

Saint Francis Solanus

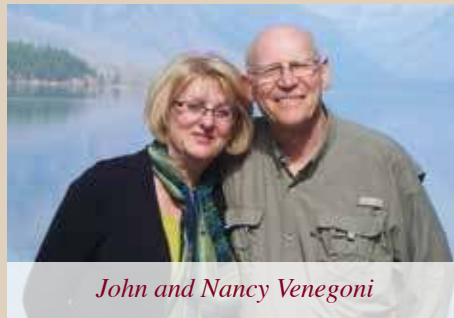


JANUARY 2015

JOHN AND NANCY VENEGONI *Come to the Table*

In the home of parishioners John and Nancy Venegoni is a kitchen table. It's a simple table — square, coated with an old patina — that used to belong to Nancy's great-grandmother. And like other kitchen tables in homes everywhere, it has played a role in the day-to-day happenings of their family life — a place to eat breakfast before school, a homework station in the afternoon, and a gathering place for dinnertime. But over the years, John and Nancy's kitchen table has also reflected their faith, for it is there they place visual reminders of liturgical seasons such as a wreath during Advent, and it is there where they sit together to pray, study and read Sacred Scripture.

"Right now, our kitchen table always has Bibles and other study books on it," Nancy says. "The two of us are involved in two different study groups, and we have materials everywhere. There's the weekly bulletin, the newspaper, a copy of Max Lucado's *Grace Happens Here*,



John and Nancy Venegoni

St. John's Gospel by Steve Ray, and since we're facilitating Fr. Robert Barron's study on the Eucharist, there are also workbooks, DVDs and study guides pertaining to the series."

Growing up in St. Louis, John was raised in a traditional Catholic family. He attended Catholic school from kindergarten through undergraduate school, his mother was very devoted to Our Mother of Perpetual Help, and both he and Nancy remember how in later years John's father would sit at his kitchen table to pray the Rosary.

Nancy's upbringing in Iowa was a little different in that she

wasn't raised Catholic, but learned valuable faith lessons from her grandmother, whom she describes as a faith giant — someone who was well-versed in Scripture and knew exactly where to find anything in the Bible. And yet, as early as grade school, Nancy felt as if something was missing from her faith.

"When I was a little girl, I became friends with a Catholic girl, and we used to play Mass," Nancy says. "Of course, I didn't even know what Mass was, but I was very intrigued. Later, when I was a teen, I got a glimmer of the Catholic faith when I watched the movie, *The Nun's Story*. It made me even more curious about Catholicism. Things came full circle when I had a roommate in college who was Catholic, and by the time I met John, I was well on my way to converting."

Today, John and Nancy have been married 39 years and have three children — Michael, Jeanine and Mark — and six grandchildren. Both initially retired from Quincy

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STEWARDSHIP

New Year's Resolutions and Stewardship

The beginning of the year is a popular time for personal reassessment. The earth has finished one more revolution around the sun. The days are shorter, and an evening of introspection seems more inviting. Somehow, when we take down the old calendar and tack up the new, we sense an opportunity to make a fresh start.

To make the best of this opportunity, it is useful to make firm commitments. It's even more useful to write them down. These resolutions, kept in a desk drawer or on the refrigerator door, are a "hard copy" of our best intentions for self-improvement. They're signposts that redirect our lives towards good, and towards God.

New Year's resolutions are often focused on personal health — losing weight, relaxing more or smoking less. It is certainly important, of course, to take good care of our bodies. But Christianity offers us a fuller concept of self-improvement. St. Paul reminds us that both the body and the soul need an exercise program. In fact, every aspect of our persons — physical, mental, spiritual, emotional — can benefit from an annual self-audit.

Some people have taken to heart this multifaceted concept of the self, and each year make one resolution for each area. For instance, one could resolve to join a Rosary prayer group to

work on spirituality, or take a continuing education course to build mental skills. Still, others use the three theological virtues — faith, hope and love — to guide their resolution-making process.

By now you may have discerned a similarity between New Year's resolutions and stewardship commitments. First, we use a similar method to think about stewardship, by breaking it down into more specific concepts — time, talent and treasure. Second, to become better stewards, we write down our commitments. We record our good intentions to clarify exactly what they are — and to remind us of our commitment on the evenings when the Rosary group interferes with a bowl game.

Any serious commitment shares the same components — it is specific and it is written. From marriages to mortgages, treaties to trades, serious resolutions are spelled out both literally and figuratively.

But even more important than the methodology of a commitment is the heart of the person who makes it. Even the most well-written job descriptions are useless unless there is someone to do the job well! Let us pray that this new year is a time of grace and wisdom for those of us who seek to recommit our lives to our family, our parish and our God.

