Get To Know
The Episcopal Church of the Nativity
Burnsville, Minnesota
Who We Are Looking For

Come: Walk with us. Talk with us. Teach us and, we hope, learn from us. Make new friends here, and help us to make new friends of the visitors and newcomers who come through Nativity’s traditional, red door every Sunday looking for ... God? Love? Faith? A church they can trust? That is our mission: To be the church that keeps Jesus’ promise: Seek and you shall find.

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To Our New Rector

We have deeply appreciated the leadership of our clergy and have happily called them friends in the faith. We also look to our community, each person bringing valuable insights from their own life experience and personal faith journey. Our conversations with our spiritual leaders are laced with humor and a sense of wonder when we contemplate the presence of God in our lives. The emphasis on lay leadership at Nativity has been a benefit for the congregation and for the priests who have journeyed with us. Clergy have been our colleagues and friends. The inclusion of families and children in all aspects of our community has enriched and enlivened our experiences together. We are looking for someone to inspire us through their own deep relationship with God, through Christ. Someone to teach us the ways and means for transforming the world around us and how to raise Nativity as a beacon of hope in the several communities we serve. We are striving to be the church of tomorrow, not of yesterday.

You have been called to Nativity because you offer us a life that is full of meaning. This is very much a personal ministry, not entirely an executive position. You will be involved in the lives of our parishioners, and we would like for you to be appropriately open about your own faith journey. We also expect you to model wholeness and health, as well as balance in your life between the duties of home and church. A professional work week is sufficient to lead Nativity. Refresh yourself with personal time off and time for continuing education each year. Look forward to a sabbatical leave after seven years. Thrive here; we do.

A word about preaching. The bar has been set high. We will listen to your sermons with engaged minds and open hearts. We have come to value intelligent, challenging and thoughtfully-prepared homilies. We expect the pulpit to always reflect compassionate concern for what is happening in the world. We seek God’s wisdom through the Bible, and appreciate your holy insights. Yet we are humbled before God’s mystery, and do not want our preachers to presume divine certainty based on isolated texts, or use the scripture as a club. How well you know us and care for the world and love the Lord will be evident in your preaching.

Please think about how your career experience can contribute to the growth of our congregation. Our facilities will accommodate more than fifty percent growth. Our church life would be richer with additional members, and we believe the lives of new members would be richer for their being at Nativity. The challenge is here and so is the work. We are not looking for an ox willing to accept a yoke. We are looking for a community builder who can bring excitement to our next chapter together.

Yours in Christ,

Doug Maust - Senior Warden        Jonelle Joyner - Junior Warden
Andrea Thermos                   Andy Cerio
Helen Goeden                     Gretchen Goodman
Jon Stoan                        Jeff Shewchuk
                                  Brenda Steinkamp
Living the Faith

Sharing One Table

The aprons worn in our kitchen at Community Café every Wednesday evening say it all: *Sharing One Table*. It is not a parish motto, it is our way of life. It is clear to us that Jesus means for us to join with Him at his Eucharistic table. It is equally clear that He means for us to feed others as He has fed us. And so, once a week we invite the community to share an evening meal with us, as well as to join us on Sunday morning. The café diners are Nativity members who are at church to participate in our programs and other folks from the community who want a meal in the company of others. We get to know one another and the familiar faces are comfortable with each other.

Sharing extends to the land around our church. We offer community garden space, as well as gardening instruction, to our members and our neighbors in exchange for them sharing a portion of their harvest with the local food shelves and shelters.

Nativity is also active within the Ebenezer Senior Living community. Our members organize the operation of their coffee shop, which serves as a place for residents and staff to gather; and we feed the spirits of residents when we conduct services in rotation with other denominations.

Our youth feed those in our city, state, and region on their mission trips. The summer trips offer our middle school and senior high students adventure, insight, spiritual growth and an opportunity to serve.

