



CHURCH OF

# Saint Mary

## Church Decorator Ministry:

### Sharing Talents to Lift up the Liturgy and Our Church Home

There is a subtle art that goes into decorating the church — to enhance the beauty of the architecture without covering it up, to lift up the liturgy without distracting, and to enrich the parishioners’ prayer lives without being the center of attention. This all takes a great deal of thought and planning. Lisa Brixius and Pat Tomasek do this important work largely behind the scenes.

“I am a visual learner,” Lisa says. “To come in and see things that are visually appealing makes the church feel more homey, more welcoming.”

Lisa and Pat are members of the Liturgy Committee, a group of six to eight people who meet monthly to plan the music, look at the Mass readings, and decorate the church environment. Pat and Lisa take the lead on the church decorations, carefully considering each liturgical season and how they can use natural elements to enhance the beauty of the church.

Since this has been our first year in the new church, Lisa and Pat have had to start from scratch in many ways. Much was lost in the fire, so they have had to learn to be creative on a budget.

“One of the things we are learning is to use things that are real and authentic,” Lisa says. “We are at a great time in our church to be able to start anew and make something fresh.”

Lisa and Pat incorporate the color of the liturgical season to help remind parishioners of the season. They bring in elements of nature and arrange things in a way that helps draw our attention to what is happening at the altar.



Lisa Brixius

Church of Saint Mary  
755 Kraft Drive SE  
Melrose, MN 56352

#### MASS TIMES:

Saturday: 5:00 p.m. (English)

Sunday: 10:00 a.m. (English) & 12:30 p.m. (Spanish)

#### DAILY MASS:

Monday: 6:30 p.m.

Friday: 8:30 a.m.

VER AL DORSO  
PARA ESPAÑOL



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## Creating Faithful and Loving Advent Traditions

As the Christmas season approaches, it is easy to get swept up in the commercialism that tells us Christmas begins on Black Friday. Advent begins on Nov. 28, and Advent-centered traditions are a simple way to differentiate between the two seasons. Traditions can help us embrace what this season truly means and allow us to consider ways to enter into careful preparation for the birth of the Christ child with our families.

While hanging stockings, consider hanging one for Jesus so family members can place “gifts” in the stocking for Him. These can be commitments made on a notecard offering to give up desserts during the week or promising to do one extra chore for another family member. Advent can be as much of a time for fasting and almsgiving as

the season of Lent — after all, both seasons prepare our hearts for a great feast of the Church.

Need more ideas? Create a manger bed for Jesus. For every good deed that a member of your family performs, place some straw in a small manger displayed somewhere prominently in your home. By Christmas, there will be a fitting bed in which the Christ Child can be placed. If your parish participates in a gift outreach, make the shopping experience for that gift a family outing. By focusing on the person who will receive the gift, you will help make the act of shopping more meaningful.

While there are many activities to help prepare our hearts for the Christmas celebration, nothing centers us more securely in this season of Advent than participating

in the liturgy. Try to attend parish penance services or live nativities or take part in service opportunities organized by our parish ministries. Spend time with your children with the Blessed Sacrament in Eucharistic Adoration, reminding them that the Christ Who dwells there in the monstrance is the same Christ Who came to this world as a baby — for it will be there in the presence of Christ that we can truly sing, with hearts ready to receive Him, “Oh come let us adore Him, oh come let us adore Him.”



# Stewardship Possibilities *are Endless* at Christmas

**W**hen I think of December, the first thing that comes to my mind is Christmas. While that may seem obvious, there are several other possibilities. I could think of Advent, which prepares us for Christmas. I could think of the Immaculate Conception, a Holy Day of Obligation, and the patronal festival of the United States. I could think of Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose popularity has spread far beyond the Hispanic community. December also brings the winter solstice. And it brings the end of the secular calendar year, which means getting my financials together for the upcoming income tax season.

