

SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

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St. Michael Welcomes Fr. Nathan Hall as Our New Assistant Pastor

After serving the Church in Lincoln following his 2016 ordination, Fr. Nathan Hall is looking forward to being part of a smaller community and getting to know all of the parishioners here at St. Michael. He joins our community as our new Assistant Pastor!

"It's very wonderful here," Fr. Hall says. "The people are great and supportive. Being from a small community myself, I like that it's more personable and there is more of a chance to get to know parishioners better."

Of course, even Hastings seems a large community when compared to Fr. Hall's hometown of Morse Bluff, with a population of 134 people! Father grew up outside of the town, and his family attended the mission parish, Sacred Heart — one of the parishes served by our very own Fr. Hazuka before he arrived here last year! Remarkably, while only 25 families belong to the mission parish, they have produced two vocations to the priesthood — Msgr. Joseph Nemecek in Lincoln, and Fr. Hall.

During his early years, however, Fr. Hall had no idea that he would one day receive a call to the priesthood.



Fr. Nathan Hall

In fact, just over 10 years ago, he was graduating from the University of Nebraska in Omaha with a structural engineering degree. After a couple of years of "having it all" — an exciting job and new house — Fr. Hall still felt something was missing. He was introduced to Fr. Leo Kosch through a friend, and they began a men's group

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St. Michael Welcomes Fr. Nathan Hall

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together. The combination of feeling that life was somehow incomplete and getting a view of the priestly life through Fr. Kosch eventually led Fr. Hall to discern a call to the priesthood.

In 2010, Father began his six years of study at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland, a time he remembers fondly.

"The guys there were great, just very solid people," he recalls. "But I would say that the best part of seminary is that it's kind of like a recovery room from the rest of the world. Especially Mount St. Mary's — it's very solid and orthodox, and a great environment to hear God outside of the noisy and busy world."

Following his ordination, Fr. Hall was assigned to St. Joseph Catholic Church in Lincoln as Assistant Pastor. While there, he also taught at St. Pius X High School, an experience that is now serving him well at Hastings Catholic Schools, where he is teaching eighth-grade catechism and 10th-grade church history.

"High school is a very critical time for kids, so I enjoy maybe saving them some heartache and giving them answers before they even have the questions," Father says. "Explaining that there is a reason behind the Church's 'x, y, and z' — that it's not just a 'don't do this,' but a way to avoid things that keep you from flourishing."

As Assistant Pastor at St. Joseph, Fr. Hall enjoyed seeing the changes he brought to the RCIA — Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults — breathe new life into the program. He also finds hearing confessions to be fulfilling, as this sacrament played a big role in his vocation.

When parishioners or students come to him seeking to overcome obstacles in their faith lives, Father typically begins with one important question.

"I'll have them ask themselves — for a deeper relationship with God, do I need to be convinced more with my head, with my heart, or with what percentage of each?" Fr. Hall explains. "I know that, for me, it was 80 percent head and 20 percent heart, and for some, it's the opposite. What is holding them back from a relationship with Christ? If they mention the head, then it's more of a catechetical 'who is Jesus and what does that mean?' With the heart, we get into prayer, and it's about your experience, how you give and receive love, and is there a blockage in relationships that we can clear up? So, with the head, you answer the 'whys,' and with the heart, you really discover your own relationship with Christ. I have some great books for both."

As Fr. Hall begins his new assignment here at St. Michael, he hopes to have many opportunities to truly get to know parishioners. While his school and parish schedule keeps him on the go, in his free time, he is always up for conversation over a cup or two of hot tea — but hold the cakes and cookies, as he much prefers savories to sweets!

Father looks forward to becoming a trusted companion to all parishioners as they continue to grow in faith and in relationship with the Lord — something, as he reminds us, that is a continual work-in-progress.

"My [faith life] was definitely a gradual growth of relationship," he says. "Some people that don't have that 'aha!' moment may feel something is wrong, but I can tell them from my experience that they don't need that. It can be a lot of little moments each day. I didn't have the big 'aha!' moment, but a lot of little day-by-day growth of relationship."

