

# Saint Francis Solanus



MAY 2015

## Stewards of God's Greatest Gift

For the last 10 years, Michael Happekotte has started each day off in a truly beautiful way, and his heart is filled with peace because of it.

"I open the church six mornings of the week," says Michael, who serves as a Sacristan for Masses on Sundays and Mondays at St. Francis Solanus. "I really like arriving early at church so I can spend quite a bit of time before the Blessed Sacrament. I have learned more about the Mass by serving as a sacristan, and I enjoy serving for different priests and getting to know them."

Our weekday and weekend sacristans at St. Francis Solanus generously give their time and talent to helping our Masses run smoothly and prayerfully. They arrive well before Mass and other liturgical celebrations so they can set

out the sacred vessels. Afterward, they carefully purify them and store them away. The sacristans who serve on Sundays take the altar linens home and launder them as well. While Fr. Don oversees the Sacristan Ministry, the sacristans basically schedule themselves on an as-needed basis.

Michael says serving as a sacristan helps people grow as disciples of Christ,

"As I am preparing for Mass and putting the hosts and wine out, I reflect on how awesome it is that they are going to become the Body and Blood of Christ," Michael says. "Overall, it is a very holy and moving experience."

The work of our sacristans takes dedication, and our priests appreciate all they do.

"Sacristans need to have faith in and reverence for the Blessed



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# The True Meaning of the Word “Stewardship”

According to the late stewardship pioneer Msgr. Thomas McGread, when a pastor speaks about money during his homily, 75 percent of the congregation immediately stops listening.

Let’s face it — most of us do not like to discuss money, and many of us feel that talking about money at the pulpit is bad form.

However, did you know that tithing is mentioned in the Old Testament 39 times, and in the New Testament 11 times? Tithing is biblically based, and it simply means to give a portion of our gifts back to God.

A further distinction is that *tithing* does not equal *stewardship*. Or, more fundamentally, giving money does not equal stewardship. Stewardship, which is also a biblical principle, really has nothing to do with money. As a matter of fact, 19 of the main parables of Christ relate directly to stewardship. And, in those parables when Christ speaks of stewardship, He *never* mentions raising money. Surprised?

Stewardship simply means being grateful for all of God’s blessings. Everything we have – each breath we take on earth, the tremendous talents we possess, and our ability to earn income to sus-

tain ourselves – all stem from God. We come into the world with nothing and we leave with nothing.

Recognizing this and being grateful for our bountiful blessings is the first step of stewardship. Once these realizations fall into place, we are then eager to find a way to respond to God’s generosity and to embark upon a stewardship way of life.

And stewardship is just that, *a way of life*. It is not like a TV show to which you can tune in whenever the mood strikes, and shut off when you are no longer interested. It is truly a way of living.

Yet, the mere word “stewardship” has gotten a bad rap over the years — and not just by us lay people.

In 1992, when the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops were forming the Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, they originally didn’t want to title it *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*.

