

Monthly Newsletter

• SAINT SEBASTIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



From the desk of Fr. Peter Patrick:

Happy New Year

My sisters and brothers, we have every reason to thank God for another year. It is not because we are worthy, but because He is a God of second chances. Even though we did not accomplish all our plans and goals last year, God has given us this new year. When answers were delayed, God still remained faithful. Faith reminds us that God is working, even when we cannot see the outcome. God has never abandoned His people, even when we feel alone. He is always quietly at work, even during extended periods of waiting and silence, as we heard in the Christmas message. God gently draws close to us, Emmanuel, God with us, touching our tired hearts and whispering with love: "I have not forgotten you, I got you our backs."

Walking by faith means trusting God even when we cannot see or predict what will happen. The coming year may bring challenges, but faith assures us that God's promises stay true. God does not ask us to walk alone; He only asks us to trust Him one step at a time. "We live by faith, not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7

Sometimes we focus on what we did not accomplish or the goals we missed. St. Paul encourages us: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:13-14. We cannot change the past, but we can learn from it. In my Christmas homily, I said, "We celebrate

Christmas by Living with Gratitude, Not Complaint. Christmas can easily become a time of comparison:

- who has more,
- who has less,
- what is missing,
- What went wrong?

We celebrate Christmas not by counting what we lack, but by thanking God for what we already have."

Thank you for your faithful commitment to our parish. We could not have achieved what we did without each of you, including those who are homebound or in care facilities and remain dedicated, even when they cannot join us at church.

Before a flight, passengers get safety instructions so everyone knows what to expect. The advice to put on your own oxygen mask first underscores the importance of caring for yourself before helping others. A few months ago, we shared our financial statement in the bulletin. Thank you to everyone who continues to give their time, talents, and treasure. I know some are on fixed incomes and many support other good causes, like the Food Pantry and St. Vincent de Paul. Still, we need to maintain our church and cover essential expenses. Not giving to the church is like flying without oxygen. If you have not been giving, or if you are giving less than last year, please consider increasing your support for our parish so we can keep serving our community. Again, I wish you a Happy New Year with the Lord's blessings! As we start this New Year, I want to thank everyone involved in different ministries. If you are not yet involved, please consider serving in any

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In this newsletter you will find information about:

- Volunteering to Prepare the Church for Ordinary Time
- The Next Welcome Group Meeting
- St. Vincent de Paul Meal Program in January
- Faith Formation Family Events
- The Sparkle Squad
- A Thank You to the Christmas Decoration Volunteers
- A Welcome to New Parishioners
- Save-the-Date for the Parish & School Auction
- Married Couples Retreat
- The St. Sebastian Cabaret, "Fish Fry: The Musical"
- Las Posadas 2025
- Deacon Jim's Advent Homily
- An Invitation to a Women's Lenten Day of Reflection
- Spiritual Direction at St. Sebastian
- The Winter Farmers Market

ministry. Even our children can take part.

I know we are still in the Christmas season, but Lent will begin soon. This Lent, look for some new things in our liturgies. In recent years, I have thought about how we can better support spiritual growth in our community. Starting this Lent, we will have Saturday Mass at 8:30 am, with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament at 9:00 am. Confession will be available until 10:00 am. Here is the schedule:

1st Saturday-St. Sebastian
2nd Saturday-St. Catherine
3rd Saturday-St. Sebastian
4th Saturday-St. Catherine
5th Saturday-St. Sebastian

I want to express our sincere gratitude to Deacon Jim Matthias for his dedicated ministry to our parish and the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. Deacon Jim will retire from the Archdiocese's Pro-Life and Prison Ministry office this January and relocate to Florida to be near his children and grandchildren. This month will be his last with us. Deacon Jim also coached our girls' basketball teams for 25 years before entering Diaconate formation. Although he was not originally from St. Sebastian, he was assigned to serve our community, and we are deeply grateful for his five years with us. Please take a moment to thank him when you see him in the coming weeks. On January 4, 2026, we will honor Deacon Jim, his wife Rhonda, and their family at all Masses.