Welcome, Fr. Hall! We truly look forward to growing in faith and service with you!

"It's very wonderful here. The people are great and supportive. Being from a small community myself, I like that it's more personable and there is more of a chance to get to know parishioners better." — Fr. Nathan Hall

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Preparing for Our Lenten Journey and Prioritizing the Gift of Time

Dear Parishioners,

Lent begins on February 14, Ash Wednesday. Lent is a time of prayer, penance and giving alms. Lent is also a perfect time for stewardship. As we take up the traditional penances of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer to deepen our relationship with God, we remember that these penances can be considered extensions of living as better stewards, especially our almsgiving. While the traditional components of stewardship — our time, talent, or treasure — are concerned with taking care of what is our own — our family, parish and community — we cannot give alms, which means to the poor and those in need, without first taking care of what is our own.

Considering these traditional components of stewardship, time may be the hardest to offer. God has given us the precious gift of time — we show appreciation for this gift by using it wisely. Stewardship of time is about how we spend every minute of every day. Each of us is given the same amount of time — 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week — but many of us feel that we do not have enough time for all the things we hope to accomplish. This Lent may be a good time to consider how we choose to use our time. Do we prioritize this gift, which means putting the most important things first, or do we allow it to flutter away because of a lack of intentionality?

If deepening our relationship with God is a priority, then time spent in prayer — whether through Sunday or even daily Mass, spiritual or Scripture reading, and quiet time with the Lord — should be a priority. Another priority might be our relationship to our family, seeking to build a strong family unit filled with respect and love for life. A third priority should be our relationship with our parish and our community of faith. Spending time supporting others in their faith journeys and ministering to those in need could be a form of giving alms through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The penance of prayer is not easy, but our

Catholic faith is full of prayer forms and traditions that can provide a means of praying that works for each of us. There are plenty of excuses to not pray, especially the excuse of no time, but just have to do it. Perhaps it is only 10 minutes each day for quiet reflection on Holy Scripture. Or it

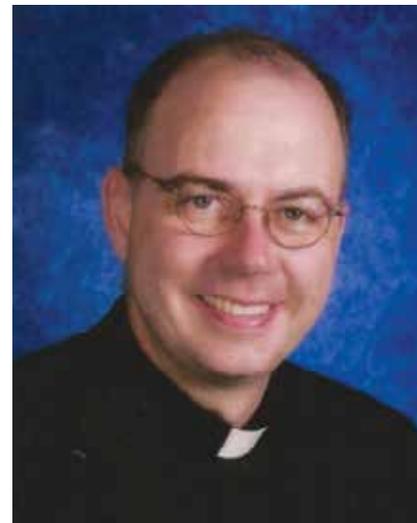
may be something more substantial — perhaps a weekend retreat in Waverly. The *Catechism* says: “It is always possible to pray: The time of the Christian is that of the risen Christ who is with us always, no matter what tempests may arise. Our time is in the hands of God: ‘It is possible to offer fervent prayer even while walking in public or strolling alone, or seated in your shop... while buying or selling... or even while cooking’” (CCC 2743).

Consider Lent our own personal Stewardship Renewal season. While fasting, prayer and almsgiving are not just for Lent, our intentional efforts to practice these customary penances during the forty days of Lent prepares us for a lifetime of renewal. One other thing to consider: the 40 days of Lent is just over 10 percent of the year — it is almost like a spiritual tithe to our Lord.

God bless you in all you do, and especially during this holy time of Lent.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Jeremy Hazuka,
Pastor



Cook-Off and Bakeoff Were “



And the winner is...! Fr. Hazuka announces the outcome in the competition.



Ethan Bright (left) proudly shows off the prize apron he won as the People's Choice Chili winner.



Presentation and costume were integral parts of the judging in the Chili competition.

The competition was keen, the chili piping hot and the cinnamon rolls were...mmmmmm!

And the Third Annual St. Michael's Chili Cook-Off and Cinnamon Roll Bakeoff was a splendid success, with parishioners earning bragging rights for the best chili and cinnamon rolls around. The Cook-Off was held from 5 to 7 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 14 in the church hall with approximately 170 attending.