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Resolutions 2015

A Letter From Our Pastor

Rediscovering Our Faith in the New Year

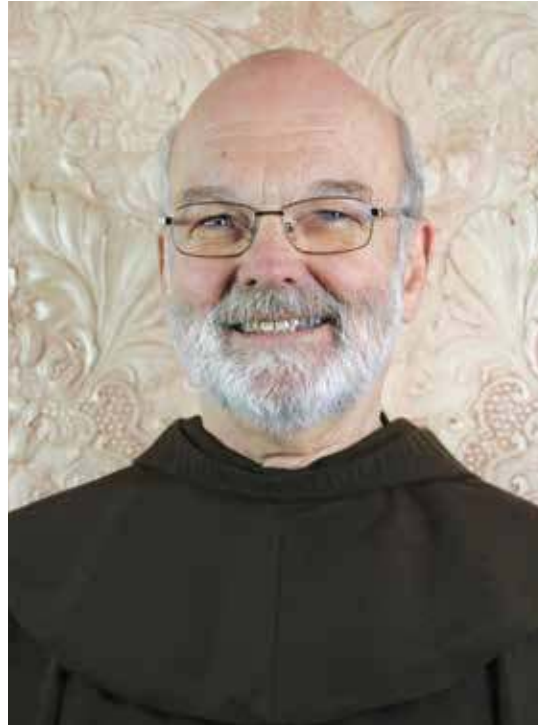
Dear Parishioners,

Happy New Year! I hope and pray that 2015 is a year of grace and blessing for St. Francis Solanus Parish and for each and every one of you personally. One of the greatest blessings for our parish in this new year will be the dedication and the opening of our Parish Center. It was first envisioned by my predecessor, Fr. Kurt Hartrich, O.F.M., and perhaps even by others prior the nine years he was here. So now we are filled with eager expectation to see the building brought to completion.

It will be so exciting to have worthy space for all the various meetings and events that are part of the very life and vitality of this thriving parish. We've been nurturing many dreams about gatherings immediately after Mass, adult education classes, funeral luncheons, and Parish School of Religion (PSR) classes in this new space, and now these dreams are about to become realities.

Many of you have heard me say that as excited as I am about the building of our Parish Center, I'm far more enthusiastic about our efforts to be strongly committed to stewardship as a way of life. As I think you know, stewardship is an expression of discipleship — following Jesus Christ, living the Gospel. And if we take that call to follow Jesus seriously, then we need the materials, the tools and the facilities for the journey.

Putting it another way, a building is only that — a building. But it can be something much greater than brick and mortar when it is filled with life, with people who bring it to life. We, together, will bring this building to life when we're in it, engaging in all the activities and ministries that are expressions of our shared faith.



On Christmas, we offered every family a copy of Matthew Kelly's book, *Rediscover Catholicism*. This is another way of saying how serious we are about stewardship — because if stewardship is an expression of being faithful disciples of Jesus, or living the Gospel, then I believe Matthew Kelly has an outstanding way of expressing that calling.

It's one thing to receive such a Christmas gift. It's another to put it to good use. I hope that each and every one of you read this book. I've read it, and although I've been a Catholic all my life, I find this book exciting. It says so much of what makes me enthusiastic about practicing my Catholic faith. Kelly writes about "*Becoming What We Celebrate*," and living

"*The Authentic Life*." Whether or not we know it, these are things for which we hunger. Of special interest to me are his "*Seven Pillars of Catholic Spirituality*." Read it and see where you measure up.

Satisfying your hunger is something you have to do for yourself. Do yourself a favor and read *Rediscover Catholicism*. See if it doesn't enliven a renewed joy about your faith and a deeper commitment to practice it. Make it your New Year's resolution to read Kelly's book. It's a great way to start the new year off right. God bless you and your family throughout this year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, OFM". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Don Blaeser, O.F.M.
Pastor

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Celebrating Faith, Knowledge and Service



Students sign up for their favorite enrichment class opportunities and are able to enjoy two different classes during the week. Afterwards, their work is showcased at the closing assembly on Friday.

“Catholic Schools Week gives us the opportunity to showcase our St. Francis family values. The students have a special theme this year, which is to follow the two most important commandments that the Lord has given us — love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. We are reminded on a regular basis the importance of putting God first in our lives, and then treating others as you would want to be treated.” — Principal Lori Shepard

St. Francis Solanus School is seagerly anticipating Catholic Schools Week 2015! Since 1974, Catholic schools across the country have celebrated this annual event, which highlights both the strong values and education that Catholic schools provide for thousands of students here in the United States.

“Our mission as a Catholic school is to ultimately help each and every student get to heaven,” says St. Francis Solanus School principal Lori Shepard. “Along the journey, we do our best to educate children to become academically strong, and eventually productive citizens in the community. Service is an important component, with stewardship as the key ingredient in a faith-filled life.”

