



PARISH
NEWSLETTER

January 2016

ST. JOSEPH PARISH

Amherst, Ohio

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Vincenzians Help Our Neighbors and Serve Our Lord

If you're wondering whether placing a few dollars in the green Mass envelope makes a difference, Ed Molnar of the Vincenzians can tell you for sure – it absolutely does.

"We are so grateful we have people who do put money in the green envelopes," Ed says. "We're very blessed that our parishioners have been very generous over the years. Without their donations, we can't do our mission. Without them, we don't exist, and can't do our work for those who need help."

Ed leads the Vincenzians here at St. Joseph. The ministry helps provide basic needs for our neighbors who are struggling to feed themselves, or keep themselves warm and sheltered.

The main function of the Vincenzians, and the largest form of assistance, is providing food to those who call in for help.

"We operate a small food pantry in the social hall," Ed says. "As the calls come in, we have a person who takes the messages off the phone. He then calls our members on a

rotating basis – we all take turns – and we get the name and number of the caller and return a call to them. We do an intake form that asks for the number in the family, the income level, their situation, and any dietary restrictions. We don't want to give them stuff they can't eat. Once we collect the information, we make arrangements to deliver food to them if they don't have transportation. If they do have it, they can come to the church foyer and get the food there."

There are also times when the group receives calls for help with utility payments, rent or clothing. Unfortunately, the ministry is not financially able to help with all these requests, as Ed points out.

"What we do is discuss each request at our meetings, and take a vote and decide, based on the greatest need, who we can financially help," he says. "When we do provide financial help, it doesn't go to the person, because there is no way to verify how it is spent."

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Hospitality: The Cornerstone of Stewardship

The dictionary defines *hospitality* as “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.”

A Christian worldview can refer to hospitality as “Christian kindness.”

We see the effects of hospitality — or the lack thereof — time and time again throughout the Bible. Christ speaks of hospitality in Matthew’s Gospel when He says, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (25:35). The Old Testament told of the Israelites, as they wandered the desert for 40 years in search of hospitable environs. Even the Holy Family spent ample time searching for shelter before the birth of our Lord.

It is safe to say that hospitality is, and most likely has always been, of great importance to people everywhere. Modern hotels and hostels often use the image of a pineapple to advertise their special brand of hospitality. There’s no doubt that in ancient times, the distant lights of an inn or tavern struck a chord of hope within weary travelers’ hearts.

Indeed, hospitality’s meaning has not diminished at all over the years, decades and millennia.

Christians view the presence of hospitality as meaning the difference between calling others “guests” and “strangers.” Guests are welcomed with open arms and warm smiles, but strangers aren’t. Guests feel the genuine love present in a

hearty welcome, but strangers don’t. Guests often return for second or third visits, while strangers don’t.

As a parish, do we find ourselves surrounded by guests, or burdened by strangers?

Hospitality is, in many respects, a mindset. The same person may be treated as guest at the church just down the road, but as a stranger here.

Matthew’s Gospel tells of Christ as he reveals a profound truth about hospitality: “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.” That is, “I used to be a stranger, but you fixed that when you welcomed me.” It’s a classic example of before-and-after. All it took was a change of heart.

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Stewardship holds hospitality as an immensely important concept. Remember the “three Ts” of stewardship — time, talent and treasure? Well, there are also “four Ps,” the four pillars of stewardship — hospitality, prayer, formation and service. Hospitality is mentioned first. Why? If not for hospitality, none of the other pillars will

ever take hold. Hospitality is the cornerstone of stewardship, because it opens the door to a person’s heart and allows them to receive joy, grace and love.

Hospitality must become second nature, if stewardship is to truly take hold within a parish. So when strangers visit our parish, welcome them as guests. Perhaps one day, they’ll pay us a second visit.

A Letter from Our Pastor

Let Us Receive and Share God's Gift of Mercy

Dear Members of our St. Joseph Parish Family,

How has God been merciful to you? Pope Francis has given us this Holy Year of Mercy that began December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. And it will conclude on November 20, the Feast of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

In his announcement proclaiming this Holy Year, the Holy Father stated, "It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective."

This Holy Year calls each of us to seek forgiveness from the Lord. And in its spirit, we also need to make an effort to forgive others. Mercy is, after all, a two-way street. We receive it, but we must also show it. During this first month of the New Year when we make resolutions, let us each resolve to be especially merciful.

This, of course, is not always easy, and sometimes may not even be convenient. Being merciful requires us to look beyond the emotion and self-centeredness that may lead us to be angry and unforgiving. Soon after becoming pope, an interviewer asked Pope Francis to describe himself, and

he immediately answered, "A sinner." And then he quickly added, "who has been looked upon by the face of mercy."

