

Dear Parish Family,

As parishioners of St. Mary Church in Downs and St. Patrick Church of Merna, you are part of two growing and vibrant parish communities who serve with the heart of Christ: celebrating the Sacraments, forming disciples, educating and forming our youth, serving those in need, and building up the kingdom of God. I would like to thank each one of you for your service and its profound impact on our parish families and the lives of those in our community. I am humbled by your generosity and faithfulness.

The following are a few examples of the many wonderful happenings in the past year in our combined parishes:

- We welcomed over 105 new families, celebrated over 20 marriages, and baptized nearly 70 infants.
- We began a monthly Encounter Night, providing intimate time with our Eucharistic Lord.
- We increased the opportunity for Eucharistic Adoration from 18 to 26 hours per week.
- We welcomed 17 new members to our parishes last Easter following their participation in our OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) program.
- We added 12 members to the St. Patrick's Adult Choir, bringing total membership to over 30.
- Our two children's choirs, the Jubilate Choir (Grades 3-5) and Con Spirito Singers (Grades 6-8) have a combined total of 40 members representing 11 schools. Both have been invited to sing at the opening Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria to kick off the two-year celebration of our diocese's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.
- We are working to build a small team to help us grow our evangelization efforts.

These are a small sampling of the amazing things God is doing in and through our parishes. We are actively planning the construction of a rectory for our priests and visiting seminarians and anticipate breaking ground in the Spring of 2025. Both parishes are debt-free and through your contributions, have been able to accumulate funds over the past four years. Thus, with the help of generous anchor gifts, we are planning to build this rectory without a capital campaign!

Our theme for this year, *Serving with the Heart of Christ*, is a reminder of our baptismal call to love and serve others as Jesus did. When we unite in support of our parishes with joyful and grateful hearts, we build a community rooted in faith, love, and service. I invite you to prayerfully discern how you are called to serve with the heart of Christ by renewing your commitment to financially supporting our parishes on Commitment Weekend, January 25 and 26, 2025.

God has blessed our parishes in many ways which has allowed us to plan for our future and provide places of solace for all those on the journey of faith. May we always strive to serve with the heart of Christ, emulating His selfless love and compassion to build up the Kingdom of God.

God bless,

Fr. Dustin Schultz  
Pastor



## Stay connected!

[www.stpatrickmerna.org](http://www.stpatrickmerna.org)  
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@saintpatrickmerna  
@stmarychurchindowns

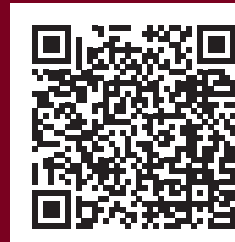


YouTube

@stpatrickmerna

## Discerning Your New Commitment

Fill out the enclosed Commitment Card  
and bring it to Mass next weekend  
or  
scan this QR code to complete your  
Commitment Card online.



Serving with the  
*Heart of Christ*

## Fulfilling Your New Commitment



To sign up for **Online Giving**  
or to update your current online  
gift, parishioners of either parish  
can visit

[www.stpatrickmerna.org/online-giving](http://www.stpatrickmerna.org/online-giving)



Use your **offertory envelope**  
and bring it to Mass  
or mail it to the parish office.



To learn more about making  
a **Planned Gift** to St. Patrick  
Church of Merna or St. Mary  
Church in Downs, contact  
the parish office at  
(309) 662-7361.



**St. Patrick Church of  
Merna & St. Mary  
Church in Downs**





## CELEBRATING

### the Sacraments

- Weekend and Weekday Masses
- Weekly Reconciliation times
- Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA)
- Marriage preparation and celebration
- Baptisms
- Priestly visits for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick



## FORMING

### Disciples of Christ

- Religious Education for Grades 1-8
- High School Youth Ministry
- Weekly Eucharistic Adoration
- Music Ministries
- Liturgical Minister Formation and Training
- Variety of Adult Faith Formation Opportunities



## SERVING

### Our Community

- Homebound Ministry
- Food Pantry Collection
- Funeral Luncheon Ministry
- Prayer Shawl Ministry
- St. Vincent de Paul Society
- Parishioners Helping Parishioners Ministry



## BUILDING UP

### the Kingdom of God

- Knights of Columbus and Ladies Auxiliary
- Monthly Adoration “Encounter Nights”
- “Faith at Home” Liturgical Living Events
- Parish Hospitality Directors and Ministers of Hospitality
- Art and Environment Ministry
- Prayer Network



## Celebrate the Sacraments with Us!

*(SPM: St. Patrick Church of Merna; SMD: St. Mary Church in Downs)*



**Weekend Masses:**  
 Saturday: 4:00 pm at SPM; 5:30 pm at SMD  
 Sunday: 7:30 am, 9:00 am, 11:00 am at SPM; 9:00 am at SMD

**Weekday Masses:**  
 Monday: 7:00 am at SPM  
 Tuesday: 8:30 am at SPM  
 Wednesday: 7:00 am at SPM; 5:30 pm at SMD  
 Thursday: 8:30 am at SPM  
 Friday: 7:00 am, 5:00 pm at SPM

**Adoration (all at St. Patrick Church of Merna):**  
 Tuesday: 4:30 pm - 8:30 pm  
 Wednesday: 7:30 am - 8:30 pm  
 Friday: 7:30 am - 4:30 pm

**Reconciliation:**  
 Friday at SPM: 12:00 pm - 4:00 pm  
 Saturday at SMD: following 5:30 pm Mass  
 Sunday at SMD: following 9:00 am Mass

*All are welcome to join us at either church location.*