St. Francis will celebrate Catholic Schools Week from Jan. 25 to Jan. 31, following the theme, “Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

“We will celebrate the gift of the students, the gift of our faith and the gift of our academic opportunity,” Ms. Shepard says. “We begin the week with an all-school Mass, and come together as a family to worship the Lord.”

Following the Mass, the week will kick off with an all-school project that celebrates the lives of the saints. Students in kindergarten through third grade will dress up as their favorite saint, students in fourth and fifth grade will create dioramas about saints of their choice, and students in sixth through eighth grade will research and write about the saints they choose. The research and projects will be displayed in the school throughout

the week, and winners will be selected from each grade.

The beginning of the week will also feature a focus on service. Students will attend presentations by the five branches of the Armed Forces — an example of national service — and will also make “thank you” cards for veterans. This project is just one aspect of St. Francis Solanus’ dedication to serving others — the school often collects funds for those in need in the local community, as well as other important causes.

“Catholic Schools Week gives us the opportunity to showcase our St. Francis family values,” Ms. Shepard says. “The students have a special theme this year, which is to follow the two most important commandments that the Lord has given us — love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. We are reminded on a regular basis the importance of putting God first in our lives, and then treating others as you would want to be treated.

“For example, we collect proceeds from a Jean Day for needy families, hold food drives for our Food Pantry or donate to help find a cure for cancer,” she continues. “We have donated to the Red Cross Association, United Way and to individual students that cannot afford to even purchase lunch tickets. It is clear that generosity lives within the hearts of the St. Francis students and staff!”

The rest of the week will include all kinds of fun activities, ranging from games like trivia, bingo and even “Crazy Winter Olympics,” to rosary-making for upper grade levels, dress-up days and an ice cream

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2015

Knowledge and Service



Another dress-up day includes crazy hats worn by all.



One fun Catholic Schools Week dress-up day has a "mismatched clothes" theme.



Crazy Winter Olympics is a favorite Catholic Schools Week activity.



Each year, Enrichment classes are offered to students.



During the Crazy Winter Olympics activity during Catholic Schools Week, families sign up for teams and participate in a variety of events.

social. Students are also looking forward to the enrichment classes that will take place throughout the week, which are presented by parent and parishioner volunteers.

"We invite volunteers in to present enrichment classes to our students and to provide unique experiences — for example, what it is like to be a carpenter, or a baker, or a floral designer," Ms. Shepard says. "Students are also taught new ways to paint, draw pictures in conjunction with artists from the Granite Bank Gallery, or do craft items and many other fun activities."

"We usually advertise in the church bulletin, to see if anyone would want to share a specific kind

of craft or art with the students," says Linda Dawson, a St. Francis teacher who leads the Catholic Schools Week Committee. "We have a lot of parishioners and parents who volunteer, or even just come in to help with these enrichment classes."

Catholic Schools Week is an essential part of each school year, which continually reinforces the strong Catholic values that are the school's backbone.

"Students in a Catholic school have an opportunity to begin every day with prayer, pray throughout the day, and end every day with prayer," Ms. Shepard says. "When good things happen, we thank the

Lord. When struggles occur, we pray for strength. The Lord is with us all day long, guiding us and helping us make the right decisions.

"It is a privilege to be a part of this Catholic community, and we welcome children of other faiths as well," she continues. "We all join together in the love of Christ to continue to grow in our faith and serve Him each and every day. Whatever the event, we enjoy building community through bonding as a school family."

If you would like to help out with Catholic Schools Week 2015, please don't hesitate to jump right in! For more information, please contact the school at 217-222-4077.



“On the Twelfth Day of Christmas, My True Love Gave to Me... Epiphany”

When asked: “What traditionally occurs on the 12th day of Christmas?” you may be tempted to shuffle through the golden rings, maids-a-milking, calling birds, and ladies dancing to the peak of the “true love” gifts — “12 drummers drumming.” Nothing beats a mental holiday treadmill!

Although “The Twelve Days of Christmas” is one of the most popular and widely recorded Christmas carols in America and Europe, its lyrics are rarely recognized as referring to the 12 days that stretch from Christmas Day on Dec. 25 until the glorious Feast of the Epiphany, which was traditionally held on Jan. 6.

The Feast of the Epiphany, which originated in the Eastern Church, is intended to celebrate the revelation of God to mankind in human form through the person of Jesus. The word “epiphany” is

taken from a Greek word meaning “appearance” or “manifestation,” and finds its earliest reference as a Christian feast in the fourth century.

But exactly which “manifestation” of Christ Jesus do we recognize on the Feast of the Epiphany? The Western Church reserves it as the commemoration of the coming of the Magi. These three men, traditionally named Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, travel in haste towards the Christ Child and remain an undying testimony to the long pilgrimage of peoples in search of salvation.