Each of us can recall when we have been "looked upon by the face of mercy." This needs to be our motivation for showing to others what we have received. Also, in his letter announcing this Holy Year, the pope called us to have a "deep desire for true

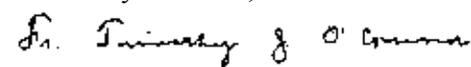
conversion." This is what stewardship is all about – turning from being self-centered to being God-centered. Stewardship as a way of life asks us to recognize and share our many gifts. To do this effectively from the heart requires a conversion on our part. And this New Year offers us lots of opportunities.

Stewardship always seems to come back to the concept of "love for one another." One of the misnomers – and a conclusion many have drawn from the Year of Mercy – is that God's essential characteristic is mercy. Rather, the Lord's fundamental attribute is love. Mercy is what love looks like when we show it.

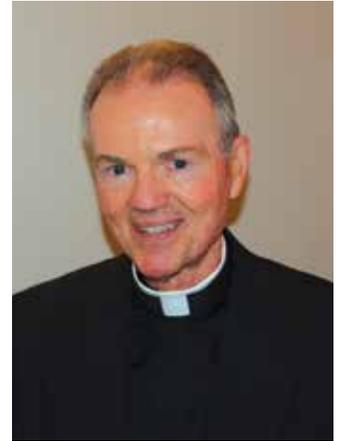
And so I ask you: how has God been merciful to you? How have others been merciful to you? How merciful are you to others? Where is God asking you to be merciful?

"The Lord is kind and merciful," Psalm 103 tells us. Let us receive and share God's gift of mercy during this Holy Year of grace.

Gratefully in Christ,



Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,
Pastor



Celebrating the Importance of Catholic Education *Catholic Schools Week*

The Christmas decorations may have been put away, and we've already celebrated the new year. Could there be anything else we might look forward to this winter? In fact, there is – our St. Joseph School students are preparing to celebrate something very special!

Each year in January, Catholic schools around the country join together to celebrate Catholic Schools Week. The National Catholic Education Association chooses a theme each year, and dedicates each day during the week to honoring an aspect of the Catholic School community. And here at St. Joseph School, our students, faculty and staff look forward to Catholic Schools Week all year!

“The main purpose of Catholic Schools Week is to remind our students and our families that because of our Catholic faith, we are a different kind of school,” says Amy Makruski, our Assistant Principal and the Chairperson for this year's Catholic Schools Week celebration. “We highlight the different aspects of our Catholic school community throughout the week. These are things we appreciate and focus on all year long, but this week really reminds the students that we are special and our faith is what makes us special.”

The overall theme for Catholic Schools Week – which runs this year from Sunday, Jan. 31 through Saturday, Feb. 6 – is “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.” Each day is dedicated to honoring a facet of our school community, and events are planned throughout the week to help us focus on these themes:

- Sunday – *In Our Parish*
- Monday – *In Our Community*
- Tuesday – *In Our Students*
- Wednesday – *In Our Nation*
- Thursday – *In Our Vocations*
- Friday – *In Our Faculty, Staff and Volunteers*
- Saturday – *In Our Families*



A student dresses as Rosa Parks during last year's presentation

“To start the week, we have the student-led Mass on Sunday for the parish,” Mrs. Makruski says. “They do everything from the readings, taking up the gifts, and praying the petitions, and the whole rest of the school sings in the choir. It's beautiful!”

While many of the events throughout the week are purely for fun – like the “Socks and Shades” day or the whole-school bowling field trip at the end of the week – the real focus of all Catholic Schools Week activities is to reinforce the importance of Catholic education.

“It's important to recognize the many benefits of a Catholic education,” Mrs. Makruski says. “It provides students with a full immersion into their faith every day. In everything we do, we are always going back to our Catholic values. This year for our focus on community, we're focusing specifically on our St. Joseph School community. Each class will display an ‘Acts of Kindness’ or ‘Acts of Service’ board outside their class. The goal is that during the week, the students will be doing acts of kindness or acts of service, and when they do, they write them down and tape them on the board. Students will be putting together First Responder survival kits to be distributed to EMS, police and first responders in our community, and there will be other events during the week designed to help the children to learn about how they can serve others and live out their faith every day.”

There will be an Open House, open to parishioners and prospective families, on Jan. 28 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. for those interested in learning more about St. Joseph School and all that it has to offer. If you would like more information on Catholic Schools Week at St. Joseph School, or to find out how you can get involved, please contact the school office at 440-988-4244.

