



# ST. JOSEPH PARISH

## NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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**SEPTEMBER 2024**

## Meet Parishioner **Keith Gutierrez** *A Life Changed by Embracing the Catholic Faith and Stewardship*

There's a real beauty to being raised in the Catholic Church and continuing to practice the faith from childhood to adulthood. But there is also beauty in finding the Catholic faith as an adult and going through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process, or RCIA. Keith Gutierrez spent most of his life in the Protestant faith and went through the RCIA process here in 2013, fully entering into the Catholic faith in 2014.

Keith's love for learning about the faith didn't end when he became Catholic — it continues to this day. Keith's wife, Tiffany, grew up Catholic. When the couple married, Keith didn't have a desire to learn about Catholicism but agreed to raise their twin girls in the Catholic faith. They attended Mass together as a family. As the twins started Parish School of Religion classes, a few things happened that made Keith want to explore the faith.

"I just decided that I was going to learn what this Catholicism thing was all about," he says.

Keith had been reading the book *Best Life Ever*, written by Jim Rohn. This book focused on four areas — strengthening the mind, and



*The Gutierrez family — (from left) MacKenzie, Tiffany, Keith, and Madison with family dog, Wembley*

growing physically, financially, and spiritually stronger. Keith was curious about growing spiritually stronger, which was another reason he decided to delve into the Catholic faith. This led him to RCIA, which changed his life.

"I felt so at home there," Keith says. "I connected with everyone. It was one of the most incredible times of my life."

The RCIA process initially seemed like

*continued on page 5*



# STEWARDSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE

## *The Job of a Grateful Steward*

When we think of stewardship, we tend to think of it only in terms of what we do within the life of our parish or the broader Church. We give of our time, our talent and our treasure to build the Church, to serve the parish family, and to give glory to God.

But stewardship extends far beyond our faith community. Being good stewards involves every aspect of our lives. So when we say we are called to live a stewardship way of life, we are called to live it at church, at home, in the community, and even at work.

How can we live out stewardship at work? We spend much of our day at work, and it is there that we earn our treasure by the use of our talents. Indeed, living as a Christian steward should indeed shape who we are in the workplace and guide us in how we do our jobs.

As Christ's disciples, everything we do should glorify Him — how we conduct ourselves, how we speak, how we interact with co-workers or clients. What's more, the talents we use to do our jobs come from God, so in an effort to glorify Him, we must not settle for simply “getting the job done” and taking home the paycheck. Rather, as stewards, we must do our jobs

— whether we are a CEO or an entry-level employee — to the best of our ability, and we must thank the Lord for the opportunity. Without the Lord and His immeasurable generosity, we would have no time to do anything, no talents with which to make a living, and no treasure to bring home.

Furthermore, when we work with the attitude of a grateful steward, not only do we grow stronger in our commitment to Christ and our recognition that all good things come from Him, but we also call and inspire others to do the same.

Imagine you worked with a person who was always joyfully doing his job, a person who was obviously grateful to do his work, no matter how stressful the tasks at hand. Most of us would be drawn to this person. We would wonder how, even when things get particularly tough, there is always a sense of peace, joy and gratefulness about him.

As Catholic stewards, we all should strive to be that person. Living our work lives with attitudes of gratitude will undoubtedly call others to question what it is that makes us so grateful and so deeply happy, giving us the opportunity to preach the Gospel and to preach stewardship to others — through our words and through our example.

*A Letter from Our Pastor*

## Welcome to All That the Fall Season Has to Offer



Dear Members of St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes,

**F**or many people, when Labor Day rolls around, it signals time “to get back to normal again.” And there is truth to this, as the opening of school calls for “getting back to a solid routine.”

In June our St. Joseph and Nativity Parishes marked our nine-year anniversary of our journey in growing as “one family in Christ with two addresses/locations and one priest.” Our relationships within and between our two parishes are bearing much fruit and paving the way for a bright future together.