See you at mass,
Fr. Peter Patrick

**SCAM
ALERT!**

Scam Warning Reminder

If you get an email or text that looks like it's from Fr Peter Patrick BEWARE. He will **never** send you an email or text asking for money or gift cards or making the request URGENT. Scammers are praying on your good intentions. **Do not hesitate to contact the parish house for verification, 414-453-1061 or email jperleberg@saintsebs.org** first before taking any action. Protect yourself from these unscrupulous people.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: CHRISTMAS DECORATION TAKE-DOWN & ORDINARY TIME INSTALLATION IN CHURCH

It is time to take down all the Christmas decorations in the Church and we need your help on **Saturday, January 17th**, from **9am – 11am**. We hope to have 8 volunteers to assist Linda Tanner and Kathy Bottoni (our Church Environmentalists). Any amount of time you can offer will be appreciated. Activities include removing fabrics from the altars, and taking items (little artificial trees, wreaths, fabrics, and manger figurines) to the Church environment room for storage. We will also set up for Ordinary Time. Students who would like to help must be accompanied by a Parent or Guardian.

Please contact Julia Galligan at (414) 453-1061, ext. 117 if you would like to volunteer.



BRIDGING THE GAP: CONVERSATIONS THAT CONNECT

The next St. Sebastian Welcome Group gathering will take place at 6:30 on Monday, February 9 in the Adult Formation Room as we consider how to talk about LGBTQ issues with people who see things differently - no matter your perspective. Led by parishioner Michele Matthai, Director of Culture, Diversity & Inclusion at Dell Technologies, we'll explore ways to find common ground rooted in respect and Catholic social teaching. It's not about winning arguments - it's about creating understanding, sharing real-life experiences, building bridges and doing God's work. Come ready to listen, learn, and grow together. For more information, contact Barb Haig, barbh1836@gmail.com.

Suggested ways to support LGBTQ individuals

1. Be visible as witnesses in your communities, sharing your story so others know how Jesus works in gay people's lives.
2. Speak honestly, affirmatively, and from the heart, and listen when others' stories differ from your own.
3. Invite others to encounter the wisdom and beauty that the Church has to offer, welcoming others as you are welcomed.
4. Imagine how ministries in your parish might help gay people grow as disciples.
5. Advocate for others. Accompany them, encourage their formation, and be the mentor you wish you'd had.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL MEAL PROGRAM

St. Sebastian will once again be helping with the SVDP Meal Program on **Friday, January 9**. Volunteers are needed to help cook or to serve the meal. Cooks meet in the church hall kitchen at 8 am, servers at 4 pm. Servers will load up the food to bring it down to All People's Church (2600 N. 2nd Street) to serve the meal.

Donations of apples/oranges, cookies/desserts, and lettuce for salad (bags or heads cut up and ready to go) are also appreciated and can be dropped off in the church hall kitchen anytime on Friday, January 9 before 4 pm.



For more information or to donate food or to volunteer, contact Phil Bielefeld at 414-559-0996 or pjb0469@gmail.com. Monetary donations are accepted as well to help offset the rising cost of purchasing groceries.

Thank you to all of the cooks, servers, and donors who helped at the meal program on October 24 where we served 100 meals that evening with plenty of leftovers to feed more the following days that they were open. All who were served were very appreciative and thankful for our efforts.

**Please note that there is NOT a Meal Program date in December because the SVDP kitchen is closed as part of the Christmas holiday on our normal designated date. Future dates going forward for 2026 will be on the 2nd Friday of the odd months.*

Faith Formation Family Events

These intergenerational lessons are held five times a year, focusing on different core themes. Each Family Program involves catechesis, activities, and take-home materials for continued spiritual growth. All families are welcome to participate in any of the Family Programs.

DATES

- November 1st, 10am-12pm:
Saints & Souls
- November 30th, 4- 5:45 pm:
Advent
- January 6th, 5:30-7pm:
Scripture & Tradition
- March 14th, 10 am-12pm:
Catholic Social Teaching:
Family & Participation
- May 9th, 10am-12pm: Mary



SPARKLE SQUAD RETURNS

JOIN US FOR A SEASON OF PARISH CARE!



We are excited to announce that Sparkle Squad is returning for another season at Saint Sebastian! Beginning in January, we will meet on the third Saturday morning of every month from 9 to 11 am, continuing through to our Spring Into Service event in May.

Sparkle Squad was originally created to tackle focus cleaning and beautification projects around the parish — those deeper, less-frequent tasks

that go beyond everyday upkeep. It's a chance for all of us — children, teens, adults, longtime parishioners and new friends alike — to come together, roll up our sleeves, and "make our parish shine." For students, these sessions are a great way to earn service hours. But to make this effort successful, we also need adults to help coordinate, lead, and work alongside the youth.

