two oldest daughters each have their own weekly Adoration hours. Kerry-Anne has been attending daily Mass since her mom passed away in 2017, and Wes tries to come as often as he can. They have benefited from retreats, as well, and their children have also undergone transformational faith experiences. The two oldest daughters attend daily Mass at Saint Ambrose regularly; their oldest son and his wife have visited several

Catholic pilgrimage sites and countless Catholic churches while he plays professional hockey in Europe; and their youngest two children continue to grow in faith at home.

“We encourage them to get to Confession regularly, pray daily, and understand that missing Sunday Mass is unacceptable in our home. The Lord loves our kids more than we do so He will take care of the rest,” Kerry-Anne says. “All God really asks is that we trust and honor Him—just come to Church and truly worship Him. One hour every Sunday, honoring and praising our God, will change your life! Also, praying the Rosary daily and asking Mary to intercede for us has been a big blessing! My kids know that if they get in the car with me, we are praying at least three Hail Marys. We love her!”

“Keep moving forward, not backward or standing still,” says Wes. “Mass is never an option; it is a must! If you are going to trust one thing in life, trust Jesus: He said, “I am the Bread of Life”, and we go to Mass to receive Him.”

Wes and Kerry-Anne affirm that their struggles have always led them to seek God, who has always strengthened them.

“When we felt like we had nowhere else to turn or that our world was crashing in, Wes and I have always ended up in a Catholic Church—maybe feeling alone, hurt, or worried, but always together and always with Him.”





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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)

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

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# Save the date!

# FALLFEST 2025

## September 19th & 20th



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