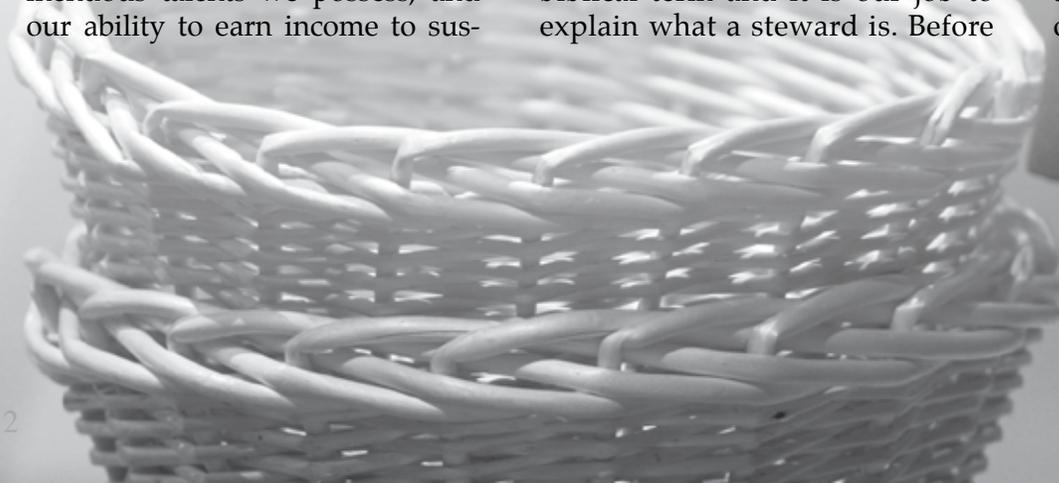
“Instead, they wanted to just call it *A Disciple’s Response*, with the reason being that they felt stewardship meant money,” said Msgr. McGread before his dying in April 2013. “I convinced them at the time that ‘stewardship’ is a biblical term and it is our job to explain what a steward is. Before

the Pastoral Letter, most of us didn’t understand the spiritual dimension of stewardship.”

So, how do we go about sharing the spiritual dimensions of stewardship with fellow parishioners and lay leaders?

First of all, Msgr. McGread cited the importance of being hospitable and discovering the needs of parishioners. He felt that when parishioners were welcomed and their needs were met, they were fulfilled and felt a sense of belonging to their parish. This, in turn, creates ownership. Once parishioners felt like they were part of the parish, they wanted to respond by volunteering, and sharing their time, talent and treasure in order to help make it the best parish community possible.

And, when parishioners support their parish with all of their resources out of gratitude, the entire parish blossoms. Prayers increase, ministries grow, and yes, the offertory increases. These blessings are natural outcomes of living a stewardship way of life, and they are why it is important that we should always remember the true meaning of the word “stewardship.”



## A Letter From Our Pastor

# The Love for God and One Another

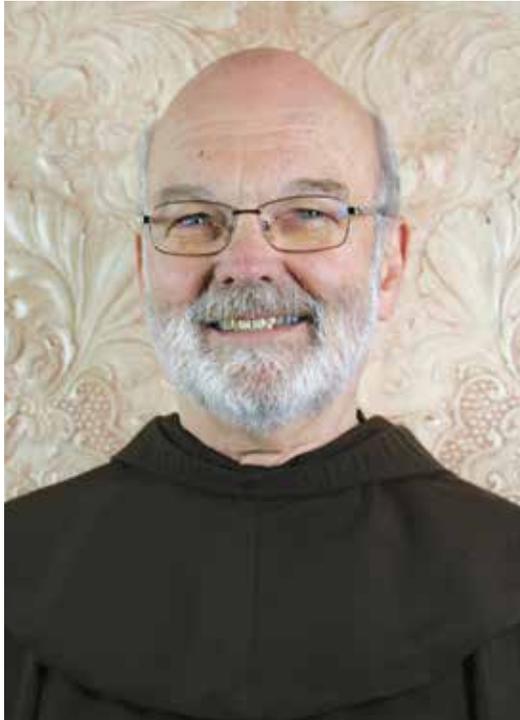
Dear Parishioners,

If we listen closely to the Mass readings throughout this month of May, we will recognize a common theme – love. Of course, every month and every day – and every minute, for that matter – is a time to show our love for one another. St. John begins many of the passages of his letters with the word “Beloved.”

We will hear in one of the readings, “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God.” If we would simply follow that one commandment to “Love one another,” we will carry out the stewardship of all of our gifts. Living as a steward is indeed living a life of love – for God, for the Church, for everyone in need, for our families, and for everyone with whom we come in contact.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis has spoken about this often during his papacy. At his very first Mass as pope, he said in his homily, “Everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts.” There are two important parts to this statement: first, we need to recognize that all is a gift from God, everything we have and everything we are; second, we have a responsibility to use those gifts wisely in service to others.

