

Saint Francis Solanus



DECEMBER 2015

Enhancing the Mass and Leading the Congregation *Parish Choir*

We've all heard that familiar saying, attributed to St. Augustine: "He who sings, prays twice." Music is powerful and moving, often bringing about deep emotion in people – and this is especially true of music used for worship or prayer. For those who offer their talent for singing to our St. Francis Solanus Parish Choir, singing at Mass is a means to a deeper experience of the Mass, and fosters a deeper relationship with our Lord.

"Music moves people in different ways," says Roger Begley, our Director of Music who oversees the musicians for all of the Masses at our parish. "I often play the organ after Communion when everyone is quiet, and I get more people telling me about how beautiful the organ and the bells and chimes are. People love



the chimes. It makes you feel like you're in church – it's a reverence, and a meditative thing. The choir feels that, too. It moves us. You can't help being moved and inspired when listening to a beautiful choir. And we are blessed to have such a beautiful church. The organ is wonderful and we have amazing acoustics."

The Parish Choir, which is open to all parishioners and sings a variety of musical styles

from traditional hymns to modern adaptations, can be heard at the 9:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays. While the choir serves to inspire the congregation, Roger says there is a simpler, more practical purpose as well.

"The choir is there to keep the Mass flowing," Roger says. "When you've got a group up there, it's so much more exciting than just a cantor. A choir helps people to interact much more with the music during the Mass. The choir is there to help the congregation get started, and encourage them to sing along. Whatever we do should always enhance the liturgy. We don't want to be distracting – we want the music to add to the Mass, and to assist and help lead the congregation through the Mass and songs."

In his 16 years as a choir

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Make Room for an Advent Tradition

If you have been searching for the perfect holiday dining room centerpiece, you need to look no further!

The long-standing history and tradition of the Church encourages every Catholic household to place an Advent wreath in their home during the penitential season of Advent, prior to the glorious celebration of Christmas. This wreath consists of a simple wire ring decorated with evergreen branches and four candles – three purple and one pink.

The exact origins of the Advent wreath are uncertain, although evidence points to a pre-Christian Germanic practice in which lighted candles were placed around a wheel during winter. Prayers were offered to the god of light in hopes that the wheel of earth would turn back towards the sun and restore warmth.

This pagan practice was then adapted by Christians in the Middle Ages, as a part of the spiritual preparation process for Christmas.

An article of natural beauty, the Advent wreath carries abundant symbolism and is a fantastic vehicle of family prayer. Its circular shape, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life found in Christ. The purple candles represent prayer, penance and sacrifice, while the rose candle calls to mind hope and joy.

The practice of lighting the wreath throughout Advent, both

in the church sanctuary and in our homes, directs our hearts towards the hope found in Christ's humble birth and simultaneously calls us towards inner conversion, so as to prepare for Christ's second coming.

The custom is simple. On the first Sunday of Advent, as you sit down to dinner, light the first purple candle and recite a simple prayer with your family. Repeat the prayerful reflection every evening throughout the week, lighting an additional candle with each Sunday of Advent. The rose candle is lit on the third Sunday of Advent, known as Gaudete Sunday – from the Latin word for “rejoice.” This is a day of joy!

The Advent wreath is a time-tested and true method of bringing the altar alive in our homes. Children love the beauty and simplicity of family-oriented religious traditions, which are easy to establish and will create lifelong memories.

Wreaths can be purchased from any Catholic supply company, although it is nearly effortless to make your own. You can use a coat hanger for the wire ring, or simply purchase a ring from any art supply store. Wrap the ring with evergreen branches and place four candles amongst the branches. Add ribbon or pine cones for additional beauty.

Prayer of Blessing for the wreath:

“O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath,

and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.”

Prayer for week one:

“O Lord, stir up Your might, we beg You, and come, that by Your protection we may deserve to be rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by Your deliverance. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.” (One candle is then lit.)

Prayer for week two:

“O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for Your only begotten Son, that through His coming we may be worthy to serve You with pure minds. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.” (The original purple candle and an additional purple candle are lit.)

Prayer for week three:

“O Lord, we beg You, incline Your ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of Your visitation. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.” (The first two candles and the rose candle are then lit.)

Prayer for week four:

“O Lord, stir up Your power, we pray You, and come; and with great might help us, that with the help of Your grace, Your merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen.” (All four candles are lit.)

