

Saint Francis Solanus



SEPTEMBER 2016

Vacation Bible School: Allowing the Community to Help Pass on the Faith

In Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of Love*, he writes, "If the family is the sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for... the family protects human life in all its stages." These words remind us of the important role of family for each of us, but also of our greater calling to be a Catholic community that is like a family. Part of fostering community includes taking care of the "little ones" amongst us – the children in the parish. Here at St. Francis Solanus, Vacation Bible School, or VBS, is one of the summer opportunities provided to help parents in the formation of their children in the faith.

"It gives the children an opportunity to learn about their faith in a fun way," says Director of Religious Education Carol Seifert. "I think it's important for parishioners to be involved and take ownership. The leaders for VBS do – they take ownership and provide a great experience for the kids."

This camp, made possible by many volunteers of all ages, is a collaborative effort of the parish. This year, 84 children attended, with over 30 junior high and high school kids helping out alongside 10 to 12 adult volunteers.



This year's theme was "Cave Quest," and children were invited to learn more about how God's love is our foundation and Jesus is the light of the world, guiding us through dark times.

"It really touches a significant number of people," says volunteer Wendy Steinkamp. "It's important for the little ones because it plants seeds, and you never know when they're going to take those seeds, but it's also important for our junior high and high school kids. It gives them that feeling of empowerment that they can help the little ones. Adults really witness things happening in the children and it renews their faith as well."

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Vacation Bible School *continued from front cover*

This year's "Cave Quest" theme invited our children to learn more about how God's love is our foundation and Jesus is the Light of the world, guiding us through dark times. Each day features a daily Bible lesson that comes alive as the children travel between various stations such as an imagination station, Bible story, games, food, and a crafts/science experiment.

"The kids learn the Bible stories from their parents and from priests and from going to Church, but getting to interact with each other at Vacation Bible School and really become part of the story makes a difference," says volunteer Jill Steinkamp. "It puts a fun spin on some of the stories they've heard before, and helps them to identify with the characters in a summer setting with their friends."

In this way, Vacation Bible School truly is an extension of the yearlong faith formation program that the parish offers for our children. Wendy and Jill both got involved with VBS when their children were young enough to attend, and now their children have contin-

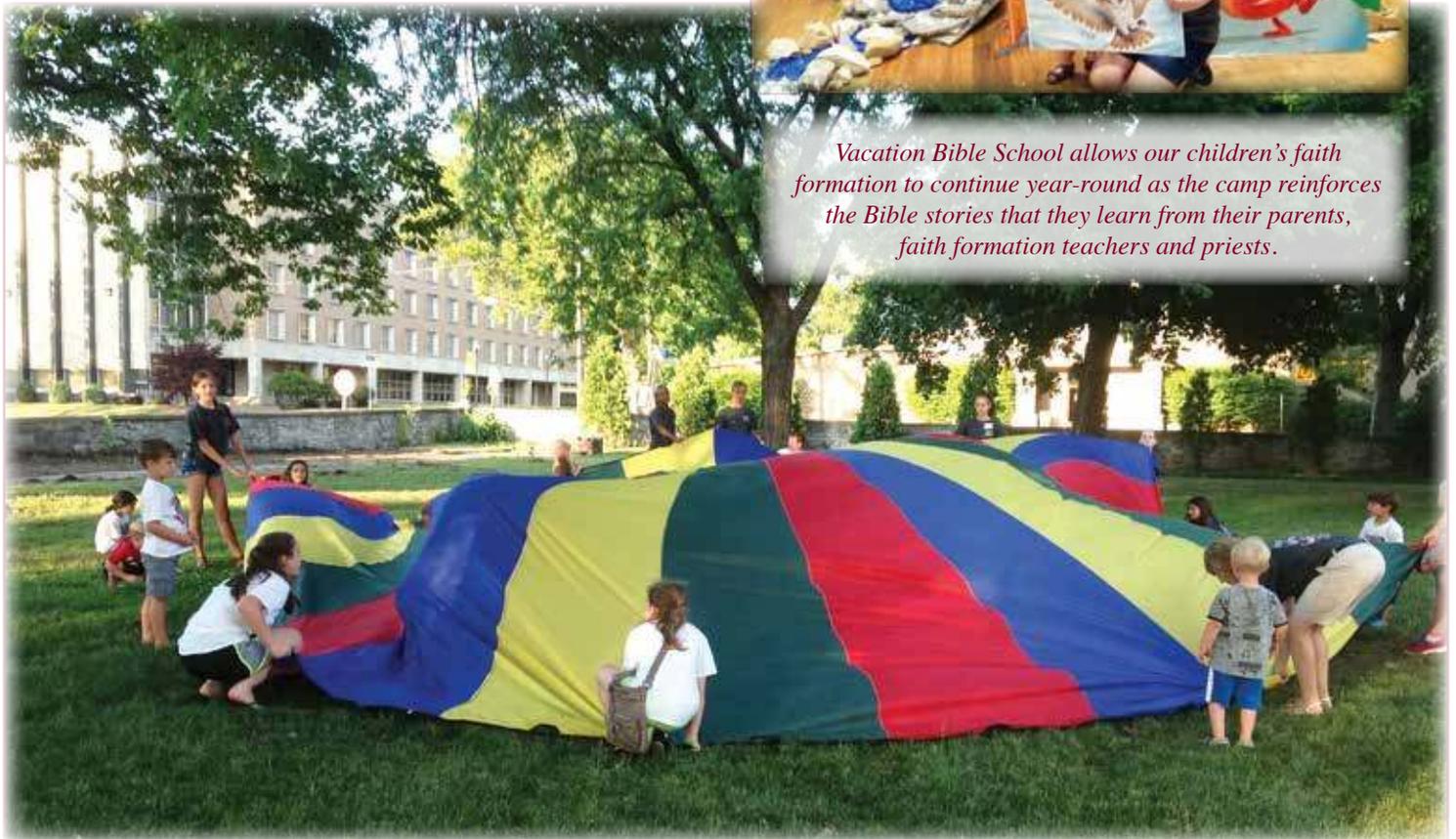
ued to participate and share the faith by volunteering alongside their parents.