*Sharing One Table* is also demonstrated in our demographic. We are a diverse and inclusive congregation. Nicely mixed ethnically and economically, our membership includes families in every configuration: traditional household of mom and dad and the kids, retired couples, single parents raising great kids, gay and lesbian couples, singles by virtue of choice, divorce, and death —– all one family embraced by the loving spirit of Nativity.
**Vibrant Worship**

We feed because we are fed. Three Eucharistic celebrations each Sunday draw from the rich and varied resources of the Book of Common Prayer. Challenging sermons and Biblical inspiration send us out into the world in the power of the Spirit; and music, both traditional and contemporary, lifts our hearts heavenward. Sunday morning starts at 8 am with Eucharist, Rite II, with sermon but no music. It is our most contemplative service. The morning continues at 9 am with what most Episcopalians expect in a service: Eucharist, Rite II, organ, choir, and sermon. A Faith Formation hour separates our second and third services. The third service begins at 11:30 am and is Eucharist, Rite III, with music led by our contemporary ensemble, and children at the altar with the celebrant, helping to make the bread and wine holy. What makes Sunday at Nativity markedly different from most congregations is how well our adults enjoy the presence of our children (and vice versa). All ages note storytime at the 9:00 and 11:30 a.m. services as an integral part of their worship experience and how it gives everyone an opportunity to wonder where God is in the story. Our children participate and remain in church for the entire service.

**Spiritual Growth**

Even when Nativity could not afford a full-time rector, we maintained a full-time Director of Faith Formation, assuring that persons of all ages would find spiritual resources for their journey in faith. The Godly Play program stimulates children to embrace the Biblical stories and to find God in their personal stories as well. Vacation Bible School holds our children close to our heart during the summer. Our Rite 13, Journey to Adulthood and mentorships feed pre-teens and teens on Sunday mornings and our Youth Groups (middle and high school aged) continue the fellowship and relationships on Wednesday evenings. Adult Forum every week brings interesting guest speakers and also provides opportunity for personal spiritual sharing. Bible study, small group discussions, prayer groups and pilgrimages to the Holy Land are some of the programs that support our growth in the Spirit.
See How They Love One Another

Our retiring rector paid us a great compliment when he said that in his forty years of professional ministry he had not been in a congregation so free of conflict and so full of love. We attribute that to the success of several programs:

- *Pastoral care* is provided primarily by a team of lay callers who reach out in compassionate care to Nativity members
- *We Gather Together* events are family sponsored social gatherings that take place throughout the year
- The *Gala* is our annual fund raising event that builds community as readily as it raises money
- *Friday Fellowship* is a social and worshipful monthly gathering set in homes around a shared meal
- *Men’s Group* meets monthly for a meal and stimulating discussion
- *The Music Ministry* is the result of more than sixty parishioners making music and enjoying one another’s company in six groups, including adult choir, children’s choir, youth ensemble, contemporary music ensemble, quintet, and bell choir

Life at Nativity is a gift to be enjoyed, not problems to be solved. Gossip, back-biting and cliques, sadly so often found in other congregations, are largely absent from our life together.
Our History

Born in a Brewery…

We delight in remembering that Nativity began with a conversation between a future Nativity member and a Diocesan employee from the Office of Church Extension. They met during a social event at the Hamm’s Brewery in St. Paul. They were both, from distinct perspectives, seeing the growth of a second suburban ring south of the Twin Cities, and they realized that the time was right to plant a new congregation. And so, they did! January 5, 2014, marked the 50th anniversary of our first service. Social pleasures and spiritual zeal combined to give Nativity its distinctive personality and still do.

Nativity — Birth — New Life

Our congregation is aptly named. Nativity = Birth. Our founding marked a new birth of expansion for the Episcopal Church in Minnesota (ECMN). Likewise, many folks who have joined Nativity have experienced a new spiritual birth. They find here a church that makes sense to them. Theologically liberal and socially progressive, we worship in the vibrant traditions of the Book of Common Prayer. The Biblical stories provide foundation for how our personal stories also tell of God’s Holy Spirit continuing to work in our generation.