“The Stimulus for Stewardship at St. Joseph” *Our St. Joseph Stewardship Council*

When the Lord calls us to discipleship, we are also called to stewardship, as Stewardship Council Chair Jim Pecchio reminds us.

“I think that those two things, along with evangelization, go hand-in-hand,” says Jim, a parishioner for over 30 years and member of the Stewardship Council for 10 years. “I became involved initially, and I continue to be involved because I love this parish, and I also love God, and I appreciate that I need to do my part for the parish to be successful, and for God to be a presence here at St. Joseph.”

Council member Pam Belskis also notes that stewardship is “always a work in progress.”

“However, we have grown in stewardship in leaps and bounds here,” she says. “As members of the Council we realize that we are gifted; we are enriched. Our role is to enrich the parish.”

The late Archbishop Thomas Murphy of Seattle, who was the original Chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Stewardship Committee, had this to say about the need and importance of such councils and groups: “An active, praying stewardship council is absolutely critical to a parish for the ongoing education and commitment of parishioners to the stewardship

of time, talent, and treasure. Members need to be spiritually motivated, exemplify stewardship in their own lives, and envision where stewardship can take the parish.”

As Jim notes, our Stewardship Council is charged with “being the stimulus for stewardship at St. Joseph.”



Jim Pecchio and Pam Belskis have been on the parish Stewardship Committee since it was first established.

“We coordinate stewardship renewals and oversee the entire stewardship effort,” he says. “We need to provide the means for people to share time, talent and treasure.”

“I feel like the Council discerns how each of us as members of the Council and as stewards should participate in the stewardship endeavor here in our parish,” Pam adds. “Then we need to transmit to the people how they

might live out stewardship as an active participant.”

The Stewardship Council meets with Fr. Tim on a monthly basis. Jim and Father discuss and establish an agenda for each meeting.

“I am doing God’s work – knowing that helps me get more out of what I do,” Jim says. “Everyone in the parish has something to offer. We have tried to communicate to them that everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God. Once we recognize and accept that, we have to grow those gifts and share them with God and others in thanksgiving. What are we asking? We are encouraging people to give at least an hour a month outside of normal Mass attendance, or as much as you can and are willing to give. We have some 60 ministries here with almost 50 ministry leaders. Each person should be able to

find a place where he or she can participate and share of themselves.”

“I know Jim used the word ‘discipleship’ in relation to stewardship,” Pam adds. “That idea can be a bit overwhelming, but that is exactly what Jesus tells us we are supposed to do. This parish would not be the great place it is without a lot of people being willing to step forward and be an active part of it.”

If you would like more information on stewardship, our parish ministries or the Stewardship Council itself, please contact Jim Pecchio at 330-631-9948.

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Fr. Timothy O'Connor, Pastor
Father Michael Denk, Parochial Vicar

Address Service Requested

Liturgy Schedule

Mass:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday - 9:00 a.m.
Tuesday - 8:00 a.m. at Nativity of the BVM Parish
Thursday - 7:00 p.m.
Saturday - Vigil 4:00 p.m.
Sunday - 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m.

Confession:

Thursday - Individual Reconciliation 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Saturday - Individual Reconciliation 11:00 a.m. - noon

Vincentians *continued from front cover*

The Vincentians contact the landlord, in the case of rent, and verify what is needed. If a payment is to be made, it is made directly to the landlord. The same procedure is used to pay utility bills. Most of the time in the rent or utility cases, the society does not pay the entire rent or utility bill.

“We do a negotiation and see if the person can’t get a lower rate, or if the person can go half-and-half,” Ed says. “We try to be good stewards to the ministry.”

Besides the financial help from the green envelopes, about one-third of the food distributed is directly donated to a box in the church vestibule, Ed says. Several times a year, donations are received from the school or another parish organization.

“But the other two-thirds comes from the green envelopes,” Ed says.

The 16 members of the Vincentians meet every other Monday and when necessary during special times of need, especially during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday



seasons. The group opens with a prayer, and has readings, usually on works of charity, and follows with a discussion.

“We get a chance to hear the stories of the people requesting help, and it makes you grateful for all each of us have,” Ed says. “We’re not in their situation. When we interact with them, we tell each other, this is our ministry. Jesus said, ‘Whatever you do to the least, you do to me.’ I always remind myself what I’m doing is directly for the Lord.”

New members are welcome! If you would like to learn more about the Vincentians here at St. Joseph, please contact Ed Molnar at 440-320-0120.