Wendy's 18-year-old daughter, Ginny, now helps with the music while her 15-year-old daughter, Sarah, is the "comic sidekick" who needs to be taught the Bible lessons by the children throughout the week. Jill's 15-year-old daughter, Allison, and 13-year-old daughter, Jamie, both help Jill with leading the Bible Story station.

If you would like to get involved or learn more about faith formation opportunities, please call Carol Seifert at 217-222-4077 or cseifert57@gmail.com.



Vacation Bible School allows our children's faith formation to continue year-round as the camp reinforces the Bible stories that they learn from their parents, faith formation teachers and priests.



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A Letter From Our Pastor

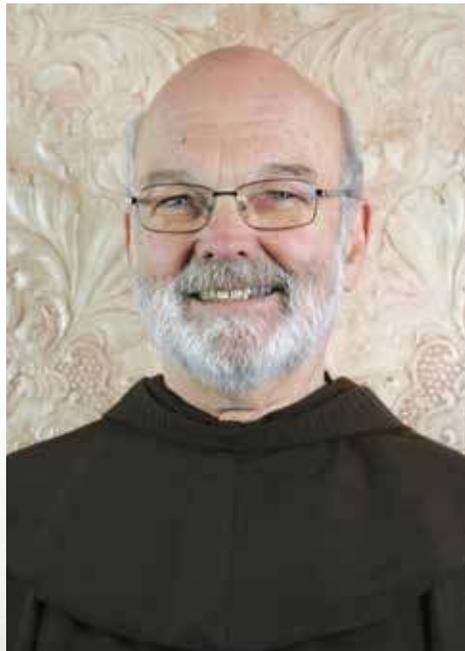
Stewardship: “This Is the Day the Lord Has Made; Let Us Rejoice in It and Be Glad”

Dear Parishioners,

Sometimes, we spend much time looking at, analyzing and speaking about the meaning of various passages and readings from Holy Scripture. Of course, we need to do that – it is important to our spiritual well-being, and to have a complete understanding of the messages revealed to us in the Word of God. As you are aware, most weeks we have four readings as part of our Liturgy of the Word – a First Reading, then a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, and the Holy Gospel.

The one reading that sometimes is ignored is that Psalm. Yet, there are truths and wisdom in the Psalms that are worthy of our comments and our recognition. Psalm 24 (a song of David) strikes me in particular as one rich in meaning for us, especially from the perspective of stewardship. It opens, “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, the world and those who dwell in it.” For me, that says everything we believe and provides us with all the motivation we need to pursue stewardship as a way of life.

Let us consider how profound that statement – “The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds” – really is. If we do embrace stewardship as a way of life, we admit and accept that everything comes from God and everything is God’s. Stewardship is not complicated, although we try to make everything complex and complicated, it seems. It is, as stated, merely the realization that our very existence, our lives, our goods all come from and in finality belong to God. We are the stewards of all of this. If we do accept that and try to live that way, we then tend to administer well God’s gifts on behalf of God. That is all stewardship is.



At the heart of all of this is our relationship with the Lord. We can also say that stewardship is all about getting that relationship right. Jesus certainly makes reference to stewards and stewardship in the Gospels. The Gospels were all written in Greek, and the English words for “steward” and “stewardship” are translations from a Greek word that means “to administer what belongs to someone else.”

That is what we do in this life. We receive gifts – we are granted the stewardship of time, talent and treasure from God. But all of this and all we may be are only gifts. Our use of them to serve one another and all those around us in our

community, our parish and the Church Universal is the measure of our stewardship.

In the northern hemisphere, autumn begins on Thursday, Sept. 22. This time of year in the Church is when everything seems to begin or resume. There is another wonderful Psalm that states, “This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad” (Psalm 118:24). Let us do that together, and let us be good stewards together.