Pope Francis has also emphasized this stewardship of service throughout his papacy. Speaking to young people in Brazil, he said, “Let us protect with love all that God has given us.” Not only does he point



out how we are gifted, but he recognizes that our motivation for using and sharing those gifts should be love. Recently, at an audience with young people, he was even more specific: “Have you thought of how you can put your talents at the service of others?” he asked. “Do not bury your talents! Set your stakes on great ideals, the ideals that enlarge the heart, the ideals of service that make your talents fruitful.”

We all have been called to love – called by our Lord and Savior, by our saints, by our Pope, and by our spiritual leaders. Nevertheless, we also understand that loving in this way

and being good stewards is never easy. Let us vow to work together to love and to carry out our lives in ways so many have challenged us to do.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

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

*If we would simply follow that one commandment to “Love one another,” we will carry out the stewardship of all of our gifts.*

# Holy Name Society Answering God's

Everyone needs someone they can call when they need help. Since 1863, the Holy Name Society has been that someone at St. Francis Solanus.

"This spring is our 152nd year of existence," says society President Dennis Holbrook. "We are called to do servant work for St. Francis Solanus. Whenever Father calls, the answer is 'yes.' We make phone calls and get the guys there."

Many times, that help includes preparing the church for a special holiday, or helping raise money for the parish or school. This past Easter, for example, the group was charged with preparing and decorating the church for Easter Sunday and managing the Easter Vigil fire. This is all part of what Dennis says is the intention behind the Holy Name Society.

"Our goal is to be servants for our parish in the tradition of St. Francis Solanus," he explains. "We really want to be a springboard for other ministries, whether it's lecturing, RCIA or the Parish School of Religion. We really want other parishioners to feel inspired by what we do enough to break away and be a part of other ministries as much as they can."

As Dennis explains, all male members of the parish are automatically enrolled in the Holy Name Society. Meetings are held quarterly and encourage the men to take part in events held throughout the year such as the golf outing held in the fall to benefit St. Francis Solanus School and the Christmas meal that benefits the food pantry.

"What's neat about this organization is that we all chip in as much as we can – just because I'm the president doesn't mean I'm more involved than anyone else," says



*Following their annual Golf Outing, Holy Name Society board members presented St. Francis Solanus School with a check for money raised during the event. (From left) Treasurer Dennis Steinkamp, Golf Outing Chairman Ray Wheeler, Principal Lori Shepard, President Dennis Holbrook, Fr. Don Blaaser, OFM, and Secretary Steve McMillen.*

Dennis, adding that group Vice President Tony Costigan, Secretary Steve McMillen, and Treasurer Dennis Steinkamp are all instrumental in keeping the group moving forward.

The annual Holy Name Banquet was held this past Holy Thursday, and it gave group members and parishioners alike the chance to hear Fr. Macario Torres-Torres speak.

"It's a wonderful way to get together with the guys," Dennis says of the yearly event. "A lot of the old-timers show up for that. It's a fun time."

Up next month, the gentlemen and their wives will prepare the food for the Parish Picnic to be held in the second Saturday in June. Dennis says the group bands together to make picnic favorites like pulled pork and hamburgers.

"It's a lot of work, but it's fun

and just another way we build community and get to know people and each other's wives," he says.

Ongoing throughout the year, Dennis says the men have a special opportunity to help out other parishioners through an effort called Helping Hands. With just a phone call, any member of the parish can get assistance with household tasks courtesy of the Holy Name Society.

"If anyone calls the parish needing light work done, we can come and help them," Dennis says adding that tasks usually include moving things or cleaning gutters. "Call the parish and we'll take care of it."

Gentlemen of the parish who are interested in getting involved with the Holy Name Society's work should contact Dennis Holbrook at 217-224-3898.

# Call to Service... All Year, Every Year



Golf carts line up before the start of the annual Holy Name Society Golf Outing. A regular part of the Holy Name Society's fundraising calendar, the Golf Outing is just one way the group supports the parish and school.