Our first gathering will be an outdoor fall cleanup: raking leaves, tidying garden beds, removing debris, and preparing our grounds for the season ahead. If you'd like to join us (or lead a subteam), please sign up here:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E4EAFAB28A7F58-59022441-sparkle>.



THANKS TO OUR VOLUNTEERS!



Many thanks to the many volunteers who prepared our worship space for our Christmas liturgies!!

See just some of our volunteers in the photo here!

Thank You

WELCOME TO OUR NEW PARISHIONERS!

We warmly welcome all those who joined our Saint Sebastian parish family in **December**!

Caleb and Caitlin Johnson, with daughters, Mickey and Ruth, and son, Sonny

Sophia Altenburg

Lisa and Robert Manier, with son, Archie, and daughter, Judy

MaryClaire Nwachukwu, with daughter, Lauryn

Kevin Van Dycue

Josh and Jenny Wright, with son, Eric, and daughter, Abigail

Your presence enriches our community. May you find a warm, spiritual home here at Saint Sebastian. We invite all parishioners to extend a friendly greeting, introduce yourselves, and help our newest members feel at home as we continue to grow together in faith and fellowship.

SAVE THE DATE: PARISH & SCHOOL AUCTION | FEBRUARY 14TH!



MARRIED COUPLES RETREAT | FEBRUARY 5-8

Parishioners Leah and John Sealey will be facilitating a married couples retreat at the Jesuit Retreat House (JRH) in Oshkosh February 5-8.

The weekend will include talks touching on various concepts including the vocation of marriage and marriage as pilgrimage. The retreat is interspersed with opportunities for private spiritual direction with JRH staff, reflection, eucharistic adoration, reconciliation, and personal prayer all surrounded by the peaceful and beautiful retreat house grounds on Lake Winnebago.

Click below for more information and/or to register.
<https://www.jesuitretreathouse.org/index.cfm>

ST. SEBASTIAN CABARET PRESENTS: “FISH FRY: THE MUSICAL” | MARCH 20-21

"Fish Fry the Musical" is coming!

Join us on Friday, March 20 and Saturday, March 21st (7 pm) for this custom scripted musical written by Marilyn Jozwik, Mary Madigan, Deb Mamerow and Jim Zaffiro.

Online tickets and additional information will be available on the Saint Sebastian website in February.

Questions can be emailed to: saintsebastiocabaret@gmail.com. We hope to see you there!

LAS POSADAS 2025

On Friday Dec. 19 the St. Sebastian El Salvador committee hosted the annual Las Posadas event featuring the Casa Romero youth choir. We experienced the journey that Joseph and Mary took to try to find lodging through song and live reenactment with some really cute kiddos!

Later, all were invited to sign a soccer ball, Christmas cards and two banners for the delegation to present to our sister parish in Teosinte, on their visit in January. The banners remain in the gathering space of the church for additional people to sign so please stop by.

An abundance of cookies, juice, and hot chocolate were enjoyed by all, and the night finished off with a fun piñata in the multi-purpose room

Join us for 2026!





“A GOD WHO KEEPS HIS PROMISE”

DEACON JIM MATTHIAS

Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 21, 2025

Isaiah 7:10-14, Romans 1:1-7, Matthew 1:18-24

I remember watching old Westerns where a cowboy, like John Wayne or Clint Eastwood, would say something like, “A man’s only as good as his word.” Or, “My word is my bond.”

For those characters, there was no glory without honor. It wasn’t just about taking down the bad guy—it was about how you lived. A man’s reputation mattered. If he broke his word, he didn’t just lose a deal; he lost his name. And once a man lost his name, he lost his place in the community.

I think we are missing some of that today. Promises are made lightly. Words are walked back. Commitments are treated as temporary intentions rather than lasting obligations. We even joke that “promises were made to be broken.” But when enough promises are broken, words stop meaning anything at all. Trust erodes. And when trust erodes, relationships—families, communities, even faith—begin to fracture.

That’s why the Fourth Week of Advent matters so much. Advent invites us to move from guarded faith toward confident hope—to trust that God keeps His promises, even when they arrive in ways we did not expect or on a timeline we would not choose.

In the Scriptures today, we see two men standing before the same promise.

Centuries earlier, King Ahaz faced a very real and frightening threat. Enemy armies from Israel and Aram were marching toward Jerusalem, intent on overthrowing him and ending the house of David. God sent the prophet Isaiah to assure him that the danger would pass and invited him to trust—offering even a sign if he would ask for it.

