

Meeting the Needs of the Community

Volunteers then and now



BY RACHEL NEWMAN

That's absolutely false," said Ashley Wyatt, Coordinator of Stewardship, Volunteers, and Membership at The Basilica. "We have an amazing staff, but there is no way staff alone can accomplish all the work of our ministries."

The Basilica has been leveraging volunteer support to rise to meet the needs of the community for the entirety of its 150-year history. During World War II, Basilica volunteers rolled strips of gauze to serve as bandages for troops to support the war effort. During our recent Great Recession,

Whether it's the beautiful liturgies or the welcoming community, every Basilica parishioner has something they love about our church. What may not be evident on the surface is that volunteers play a crucial role in bringing every aspect of The Basilica to life.

"I THINK there is an idea that because things always seem to run smoothly at The Basilica, we don't need help.

The Basilica expanded its Employment Ministry to assist those out-of-work or in career transition with skills like resumé writing and interviewing. These are just two examples of how The Basilica's faith community has lived out works of mercy in the Twin Cities and beyond.

"It is important for parishioners to get involved at The Basilica for a variety of reasons, but I think that the most important is that, at the end of the day, we are all called to service," Ashley said. "God has gifted us all with unique talents, strengths, and interests which have equipped us all to each serve in our own unique way. As a parish we need all gifts, talents, strengths, and interests to thrive."

The Basilica is blessed to have the support of more than 140 volunteer ministries of all kinds, from one-day commitments to ongoing involvement. Opportunities range from packing sandwiches for the St. Vincent de Paul ministry to assisting with faith formation for children and adults.

No matter what your passion is, there's a ministry for that. Love to knit? Join the prayer shawl group! Love a good party? Volunteer to help at events like The Basilica Block Party, Basilica Day, or Fall Festival.

"It's also not a lifelong commitment or something you need to get right on the first try," Ashley said. "If you try out a ministry and it's not a good fit, or you've served in one position for the past seven years and want to find something new, that's ok."

Read on for a highlight of one ministry that is currently making a big impact in advancing the church's mission.

IMMIGRANT SUPPORT MINISTRY

The Immigrant Support Ministry partners with Lutheran Social Services to accompany new refugee families during their first year in the United States. The Basilica helps pay for rent and other necessities during that first year, while members of the Immigrant Support Ministry provide additional social support. For example, members accompany these refugee families on shopping trips for winter clothing, help orientate them with the public transit system and resources like public libraries, and enjoy fun family outings to places like the Como Zoo.

For many members of the Immigrant Support Ministry, welcoming immigrants and refugees to this country has deepened their faith and has become a great spiritual calling. Betsy Ramsey joined the group in 2017 and has found lots of satisfaction and joy in being able to learn more about Minnesota's refugee population and form strong relationships with these refugee families and other parish members.

"By extending hospitality and service to refugees and asylees, we are helping to fulfill the mission of the Basilica," said Betsy. "It is an engaging ministry as it provides one-on-one interaction with

(Opposite) 1970s volunteer sandwich makers; (right) Betsy Ramsey, Immigrant Support Ministry volunteer

a diverse and international population. It continues to be a learning experience as we meet new refugee families."

Last year, the Immigrant Support Ministry also started supporting asylum seekers. An asylum seeker is a person who has come to this country because of persecution and human rights violations in their home country but who has not yet been legally recognized as a refugee by the United States.

The Immigrant Support Ministry partners with the Advocates for Human Rights, a Twin Cities-based legal advocacy group, to help support asylum seekers as they work to achieve legal status and a path to citizenship in this country.

For volunteers, the Immigrant Support Ministry provides a great opportunity to get to know people from around the world, learn about a new culture, and form meaningful and lasting connections with our new neighbors.

"When I joined the ministry in 2017, I helped accompany a Karenni family from Myanmar. I continue to stay in touch with the family, and I take them to their dental appointments," Betsy said. "It gives me great joy to see their children grow and watch the family become more and more settled in their new country."

Betsy is a fairly new member of The Basilica, but she was welcomed with open arms when she decided to join the group.

"If anyone wishes to become involved with the ministries at The Basilica, I would encourage them to do so," Betsy said. "It's easy to volunteer, and I have been welcomed enthusiastically. I continue to be amazed at how much is accomplished at The Basilica!"



PHOTO / NAE DESAIRE

GET INVOLVED

Visit mary.org to view a full listing of the ministries seeking volunteers. Overwhelmed by the number of choices? The Basilica offers a Gifts Leadership Team that helps parishioners identify their strengths and find where they can best leverage those gifts to support the church.

"There is absolutely a place for you in our ministries. Volunteering is easy and hopefully, a fulfilling and fun experience for all of our volunteer ministers. We have some incredibly amazing ministries, ministry coordinators, and volunteers who are all incredibly passionate about the work they do," Ashley said. "Their hard work makes a huge difference, not just in our parish, but in the surrounding communities as well." ✚

Rachel Newman has been an active volunteer and parishioner since 2017.