Thanks to God’s marvelous love at work through our Church of the Ascension parish family, none of our parishioners have to go through the coronavirus crisis alone.

“Right after all of this started, parishioner Carol Reinert asked for a list of those who are sick, homebound, living alone or in care facilities, or in need of special attention at this time,” says Parish Business Manager Beth Kathol. “She has collected the names of 45 people, and every week she sends them a handwritten and handcrafted card, and signs it, ‘Your friends from Ascension Parish.’ Carol is a little secret angel! It has meant so much to the parishioners who have received the cards.”

In addition to Carol’s loving concern, our parish community has showed a positive response to the crisis in other significant ways. During Holy Week and on Easter, the parishioner Carol Reinert put together May Day baskets, which were delivered by parish staff, to parishioners who are homebound, isolated or in care facilities. She sent the cards to approximately 45 individuals on a weekly basis, shortly after Masses were canceled.

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The task of keeping a large and vibrant parish running is not an easy one. But here at Ascension, we are blessed with an amazing office staff who not only keep parish life ticking, but do so with a smile! Parish secretary Julie Luger is one such team member who is dedicated to making Ascension a truly wonderful place to worship and serve.

As a parish secretary, Julie is often a first point of contact for visitors and newcomers to Ascension, as well as parishioners seeking information about various ministries, faith formation and other parish activities. Julie shares the position of secretary with Rita Ritter and is present in the office on Tuesdays, Thursdays and alternating Fridays.

The role of parish secretary is a varied one, and as Julie confirms, there is never a dull moment! Whether she is updating the parishioner database for the diocese, answering the office phone, assisting our faith formation director, or helping with parish mailings, Julie’s days are typically very full. One of her favorite aspects of the job is getting to know her fellow parishioners.

“I just love being with the people and interacting with the parishioners,” she says. “It’s nice when people stop in the office, as interacting with them is our ministry.”

Julie also enjoys serving Ascension as the head sacristan and as a vocalist with the adult choir and the small vocal group, Caritas. Julie has always had a love of music and affirms the saying that singing liturgical music is “like praying twice.”

Julie and her husband, Mike, have been parishioners at Ascension since 1981. The Lugers began their involvement in the parish when their children were small by joining the social committee that existed at the time. They both enjoyed helping with events like the parish picnic and Valentine’s dinner, and found that they were able to form meaningful relationships with their fellow parishioners by becoming more engaged in parish life.

Julie and Mike raised their three children here at Ascension and feel blessed that they have all continued to keep the Catholic faith at the center of their lives. Their son, Fr. Greg Luger, is the Associate Pastor at St. Joseph’s Catholic Church in Williston; their daughter Amy is the Librarian (and parent) at Holy Family-St. Mary’s Catholic School in Grand Forks where she and her husband Mike Lents raise their sons, Theo and Henry; and their son Matthew, an Engineer, along with his wife Aprille are raising their daughter, Madeline, right here in Bismarck and are members of Ascension Parish.

In all her time here at Ascension, there is one thing Julie is happy to say has not changed. “It’s a very welcoming parish,” she says. “We hear that from people who are new to the parish who feel so welcome. We have hospitality ministers that are here to greet people, and I think that is all part of the welcoming feeling.”

In her fifth year as parish secretary, Julie still loves to come to work every day and feels blessed to have found this special vocation in life.

“The staff gets along really well, and Monsignor Jim is a wonderful leader,” she says. “At noon, we gather as a staff and pray from the breviary. It’s something you can’t do in the private sector all the time — go to Mass in the morning and have prayer at noon. It’s wonderful to work in a place where your faith can be at the forefront.

“Working for the church, you don’t think of it as an 8-to-5 job,” Julie continues. “It’s just what you do. I don’t mind if I’m here late or on the weekend — I do it with a smile and absolutely love it!”
Dear Parishioners,

As this unprecedented crisis for our Church, nation and world continues to unfold, we are starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel. As we begin a return to our “new normal,” we have so much for which to be grateful.

I have witnessed so many of you continuing to actively live out stewardship during these past few months while our parish family has been apart, and that is truly a blessing. But with the uncertainty of what this “new normal” will be like in the days, weeks and months ahead, I ask you all to again consider how you are living out your call to stewardship.

Regardless of whether or not we can physically gather in our church or come together for ministry activities and events, our faith always lives on. Remember that stewardship is a way of life, meaning that we are called to live as intentional disciples of Christ through the practice of stewardship in all circumstances.

Have you been giving God your Time? I encourage you to pray every day. Use this time as an opportunity to develop or strengthen your prayer life.

How can you serve the Lord right now with your Talents? Serve your family and friends in the ways that you can. Use your talents wisely to grow in relationship with others near or far.