Growing and Outgrowing

Initial growth of the congregation was rapid and led to several moves, from rented space, to the building of a small sanctuary in a residential neighborhood, to the purchase of our present facility in 1995. This purchase, financed by loans from the Trustees of ECMN, required Nativity to revert from parish to mission status, and put a challenging debt of nearly $1 million on the congregation. Membership surged on two occasions, peaking in 2003.
Abundance Replaces Scarcity

In 2008 The Rev. Canon Denis O’Pray came out of retirement and accepted a part-time position as Vicar of Nativity to walk with a financially stressed congregation and its staff. Everyone’s goal was to retire the debt, stabilize the finances of the congregation and find our way back to parish status. That has been accomplished, and “Nativity by the Numbers” demonstrates how scarcity has been replaced by a spirit of abundance and generosity. The congregation is now positioned for another season of growth and prosperity and is prepared to call a full-time rector. During this time, we have experienced little growth in attendance, but we have learned how to be more generous.

Our Place in the World

World-wide Anglican Communion

Nativity is exploring its place in our Anglican Communion and our membership includes Anglican immigrants who have found a place at Nativity. Two pilgrimages to the Holy Land, one in the recent past and one in the near future, are shaping and will shape our understanding of where Jesus walked, the archeology and the politics of the place. In particular, a visit to St. Paul’s Church in Shef a’ram, Israel connected us with Christian Palestinians whose fathers and fore fathers are the Christians who lived their lives on this land since Jesus’ time. Minnesota is also experiencing an influx of immigrants who are pleasantly surprised that Episcopal means Anglican in the United States and they can find both familiarity and community when joining our church.
TEC (The Episcopal Church)

In a generation when controversy over the ordination of women to the Episcopate and gay and lesbian persons being ordained has caused division in the US Episcopal Church and global Anglican Communion, Nativity remains loyal to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church, fully accepting of the gracious evolution that is taking place in the larger church.

ECMN (Episcopal Church in Minnesota)

Nativity enjoys a close, cordial relationship with our Bishop, The Rt. Rev. Brian N. Prior, and provides particular leadership in the youth ministries of ECMN. In measurable indicators of vitality (membership, attendance, personal giving, annual budget, and rate of growth), Nativity can be counted among the ten most vibrant of the 108 congregations in ECMN. That said, it is the opinion of many that Nativity has not been active enough in ECMN programs and has not done all that it could do to expand the Episcopal witness in Minnesota. We look forward to taking a more active role in ECMN life in the near future.

Twin Cities

Just as Nativity has not been fully active in the statewide ECMN programs, neither has it been fully active in the regional association of faith communities in ECMN. We look for our new rector to take her/his place in the councils of the church and in clerical meetings and to help us engage more meaningfully with our neighboring Episcopal congregations.
Our Neighborhood

Nativity members live primarily in six contiguous cities along the Interstate-35 corridor: Burnsville, Apple Valley, Prior Lake, Lakeville, Savage, and Shakopee, an area often referred to as “South of the River”.

Currently, the area is home to just over 215,000 residents and has grown approximately 13% since 2000. The area is characterized as largely suburban, middle-to-upper-middle-class in nature, dominated by families living in single-family homes with both parents working at white collar jobs. The commercial areas are dominated by shopping malls, big-box retailers, grocery stores, movie theaters and ancillary retail.

The dominant racial group is Caucasian (just over 8 out of 10 residents are Caucasian); African American, Hispanic and persons of Asian descent each comprise approximately six percent of the total population.

Further characteristics of the population are:

- **Highly Educated:** 30% have a 4+ year college degree; 12% have a graduate/professional degree.
- **Large household sizes:** Indicative of the suburban/family dominated household structures, households are large – 62% of households are comprised of three or more persons.
- **Home Owners:** 68% of residents own their own housing units.
- **High Income:** Median Household Income for 2013 is estimated at $78,569 which is 18% higher than the metro average.
Our Staff

Nativity has enjoyed staffing continuity for nearly a decade. Each staff member brings their own enthusiasm and skills to our congregation and has become an integral part of our shared experience. We look forward to seeing our new rector have the same sort of enthusiasm and skill, and to participate in our community’s experience going forward.

Rev. Canon Denis O’Pray, Rector

Our Rector, Denis O’Pray, began his life as a “rectory brat” in Buffalo, New York, where his Dad served St. Clement’s congregation. Denis attended Hobart College and then the University of Minnesota where he earned a Master’s degree in American Studies and stayed on to teach at “The U” for ten years. Denis was ordained in 1975 and served congregations in Minneapolis and San Gabriel, CA before retiring for the first time in 2007. Sharing his experiences and knowledge gained from an extensive career of local, national and international leadership has opened the eyes of Nativity members to our place in the greater Communion.