A Letter From Our Pastor

December: A Time for Mercy and Tenderness

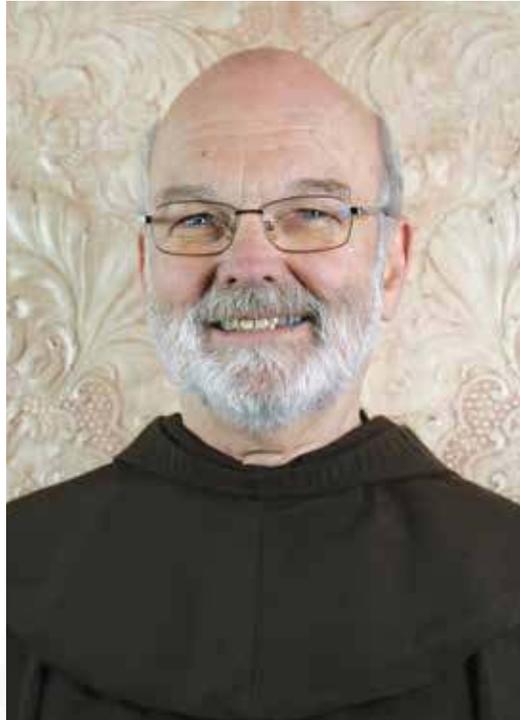
Dear Parishioners,

Advent and Christmas are upon us. This is a busy time for me, for our parish, for priests, and certainly for most of you. We all know that our homes, schools, offices, and churches will soon be overflowing with many holiday events, and our pews will be overflowing with all of those present for Christmas Masses.

We all know why – there is something special about the Church and about our faith during these holidays. First of all, you and I need to remember that fact – and we need to be grateful for it. For those of us who are here every Sunday, this is a time not to resent those who fill our pews and our parking lots. Rather, it is a time to be the loving and welcoming people Christ calls us to be. Hospitality is an important part of being a good steward, and this is a perfect time to practice it.

For those of us who may only come every once in a while, or for these special occasions, you are welcome here! We hope you like what you see, and we want you to know that you always have a home and family here, any time you need it.

You may have heard of the term “the New Evangelization.” It is something Pope Francis has emphasized, in particular through his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which he wrote and issued two years ago. The pope’s letter, with the title that means “The Joy of the Gospel,” has advice for all Catholics relating to how we should



all view and treat each other, as sons and daughters of God and members of the Church.

The pope said, “There is a need for Christians who help show God’s mercy and tenderness toward every creature. We all know that today’s humanity is facing a deep crisis. This is why the new evangelization must necessarily use the language of mercy, which is more about gestures and attitudes than words.” It is appropriate that the Year of Mercy proclaimed by the pope begins this Dec. 8.

As the Holy Father reminds us, this is a time for “mercy and tenderness.” This is a time for us to show love for everyone, to our brothers and sisters in the next

pew or on the other side of the globe. This is a time to share the Good News of Emmanuel, God-with-us, with all we meet.

May you and your families have a blessed Advent and Merry Christmas!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, 2/14". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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

Good Samaritan Mass G

Those in the Good Samaritan Mass Group know how deeply grateful the Good Samaritan Home residents are to receive the grace of celebrating weekly Mass and receiving the sacraments. Yet, the ministry members will tell you that it is they, themselves, who are blessed by the experience.

Bobbi Talken is ministry coordinator. She came to the ministry when she saw firsthand what it meant to the Good Samaritan Catholic residents.

"A friend of mine used to take Communion to the home on Sundays," Bobbi says. "She asked me to help the group at Mass on Thursdays. My mother-in-law was a resident there for a long time, and I knew what it meant to her to go to Mass and receive Communion when she couldn't leave the facility. I couldn't do it for my own mother, so this seemed like a good way to help the people living there."

The Good Samaritan Mass Group assists at the Mass at 10 a.m. each Thursday in the home interdenominational chapel.

"The volunteers do everything other than the priest's duties," Bobbi says. "We supply the readers, organist, pianist, and lead the singing. We set up the altar, make sure the hosts and wine are there, provide the missals, and set up the chairs. We wash the linens afterwards and make sure they are ready for the next Mass. We all work together, doing what needs to be done."

Other duties include bringing residents to the chapel who may



Some of the Good Samaritan Mass Group volunteers

not be able to navigate the walk themselves, or by stopping by residents' rooms to remind them Mass time is approaching.

"These people appreciate it so much," Bobbi says. "You feel good. I get as much out of it as they do. Many can't do what they used to, or a lot can't see or hear well, and if they've been going to Mass all their lives, this is such a good benefit to them, to go to Mass."

The ministry members also help the priest during the anointing of the sick that is done once a year at the home.