But Ahaz chose fear over faith. He did not reject God loudly or angrily; he sounded religious and used pious language. Yet his heart was already set on another plan. He relied on a political alliance and human power rather than divine promise.

The crisis passed, but at a great cost. Ahaz bought short-term security from Assyria and paid for it with Judah’s freedom and faith. He died in dishonor, leaving behind a weakened kingdom and a lasting warning: faith is not proven by what we say about God, but by what we rely on when fear sets in.

Yet God keeps His promise anyway.

Through Isaiah, the Lord declares: “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel—God is with us.” What begins as reassurance in a moment of crisis becomes a promise that stretches across centuries—pointing toward a deeper and lasting salvation.

That promise reaches its fulfillment not through a king, but through a carpenter.

Joseph is different.

Joseph is not powerful. He has no army, no throne, no public voice. Scripture records not a single word spoken by him. And yet God entrusts him with something far greater than a kingdom—His Son.

When we hear that Joseph obeyed, it can sound quick and easy. But the Gospel is careful to tell us that Joseph formed an intention before God intervened. Matthew says that Joseph was a righteous man and that he decided to divorce Mary quietly, unwilling to expose her to shame.

“Such was his intention...”

Those words matter. Joseph had already chosen what he believed was the right and merciful course of action. His righteousness did not spare him uncertainty; it required him to act faithfully with the light he had.

It is precisely then—after the decision is made—that God speaks. Not with explanations, not with guarantees, but with a command:

“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home.”

Continued on next page.

And Joseph obeys.

Joseph teaches us that faith does not eliminate struggle—it decides who we trust when answers are incomplete. Obedience is not the absence of fear; it is refusing to let fear have the final word.

The Litany of St. Joseph calls him Most just, Most chaste, Most obedient, Most faithful. These are not poetic flourishes. They describe a man whose life is built on keeping his word.

Ahaz heard God's word and chose fear.

Joseph heard God's word and chose faith.

That difference matters.

While women can certainly look to St. Joseph for intercession and as a model of virtue, I want to take a moment to speak to my brothers—fathers, grandfathers, husbands, and men of any age. Joseph shows us that true manhood is not measured by control, success, or applause, but by reliability. God chose Joseph because he could be trusted—and that trust is what makes him a model for us today.

The Litany calls him Pillar of families and Guardian of the Redeemer. A pillar does not move when pressure comes. A guardian does not walk away when things become complicated.

Many people carry wounds from absent or emotionally distant fathers. Joseph reminds us that fatherhood is not about perfection—it is about presence. Showing up. Staying. Choosing faithfulness one day at a time. Children may forget many things, but they never forget a father who knelt beside them in prayer, who brought them to the altar, who kept his word when it was hard.

By naming Jesus, Joseph claims Him.

By staying, Joseph protects Him.

By remaining faithful, Joseph allows God's promise to be fulfilled.

This lesson is not only for men—promises bind all of us, men and women alike. But families suffer most when men fail to keep their word, and families flourish when men do.

Ahaz places his trust in fear and human power, and he leaves behind dishonor and instability. Joseph shows us that trusting in God produces a far better result—a life marked by faithfulness, protection, and God's promise fulfilled in Jesus.

So today we give thanks for the men who show up, who pray beside their children, and who bring their families to the altar of grace. And we extend an invitation: your presence matters. Your faith matters. Your children are watching—and it is never too late.

The Church cannot afford more Ahazes.

The Church needs more Josephs—quiet, faithful men whose fidelity opens the way for God's promises to be fulfilled.

Go to St. Joseph.

Learn from St. Joseph.

Be like St. Joseph.

St. Joseph, pray for us.





A Lenten Day of Reflection: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

Saturday, February 21, 2026

8:30am – 4:30pm

St. Sebastian Church

The St. Catherine/St. Sebastian Women's Retreat "A Lenten Day of Reflection: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving" will be held on Saturday February 21, 2026 from 8:30am-4:30pm. In this day-long retreat we will focus on our prayer stories and how they help us to keep connection with God and to serve our neighbor. We will take a deep dive into the prayer of the Church, and how different prayer forms help us to maintain our internal strength. Life can give us a few curveballs, and our goal is to remain nimble, courageous, and wise in our approach to these challenges. Remaining closely connected with God in prayer is the best way to serve the people that God sends our way, so we will practice various prayer forms throughout the day.

