



CHURCH OF

Saint Mary

MEET THE FUNK FAMILY

Embracing Parish Life and Service Together

Sharing our talents as a means of stewardship isn't something that's limited to a certain age. The members of the Funk family believe in the importance of service in our parish community. Parents Jill and Karl, as well as their four children – Ian, Owen, Aubrey, and Aleah – are involved in parish life here at St. Mary's.

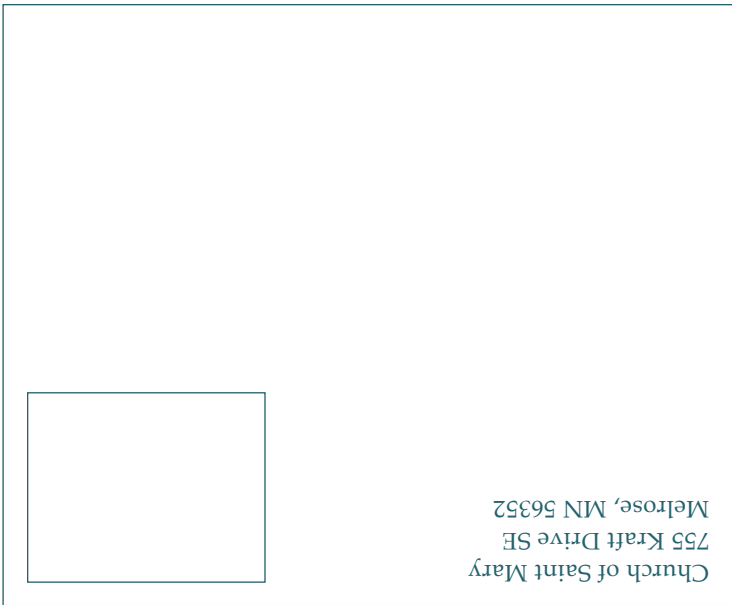
"As a family, we try to stress the importance of kindness, giving back, and helping out your neighbors," Jill says.

This past April, Jill and Karl celebrated 20 years of marriage. While Jill has been a parishioner here at St. Mary's for her entire life, Karl joined when the two of them were married. They both started becoming involved when their children began attending school at St. Mary's.

"For me, it always feels good to help out in whatever way possible," Jill says. "I think that is a big part of being Catholic – if you see a need, you can step forward and try your best to fulfill that need."

Karl is on the Finance Council while Jill assists with AV during Sunday Masses. Ian, Owen, Aubrey, and Aleah also do

continued on page 6



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.



The members of the Funk family are involved in parish life at St. Mary's.

VER AL DORSO
PARA ESPAÑOL



(320) 256-4207

www.oneinfaith.org/stmarys

Christmastime Stewardship

How We Can Bring His Son to the World

It is not uncommon to give gifts during Advent and Christmas, but it is never enough just to leave it at that. True, Jesus gave Himself to us at the first Christmas. And, as always, we should strive to imitate Him by giving of ourselves in some way as we celebrate the anniversary of His birth. But there is a way to give even more than just ourselves — by giving the gift of Christ to others. The seasons of Advent and Christmas are perfect opportunities to share the love and message of Jesus with others in a beautiful way.

Of course, giving of ourselves in imitation of Jesus is a beautiful thing. But it is just as important to remember that, as human beings, we bear the likeness of God. As Christians, Jesus Himself inhabits our very souls. As Catholics, our Lord literally dwells within us when we receive Him in the Eucharist. Based upon this logic, we do so much more than imitate Jesus when we selflessly give of ourselves to others. Indeed, just as Mary carried Christ in her womb when she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, and just as she brought Him in her arms to Simeon as a newborn child, we can also literally bring Jesus Christ to the world.

What a profound task Our Lord has laid out for us

this season! As He grew in Mary's womb, Jesus could only go where Mary chose to take Him. Of course, He couldn't do anything — He couldn't even speak. Mary became His hands and feet, and even His voice. Mary could have stayed at home during her pregnancy, resting and preparing for life with a newborn, as most mothers do. But instead, the Blessed Mother helped her Son begin His mission by bringing Him to her cousin, Elizabeth. Today, in much the same way, Christ invites us to share Him with the rest of the world. He chooses to make His presence known through us.

How do we bring Jesus to those in our parish and community? We might visit with a sick parishioner over the holidays, providing fellowship and support in their time of need. We may consider serving a local soup kitchen or food bank, and doing our part to make sure that the hungry are fed. We can sing Christmas carols for our neighbors, bringing true joy and love to their homes. Perhaps we could help a tired friend clean her house, making her life a little bit easier during this busy season. Or we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. We might even try going to work with a cheery disposition, or donating money so that a starving child in a poor country can have something to eat. These are just a few examples of how we can practice stewardship.

