

Saint Francis Solanus



MARCH 2018

Making Christ the Center of the Family **Meet Gerald and Peggy Koettters**

Our habits create our character, and Gerald Koettters credits his parents and upbringing for the fact there's now nothing he would rather do on a Sunday morning than go to Mass.

"Really, the faith was embedded in my life when I was a child," Gerald says. "It was implanted in us through habits like praying at meals and before bedtime. We've likewise given the faith to our children and watched it blossom."

Gerald and Peggy Koettters came "home" to St. Francis in 2008, after attending St. Joseph for 36 years.

"I went to St. Francis as a young girl," Peggy says. "That's where we were married 42 years ago, and two of our five children live in Quincy."

"Truly blessed" is how Gerald and Peggy describe feeling about their Catholic upbringing. They observed how involved their parents were, and then they took small steps to be active parish members. Gerald even began serving a lector in high school.

After serving at St. Joseph for years, Gerald and Peggy found ways to transfer their involvement to St. Francis when they returned. They were soon active as liturgical ministers and offered to help with the Parish Picnic, something they've always enjoyed doing together.

"Gerald has always served as a lector, and I've been a Eucharistic Minister," Peggy says. "I can't think of anything more special than giving the Body and Blood of Christ to others."

The Koettters children were altar servers and sang in the choir. As Gerald and Peggy were involved in Cursillo, their children were engaged in Teens Encountering Christ, or TEC.



Peggy and Gerald Koettters

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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” (Matthew 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 is 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 wel-

come, 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.

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 a stranger visits our parish, welcome them as a guest. Perhaps one day, they’ll pay us a second visit.

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A Letter From Our Pastor

March — A Time to Take a Close Look at the Examples We Follow

Dear Parishioners,

This month of March is a significant time for us as Catholics. We are in the midst of Lent, and then we celebrate Holy Week, with Easter occurring just after the end of the month, on April 1. In addition, many may point to the month of March as a time we celebrate the Irish on March 17, the Feast of St. Patrick.

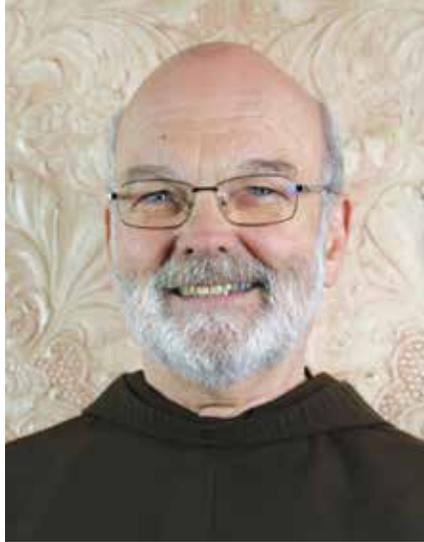
However, two days after that is the Feast of St. Joseph on March 19 — and for many in the world, that is more important. St. Joseph was, of course, the husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the foster father of Jesus Christ.

Everything we know about Joseph comes to us from Holy Scripture. It might be said that, in order to understand him completely, we must read between the lines. The Catholic Church has designated the month of March as the month of St. Joseph. Yet, there is not a single example of Joseph saying something that can be quoted in the Bible. We can assume he was a man of few words — in turn, we may consider that he speaks to us through his actions. It is also clear that he was a humble man. Many point to him as an example of what a good father is and should be.

St. Joseph provides an example to all of us. Think of some of his strengths — he was obedient; he put his own needs aside to assure that Jesus and Mary were cared for; he surely trusted in God, even when God's will may not have made complete sense to him.

Those traits give each of us some idea of what we need to do in life. Do we only embrace those parts of our faith that make sense to us or that we find agreeable? Do we put the needs of others before our own? Our lives are filled with crosses and challenges, but do we trust in the Lord as Joseph did? Do our actions show us to be good Catholics and Christians? What kinds of examples are we setting?

Lent and Easter are times for us to look closely at



the answers to these questions. Joseph was a carpenter, a worker — and he obviously was not a man of wealth or prestige. By the time Jesus' public ministry begins, Joseph seems to disappear. Nevertheless, he was a man of royal origins. When St. Luke introduces him to us in Luke 1, he calls him "Joseph, of the house of David."

All of this leads us to know and believe that Joseph was someone we would classify as a "good steward." Who do we look up to? Do we seek to be like people who are like Joseph, or are our models more worldly and more successful in the eyes of others?

St. Joseph is a wonderful example for us. We all need to be like him in many, many ways.

God bless you during this holy time.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, O.F.M." with a flourish at the end.

Fr. Don Blaeser, O.F.M.

Pastor

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Joyfully Preparing You at St. Francis So



Jennifer Spohr and teacher aide Barb Peters take the preschoolers on field trips.