Our St. Joseph Day School serves both of our parishes and our communities. Our principal is Mrs. Amy Makruski and we look forward to an exciting year of Catholic education with our STEM School designation by the State of Ohio. STEM stands for “Science, Technology, Engineering and Math,” helping our students be prepared for this 21st century and its opportunities.

Our St. Joseph Day School is a real gem and adds so much value to our lives. It has a splendid history and a promising future — and is ever fresh in its newness of life. Please check out

what is going on in our school through its website ([sjsamherst.org](http://sjsamherst.org)) or by calling the school office (440-988-4244) for a tour and for more information. We welcome your inquiries and new school families.

Our joint Parish School of Religion (PSR) program for our children in public schools takes place on Wednesday evenings this school year. It is under the leadership of our PSR Principal, Mrs. Angie Eads. Mrs. Eads is also the STEM Coach in our St. Joseph Day School. An enriching year of faith formation lies ahead for us in our Parish School of Religion.

Our St. Joseph Preschool is designated with a five-star “Step Up to Quality” rating from the State of Ohio. This is the top rating and it gives us lots of reasons to be proud of and grateful for our preschool program and its leadership.

We welcome Mrs. Rachel MacDonald as our new Director of Youth Activities for the young people of our parishes. You will be hearing and seeing more of Rachel and her team, with some bright new offerings for our youth in seventh through 12th grades.

The music and performing arts and media ministries continue to grow and develop under the leadership of Christina Dupre, our St. Joseph Worship and Liturgy Coordinator and her team. Stay tuned for more wonderful news and opportunities.

We look forward to welcoming new candidates to our Catholic family in the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA, formerly known as RCIA) which begins this fall. Anyone who is interested in examining our Catholic faith and life is welcome to participate. Please watch the Sunday bulletins and parish website for dates and times.

Welcome to September and all that this fall season has to offer. And may your routines, re-established and newly-established, bring you closer to God and to each other in our St. Joseph and Nativity Parish families.

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor".

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,  
Pastor

# *Grief Recovery Ministry* Addressing Essential Long-Term Needs for Those Still Dealing With Loss

**P**am Waite has over 40 years of experience in psychiatric-mental health nursing. This included work in areas of loss, grief, and grief recovery. In May 2024, Pam approached Fr. Tim about starting a Grief Recovery Ministry that will be open to parishioners from St. Joseph and Nativity. The ministry will be based on the book and program called *Grief Recovery Handbook*, which was developed by John James and Frank Cherry.

The new ministry is not a grief support group, in terms of being for someone who is newly grieving. Rather, this ministry will serve those who suffered a loss a year or more prior and are still struggling with grief as though the loss just occurred.

“Grief and grieving is a normal emotional response to loss,” Pam says. “In some instances, this grief can become prolonged and complicated and last for a year or longer. A person becomes unable to find joy in life and unresolved grief can lead to more serious emotional and physical issues. The Grief Recovery program is based on a 12-step model