In the morning session we will focus on Fasting as a way to connect more deeply with God and to be ready to serve others. The afternoon session will explore Almsgiving as a way to connect in a deeper way with the world and its needs. We will end our day together with a Communal Reconciliation Service. You are encouraged to come for the whole day, but if a half day works best for you, join us when you are able.

Meet Our Facilitator

Theresa Utschig is a spiritual director, artist, and Catholic lay woman serving the spiritual needs of people in the Milwaukee area and beyond. She was born in Milwaukee and raised Catholic at St. Catherine Church on 51st and Center St. where she still is a member. Theresa served at the community of Taizé in France for many years, and for 17 years as a hospital chaplain in Milwaukee. She is currently Director of Campus Ministry at Mount Mary University, and sees clients for Spiritual Direction. She is an iconographer and oil painter, focusing her body of work on the Light Within.



Registration

Online registration will open on January 12, 2026. Full and half day options will be available. More information will be shared in the bulletin and on the St. Sebastian website.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AT ST. SEBASTIAN

As Catholics, we believe that God is present and active within our lives and yet, it's all too easy to miss. Spiritual direction offers an opportunity for you to intentionally slow down and notice that which reveals itself as Sacred within the concrete particulars of your days. In this paying attention, you can begin to savor and clarify your awareness of the way in which the Spirit is moving within you and within your world and thus deepen your relationship with the Divine Mystery.

Spiritual direction is also a place in which you can consider how your upbringing, your faith tradition, the joys and sorrows of your personal history, and your present-day reality connect you to the Sacred. It can be a place where you can navigate transitions, grieve, and discern. It's a place where you can question and engage and discover. As a monthly spiritual practice, spiritual direction seeks to illuminate and enliven this relationship between you and All That Is, thus distinguishing it from counseling, therapy or life coaching.

A spiritual director offers the experience of "holy listening" in that it takes you where you are at. Grace, healing, and growth are sought through these times of active listening, reflection, and prayer during the session and in the days that follow. Consider this an invitation to explore this as a spiritual practice for yourself.

The "Spiritual Reflection Room," on the second floor of the Parish House, hosts spiritual directors trained in various lineages (Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican, for example) to meet with individuals desiring to explore their own unique sacred journeys. These one-on-one sessions are generally scheduled once a month and last for about an hour. Compensation, intake information, and meeting times are negotiated individually between you and your chosen spiritual director.

The following parishioners are trained guides who offer spiritual direction here at the Saint Sebastian Parish House. Please contact via email to explore the opportunity to work together.

Julia Gray - juliagraylange@gmail.com

Rhonda Matthias - ListeningPostMKE.Rhonda@gmail.com

Nicki Nelson - nicki@nickinelson.com

Leah Sealey - leahsealey@hotmail.com

If you would like to explore spiritual direction outside of our parish, please check out www.mkespiritualdirectors.com. In 2019, Nicki and Leah helped establish this peer group of local spiritual directors. The group's website was established so that seekers could easily access the profiles of providers in the Milwaukee area. Currently nearly 30 directors are profiled on the site. Along with their contact information, each profile shares the director's background, type of training, and specific areas of interest in their practice.

Please feel free to contact Leah Sealey if you have any questions, leahsealey@hotmail.com.

Winter FARMERS MARKET

Sunday, March 1, 2026

Market: 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Brunch: 9 a.m. – noon

*All are
welcome*

St. Sebastian Catholic Church
5400 W. Washington Blvd, Milwaukee WI

Products include

Eggs
Meat
Rice
Sweet Breads
Preserves, Jams, Jellies
Salsa
Mushrooms
Soaps & Body care
Apples & Cider (Slushies!)
Syrups
Honey
Oats & Granola
Alpaca Wool Products
Gluten-free & Vegan Bread
Rustic Sourdough Bread

*Freewill donation
accepted to
support the work of*

**Join us for Farm-to-Fork
Breakfast Buffet**

**Locally-sourced meal including:
sausage or veggie strata, pancakes
with Wisconsin produced maple
syrup, homemade applesauce, slow-
cooked oatmeal, apple cider and
Valentine coffee**

**Tickets are \$12 for adults, \$8 for students
and \$5 for kids age 3-7**

**Buy Tickets Anytime after Jan. 15, 2026
<https://saintsebs.org/>**



**Food, Faith and
Farming Network**
Connecting Community, Land, and People

This Winter Farmers Market is hosted by **St. Sebastian's Catholic Church** and sponsored by **Food, Faith and Farming Network**, a nonprofit organization supporting local, sustainable food sources and Wisconsin family farmers since the 1980s.