At the heart of the Church are our children, and the gift of Catholic education that guides them in the formation of their faith is a blessing. It takes time and talent to teach young minds — especially as we prepare our younger children for school. And for Mrs. Jennifer Spohr, teacher and Director of the St. Francis Solanus Preschool, educating our youngest students is a fulfilling and enjoyable way to serve both God and the parish.

While Mrs. Spohr has been teaching preschoolers at the St. Francis Solanus School since August 2015, she has several important ties with the school — she was a student teacher there, and now her daughter is a student there as well.

“It’s been really nice that we’ve been able to all be here,” Mrs. Spohr says.

The St. Francis Solanus Preschool offers programs for children ages 3 and 4. The 4-year-olds attend classes on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, while the 3-year-olds attend on Thursday and Friday. The children are split into the morning class, which goes from 8:10 until 11 a.m., and the afternoon class, which goes from 12:15 until 2:45 p.m. Currently, the 4-year-old classes have 25 children, while the 3-year-old classes have 17 children.

The preschool’s primary focus is getting children

used to the structure of school, so that by kindergarten, they are ready to learn. On a normal day, the 4-year-olds start school with play. “Play is really the most important thing,” Mrs. Spohr says. “When they’re young, they’re learning through play.”

For the 3-year-olds, Mrs. Spohr focuses mostly on social skills.

“That’s a big one for the 3-year-olds, it’s so important,” she says. “I see when they come into kindergarten and they haven’t been to preschool, they’re so worried about the social aspect and they’re not ready to learn yet.”

Another important focus for the 3-year-olds is learning how to sit still in an organized setting. That way, by the time they are 4, they are able to focus on more in-depth subjects, such as writing their names and letters, learning directions and following a math curriculum.

The children also learn about a particular “theme” each day, which often includes an experiment for the children — such as going on field trips to the dentist, or growing butterflies, which they love to watch fly off when they are grown.

“Those are the kinds of things they remember the most,” Mrs. Spohr says. “It kind of gets that theme stuck

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in their heads.”

Of course, the children also learn about the Catholic faith, with prayer incorporated in their daily activities — in particular, the 4-year-olds have a religion curriculum.

“We start with doing the Sign of the Cross,” Mrs. Spohr says.

The children learn the importance of being a good person and going to church. Their lessons also cover Advent and Lent, as well as following the Bible.

One way that Jennifer teaches the children about the Catholic faith is with a book called *Dear Pope Francis: The Pope Answers Letters From Children Around the World*. This gives the children lessons from the Pope himself, written for children just like them.

“One of the questions asked is, ‘Why God didn’t defeat the devil?’” Mrs. Spohr says. “And then he goes on about how He did, and how we have to remember that the devil is always there, but we can defeat him every day.”

And with Easter coming up, the children learn about how this season is so important.

“Since it’s during Lent, we can’t really party, per se,” Mrs. Spohr says.

However, the children usually participate in an Easter egg hunt, and the parents work together to prepare a “visit” from the Easter bunny. The children — the 4-year-olds especially — also talk about Jesus on the cross.

“They do pretty well with that,” Mrs. Spohr says. “We’ll go over to the Church and show them the cross, and talk about that.”

Throughout her years as a teacher, Mrs. Spohr has tried to make the school stronger, devoting her time to the children and adapting to ongoing developments in education. She hopes the children enjoy learning just as much as she enjoys teaching.

“It’s been a pretty good experience,” Mrs. Spohr says. “And I hope others feel the same way.”

If you would like more information about St. Francis Solanus Preschool, please call the school office at 217-222-4077.

Making Christ the Center of the Family

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“It’s so important to make Christ the center of your family,” Peggy says. “When you are stewards in your church, you give the best example you can for them.”

You can start with something small to create faith-filled habits and renew or further your stewardship journey. Ask how you can help, and if you are already involved, reach out to others to encourage them.

“People can be a little complacent, and we all need a little push!” Gerald says. “St. Francis is such a loving parish, and there are so many good people here. Just ask, and they would be happy to help you.”

For Peggy and Gerald, living stewardship has deepened their connection to Christ and to others.

“Any time you do something for the Church, it makes you feel closer to God,” Peggy says. “You have to grow closer to God when you give someone the Eucharist, when you look in their eyes and offer them the Body of Christ.”

Gerald and Peggy would like to thank all the members of St. Francis Solanus for being so welcoming from the day they returned to the faith community, to every time they join together to worship on Sunday.

“This attitude of the people of St. Francis is something I’ve never seen,” Gerald says. “It warms my heart. Thank you for being so friendly to us.”

“Any time you do something for the Church, it makes you feel closer to God. You have to grow closer to God when you give someone the Eucharist, when you look in their eyes and offer them the Body of Christ.” — Peggy Koettters

Mass Reverence and Etiquette

For many of us, when we are invited to a wedding, one of our first considerations is “what am I going to wear?” We wouldn’t think of showing up at a formal event in our workout clothes. How many of us search for just the right outfit to wear to our annual office party or on a date? Compare that to how much thought we put into what we wear to Mass on Sunday.