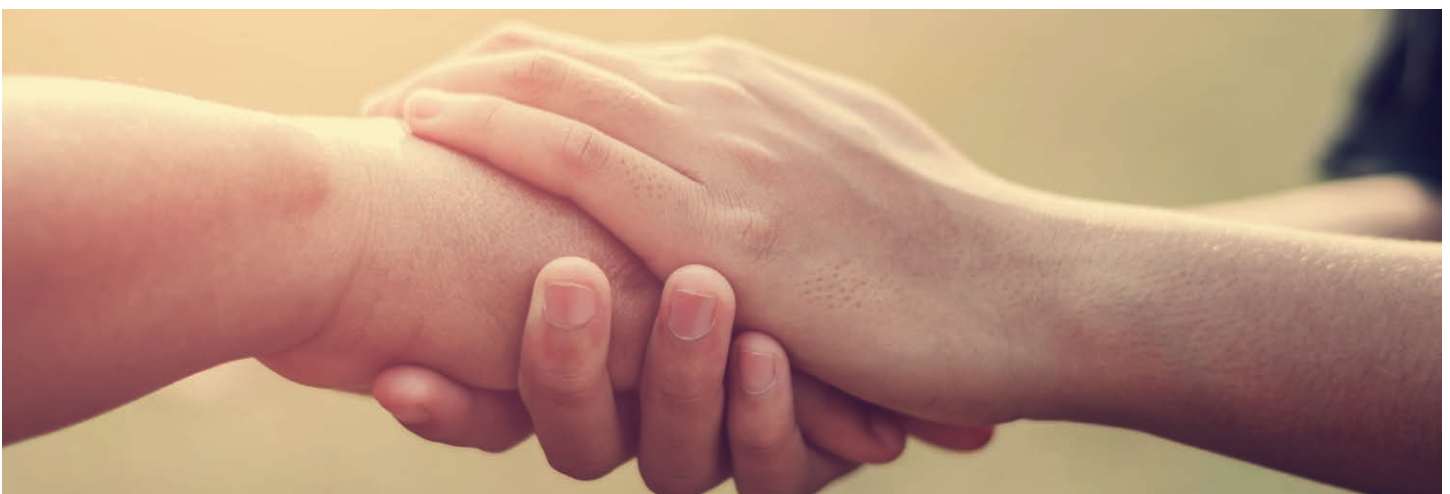
and leads griever through a process by which they can find closure and some sense of relief.”

Pam has seen a rise in people who struggle with complicated grief since COVID. There were a lot of restrictions put into place that made it difficult for people to find closure during this time, and as a result, they are still carrying around that grief. This is part of the reason why Pam has decided to start this ministry.

Currently, Pam is facilitating the start-up of this ministry, with the introductory meeting taking place on Monday, Sept. 16, from 3:30 to 5 p.m. at St. Joseph Social Hall. During this meeting, Pam will explain how the ministry will work and will ask participants to find a partner. Most of the work for this ministry will be done partner-to-partner, with larger group meetings on Mondays for about one to one and a half hours.

“This process is directed at any type of loss, not just loss through death,” Pam says. “It could be loss due to a loss of career, retirement, divorce or split in any relationship, loss of health, etc.”

**If you have questions about the Grief Recovery Ministry, contact Pam Waite at 440-309-7661 and leave a message**



## ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM:

### *A Doctor in the Catholic Faith*

St. John Chrysostom, meaning “golden mouth” in Greek, is a revered figure in the Catholic Church, commemorated on his feast day each September. Born in Antioch around 347 AD, he became the Archbishop of Constantinople and was known for his eloquent sermons and theological writings. Chrysostom’s commitment to social justice is highlighted by his famous words, “The poor do not need charity, they need justice,” reflecting his advocacy for the marginalized and critique of the wealthy’s excesses.

His contributions to liturgical reforms, particularly the Divine



Liturgy of the Eastern Church, have left a lasting impact on both Eastern and Western liturgical practices. His homilies, especially on the Gospel of Matthew, continue to offer profound spiritual insights, making complex theology accessible to all.

Celebrating St. John Chrysostom’s feast day on Sept. 13 allows Catholics to reflect on his life and teachings, emphasizing the importance of service to God and others. His legacy of social justice, theological wisdom, and pastoral care remains a source of inspiration, challenging Catholics to live their faith with love and compassion.

## Meet Parishioner Keith Gutierrez *continued from front cover*

it would be long and tedious for Keith — but he found it to be just the opposite.

“It was so awesome and amazing,” he says.

Now, Keith is in his 10th year serving on the RCIA team.

“RCIA has been so rewarding,” he says. “It’s also been a great way to get to know people.”

RCIA opened up important new doors for Keith, and he wanted to get involved as much as possible. Keith serves as a lector and has helped with the Men’s Renewal Team. He is also involved with the Men’s Group and is on the board of The Prodigal Father ([www.theprodigalfather.org](http://www.theprodigalfather.org)). He uses his digital marketing skills for the organization’s website and digital presence.