Finally, is God still a priority in your Treasure? Despite the hardships, are you still keeping God at the heart of all your financial decisions. I encourage you to give God a portion of your treasure out of gratitude, no matter how big or small.

Thank you for your continued support by way of prayers, service and generous financial giving during these challenging times. I have been overwhelmed with a new sense of gratitude and dependence on our Lord during this crisis, and continue praying for each of you. I look forward to the day our parish and our church is bustling with life again, and I pray that day is coming soon.

Let us live with the joy of the Resurrection each day of our lives!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Jim Braaten
Pastor
Understanding the Ways to Give at Ascension

Here at Ascension, we spent 2019 focusing on the theme “Stewardship Starts at Home.” According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, each of our homes should be considered a “domestic church” (1666). We ask that each family considers giving of their time, talent and treasure. Make time with your family to hear the Lord’s voice in prayer and by reading the Bible. We all have talents to serve our Lord, whether it’s through helping at the parish office, serving as a lector or counting the offering. We ask all members of our parish to serve our parish, our community and their families. Even those who are homebound can commit to praying on the Prayer Chain Ministry, sewing or baking for a parish event, or helping a ministry by making phone calls. All of our gifts are needed at Ascension.

When we consider the stewardship of treasure, giving is easy at Ascension, whether by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), online giving or traditional envelope giving.

“Everything in our lives and every breath we take are God’s gifts to us. But, we can get so caught up in the stresses and distractions of daily life that we lose touch with this truth. Gratitude begins within our minds and hearts when we take the time to recognize how blessed we truly are, and when we have the humility to recognize where these blessings come from — our merciful and loving God.”

— BETH KATHOL, PARISH BUSINESS MANAGER

EFT is a monthly automatic payment that comes from your bank account.

“One advantage of EFT is that it involves minimal work on the parishioner’s part — we take care of everything here in the parish office,” says Beth Kathol, Parish Business Manager. “EFT is very easy to set up. The only steps involved are to fill out the EFT form in which parishioners write in the amount, check the day of the month they prefer their funds be withdrawn, provide their bank information, attach a voided check and sign the document.”

Forms can be found at the parish office, in the entrance of Ascension and at ascensionbismarck.org under the “Stewardship Life” section.

Online giving is another option. This can be done right on the Ascension homepage ascensionbismarck.org. There is no registration required and you can set your own date and frequency.

Beth says both online giving and EFT are particularly helpful if you have to miss Mass for sickness or vacation.

The traditional collection envelopes are another way to give. They are mailed out bi-monthly and can be dropped in the collection. Recently, a checkbox was added to the envelopes that says “I gave online/EFT.” Those who give that way can drop these in the collection.

“It’s very important to show how we are all participating in sharing our financial gifts with the parish,” Beth says.

So, how much should one be giving each week?

Ascension believes 10 percent of a person’s or family’s income should be given to the church, which is the traditional teaching of tithing — five percent goes to Ascension, four percent to another charity and one percent to the Diocese of Bismarck.

“Many times, parishioners already have specific outside charities that are near and dear

— BETH KATHOL, PARISH BUSINESS MANAGER
Giving and Share Our Gifts at Ascension

Understanding the Ways to Give and Share Our Gifts at Ascension

“...to their hearts,” Beth says. “For those who are looking for organizations that operate by Catholic Social Teaching standards, two in particular are the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and Ministry on the Margins.”

The mission of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is personal service to the poor. Ministry on the Margins is a unique charity in Bismarck that was founded in 2013 by Sister Kathleen Atkinson, OSB, a sister of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck and operates under the guidance of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. This is a volunteer-based ecumenical ministry committed to supporting those who fall through the cracks during times of transition.

“The one percent given to the Diocese of Bismarck provides critical funding that enables the Church in western North Dakota to form our youth and adults in faith, promote the dignity of life and marriage, and foster vocations to the priesthood,” Beth says.

Money for the diocese is collected during the God’s Share Appeal. The diocese also has an African Mission appeal which supports our missionaries in East Africa.

Youth and children are also encouraged to give in the weekly collection.

“Teaching our children early about stewardship and giving back to God is vital to the growth of our parish communities,” Beth says.

Children’s envelopes can be obtained through the parish office. Youth and children may also drop money in the baskets at the offertory. Beth encourages families to choose an outside charity together.

Beth says we should all be giving to Ascension — but not merely because it helps the church “keep the lights on” and supports the diocese. More than that, as Beth points out, giving changes us.