How we dress for an occasion indicates the importance that we place upon that particular celebration. At Mass, we encounter God through the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Dressing appropriately for Mass is one way that we show respect both for God and for our faith family. And this respect is important at all Masses – no matter what time of day or night.

Think about what you are teaching your children when you all wear your “Sunday clothes” to Mass. You are reminding them that Mass is a special celebration. After all, we are going to Jesus’ house.

Some people may quickly



point out that Mass shouldn’t be a fashion show – a place to show off your finery – and they are right! We also know that some parishioners come to Mass on their way home from work, and they certainly should not feel embarrassed about arriving at Mass in their work clothes. And no one should ever stay away from Mass because of simplicity of clothing.

But one rule should apply in all instances – our attire at Mass should always be modest. Our clothing should never distract others from what we are gathered together to celebrate – the life, death and resurrection of our Lord.

The celebration of Mass is always a holy occasion and thus should be treated in the most holy manner – in body, mind and spirit.

Eucharistic Adoration

As part of our Lenten devotions, St. Francis Parish began offering Eucharistic Adoration on Ash Wednesday and is continuing every Wednesday through March 21. We are having Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 1 to 5 p.m. At 5:00, Benediction will be celebrated followed by Mass at 5:30. We would like to have at least three to four people commit to one hour during this period of time.

Those willing to commit may contact Jan Zeidler at rzjz2010@hotmail.com or 217-779-0290. You can also go online to StFrancisSolanus.com/Adoration to sign up.

A GOOD MEAL AND EVEN BETTER COMPANY: Lenten Soup Suppers



For lifelong Catholics, there are probably many things that come to mind when thinking of the season of Lent — from ashes on your forehead, to fish on Fridays, to fasting and making other acts of penance. This year, we hope that our Wednesday Soup Suppers will also be on that list.

Joselyn Smith serves on the Liturgy Committee, which coordinates the Soup Suppers. This year, they will be held on Wednesdays, beginning February 21 through March 21, at 6:30 p.m. in Solanus Hall.

“These suppers were going on long before I became a member of the parish,” says Joselyn, who has been a parishioner for the past 10 years. “It’s a wonderful tradition.”

The suppers are provided by different organizations in the parish, from official committees such as Stewardship, Pastoral and Liturgy, to other groups such as Curtillo small groups or Bible studies.

“Sometimes, we might have two smaller groups choose to combine for a meal,” Joselyn says. “We really have a lot of people who give in a lot of ways.”

The suppers, which generally draw 50-75 people, are open to all, and many take advantage of the

opportunity to forego a night of cooking and enjoy some fellowship, following the evening Mass. A freewill offering is collected to help cover the expense of supplies.

“We just want to make it a relaxing, welcoming environment where people can just share, ideas, values, conversations, maybe catch up with old friends you haven’t seen for a while,” Joselyn says. “To see the bright smiles and to hear the laughter that comes from people interacting, it doesn’t get any better than that.”

With many of those who serve at Soup Suppers being involved in a variety of ways, not only do you get to meet other parishioners, but you can also learn more about the various activities going on in the parish.

“You meet other parishioners and you learn all about things that other people are involved in,” Joselyn says. “You might start thinking about whether one of those things is for you and you can become more involved in the church.”

The Soup Suppers are also an opportunity to grow closer to God through prayer, during Lent, as Mass is celebrated at 5:30 p.m. on Wednesday evenings, just prior to the meal.

Joselyn hopes that busy families will make the time

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Lenten Soup Suppers *continued from page 7*

to attend, even if just one Wednesday during the Lenten season.

“The business of life can take away from making Lent a priority and showing our kids the importance of the Catholic seasons in our faith,” Joselyn says. “I understand maybe the commitment for every Wednesday can’t be there, but there’s five Soup Suppers during Lent. I wish that people would maybe choose one, circle it on the calendar and say, ‘Nothing else is happening on this particular day that we cannot give up in order to spend more

time in the Word, by going to Mass and participating in fellowship in our church.’ That would be my challenge to people — out of the five, choose one and be present.”

Joselyn encourages all of her fellow parishioners to come see what the Lenten Soup Suppers are all about.

“God moments happen when you least expect them — stay open,” Joselyn says. “If God is putting it on your heart that maybe you should attend, just take a leap of faith and attend. There are no strangers at Soup Suppers!”

Parish groups are welcome to come and serve, as well as individuals who are interested in contributing to a meal. For more information or to find out how you can help with the Lenten Soup Suppers, please contact Joselyn Smith at 217-653-3021.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 a.m.

Weekday Mass: M, T, W, Th, F, 6:30 a.m. | M, T, W, Th, F, S, 8:00 a.m. | W, 8:35 a.m. during school year

Confessions: Saturdays 8:30 a.m., 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Holy Days of Obligation: Vigil 5:30 p.m.; Holy Day: 6:30 a.m.; 8:35 a.m. on school days; 8:00 a.m. during summer; 5:30 p.m.