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– Dennis Holbrook, Holy Name Society President

## Stewards of God's Greatest Gift continued from front cover

Sacrament," Fr. Don says. "Their service really frees us priests up before Mass so we can just prepare ourselves to lead the people in prayer and preach a good homily. If they can do the busy work of setting everything out, we can keep our minds where they are supposed to be in order to offer a prayerful Mass."

Impressively, there are actually several whole families who serve in the Sacristan Ministry together.

"We have a young family that does the sacristy work together, and it was actually their children who first approached me, wanting to do the ministry," Fr. Don says. "This ministry is a great way for families to live out stewardship together, and for parents to model stewardship to their children."

For more information about the Sacristan Ministry, please contact Fr. Don Blaeser at 217-222-2898.



*"I have learned more about the Mass by serving as a sacristan, and I enjoy serving for different priests and getting to know them. I am sure it has helped me to grow closer to Christ. As I am preparing for Mass and putting the hosts and wine out, I reflect on how awesome it is that they are going to become the Body and Blood of Christ. Overall, it is a very holy and moving experience."* – Michael Happekotte

# Results of the 2014 Stewardship Renewal

Our parish leadership at St. Francis Solanus recently conducted the 2014 Stewardship Renewal. The results certainly demonstrate that commitment to prayer, ministry and the Catholic faith are of continually increasing importance to our parish community.

Several of the notable results from the 2014 Stewardship Renewal include the following:

- A total of 1,661 Prayer Commitments — or commitments to Stewardship of Time — were made by 400 households who returned commitment cards.

- The top five “Time” commitments were:

- “Attend Mass every Sunday and on Holy Days,” 372 commitments
- “Spend 15 minutes a day in personal prayer,” 261 commitments
- “Pray together with my family,” 180 commitments
- “Pray the Rosary at least once a week,” 179 commitments
- “Spend extra time with my spouse each day,” 165 commitments

- A total of 1,436 Ministry Commitments — or commitments to Stewardship of Talent — were made during the Stewardship Renewal, with 396 of these being new “interested in joining” commitments and 1,040 being re-commitments. There were 371 commitment cards with talent commitments.

- The top five “Talent” commitments were:

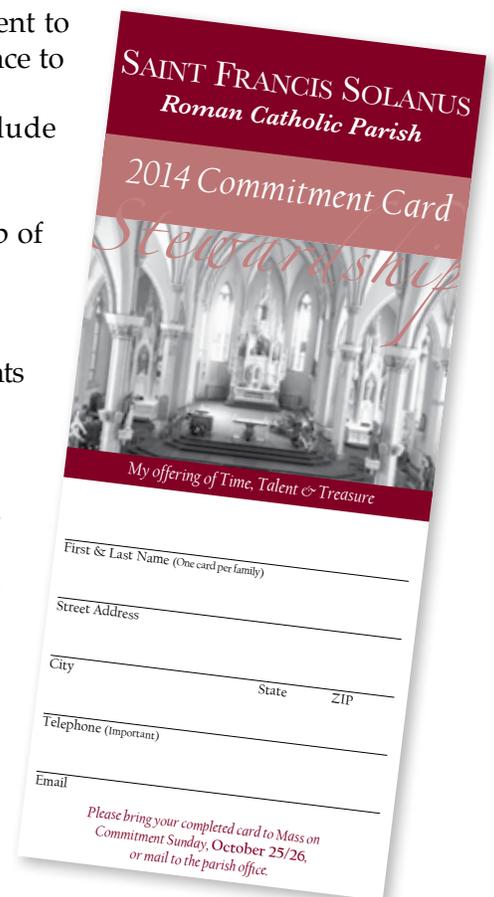
- Funeral Dinners, 142 commitments
- Ladies of St. Francis, 138 commitments
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, 120 commitments
- Parish Picnic, 117 commitments
- Usher, 89 commitments

- A total of 297 households made “Stewardship of Treasure” commitments. The average annual pledge was \$1,547.