"He anoints the sick at Mass, or if they can't come to Mass, we go with him so he can anoint others," Bobbi says. "Each week, we also take Communion to the residents who can't come to Mass.

On Ash Wednesday, we distribute ashes."

There is no special training involved to take part in the ministry.

"We just learn from each other, by watching," Bobbi says.

Roger and Phyllis Knuffman have been serving in the ministry since July 2011, when Bobbi asked them to help out following Phyllis's retirement.

Both agree that the benefits from the ministry's work they observe are the contacts they can make with the residents to keep them attuned to the world beyond the home.

"We really make friends with them," Phyllis says. "We talk with them and they tell us what has been going on in their week, and we tell them about ours."

Group Brings Grace to All

Phyllis and Roger also agree that they have made new friends among the volunteers, as well.

Spiritual benefits abound, too: "This is an excellent opportunity for us to attend an extra Mass," she says. "When you see Father interact with (the residents) at Mass – most can't do what they did before, but they still have faith and they look forward to Mass. After Mass, Father will talk and everyone lights up. We celebrate after Mass and they announce the birthdays. We all sing 'Happy Birthday,' and it makes them feel they're having a special time."

The couple also views their serving in the ministry as a way of living stewardship.

"It's a way of reaching out to others," Phyllis says.

Roger adds that he and Phyllis are also involved in other ministries in the parish, with their efforts all part of their stewardship.

"That's dedicating our lives to God and others," he says.

"These people appreciate it so much. You feel good. I get as much out of it as they do. Many can't do what they used to, or a lot can't see or hear well, and if they've been going to Mass all their lives, this is such a good benefit to them, to go to Mass."

– Bobbi Talken

Volunteers are always welcome in the Good Samaritan Mass Group because many of the members are retired and travel to visit families. Anyone interested in joining the ministry may call Bobbi at 217-223-4788.

Parish Choir *continued from front cover*

director, Roger has seen the number of choir members dwindle, and is always looking for parishioners with a love for song to join the choir.

"Singing in a choir can be incredibly rewarding – to know that what you're doing makes such a difference," Roger says. "What the choir does is simple, but it has an incredible value to the Church. They give of their time and talent, and it's a wonderful thing that they do when they commit to that. We have many people who've sung for many years. Once you get involved, people always stay. It becomes a family and it's a great group to be a part of. We have over 2,000 families. There's so much potential for great music here! But we need more people to join."

The choir chooses music throughout the year that follows the liturgical calendar, and Roger says they have some exciting plans for the Advent and Christmas season.

"We do all of the big Masses during the Advent and Christmas seasons," Roger says. "We do the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. It is a special liturgy and the music is beautiful. Then we do the more traditional 10 a.m. Mass on Christmas Day. We play a lot of contemporary music, as well as traditional but it's not all traditional hymns. I try to do a mix and, as always, I pick music out of the suggestions from the Catholic Leadership. Christmas is a very special time for the Church and we hope the music we choose enhances the beautiful Christmas liturgies."

For more information on our wonderful Parish Choir and its plans for the holiday season, or to join your voice to the choir, please contact Roger Begley at 573-406-3933.

Be Stewards, Not Consumers During the Advent and Christmas Seasons

The secularization of the Advent and Christmas seasons celebrates the “holidays” with full fury all the way up to the 25th of December. Between the gift buying, partying and rushed errands, we miss the true purpose of the Advent season, which was meant to be more austere, contemplative and penitential.

Indeed, through our hectic schedules, we often fail to properly grasp the significance of this season, due in large part to the successful secularization of our Catholic “holy day,” which is now simply reduced to “the holiday season.” This fact serves as a metaphor for our examination of conscience and confession of sins in the Sacrament of Penance during the season of Advent.

Look to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke and reflect upon the “Infancy Narratives” concern-

ing the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ. If we only had the “Infancy Narratives” of these Gospels and no other information, we would have the Gospel of Christ in miniature. The angelic choir makes clear that Jesus is God and Man, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. The message to the shepherds makes clear that Jesus came for the outcast and rejected – for the sinner. The adoration of the Magi shows that conversion is for all people and Jesus’ message is universal. It makes clear that Jesus will suffer and eventually die, but by way of paradox, this will fulfill His mission to redeem the world from sin and death. The wood of the manger and the swaddling clothes anticipate the wood of the cross and the burial shroud. Jesus is placed into a “feeding trough” for animals, symbolizing the Risen Lord who will become the Eucharistic Food for

the world at Mass.

