

# SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

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## *Strength in Numbers: Mothers Share in Christian Fellowship*

The spiritual life finds meaning and best flourishes within the context of community. There, we are able to support and encourage one another along the path to sanctity. This is perhaps doubly true when it comes to women, who naturally long to share their minds and hearts with others.

"I think especially that we, as women, thrive when we come together and are able to share our faith," says parishioner Andrea Rodriguez. "It's one of the great gifts of our feminine genius; that desire to share our heart and walk the journey with others."

Andrea learned this firsthand several years ago when she was invited by a female parishioner to attend a study on John Paul II's writings on the vocation of wives and mothers. Describing it as a "pivotal moment" in her faith life, Andrea was amazed by the witness and zeal of the women around her, as well as the late Holy Father's words. It planted a seed in her heart, pushing Andrea to become more actively involved in her faith and the parish community.

"It was a real game changer for me as a Christian, a wife and a mother,"



*The hope of the Mother's Prayer Group at St. Michael is to remind women that they are not alone, strengthening them in their vocations as wives and mothers, and encouraging them in their ongoing faith journeys.*

Andrea says. "It really changed our entire family dynamic, just because it was there for me at the right time."

Seeking to make that same experience available to all women of the

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## *Strength in Numbers: Mothers Share in Christian Fellowship* *continued from front cover*

parish, Andrea later felt called to help form the Mother's Prayer Group here at St. Michael. Gathering each Thursday from 8:10-10 a.m. in the Family Room, this ministry allows mothers from all different stages of life to support one another in their vocations as wives and mothers. It's designed to be a place of encouragement and strength, giving women the tools needed to become countercultural in today's increasingly secular world.

"So often in our gatherings, women will say that it is good to know that they are not alone," Andrea says. "We live in a world where marriage is constantly under attack and parenting is probably harder than it's ever been. Just knowing that you aren't alone in striving to create that Christ-centered family is so encouraging and life giving. This ministry is designed to be a place for fellowship, learning and encouragement on that journey toward holiness."

Meetings typically begin with designated prayers, followed by some sort of book study

pertaining to motherhood, the feminine genius, or the spiritual journey. For example, members of the Mother's Prayer Group are currently reading and reflecting on Catholic author Colleen C. Mitchell's book *Who Does He Say You Are?* Following their discussion, the group ends with intercessory prayer and, of course, there is always sharing and laughter intermingled throughout.

The Mother's Prayer Group also hosts various forms of service opportunities, enabling members to take what they have received out into the parish and world. In past years, this has

included assisting with the Good Angel Tree, coordinating meals and errands for women in need, and serving female residents at a local halfway house.

"I think this helps bring about an awareness of other people's needs that normally we might be afraid to put out into the world," Andrea says. "It's a comforting feeling to know that there are other women who truly care for you and are willing to pick up and push you to grow. And whatever you get from this group, you are then able to take out into the world, through our families and beyond."

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– Andrea Rodriguez

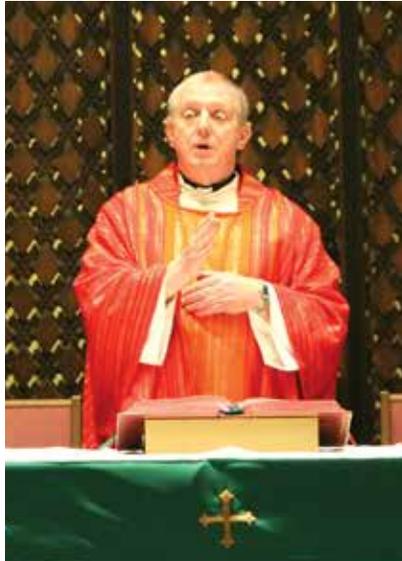
*Women of the parish are invited to join the Mother's Prayer Group, drawing strength and comfort from its fellowship and enrichment. Meetings are always open, with no prior registration needed. And for mothers with young children, childcare is provided in the church basement for a small fee. To learn more about the Mother's Prayer Group, please contact Andrea Rodriguez at 402-984-0076 or [anrearod6@gmail.com](mailto:anrearod6@gmail.com).*

## A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

*Give Thanks to the Lord, It Is Right and Just*

Dear Parishioners,

Every time I prepare my monthly letter to you in this newsletter, I am reminded how blessed I am. Being a priest truly is a blessing. While the job is not always easy — a pastor has many responsibilities — the rewards are equally humbling.