"It went wonderfully," says Jackie Kasselbaum, past President of the Parish Council of Catholic Women, also known as the Altar Society. "It was a time for fellowship and building awareness for the Altar Society, that we're not just there to do funeral dinners. We thought it would be a fun and enjoyable way of doing it."

The Altar Society sponsors the event, which evolved from the group's traditional soup supper.

"We'd make turkey noodle soup and chili, and it was all made by the Altar Society members," Jackie says. "Then we came up with the Chili Cook-Off. It piqued the interest of the parish to get more active and make it more fun."

There were five chili competitors this year, and each one prepared "red" chili. (The opposite is "green" chili, or verde, and it is made with clear broth, navy or great northern beans, a variety of green chilies, and chicken or pork.)

"We had one that used different types of meats, some smoked, and it was a little spicy," Jackie says. "We had a no-salt option there. Otherwise, it was pretty much traditional on the whole."

The Altar Society prepared turkey noodle soup and their own chili, but it wasn't entered in the competition.

The People's Choice Chili winner were Ethan Bright and his dad, Brian. Second Place was Trystin McKenna. The Judge's Choice winner was Becky Carey. In the Cinnamon Roll Bakeoff, Wanda Kumke was the First Place winner, with Pam Koch capturing second. The judges for the day were Fr. Hazuka and Doug Hollister.

Admission for the event was \$7 for adults

Sweet and Spicy” Successes!

and \$4 for children ages 6-12, with age 5 and under free. Proceeds went to the Altar Society.

Additional funds were realized, however, when the chili competitors donated back their monetary ballots cast by hungry voters. Ethan and his dad garnered \$94 alone!

“The money helps pay for all the Altar Society projects, such as altar candles, flowers and everything traditionally paid for by the society,” Jackie says.

She is confident that the event will become a tradition, although as of press time of this newsletter, the Altar Society had not yet met to review the results.



Approximately 170 hungry guests sampled chili and cinnamon rolls.



It was friendly competition all afternoon, as this happy group attests.

*For more information about the Parish Council of Catholic Women,
call the parish office at 402-463-1023.*

Stewardship **Becoming Fishers of Men**

Whether you hold a high-profile position, such as parish council president, or have more of a behind-the-scenes role as a coordinator of a parish ministry, God has called you – as a parish leader – to help build His Church.

This challenge is just as important as the call of any other Catholic leader, including the earliest disciples.

When Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, He urged a group of fishermen, “Come follow me.” Jesus promised if they laid down their nets and followed Him, He would make them fishers of men. These men were among His original disciples, and they knew Christ’s call was so important that they left their secular occupation to follow Him.

Just as He did with the fishermen, Jesus calls each of us today. He is not necessarily asking us to leave our secular careers, but He is asking us to put Him first in our lives and to share His message of love with others.

God truly wants us to serve Him and to build His Church through the secular occupations we have chosen. It is through the Church that new disciples are born, and it is in the Church that disciples continue to mature. Forming disciples of Christ is the most important work that can be done on earth, and each of us has been called to play an active role in this work.

So, how do we go about building the Church? Where do we find the plans?

Some people mistakenly think that building the Church – in particular, building our own parish or diocese – is no different than building a successful business. Indeed, the purpose of building the Church is to change hearts – a goal that only God

can accomplish.

Secular society has not prepared us for this work. However, the Holy Spirit – sometimes referred to as the “Architect of the Church” – has the plan. In order to implement this plan, we must become good listeners. We must open ourselves to the workings of the Holy Spirit as He transforms us and guides us to carry out God’s work and to serve as His instruments on earth, building the Church together with Him.

This is where spiritual exercises, such as retreats, come into play. A retreat offers the individual an opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord, allowing God to draw the person deeper into the mystery of who He is, who we are and what He is doing in our lives. Stewardship retreats can offer parish leaders the opportunity each year to spend time with the Lord as He directs them in the ways of discipleship. As leaders, we must take time to meditate on the Scriptures and allow Jesus to open up His Word to us. Then, as we grow deeper in our understanding of what God wants of us, we can exclaim, just as the first disciples did on the road to Emmaus, “Our hearts are burning within us” (Lk 24:32).