“The more you put in, the more you get out of it,”

Keith says. “It’s great being a member of the parish. It’s hard to put into words what it means to me.”

Keith wants to thank Tiffany for supporting his faith and ministry involvement.

“I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for my wife and her support through the whole journey,” he says. “She never pressured me to become Catholic. I sought it out on my own with her support.”

If you’re considering becoming Catholic, take that first step and look into RCIA, like Keith did. It could change your life!

“Open yourself up,” he says. “Being willing to learn and have an open mind through the process. It’s difficult to get anywhere if you don’t take that first step.”

# St. Joseph Parish School Community Looks



When reflecting on the responsibilities of parenthood, we can look to Scripture for concise guidance, such as Proverbs 22:6 — “Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it.” As the circle of influence extends beyond the home, a true mission-driven Catholic school is an excellent resource for parents as they educate their children.

An education at St. Joseph Parish School — focused on learning about the Glory of God and the truth and beauty He instilled in our faith — is a gift that parents can offer their children. As a parish, supporting our Catholic school is an important way that we evangelize and support the next generation.

“By having a school as a part of the parish, we are able to reach and evangelize our Catholic faith to our youngest parishioners at a time in their life when they are sponges and absorb so much about their faith,” says Amy Makruski, principal of St. Joseph Parish School. “These early experiences help to create a lifelong journey with Jesus, which is so important. We are also able to reach families and adults through these children and help them to be in touch with parts of their own faith journeys that have perhaps been forgotten.”

The mission of St. Joseph Parish School is to provide an education immersed in the faith and to prepare children for the world, in order to help them reach their maximum potential. The dedicated teachers, staff, and supporters of our school all work very hard to do just that. As we head into a new school year, the staff are excited to open the doors to welcome the children once again.

“A new year always brings new hope and possibilities,” Mrs. Makruski says. “It feels like a fresh start with a lightness that is unique to the beginning of the year. After some time apart, it feels good to be back together and to support each other as the year begins, for both students and staff.”

There are a few new and exciting things taking place this year. Joy Nagy will be moving from her role as first-grade aide to that of school secretary. There will be new faces in the building in the first grade, third grade, fifth grade, and seventh grade.

Additionally, thanks to the generosity of anonymous donors, the bathrooms near the music and art rooms have been completely renovated and new flooring has been installed in part of the building as well. These upgrades are wonderful additions to our school and



## Forward to Start of a Great New Year

another way that they create a great learning environment for the children.

The school has two big evaluations coming up this year — the Ohio Catholic Schools Accrediting Association (OCSAA) and the STEM accreditation. The OCSAA re-accreditation takes place every six years to ensure that the school is meeting both the standards of a chartered non-public school and all of the Catholic identity requirements. The STEM accreditation, taking place every five years, is a rigorous process that ensures the school is meeting the standards required by state law.

“It is a challenge and an honor to have earned the STEM designation,” Mrs. Makruski says. “We are looking forward to having that renewed and validating the hard work that takes place at our school each day.”

One way that the school uses this STEM designation is through community partners.

“These partners include businesses or corporations that bring an authentic problem to our students and ask them to help solve it using design cycle thinking,” Mrs. Makruski says. “They can also be someone who can share knowledge about STEM careers and local opportunities for STEM experiences with our students.”

An important part of maintaining the Catholic identity of the school is through the strong relationship bond that exists between the parish and the school. During the school year, the students attend the 9 a.m. daily Mass on Fridays. The students lead the Mass with first through eighth-grade students taking turns doing the readings and petitions, bringing up the gifts, altar serving, and singing in the choir. Parishioners are encouraged to attend this Mass with the students.