As we complete our preparations and then share in our celebrations of the Triduum and Easter, I am also prompted to think about the holiest things I do. By far, the holiest is celebrating Mass, and especially consecrating the holy bread and wine so Christ is present among us. The very word “consecration” literally means “association with the sacred.” To have that duty is incredible. I have never taken it for granted, and although it may appear at times to be somewhat automatic, it never is for me.

Almost all of us are familiar with the Mass, and with what we do and say leading up to the high point – the Eucharist. But I think we must guard against becoming too casual in our responses and what we say. That is what I work to avoid, but I believe you need to work just as diligently to make sure that you are listening, hearing, and being aware of what you are saying. For us as Catholics, the Mass is the most important sacred act in the Church.

I suppose I could write a whole series of letters or articles on the meaning of everything we say and do at Mass, but I was thinking of one exchange in

particular during the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is something we may say in sort of a habitual way, but I firmly believe each of us must truly consider what we are saying.

I say to you, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God,” and you respond, “It is right and just.” Think about what that means, because it is very much at the heart of stewardship. I am saying we need to thank God, show gratitude for everything we are and everything with which we are gifted – and you, at least in words, acknowledge that doing that is exactly what we need to do. The Mass is filled

with statements and exchanges of that sort, and I would ask that we really think about what they truly mean.

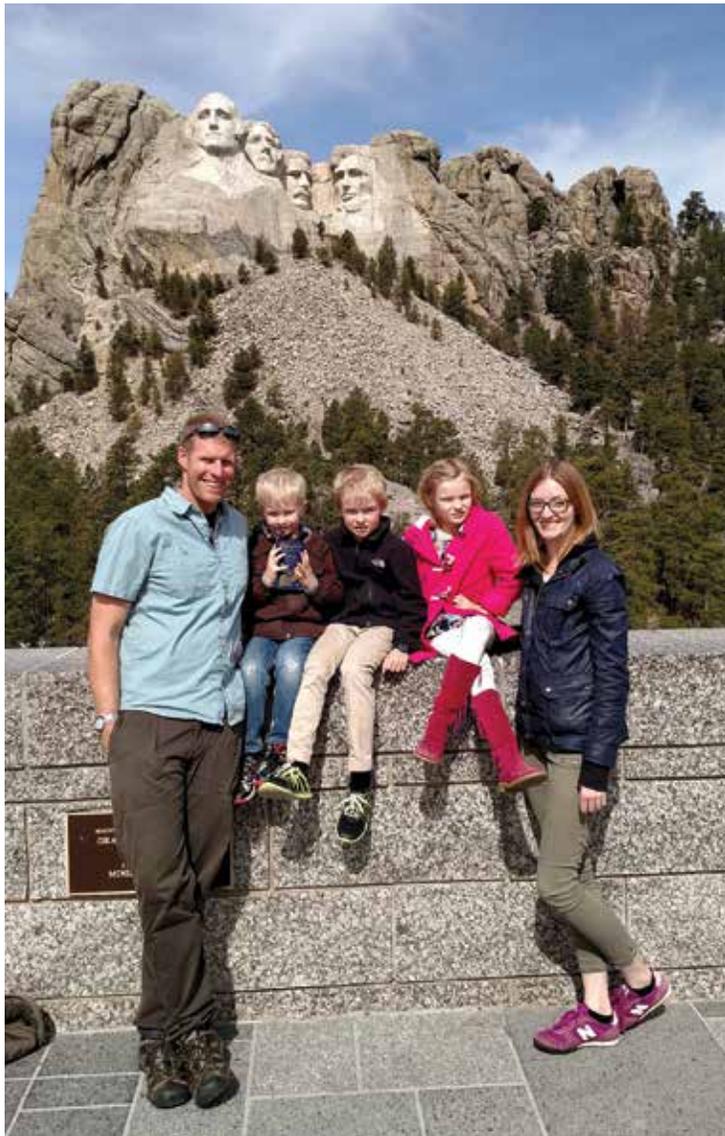
Even the simple exchange between the Eucharistic Minister and you at the actual reception of the Host is heavy with meaning. We say, “The Body of Christ,” and you reply “Amen.” In that instance, “Amen” means “Yes, I do believe this is Jesus.” Like myself, you are blessed. Sometimes we just need to realize it. Happy Easter!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Houlihan,  
Pastor

## Living out “the **Vertical** and *Sarah Hoops*”

Sometimes the image of a cross is used as an analogy for the Christian life. The vertical beam symbolizes our relationship with God, and the horizontal beam symbolizes our relationship with others, both through Christian friends and support, as well as serving those around us. To picture this lived out, look no farther than parishioner Sarah Hoops and her family.