“Everything in our lives and every breath we take are God’s gifts to us,” she says. “But, we can get so caught up in the stresses and distractions of daily life that we lose touch with this truth. Gratitude begins within our minds and hearts when we take the time to recognize how blessed we truly are, and when we have the humility to recognize where these blessings come from — our merciful and loving God.”

To start giving, please visit ascensionbismarck.org for online giving, or pick up an EFT form in the church entrance, at the parish office or on the website “Stewardship Life” tab. If you are not receiving collection envelopes in the mail, please call the parish office at 701-223-3606.
"Let the Church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven.”

These words from Pope Francis weren’t delivered during a homily in St. Peter’s or in a speech from St. Peter’s Square — nor were they written in a papal bull or apostolic letter. Rather, they were delivered in an instant to millions of Catholics around the world through the pope’s very own Twitter account.

The technology of communication has perhaps changed more in the past century than in the previous 20 combined. And with these developments, the Catholic Church — led by our Holy Fathers, from Pope St. John Paul II through Pope Francis — strongly encourages that the faithful adopt and adapt these resources for the all-important task of spreading the Gospel throughout the whole world.

Just as St. Paul used every convenience at his disposal to spread the Gospel throughout the far reaches of the Roman empire, today’s evangelists are using every resource available to them. Examples of Catholic figures using the new media with great success abound.

Only a few months into his pontificate, Pope Francis took the Vatican’s social media efforts to a whole new level. In spring 2013, the Vatican released The Pope App, which features quotes, news, images and videos of all the Holy Father’s latest doings.

Following the pope’s lead, bishops, priests and apologists are taking the technological gifts at their fingertips and utilizing them to spread the Gospel throughout the world in a variety of ways.

One great example is Bishop Robert Barron of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, whose Word On Fire Ministry has produced wildly popular YouTube videos discussing everything from controversial Church teachings to movie reviews from a Catholic perspective. Word On Fire also released the critically acclaimed Catholicism DVD documentary series.

Independent Catholic bloggers and Web-based media are also widely established and provide their audiences and readership with Catholic news and cultural commentary.

Throughout America, parishes, Catholic schools, dioceses, and even the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops are utilizing these tools as well, creating first-rate websites, maintaining Twitter and Facebook accounts, and more.

All of these resources are geared toward a wide variety of audiences, from the un-churched and fallen-away Catholics to active parishioners.

Being knowledgeable of the new media tools available to us as Catholics is a great way to be more effective in our universal call to evangelization. Take some time to see what media resources our parish and diocese are using, and be sure to pass them along to those in your sphere of influence!
parish recorded video messages of Msgr. Jim Braaten along with short reflections offered by our deacons and parish staff. This video message was emailed to our parishioners and posted on the parish website.

“We have been making greater efforts to keep our website up to date and post more information on our parish Facebook page,” Beth says. “We have been emailing the weekly bulletin out every Friday, and have offered to mail it out to anyone that does not have email. We have been sending out additional parish app messages so that our parishioners can have more information and know they are in our thoughts and prayers.”

Furthermore, the church doors have been left open for an extended period of time each day from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

“We want our parishioners to feel welcome to come in to pray, and remain connected to Christ in the Eucharist,” Beth says. “We have also been putting parish bulletins in the entranceway, along with the Magnifikid and other adult faith formation materials.”

In the midst of this trying time, it is comforting to know God is still looking out for each member of our parish.

“The hardest aspect of this for our parishioners has been that they miss the Mass and the sacraments,” Beth says. “They all say this — it is universal. They have been so appreciative of communication that has been sent out. The parish staff members really miss our parishioners. Msgr. Braaten sent out a voicemail to every parish family on Easter Sunday and so many commented to me on how delighted they were to hear his voice.”

Furthermore, under the direction of member Brent Freese, the Knights of Columbus offered to do errands and yard work for our homebound and elderly parishioners.

If you would like more information about any of these offerings, please contact Beth Katholat 701-223-3606 or email her at bkathol@ascensionbismarck.org.
UPCOMING EVENTS: June 13-14
First Holy Communion at all Masses

The new LED lighting in the church has been fully completed with a big thank you to Richard Schwingler and his crew at Frontier Electric for doing a fabulous job!

For our third spring/summer in row, we brought in the team from Anyleaks. This time it was to put a new roof on the Parish Center and Rectory due to extensive hail damage from last summer.

The parking lot received some fresh paint with a huge thank you to parishioner Greg Klein and his assistant Scott Brustad for volunteering their time and equipment to re-strip...just in time for masses resuming too!

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday, 5:00 p.m. | Sunday, 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m.
Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. | Holy Days: 8:00 a.m., 7:00 p.m.

Stewardship is the grateful response of a Christian disciple who recognizes and receives God’s gifts and shares these gifts in love of God and neighbor.