“This is one of the times that we know our whole school community will be together and that we will get to actively practice our faith with parishioners,” Mrs. Makruski says. “Fr. Tim is very supportive of the students leading the Mass and



supports the value that playing a role in the Mass can have for young children. This is one of our favorite school ministries.”

Please continue to keep the school, its staff, and students in your prayers as we start the new school year. The support of the parish is vital to the parish operating well and serving not only the children but also God.

“I am so grateful for everyone who makes it possible to open and operate St. Joseph Parish School each year,” Mrs. Makruski says. “It is no small task to have everything line up to make a school successful. There are so many people working in the background that will never be seen, as well as the faces you see each day that contribute to the daily school operations. One of our root beliefs at SJS is that ‘excellence happens on purpose’ and this can be seen in the coming together of everyone to create this most important ministry for our parish.”

**Visit [sjsamherst.org](http://sjsamherst.org) to learn more about St. Joseph Parish School.**



## Drawing From the Traditions of *Spirituality* in Our Catholic Church

If you knew that the person who loves you most in the world was longing to spend some time with you, would you want to meet with them? What if this person was also the only one capable of saving your soul for all eternity, not to mention blessing you abundantly on earth?

It would seem ridiculous to say “no” to getting to know them just a little better, right?

That being said, you may wonder how you can best go about getting to know this particular person. To do just that, as Catholics, it is important that we seek out and read things from our Catholic Christian tradition — immersing ourselves in the spiritual works of those who have found Christ in a very deep way in accordance with the Church. Indeed, there are many great saints who have flowered out of the community of believers, and we can turn to them to get to know God better.

Over the centuries, the Catholic Church has been profoundly touched, enriched and enlightened by spiritual masters whose works are powerful enough to convert souls. It is also important to recognize that the spiritual traditions in the Church express many of the same ideas but in different ways, bearing witness to the ineffable, mosaic-like beauty of Catholicism.

St. Benedict began the first formal monastic tradition in the western Catholic Church, basing it on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. To this day, Benedictine spirituality is centered around the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, simplicity and the appreciation of the Holy Eucharist.

The Franciscan spiritual tradition began with St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. These saints brought about the Counter-Reformation that still marks the Church with splendor today. St. Francis is widely known for his Gospel-centered living, love of poverty, devotion to Christ Crucified, and mercy for

all men and creatures. *The Life of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Bonaventure, as well as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* both help one to learn more about this magnificent saint.

Similar to St. Francis, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila also sparked a critical reformation within the Carmelite Order, which later influenced the entire Church in a positive way. Carmelite spirituality is a desert spirituality, which bases itself on silence, deep contemplative prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, outstanding penance, and various traditional Catholic devotions. *The Story of a Soul*, which is the autobiography of renowned Carmelite St. Therese of Lisieux, the *Autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila*, and the works of St. John of the Cross all capture the essence of Carmelite spirituality.

Furthermore, Salesian spirituality stems from the great life and work of St. Francis de Sales. *The Introduction to the Devout Life* is a fantastic primer for those desiring to enter more profoundly into a life of union with Christ.

Ignatian spirituality is known for educating people on the discernment of spirits. *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, as well as *The Discernment of Spirits* by Fr. Timothy Gallagher are excellent resources for learning more about this powerful spiritual tradition.

Last but not least, *The Fulfillment of All Desire* by Ralph Martin is modern-day spiritual work that can help those who are seeking Christ, to find Him.

The rich variety of spiritual traditions we have in the Catholic Church are an indication of how diverse our Church is. There are so many different ways of following Christ and praying — and to do so, we can draw from the spiritual “greats.” But of course, we must always pray in the way that God is leading us, in a way that we can truly encounter God in conversation.



## *What's Coming Next*

By NATHAN FRANKART, Seminarian

**P**ease of Christ to you! Well, it's the start of yet another year of formation. (I mean honestly, what else is there to do here?)