God has placed an extremely important call on the lives of all parish leaders, no matter how big or small the role. It is vital to understand how we, as parish leaders, can best answer His call. What, in particular, is the Lord calling each one of us to do? He most likely is not asking us to drop our nets, but to pick them up and become “fishers of men.” We must discern how we can most effectively cast our nets for Him.

VanCuras Find Home in a Prayerful, Loving Catholic Community

We often hear about how Catholic education benefits students in a host of profound ways. But it has other impacts as well, which extend to the faculty and staff members of our Catholic schools. Just ask St. Cecilia Principal Sandy VanCura.

“I do feel very strongly that my faith would not be where it is if I was in public education,” says Mrs. VanCura. “Just the opportunities I’ve had to grow in my faith by being part of Catholic education — it’s such a blessing.”

“If not for teaching at St. Cecilia’s, I’d probably be a once a week, Sunday church-goer,” says her husband, Alan.

Both Mrs. and Mr. VanCura have been at St. Cecilia High School for the past 40 years. Mrs. VanCura has taught science, health, and physical education, and is currently in her third year of serving as our Principal. Mr. VanCura, who recently retired as one of the most decorated volleyball coaches in the state, also coached track, and continues to teach math full-time.

Ironically, however, when they first began at the school, over four decades ago, neither of them would have imagined the path their lives would take.

“I really thought that St. Cecilia’s would just be a stepping stone for me,” Mrs. VanCura says. “I thought I’d be here for a couple of years and then I’ll move on to a bigger school. Then, I met Alan and that changed things.

“But I also fell in love with being able to go to Mass with the kids and being able to practice my Catholic faith, and pray with students or ask faculty members to pray for special intentions,” she continues.

Both of the VanCuras, who were raised Catholic and grew up attending public schools, were surprised at what they found at St. Cecilia’s.

“We would always pray before a volleyball match — that’s not something you would do in a public school,” Mr. VanCura says.

“There’s just a real sense of family and community that we have here that you don’t necessarily find in large schools and in public



Sandy and Alan VanCura have been serving the community at St. Cecilia High School for over 40 years.

schools,” says Mrs. VanCura, who loves seeing students attend daily Mass voluntarily during the week, as well as pray at the weekly 9 p.m. Holy Hour at St. Cecilia’s.

“They’re probably tired and have had practice and homework, but to see them attend those Holy Hours and have the opportunity to go to Confession — it’s just awesome,” she continues.

The couple, who got married in 1982, joined St. Michael’s at the same time, when they moved into their home, a half-mile from the parish. Mr. VanCura is an usher and a member of the Knights of Columbus, and Mrs. VanCura is a reader at Mass and a member of Catholic Daughters.

The VanCuras have found themselves being inspired to grow in their faith by watching their students.

“We have such a close-knit group of kids and they volunteer for everything,” Mr. VanCura says. “There’s so much involvement. Service is a big thing.”

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“Sometimes, I am kind of overwhelmed at the strength of some of our students and their relationship with God,” Mrs. VanCura adds. “It’s such a blessing.”

Mrs. VanCura credits her ability to serve and lead to the power of the Eucharist.

“I think I need to receive the Eucharist as often as I can,” she says. “Attending daily Mass and going to my Holy Hour, it’s an opportunity for me to listen and it’s an opportunity for God to work on me, to help me be the person He wants me to be.”

The VanCuras thank God for the opportunity to make a difference at St. Cecilia’s and hope that the community they have formed here will continue.

“I pray that our students will not forget or move away from their Catholic faith,” Mrs. VanCura says. “And that ultimately, we’ll all be united one day in heaven.”

*“I do feel very strongly that my faith would not be where it is if I was in public education. Just the opportunities I’ve had to grow in my faith by being part of Catholic education — it’s such a blessing.”
— St. Cecilia Principal
Sandy VanCura*

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.*