But instead, I think of Christmas — one of the greatest feasts of the Christian year, along with Easter and Pentecost. The basic truth of Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus the Messiah, God Incarnate, is plenty of reason for us all to rejoice and worship. But we've piled so much extra baggage on our Christmas observance, and worship is often almost lost in the shuffle.

We send Christmas cards to people we contact at no other time of the year. We put up wreaths, Christmas trees, and lights. We host parties for family and friends. We visit relatives. We plan and prepare



Christmas meals. And we have Christmas gifts to buy. No wonder the Christ Mass becomes an afterthought!

Maybe, though, we can combine our Christmas activities with our stewardship commitments.

Treasure is the simplest. Shouldn't the most expensive Christmas present we give be the one to Jesus whose birthday we're celebrating? Risen and glorified, He needs nothing we have. But His Body — the Church — continues Jesus' mission here on earth and always needs additional resources.

Time and Talent may be a little

more complicated, but can't we spend a little more of our time in worship and prayer? Stop by the church for a visit to the Christmas Crib and offer a prayer of thanks for the gift of God's Son. Attend Mass each day of the Christmas Octave. Gather your family for prayers together in the morning or at dinner in preparation for Christmas Day and through the Christmas season.

And Talent? There are lots of possibilities: Sing in the choir for the Christmas Masses. Help decorate the Church. Cook or bake for someone who is homebound. Invite someone who will be alone to share Christmas dinner with your family. Offer to work in a soup kitchen if you will be alone. The possibilities are endless.

Yes, December means Christmas. But with some planning, we can make this hectic time a real blessing both for ourselves and others. Pray for me that I can keep Christmas properly, and I'll pray for you. And by the way, have a Merry Christmas!

In Christ,

Fr. Marvin Enneking  
Pastor

## MEET JESÚS HERNANDEZ: A Faith



*God willing, Jesús Hernández will be ordained as a deacon in June 2022.*

After attending a retreat that completely changed his life, Jesús Hernández and his family have found true peace and joy in the Lord. As a result, he got more involved at the parish and was able to grow in stewardship and faith — he has even begun the process of becoming a deacon.

Jesús grew up in Michoacán, México as the eighth of 12 siblings — six brothers and six sisters.

“I grew up in a Catholic home, and my parents always wanted to bring us closer to the Church,” he says. “When I was 16 years old, I immigrated to the U.S. with my older brother, and came to work in California for a few months before moving to Minnesota where I’ve now been for 23 years. Three years ago we bought a house here in Melrose, and we hope to stay here for the rest of our lives.”

Married with five children between 8 months and 18 years old, Jesús experienced a conversion of heart after attending the Koinonía spiritual retreat about 10 years ago.

“I used to be a man who wasn’t close to the Church — I would always have my kids baptized, but I never dedicated my life to Christ,” he says. “I felt a call to grow closer to God specifically during this retreat. Throughout the retreat, I became reacquainted with the voice of God, and with the testimony of my brothers and sisters in Christ. I realized that I felt emptiness and pain because of my distance from God’s love and mercy. God asked me to serve Him with my life. After the retreat, everything changed — my love for God and the Church grew and grew, and I was changing, too.”

Jesús’ entire family noticed and was affected by this change, as well — and as a family, they embarked on a faith journey together.

“God called me to heal our domestic Church and to live with Him at the center of our lives, as a family,” he says. “My wife can testify to the joy that entered our home after this conversion of heart — my personality changed, we started communicating better, and we began to fully understand what it means to live in Christ. Since we started attending Mass at the parish, I really began to understand what it means to have Jesus as the center of my life, in my home and in my heart. It brings us peace.”

This new clarity made it clear to Jesús that God was also calling him to be of service to the parish community. He has served as a lector and an

## th Journey of JOY, PEACE and HOPE

acolyte, as part of the Hospitality Ministry, and as part of the Hispanic Ministry.

"I have learned that it's important to be of service to the parish, and to help our priests through the different ministries," he says. "I also saw it was important to support our priests who don't speak Spanish. I really want to serve my faith community as best as I can. I've also realized that in order to be a good steward, I need constant spiritual formation and a heart that is open to the Word of God. I decided to start going to faith formation classes to learn more about the faith and better understand the different ministries in the parish."