Denis was called in 2008 by Bishop Jelinek, former Bishop of the Episcopal Church of Minnesota (ECMN), to act as a part-time interim priest of Nativity. During his 6 years with us, we have enjoyed an ideal partnership between a rector and a congregation. We have paid down our capital debt, moved from Mission status back to Parish status, maintained our membership and gained a better sense of who we are and our place in the world. Denis and his wife, Lyn, celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary this year and now continue to enjoy the fruits of their marriage: three adult sons and three spectacular grandchildren. When he gets to retire for a second time, he promises to weed the garden more faithfully, continue his writing and cosmology studies, and sail more often with his brother. We look forward to the time when Denis can rejoin us in fellowship.

Kathleen Brusco, Assistant Priest

The Rev. Kathleen Brusco serves as the part-time assistant priest at Nativity. Her role is to support the rector in his absence and to share in the sacramental life of the church. Kathleen was ordained in 1999 and served at Nativity for four years from 1999-2003. She left active ministry to stay home with her 4 children and returned to Nativity in a part-time capacity in 2012. Kathleen, a native of Minnesota, lives in the area with her husband, Paul, and children.
Anna Ostenso, Director of Faith Formation

Anna is a native Minnesotan from a large, close-knit Midwestern family. As a child, she attended Sunday School and first communion classes at various churches, but it was not until high school, actively participating in an Edina youth group and participating in the sacrament of confirmation, that she found her passion for faith formation within the church community. Her educational background includes a BA in Chinese International Studies from Middlebury College, Vermont, an MA in Youth Ministry from King’s College, London and Clinical Pastoral Education at the University of Minnesota Medical Center. Prior to joining Nativity’s staff, she was a youth minister for the Trinity Trust Team, a consortium of Anglican, Catholic and United Methodist churches in Godalming, England.

For Anna, faith formation is grounded in a Christian community of diverse people united by their wonder at the mystery of God and our Sacred Stories. Within this faith community opportunities are facilitated for everyone to realize their individual gifts and feel valued as both an individual and a member of a whole. Together this community addresses how to be a people grounded in the Christian tradition, authentically interacting with God, each other, society and contemporary culture.

Anna is on track to be ordained as a Transitional Deacon in June, 2015 and then full Ordination in June, 2016.

J. David Moore, Music Director

David has been singing in church choirs almost continuously since he was six. He moved to Minnesota in 1993 with a degree in choral conducting and composition from The University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. He founded and directed two professional a cappella groups, and has sung and recorded with some of the best ensembles in the Twin Cities. An award-winning composer, David’s works have been performed and recorded all over the world, and are published by his own company, Fresh Ayre Music. He is also the founder and conductor of the First Readings Project, a professional-level chamber choir, which present public readings of new works for voices. While at Nativity, David wrote a work entitled “Nativity Psalter” for each of the Psalms in the 3-year lectionary cycle. It is an amazing collection and a gift Nativity will enjoy for years to come.
David is committed to providing the means for anyone to participate in the musical life of Nativity, regardless of instrument or perceived ability. Neither our children nor God require perfection from us as musicians, just a willingness to offer what we have with joy.

David and Anna Ostenso are engaged to be married in October 2014.

Sandy Batz, Office Administrator

Sandy Batz, the youngest of five children, was born and raised in the Chicago area. Growing up, she was an acolyte and active member of her Lutheran Church. She now enjoys life in Lakeville with her husband, three children and several pets. She earned a degree in Food Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and spent five years working for the Smucker Company. Before joining Nativity five years ago, she spent three years as a youth and family administrative assistant at Christ the Saviour Lutheran in Indianapolis. She enjoys the hospitality aspects of her ministry, as well as all of the people she meets.

Our Building

In 1995, Hosanna Lutheran Church, the original builder and owner of the structure, outgrew the space and built a new facility nearby. By the grace of God, the architectural requirements Nativity identified for our needs were nearly a match for our growing community. The Sanctuary seats 350 and there are two large spaces where groups can gather. The balance of the space is classroom and offices.

We have maintained the property, but made few improvements. There are maintenance projects that will require capital investment and are anticipated as 2015-2017 funding targets.