We may sometimes feel as if our efforts are in vain — especially when it is hard to see the effects of our evangelization. This temptation is particularly strong when we offer our treasure as a gift to God. The positive effects of monetary gifts aren't always as visible as gifts of time or talent. But when we give of our treasure, the love of Jesus can travel to places we could never go. While our gift may not directly affect someone in a positive way, it very well may enable someone else to do it for us. Sometimes, God doesn't just ask us to be His hands and feet, but to enable someone else to be them, as well.

Advent and Christmas give us the opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word. God has put us in a particular place, given us a certain amount of time, and asked us to perform particular tasks and selflessly share a portion of our gifts. This is all for a singular purpose — to bring His Son into the world, and make Christ's presence just as real as when He first became man more than 2,000 years ago.



A Time for Mercy and Tenderness

Advent and Christmas are upon us. This is a busy time for me, for our parish, for the clergy and our staff, and certainly for most of you. We all know our homes, schools, offices, and churches soon will be alive with holiday events, and our pews will overflow with all of those present for Christmas Masses.

We all know why. There is something special about the Church and our faith during these holidays. And for this, we should be grateful. For those of us who are here every Sunday, this is a time not to resent those who fill our pews and our parking lots. Rather, it is a time to be the loving and welcoming people Christ calls us to be. Hospitality is an important part of being a good steward, and this is a perfect time to practice it.

For those of us who may only come every once in a while, or for these special occasions, you are welcome here! We hope you like what you see, and we want you to know that you always have a home and family here, any time you need it.

You may have heard of the term “the New Evangelization.” It is something Pope Francis has emphasized, through his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which he wrote in 2013. The pope’s letter, with the title that means



“The Joy of the Gospel,” has advice for all Catholics relating to how we should all view and treat each other, as sons and daughters of God and members of the Church.

In an address focusing on “the New Evangelization,” the pope said, “There is a need for Christians who help show God’s mercy and tenderness toward every creature. We all know that today’s humanity is facing a deep crisis. Therefore, the new evangelization must necessarily use the language of mercy, which is more about gestures and attitudes than words.”

This is a time for mercy and tenderness.

This is a time for us to show love for everyone, to our brothers and sisters in the next pew or on the other side of the globe. This is a time to share the Good News of Emmanuel, God-with-us, with all we meet.

May you and your families have a blessed Advent and Merry Christmas!

In Christ,

Fr. Marvin Enneking
Pastor



charity

give
PEACE
ASK
humanity
SHARING
oneness
blessings
GIFT

kindness
believe
thank you

support
DONATE
CHANGE

community

The Origin and Beauty of the Nativity Scene

With all the commercialism surrounding Christmastime, it's far too easy for us to lose sight of the true reason behind the season. Overwhelmed by our endless to-do lists and the hustle and bustle of last-minute shopping, our focus quickly shifts away from the Christ Child's birth. And yet, hidden amongst the holly wreaths and garlands, the Christmas Nativity remains a tangible reminder of the Incarnation, pulling us back into time for a moment as we reflect upon the incredible gift of Christ's birth.

Interestingly, it was circumstances much like our own today which first led St. Francis of Assisi to recreate the Nativity scene nearly 800 years ago. Frustrated with the growing materialism and greed that seemed to pervade 13th-century Italy, St. Francis wanted a way to visually remind people of Christ's humble beginnings — to show them that Christmas isn't about pomp and circumstance or material goods, but rather about unselfish love. Describing the idea to his friend Giovanni, St. Francis wrote, "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger..."

And so St. Francis' idea took form on Christmas

Eve in 1223. This original Nativity scene was a living one, even including live animals. Villagers were deeply moved by the silent display of humble beauty, and the Nativity tradition soon spread throughout Italy and surrounding Europe. It is a tradition that remains today in nearly every Christian church and in many homes. In fact, it's hard to imagine Christmas without a Nativity scene somewhere.

Coming in various sizes and styles, each Nativity replica continues to focus our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas — to help us remember that Christmas isn't about the amount of gifts under the tree or the festive decorations, but rather about celebrating Christ's birth. Many families have a tradition of hiding the Infant Jesus, only placing Him in the crib on Christmas morning. This helps build anticipation during the Advent season as we anxiously await the Divine's birth. Others go a step further, actually wrapping up the Christ Child to be opened as the very first gift of Christmas.

Yet, whatever your family's particular traditions, we hope that the Christmas Nativity continues to draw your heart heavenward this Christmas season — to center us all on the greatest gift ever given, our Incarnate Lord.

Coming in various sizes and styles, each Nativity replica continues to focus our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas — to help us remember that Christmas isn't about the amount of gifts under the tree or the festive decorations, but rather about celebrating Christ's birth.