*Brent, Beckett (5), Samuel (9), Eve (7), and Sarah Hoops love to serve and be involved in their community.*

Four years ago, Sarah and her husband, Brent, and their three children joined St. Michael's. Originally from Adams County, she attended UNL, and lived and traveled abroad, as well as on the west coast, working in apparel design, while Brent served as an Officer in the U.S. Army. The couple, who met in high school, returned home to Nebraska after the birth of their first son in 2009. After living in the country for several years, working on Sarah's family farm, they moved into town and joined our parish. Sarah also serves the City of Hastings as part of the City Council.

The faith has always been a part of Sarah's life, growing up in a devout, Catholic family.

“My parents have always been very faithful,” Sarah says.

But it wasn't until college that Sarah really began to realize the value of her faith, as well as surrounding herself with community to support her in her relationship with Christ.

“I always went to church, but early on in college, a friend and mentor invited me to a Bible study through Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS),” Sarah says. “That was a big deal for me and it really led to what I'd call a re-conversion.”

It was during this time that Sarah also gained a spiritual mentor who provided one-on-one support, leading to Sarah herself becoming involved in leading a Bible study.

Today, these same priorities – the “horizontal beam” – that Sarah embraced in college continue to be vital to her spiritual development. Several years ago, she and a friend started a small group, designed to reach out to others in various stages of life, to provide support on the journey of faith.

“Prioritizing a faith-sharing group on a regular basis is square one,” Sarah says. “Mass is the highest prayer, but if you don't have any accountability outside of Mass, I would find it very difficult to grow. It's important to walk with others who are trying to challenge themselves to spiritual growth, and be able to share with each other.”

Inspired by the impact of her college mentor,

# and the **Horizontal**"

## *s and Family*

Sarah also sought guidance from a then-acquaintance who had been trained as a spiritual mentor.

"All of these moments in my life, where I've gotten one-on-one mentorship, those are times I've just shot forward in my spiritual development – that has been really important for me," she says. "The accountability to setting some real-life goals for my spiritual life and having someone there to hear how it's going, someone who's farther along than me and has walked this already and is at a different place than me – having that accountability is invaluable."

The "vertical beam" – prayer – is also vital to Sarah's growth and development in her relationship with God. She commits to a weekly adoration hour to spend time alone in prayer.

"It's not something that comes easy all the time," she affirms. "Sometimes, we're given wonderful gifts in prayer, but anyone who's tried to make a commitment to a prayer life knows it's not always fun, just like a relationship. You have to make a lot of choices to show up, even when it doesn't feel like it."

Sarah and Brent hope their own example of living out the faith will help inspire their children – Samuel, 9; Eve, 7; and Beckett, 5 – to grow closer to God. Sarah chuckles at the curiosity that the kids have about her early morning time in adoration. Brent, who converted to the Catholic faith during college, is also an acolyte at Catholic school Masses, where the children attend.

"They're seeing that we're showing up and trying to do stuff," Sarah says. "It doesn't make us perfect role models, but we're trying."



*Sarah Hoops and her family have been parishioners at St. Michael's for the past four years.*

Whether in her role on the City Council, or in trying to pass on the faith to her children and embrace her vocation, Sarah does her best to focus on the idea that she doesn't have to always be an expert – but rather, she just has to be present, and give of herself.

"You have to just hope that showing up and doing the best job you can will be enough," she says. "And if God wants it to grow, it will, by us showing up."

She also encourages others, especially moms, to take time in the presence of God, in order to be reminded of the value of their daily work and vocations, whether in the home or outside of it.