The sanctuary is decidedly unadorned and reflects the norm for its original Minnesota Lutheran design. The use of cedar behind the altar and knotty pine on the ceiling, together with wood laminate beams, offer warmth to the space. Countering the warm wood colors is the “Nativity Blue” paint on the plaster surfaces. This color was used prominently in the original building and was chosen as a way to bring some of our history from our original building with us as we moved into the new building. Nearly 20 years have gone by since we moved. An interior designer has been engaged this summer to help with making the space feel more Episcopal. We are looking forward to seeing where her advice leads us.
Our Grounds

Nativity gardens and we invite the community to garden with us. Landscaping on the south side of the building soften the edge between the parking lot and the entries and adds color in the summer and fall. The land on the northwest side of the building hosts our vegetable garden and gives way to public park land that offers a short walk to Crystal Lake. The balance of the landscape is lawn. There is some talk of installing a labyrinth on the northeast of the yard.

There is room to grow here. The original architectural plan showed room for an additional 6,000 square feet of construction that included additional classrooms, a gym and a larger dining space. The design anticipated this growth within the area currently bounded by our parking lot. We too have imagined growing our faith formation and dining space, our dining space and have contemplated a chapel space that would accommodate about 40 people.

By the Numbers

Nativity is a young congregation.

We have more members under 18 than over 65.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Households on Mailing List</th>
<th>204</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total persons</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with children under 18</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children under 18</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households with persons over 65</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults over 65</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We worship together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>July 1, 2013- June 30, 2014</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00 am</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 am</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 am</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We combine the 9:00 and 11:30 services three times each year and, when we do, the average attendance is 187. Christmas 2013 recorded 383 at two services and Holy Week and Easter recorded 736 attendees for all services during the week. Also in 2013, there were nine baptisms, one burial and two marriages.
Nativity Members are Becoming More and More Generous

The 2014 Operating Budget is $351,132 and Pledges totaled $327,801. The balance is derived from plate contributions and other fundraisers.

The Capital budget dates to 1995 when Nativity borrowed $950,000 from the Trustees of The Episcopal Church in Minnesota to purchase our present property. That loan was reduced with two separate capital funds drives, and debt service on the balance was carried in the operating fund. In 2011, the balance stood at $360,000 and a successful, final capital campaign subscribed that amount. Service of the capital debt was removed from the operating fund and carried in a capital account. Final payment on the loan will be made March 31, 2015, and Nativity will be debt free.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fund</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Pledges</th>
<th>Average Pledge</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operating</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>$1,828</td>
<td>$252,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>$2,255</td>
<td>$302,109*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operating</td>
<td>2015**</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>$2,650</td>
<td>$286,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>2011-13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>$3,600</td>
<td>$360,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*After completing their pledges to the capital drive, many parishioners significantly increased their pledges to the operating fund, resulting in a 20% increase in pledged income from 2013 to 2014.

** Pledges of support for the 2015 (as of July 1, 2014) operating fund are being solicited in the summer of 2014. Not all pledges have been recorded at the date of this publication. Results from the first 108 pledges indicate an overall 10% increase over the 2014 pledge total. This is on top of the 20% increase last year!
Nativity Going Forward

Mission can be as simple as serving one’s congregation, or as complicated as serving the larger community. We live in a big world and in a big neighborhood. Many of us have traveled to the Holy Land and our church is located along a major interstate. Our mission is in our own back yard with a community garden; in our fellowship hall every Wednesday with café that serves our parish and those in need; in Minneapolis, greater Minnesota and Chicago with mission trips; within our membership serving the needs of our congregation; and in our Sanctuary filling the hearts and minds with the knowledge and love of God.

Our mission going forward is to strengthen the relationships between families, to encourage us to grow, socialize, explore, work and play together. There are many activities that compete for the time and attention of parents and their children in today’s society. Nativity wants to be the third “leg” in our family’s lives: Work, Home and Church.

Our goal is to grow our congregation as a richly-colored and textured religious community in the suburban communities in which we live. There will be times when finding mission will build relationships and other times when the relationships will give rise to mission. We look forward to developing our relationship with our new Rector and moving Nativity forward into our rich and exciting future – together.