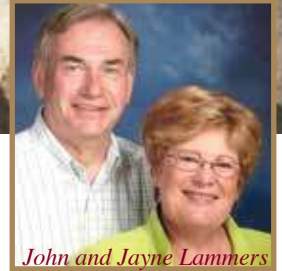
On the feast of the Epiphany in 2007, Pope Benedict acknowledged that this celebration elucidates not only man’s pilgrimage towards God, but also God’s pilgrimage towards man in the person of Jesus Christ. He spoke of the glorious incarnation with these words: “It was out of love that He made Himself

history in our history.”

On the Feast of the Epiphany, therefore, we come to realize that we are all magi on a pilgrimage towards Christ, the source of salvation. This pilgrimage is unique to each and every man, but results in a universal and dynamic experience — a constant “growing closer” between God and man. It is for this opportunity that we rejoice!

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “Happy are those who, while possessing the truth, search more earnestly for it in order to renew it, deepen it and transmit it to others. Happy also are those who, not having found it, are working toward it with a sincere heart. May they seek the light of tomorrow with the light of today until they reach the fullness of light.”

Now when asked: “What traditionally occurs on the 12th day of Christmas?” we can respond with joyful certitude: “Epiphany!”



John and Jayne Lammers

Affirming What is Important in Marriage **Evenings With the Engaged**

Good communication is the key to every marriage. And as Evenings With the Engaged Coordinator Jayne Lammers emphasizes, it's important to establish strong communication from the very beginning.

"You have to realize that you are starting a new life together, and you have to communicate with each other," Jayne says. "You're bringing everything — the good the bad and the ugly — from your families, and you are going to start your own way that you want to do things. If you keep a good perspective, and learn to communicate through the many different stages of your marriage, you can get through anything. It's always a learning situation, and it's always something that you have to work at."

As engaged couples prepare for marriage here at St. Francis Solanus, they are required to participate in the Evenings With the Engaged program. Through this program, they spend time with a trained married couple from the parish to learn about the sacrament of marriage. John and Jayne Lammers coordinate the Evenings With the Engaged Ministry, and they have been working with engaged couples for the past four years.

"This program was established to give couples going into marriage some kind of idea of what they're getting into," Jayne says. "They meet with the priest, which is great. But the priest doesn't really know what every day married life is all about — so that's the reason they meet with a married couple. We try to help them understand the 'nitty gritty' about marriage, and we try to talk to them about everything they might face once they are married."

Jayne also notes that the couples receive and are guided through a packet. There are six different sections, and subjects such as budgets, communication, sex, religion and how God enters into marriage are covered.

The volunteer couples will work with the engaged couples to determine when and how often they will meet, and they aim to be flexible to work within busy schedules. Each of the mentor couples has a different perspective on marriage to share with the engaged couple heading into marriage.

John and Jayne are always on the lookout for new volunteers to mentor engaged couples. Jayne believes all married couples have something to teach newly engaged couples entering into marriage.

"There are 15 couples who do this, and I think they all have a lot to offer," she says. "Some have been married a long time, and some haven't been married as long. But every couple has a different experience and something to offer to these young couples. I've learned something new probably every time we've gone through the course. My husband and I have been married 45 years, and we have learned things about each other through the packets ourselves. So it's fun for us to do together and it's great for our own marriage. It's really nice to reaffirm what's important in our own marriage."

For more information on the Evenings With the Engaged Ministry, or to find out how to become involved in this wonderful program, please contact Fr. Don Blaeser at the parish office at 217-222-2898.

St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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John and Nancy Venegoni *continued from front cover*

Public Schools, and then went on to retire from second careers — John from a private mental health facility, and Nancy from Quincy University. And in the almost 15 years they have been members of the parish, they have demonstrated faith in action by their involvement in various ministries — they facilitate a Divorce Recovery Program, have led Why Catholic groups, serve on the RCIA team, and are tribunal-trained advocates for people seeking annulments. They are also Eucharistic Ministers and lectors, and they distribute Communion to nursing home resi-

dents. In addition, Nancy also serves as a sacristan for the Saturday morning Mass and facilitates Protecting God's Children.

For John and Nancy, the opportunity to get involved — to live stewardship in all we think, say, and do — is a means for grace to flow both ways, for not only has their involvement been a way for their faith to grow, but it has also enabled them to meet some wonderful people. In fact, in explaining stewardship, John likes to quote Fr. Mychal Judge, a Franciscan friar, Catholic priest, and chaplain to the

NYC Fire Department who was a first responder and the first certified victim of the terrorist act on the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

“Fr. Mychal Judge used to pray, ‘Lord take me where you want me to go, let me meet who you want me to meet, tell me what you want me to say, and keep me out of your way,’” John says. “Isn’t that the essence of stewardship — to do God’s work and be the means for His goodness and mercy to shine through? God has blessed us, and to whom much is given, much is expected.”

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, F, 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.