"Put oneself in the gaze of our Lord," Sarah says. "It is frightening sometimes, because we know our hurt and brokenness and sinfulness. But being in the gaze of our Lord, that's where those things heal and where I can really embrace who I am. In this loving gaze, I'm reminded of the beauty of who am who I am made to be."

Thank you, Sarah, for your witness of faithfulness to God, your family and your community!



## *Cultivate* Your Personal Garden for Christ this Spring

**E**veryone loves springtime. The weather is warmer and beautiful flowers are blooming all around us.

But anyone with a beautiful garden will attest that the flowers do not magically appear as if the season change itself miraculously makes the flowers bloom. Beautiful flowers and lush gardens are the result of the gardener's hard work.

Imagine that a man is given some flower seeds. The man then buries the seeds in the ground and leaves them on their own. As the months pass and rain falls, some seeds may receive enough nourishment to bloom. But simply burying seeds in the ground will hardly make for a gorgeous garden. Rather, if the man truly wants to enjoy many beautiful flowers, there is much care and work ahead. Recognizing the hidden beauty within these simple seeds, he must cultivate the ground, plant the seeds in a solid foundation,

then water and fertilize them throughout the year. Only then will he see the proper fruit these seeds were made to bear.

This simple illustration speaks to the heart of us this season – not only as we look around at the flowers, but more importantly as we reflect on the springtime of the Church. We are celebrating the great feast of Easter when, through His death and resurrection, Christ offers us the greatest gift of all – eternal life with Him forever. This celebration leads us to reflect on the many gifts God has given us in this life and the fruit they will bear, especially as we look to life eternal.

He has given each of us a multitude of gifts so that we can better serve Him and bring others to Him. Do we notice the hidden potential of our gifts? Do we see them, like the seed – as seemingly small, yet so full of fruit? Everything we have – our time, talents, and treasure – is a gift from the Lord. Do we accept gifts in gratitude, then put

them to use by cultivating and nourishing them so they will bear the proper fruit?

Just like springtime flowers that we enjoy, our time, talents, and treasure need to be cared for. Our gifts need to be cultivated and nourished. Only then will we see them for what they are – wonderful gifts given by God meant for His greater glory.

Like the seeds, if we use our gifts flippantly, we may see some fruits here and there. But we are called to so much more – we are called to build a beautiful garden. We are called to offer God the most beautiful flowers of all.

This season, as we look at all the beautiful flowers around us and enjoy God's creation, let us think about the seeds in our own lives. Ask yourself if you have accepted the gifts God has given you – your time, talents, and treasure – and have cultivated and cared for them properly. Or, do they just sit dormant within you yearning to bloom?

## Prayer Chain Faithfully Offers Our Intentions

When it comes to having prayers said for an intention, the more engaged in prayer, the better! Our parish Prayer Chain is made up of dozens of volunteers who willingly offer engaged prayers for a variety of intentions.

Cathy Krebsbach coordinates the Prayer Chain, with backup support from Denise Benal. Cathy's husband, Jim, has enabled the Prayer Chain to reach most of the volunteers in an instant, thanks to the email listing that he compiled.

"Originally, it was a phone tree," Cathy says. "People would call one of the ladies on the committee, and make a request for prayers. The request was then sent out to the division captains on the committee who would share it with their groups."

Jim Krebsbach then began compiling a file of committee members who could be contacted by email. Since St. Cecilia Parish also has a Prayer Chain, Jim was able to assemble a similar email file for that group to supplement its phone tree.