- There was a total of 170 weekly offertory pledges.

- There was a total of 117 monthly offertory pledges.

Indeed, these statistics point to an increasingly-active commitment to stewardship here within our St. Francis Solanus parish community. And while the spiritual benefits of stewardship can never be quantified, this annual commitment on behalf of our parishioners helps to ensure that St. Francis Solanus remains a vital and faith-filled parish community. We thank all who participate in the life of St. Francis Solanus Parish!



## “Serving Becomes a Part of You” *Steve and Geri McMillen*



*Steve and Geri McMillen*

**I**t was something he never had the chance to do. Raised in a faithful Lutheran family, Steve McMillen was never an altar server – not until this spring when vacationing in Florida.

“It is impossible to get involved and not become closer to Christ, and even when away in Florida, I had the urge to serve,” says Steve, a Catholic and St. Francis Solanus parishioner since 1989. “I asked if they needed help at the church we went to, and I got to be an altar server for the first time in my life. Serving becomes a part of you.”

Living two blocks apart from each other, Steve and Geri McMillen grew up as great friends in Warsaw, Ill. Steve’s family lived across the street from the Lutheran church, and some years later, Steve went through instruction prior to marrying Geri, a lifelong Catholic.

Geri has fond memories of growing up in a home with her grandfather, mom, dad, and aunt and watching them model how to live Catholicism. Living only a block and a half from the church, they would walk to Mass, eat breakfast at home, and then Geri went off to school.

“I loved my childhood,” Geri says. “I can still see my mother and aunt kneeling down and praying, and I would go upstairs and light my own candle and pray as a child. I watched my mother always doing things for people.”

After high school, Geri attended a Catholic college

and kept her love for attending Mass as she began living on her own. After Geri and Steve began dating, Geri attended Mass by herself until one day she invited Steve.

“My faith became my own as a result of my conversion to Catholicism,” Steve says. “One day, Geri asked me to go to Mass with her, and I haven’t missed a Sunday Mass since.”

After buying their first home together and joining St. Francis Solanus, Steve and Geri volunteered to co-chair the annual St. Francis Solanus Picnic. And, as they say, that led to all kinds of involvement in the community!

“Find something that interests you because not everyone has the same gifts, but you do have a gift,” Steve says. “If you like reading, be a lector. If you like having fun, get involved with the Picnic. Give it a try.”

Geri most enjoys visiting with the elderly of Good Samaritan Home and Sycamore Healthcare. At Good Samaritan, St. Francis Solanus priests rotate celebrating Mass with the residents on Thursdays. Geri coordinates 11 teams of people who take turns bringing the Body of Christ to the Catholic residents on Sundays.

“I taught school and worked with young children for years, but now it is the opposite, and I am working with older people,” Geri says. “Many don’t have families to come and take care of them. You go and visit. You get to know people. It is my favorite thing to do!”

Steve goes with Geri to help with Mass on Wednesdays at Sycamore, and he is the secretary of the Holy Name Society.

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# St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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## “Serving Becomes a Part of You” *continued from page 7*

They both serve as lectors and train the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

“People who know us know that we have a great relationship and do so much together,” Geri says. “We were both teachers in the Quincy public schools and had summers off together. We both love serving. I’m happiest when I’m doing something for others.”

Steve and Geri enjoying traveling, playing golf and staying busy serving others – an integral part of who they are as individuals, a couple and members of the St. Francis Solanus community.

“We were put on this earth to serve and to love our neighbor,” Steve says. “If we want this Catholic faith of ours to continue to grow and be vibrant, we’re going to have to get people involved and show them how worthwhile it is!”

*“We were put on this earth to serve and to love our neighbor. If we want this Catholic faith of ours to continue to grow and be vibrant, we’re going to have to get people involved and show them how worthwhile it is!”*

*– Steve McMillen*

### *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.