Please know I say that facetiously — there is a lot to know, learn, and experience before ministry as an ordained clergy member of the Church. In fact, let's talk about one of those concepts, and it will give you a sense of what I will be writing about over these next few months.

One of the most important concepts that I have written about previously would be the "*lex orandi*" principle. That is the beginning of a Latin phrase that is translated roughly as "Our prayers become our beliefs, and our beliefs become our way of life." So the Church places a high level of importance on the way it prays as a fundamental building block of Christian living. Through our prayers, yes we are asking God for His grace, intercession, and presence, and also giving ourselves the chance to better shape our own beliefs about ourselves, the world, and each other.

And contained within the liturgy of the Mass are all kinds of prayers — supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, you name it. But of all these prayers and text contained in all the different kinds of Masses, I wanted to take a deep dive on one particular section that can be found in the ordination rite for transitional deacons.

There is a series of promises that I hope to make this coming April as a part of my ordination to the transitional diaconate. They will exemplify the "*lex orandi*" principle to the fullest extent. The bishop will ask a series of questions concerning the life I will live as a transitional deacon — that is, until I am a priest. Over the next few months I will detail what they are here in these articles, and give you a quick reflection on each of them!

I know so many of you have been excited for me these last six years. I can say with confidence that I am getting excited with you. I pray that through this series will prepare you and myself for ordination that should come in April!

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This newsletter brought to you by the Catholic Communities of:

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## Fr. Tim O'Connor Serving Both Parishes

### Mass:

Monday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*

Tuesday, 8:00 a.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*

Thursday, 7:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

Friday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*

Saturday, 4:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

5:30 p.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*

Sunday, 8:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

### Confession at St. Joseph:

Thursday - Individual Reconciliation 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

Saturday - Individual Reconciliation 11:00 a.m. - noon

### Eucharistic Adoration (Chapel) at Nativity of the BVM:

Monday-Friday 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

## Upcoming Activities and Events

### Labor Day Mass

Monday, Sept. 2 — 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Cemetery, weather per-  
mitting (Will be at Nativity Parish in  
the event of bad weather)  
NO SCHOOL  
PARISH OFFICES CLOSED

### Hospitality Tuesday

Tuesday, Sept. 3 — 8:30 a.m., Na-  
tivity Church (following 8 a.m. Mass)

### First day of Preschool for 3-year- old, two-day program and 4-year-old, three-day program

Tuesday, Sept. 3 — 12:15-2:45 p.m.

### Altar and Rosary Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 3 — 6:30 p.m.,  
Nativity Parish Hall

### First day of Preschool for 4yr old 5-day program

Wednesday, Sept. 4 — 8:30-11 a.m.

### First Friday Rosary

Friday, Sept. 6 — 11 a.m., Nativity Church,  
refreshments to follow in the hall

### First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, Sept. 7 — 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Church

### Annual Parish Retreat

Saturday, Sept. 7 — 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall

### Pre-Baptism Class

Wednesday, Sept. 11 — 7 p.m.,  
St. Joseph School

### St. Joseph Parish Picnic

Sunday, Sept. 15 — 12 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall

### Knights of Columbus Reverse Raffle/Clambake

Saturday, Sept. 21 — 6 p.m.,  
Amherst Eagles on Milan Ave.

### Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, Sept. 24 — 7 p.m., School MPR

### OCIA (formerly RCIA) Informa- tion Night

Monday, Sept. 30 — 7 p.m.,  
Nativity Parish Hall

### Men's Group

Tuesday, Sept. 3 and 17 — 7 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall

### Vincentians Meeting

Thursday, Sept. 5 and 19 — 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Conference Room

### Holy Ground Youth Group

Sunday, Sept. 8 and 29 — 6 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall  
(Event begins with 5 p.m. Mass —  
meet near the choir prior to Mass)

### Grief Recovery Program

Monday, Sept. 16, 23, 30 — 3:30 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall

### Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesday and Thursdays in Septem-  
ber — 9:30 a.m., Mill Hollow Park