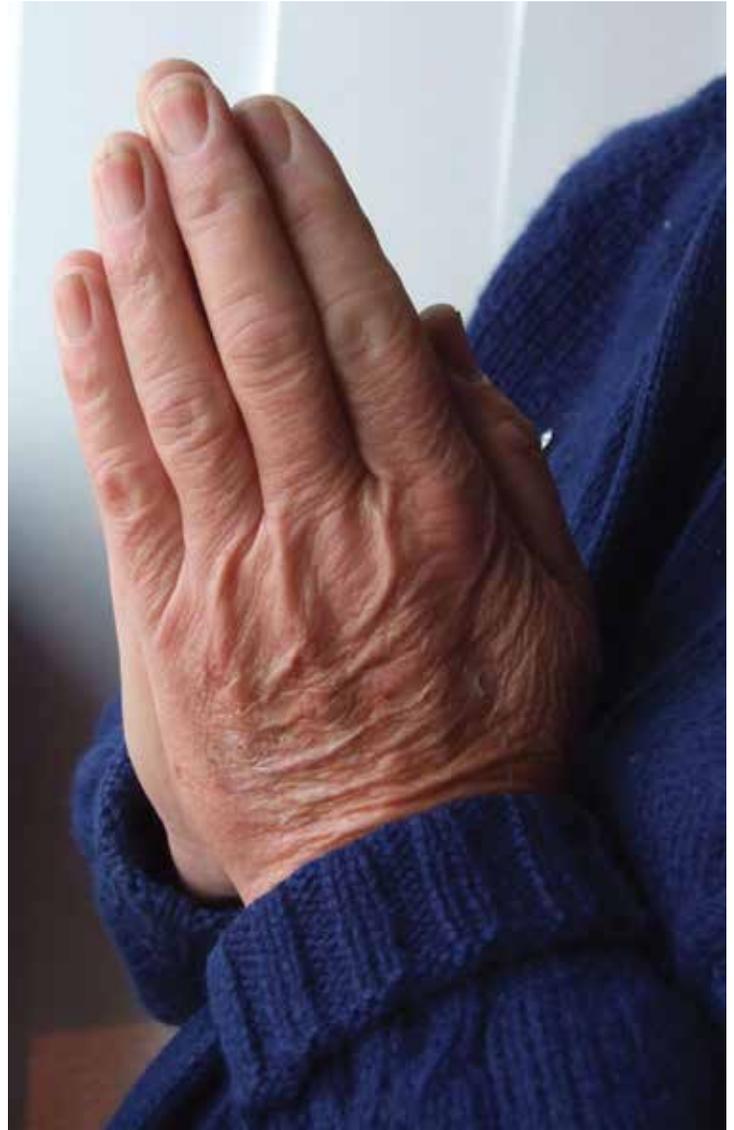
"He's coordinated things so when an intention comes in, he can disperse it on the computer," Cathy says.

St. Michael Parish has about 196 families signed up to receive email requests for prayers, and about 25 on the phone tree. St. Cecilia has 138 in its email group.

"The intentions vary," Cathy says. "Today, we had two already, but we can go a whole week without any. For the past whole year, we had between 250 to 260."

The Prayer Chain group has no meetings and no formal organization.

"It's a wonderful ministry," Cathy says. "Some have been doing it for years, and even if they can't



recall the intention, they pray in general for the people who requested the prayers. It's a great thing to pray for one another." *continued on back cover*

*"It's a wonderful ministry. Some have been doing it for years, and even if they can't recall the intention, they pray in general for the people who requested the prayers. It's a great thing to pray for one another." – Cathy Krebsbach*

715 Creighton Avenue  
Hastings, NE 68901  
(402) 463-1023  
www.stmichaelsasthastings.com

## *Prayer Chain Faithfully Offers Our Intentions*

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Having the capability to notify Prayer Chain members by email is a tremendous help.

"In this day and age with computers, it's a fact that a member can get a request any time of day and can pray whenever they can," Cathy says. "There are no formalized prayers needed, so a member can keep a person in their prayers."

Typical requests are for health-related issues, she says. Other calls can include intentions for those who have lost a job and are seeking work, or those who have lost a loved one and are

asking for comfort for the family.

"We get a variety of issues," Cathy says. "No one is identified by full name, or an intention can be made anonymously, or by a first name only. We have to respect the privacy of everyone."

Cathy joined the ministry with the thought that she could serve in stewardship on the phone tree. When one of the coordinators was stepping back, she asked Cathy to take the reins. By that time, Cathy had retired, so she was able to step into the position of coordinating the requests.

Volunteers are always welcome.

"We just add a name to the list," Cathy says. "You can volunteer to join the prayer group any time. There's no problem to add your name to the computer list."

### LITURGY SCHEDULE

#### **Sunday:**

*Saturday Vigil 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m.  
and 11:00 a.m.*

#### **Weekday:**

*Mon-Fri 7:30 a.m. & 8:10 a.m.  
(School Mass)  
Saturday 8:00 a.m.*

*Anyone interested in joining the Prayer Chain may call  
Cathy Krebsbach at 402-462-8814, or  
Denise Benal at 402-303-0478.*