As stewards, we should have no anxiety that is rooted in buying gifts or being “ready” in the secular sense. We can ease our anxieties by focusing on our relationship to God, Church and one another. Am I right with God? Do I use His many gifts of Grace for conversion and true stewardship and discipleship? Do I repent of my sins and make a firm purpose of amendment? Do I go to confession regularly, especially when I am in a state of mortal sin? Am I ready to meet my Lord and Savior either at my particular judgment at the hour of my death, or at the General Judgment when Christ will return in glory at the end of time?

Pray that this season will truly be a season of “holy days,” not just a holiday. Let us not be consumers of religion, but true stewards of God’s manifold gifts.

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“Stewardship Is the Heart of Christianity!”

Dennis and Pat Holbrook

During the Vietnam War, Dennis Holbrook’s father was stationed in Thailand. Every night, his mother would turn off the television, and Dennis and his siblings would pray the Rosary for their father and for our American troops.

This is how Dennis learned the power of prayer. Years later, he and his siblings have all kept the faith, and today, Dennis believes stewardship is central to that faith.

“Stewardship is the heart of Christianity!” Dennis says. “Stewardship is knowing that all we have is a gift from God, and we are all made in an image and likeness of God. God calls us to re-gift!”

Dennis and Pat both attended Quincy High School, but they didn’t start dating until later. Though not raised in the Catholic tradition, Pat attended Quincy College, and the friars there made a lasting impression on her.

“What brought her to join RCIA was the tradition and symbolism of our faith,” Dennis says. “Every part of Mass has a meaning and substance.”

They were married at St.

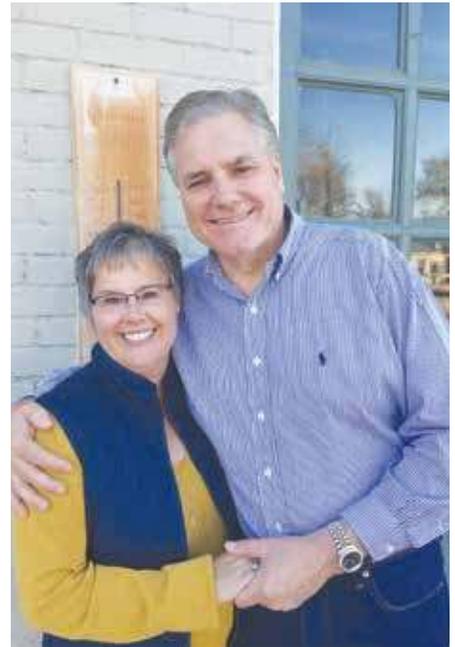
Francis Solanus 32 years ago and bought a house within six blocks of the church. When their daughters - Nicole, Elizabeth and Allison - were in school, Dennis and Pat took the step of getting more involved in parish life.

“If someone wants to get involved, they should call the rectory staff and priests,” Dennis says. “They can get you the names of various ministries and their leaders. They will be happy to talk to you.”

Both Dennis and Pat serve as Eucharistic Ministers. Pat is a past member of the school board, and Dennis is an usher and a member of the Men’s Club the Holy Name Society.

“Even though we are the Men’s Club, we could not be who we are without the support of our wives, parish staff, priests, and school personnel,” Dennis says. “We work to raise money for our parish with our annual breakfast. We raise money for school with our fall golf outing, and we sell Christmas fruit baskets to support our food pantry.”

For Dennis, 1 Peter 4 conveys a central message about



Dennis and Pat Holbrook

stewardship: “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace...so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

“Our time is God’s time – do we want to waste it?” Dennis says. “Help someone. Everyone has talents. Use them. God gave us the

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“Our time is God’s time – do we want to waste it? Help someone. Everyone has talents. Use them. God gave us the ability to work and earn money. Isn’t 10 percent the least we can give Him, the One who has given us so much?” – Dennis Holbrook

St. Francis Solanus

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Dennis and Pat Holbrook *continued from page 7*

ability to work and earn money. Isn't 10 percent the least we can give Him, the One who has given us so much?"

Dennis and Pat would like to express how grateful they are for their parish family and for all the prayers and support they have received from the faith community. They believe that each of us has a calling to be a steward.

"We, the faithful, because of our baptism, have a universal call to holiness, to receive God's Grace and Mercy and re-gift them for others through a stewardship way of life!" Dennis says.



Dennis and Pat Holbrook

Season Schedule:

Christmas Eve:
4:00, 6:00, 8:00,
and 10:00 p.m.

Christmas Day:
8:00 and 10:00 a.m.

New Year's Eve:
5:30 p.m.

New Year's Day:
8:00 and 10:00 a.m.

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.