As time went on, Jesús still felt as though God was calling him even more. After careful discernment as well as conversation with Deacon Ernie Kociemba, he decided to begin the journey to a vocation in the diaconate.

"Deacon Ernie gave our parish a special presentation about what it means to be a deacon," Jesús says. "While listening to his testimony of faith, my heart began to feel a pull, and for days I listened to the voice of God. Deacon Ernie then told us that Bishop Donald Kettler specifically wanted more Latinos to follow the call to the diaconate, and I once again heard the voice of God calling me. That night, I went home and I couldn't sleep, I just kept hearing a voice calling me. Deacon Ernie's words were in my head, that I too could serve God, and I clearly heard God calling my name and I wanted to answer, 'Lord, Your son is here to serve You.'

"Later on, I spoke with my wife, and we discerned and spoke about it with our children," he adds. "We decided, as a family, to go forward together on my journey to the diaconate. We are moving step by step, growing in our faith and ready to serve. I have received a lot of theological formation, rich in wisdom, and have been taught by capable teachers at the Emmaus Institute School of Theology. I am currently finishing my fourth year of formation."

God willing, Jesús will be ordained as a deacon in June 2022. As a deacon, he hopes to serve as a bridge between God and those who don't yet know Him, or who have drifted away from Him.

"I want to serve with the joy that God has given me, and I want to be that bridge for all who want to get to know God, and live in His grace and mercy," he says. "My goal is to bring God's love to those who are suffering."



*Jesús Hernández and his family have found true peace and joy in the Lord.*

## A Significant Moment in Our Prayer

### *The Presentation of the Gifts*

Occasionally, you might hear someone jokingly refer to “halftime” during Mass – the interval following the Prayers of the Faithful, as the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins. But this is an opportunity to enter into something deeper – a significant moment in our prayer.

The practice of bringing up the gifts has been part of our Catholic tradition from the very beginning. Although we might think of this action as being merely practical, in reality, it serves a much deeper spiritual purpose.

Each Sunday Mass, someone is chosen, whether an usher, or another member of the parish, to bring forward “the gifts” – bread, wine and, in many cases, the collection of money that has been gathered moments before, from the generosity of the congregation. These gifts not only symbolize, but also in reality, are the work of human hands. The bread and wine are fruit of God’s creation, which, through the effort of human hands, are made into the gifts that we present to the Lord.

Certainly, the collection that is presented to the priest also serves to represent the work and sacrifices of the previous week. Sharing our monetary “treasures” is one of the ways that we embrace stewardship. It’s an opportunity to generously give back to the Lord, from the fruit of our work.

The physical act of carrying the gifts forward to the priest is meant to serve as a tangible reminder of the fact that we are all called to stewardship. We are all called to present to God our lives – our work, our talents, the struggles and victories of the past week – as an offering and gift to God.



## Church Decorator Ministry *continued from front cover*

“We are trying to enhance the liturgy without distracting from it,” Lisa says.

Once Lisa and Pat have their plan for a new liturgical season, they gather a group of volunteers to make it happen. This often includes their families and is a way for everyone to serve the parish together. Lisa likes to have new people join the group to help put up the decorations because everyone brings a new perspective and fresh ideas.

Lisa has been on the Liturgy Committee for 30 years, and first started when she was a young mother in the parish.

“I was a young mom and this ministry was one that I could do in the evening and then execute the ideas at other times,” she says. “By me volunteering, my family got involved with volunteering. As a

stay-at-home mom, it gave me the opportunity to be with people.”

Our parishioners all have unique gifts and different life circumstances, but there is always a way to use your talents in our parish.

“I think it’s a good way of giving my time, talent, and gifts to our community,” Lisa says. “It’s something that’s behind the scenes. I don’t have to be in front of people, but it is there at all times to be enjoyed.”

*If you would like to use your talents to help with church decorating, please call the parish office at 715-623-2024.*