Decorating

AT HOME AND OUR PARISH: A Valuable Way of Spreading the Christmas Spirit

Our beautiful church is visible to travelers on Interstate 94. This is just one of many subtle ways we can evangelize. As we approach Christmas — when our Savior becomes man — we want to make sure our church shines. To make St. Mary’s even more beautiful and to help spread the Christmas joy, a group of committed volunteers decorates the outside of the parish with Christmas lights. It’s not a big task, but it’s an important one.

In past years, some combination of the team of Randy Dufner, Troy Tomford and Mark Heidgerken has done the decorating.

“It’s a really small thing to do to help,” Mark says. “I just enjoy spreading the Christmas spirit.”

Mark agrees that a bit of decorating and adding lights on trees makes a big difference. And he doesn’t do it to be recognized — he does it because he knows he is so blessed, it’s the least he can do to give back. Two years ago, he was asked to help shortly after a nasty bout of COVID. He and Troy both agreed to help because they are happy to be around after coming down with bad cases of the virus.

Plus, Mark knows a thing or two about Christmas decorations.



Mark Heidgerken and family

He puts up one of the biggest light displays in the area. Many, many hours are spent on the Heidgerkens’ personal display. While he admits that it can be hectic, stressful, and most certainly cold, it’s all worth it.

“As soon as Tina gets that first message over Facebook that someone drove by and they loved it, it’s all worth it,” Mark says.

Mark’s love for decorating and

his collection has grown over the years. He can’t recall how he first got started with Christmas decorating, but his display has grown every year. Last Christmas, Mark added a new display highlight — a mega tree.

“I’m not sure why I started this,” he says. “My parents weren’t big decorators. But over time, this has become almost an addiction for me. Plus, I love Christmas.”

Christmas is a season that Mark thinks he and Tina could celebrate all year.

“There’s just something about Christmas,” says Mark.

Tina and Mark have three

“It’s a really small thing to do to help. I just enjoy spreading the Christmas spirit.”

— Mark Heidgerken

continued on page 6

DECORATING AT HOME AND OUR PARISH: A Valuable Way of Spreading the Christmas Spirit *continued from page 5*

children. They help with the display at home a little bit, but it's mostly Mark's project.

"As time has gone on, I've learned better ways to do things," Mark says.

His favorite item is a Santa, reindeer and sleigh that he got secondhand from the Freeport State Bank.

Mark's work at home and the parish are all for one reason — to spread joy at this special time of year, when we celebrate the birth of the King and take extra time for family. Mark believes part of this goes back

to his mother and father. They lost a baby a few days before Christmas before Mark was born. It was a hard time of year for them, but they always vowed to make Christmas special. Mark loves to keep Christmas special for many in Melrose and surrounding areas.

"I would be dangerous if I ever won the lottery at Christmastime," Mark says. "Tina and I have talked about that. We would try to spread as much Christmas cheer as possible. So many people have so much, and so many have so little — it would be nice to spread it."

Meet the Funk Family

Embracing Parish Life and Service Together *continued from front cover*

AV on Sundays. All of the children have also been altar servers at Mass and attend religion classes.

Aubrey, 14, has also been involved in the youth group at our parish. She says she always tries to make new friends. Aubrey believes it's important to help others "so they know someone will always be there for them, even in their tough moments." Aubrey lives out her faith on a daily basis by praying before meals and before going to bed.

Each of the Funk children say they didn't have any trouble getting involved in parish life. They all enjoy helping with AV and attending various events in the parish. Karl and Jill encourage their children to be active in their Faith Formation classes and attend the many events our parish offers. But they've also taught their children to be spiritually present just as much as they are physically present.

All four children enjoy many aspects of parish life. Ian most enjoys "that the community is accepting of everyone." Owen enjoys "spending time with my friends that go." Aubrey enjoys "all of the kind people we have at our church who are willing to help out whenever needed." And Aleah says she likes "all the activities you get to do."

Raising children in the faith means instilling certain values. Jill and Karl work hard to teach their children Gospel virtues and lead by example firstly in their own relationship with each other.

"I think that over the years, we have developed an understanding of how we each communicate best, and we can see when we are in stress and need compassion," Jill says. "I try to show empathy as much as possible. As a family, we work to have our children understand how important it is to be kind to everyone including their own siblings. It is something we work on continuously."

Karl says he appreciates the opportunity of living his faith out through our parish community.

"For myself, being a part of St. Mary's allows me to be a part of our great community," Karl says. "The sense of security that I have while attending Mass is something you can't get anywhere else. The strength that I get from my faith on a difficult day is my motivation to contribute what I can."

"For me, it always feels good to help out in whatever way possible. I think that is a big part of being Catholic — if you see a need, you can step forward and try your best to fulfill that need." — Jill Funk