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

“Turning Your Commu Mark and Mart

There’s a small garden with a wide-reaching impact in the backyard of St. Francis. A few years ago, Mark and Martha Kovachevich noticed a brief announcement in the bulletin asking if anyone would be willing to cultivate this space.

“It is rewarding for us to do this manual labor together, and many people benefit from the garden,” Martha says. “The cook from the church uses the garden’s produce to cook for the priests and their guests. We give from the garden to our local food pantry, our friends and our neighbors.”

For years Mark and Martha have had a garden at their own home, which is less than three blocks from St. Francis. The couple first met when they were both working at Hy-Vee.

“I remember seeing Mark at work and noticing what a funny guy he was, and I do love to laugh!”

Martha says. “I come from a big Catholic family of six children, and being Catholic is part of my life. When I found out that Mark was Catholic, that was an added bonus.”

They were married at St. Francis in 1994, and Mark – a lifelong St. Francis parishioner – now shares the walk to Mass with Martha. They have been blessed with three children – Abigail, Cy and Emma – who all attended St. Francis School.

Actually, it was volunteering at the school that first encouraged Martha to become further involved in parish life.

“When our children started at St. Francis School, I began doing playground duty, which I love to do,” Martha says. “Then, when Emma started preschool, I got a part-time job in the kitchen. It is the best job in the world, and I get to be there with Emma, who is in

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“Helping others makes you a better person, and it’s always nice to start a new friendship. We’ve been blessed with many good things through our involvement in the school and church. We’ve gotten a lot of help, and we’re happy to help others in return.”
– Martha Kovachevich
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The Kovachevich family – (from left) Abigail, Cy, Martha, Mark and Emma

Community Into Your Family”

Martha Kovachevich

sixth grade at the school.”

In addition to tending the parish garden with Martha, Mark also works in the parish hall and sets up for different events with his son, Cy.

It was important for Mark and Martha that their children also learn how to give back to the community, and each of them has found different means of doing so. Abigail, a sophomore at John Wood Community College studying to be a veterinary technician, volunteered at the local animal shelter. A junior at Quincy Notre Dame, Cy volunteers at church, and at the public library and the Salvation Army.

“And Emma has recently befriended an elderly neighbor, which has turned into a really neat relationship,” Martha says. “Emma asked if she could walk her dog, and now we go and visit with this neighbor who has become like a grandparent to Emma.”

For Martha and Mark, stewardship means reaching out, helping others and “turning your community into your family.”

“Helping others makes you a better person, and it’s always nice to start a new friendship,” Martha says. “We’ve been blessed with many good things through our involvement in the school and church. We’ve gotten a lot of help, and we’re happy to help others in return.”

Even small ways of using our gifts and reaching out to others, like tending the parish’s garden or spending time with a neighbor, can have a big effect on our community and our relationship with Christ.

“To start becoming involved in parish life, find something you enjoy doing,” Martha says. “Start small, and pray about it. Go where your heart leads you.”



Mark and Martha Kovachevich celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage at St. Francis, 1994



Mark Kovachevich picking carrots in the garden at St. Francis

"So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God."

-1 Cor 10:31



LABOR DAY:

A Stewardship Point of View

Each Labor Day, most of us enjoy relaxing and having a good time with friends and family. And of course, who doesn't like a day off? But as we celebrate the unofficial "last day of summer," we rarely take the time to think about the origins and meaning of Labor Day. And what does the holiday mean to us as workers of the Catholic faith?

Labor Day is a creation of the labor movement, and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes an annual acknowledgment of the many contributions that workers have made to the strength and prosperity of our country. The first Labor Day was celebrated in New York City on Sept. 5, 1882, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Union.

As devoted Catholics continually searching for the best way to follow Christ in our daily lives, it is good for us to consider the spiritual significance of Labor Day.

We are all co-workers in the Lord's vineyard, called to the noble mission of serving God and others. When we are working at our individual places of employment, we can always do a diligent and honest job, no matter what it takes. When serving in parish ministries, we can be punctual, kind, generous, and faithful to the teachings of the Church. When at home with our families, we can teach our children how to work hard and feel proud of a job well done. We can also take the time to thank those who work hard on our behalf. And when we acknowledge the hard work performed by mail carriers, and retail and food service workers, we can make an effort to give those who serve us a pat on the back, and show our respect for God's gift of work in our lives.

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta encouraged the faithful to "do small things with great love." This month, as we celebrate Labor Day, try driving to work with a rejuvenated, grateful attitude. You can also love God as you work hard at your job, allowing joy to come into your heart. You will experience your labor as something that increases your dignity as a person, and as something that disciplines your being – thus sanctifying your soul for the glory of your Creator.

St. Joseph, patron of workers, pray for us!

We can take the time to thank those who work hard on our behalf. And when we acknowledge the hard work performed by mail carriers, and retail and food service workers, we can make an effort to give those who serve us a pat on the back, and show our respect for God's gift of work in our lives.

Stewardship, Safety and New Staff Ushering in a New Year at St. Francis School

It's September – and that means another school year has begun at our parish school! With changes to staff, a renewed focus on safety, and opportunities for stewardship, students and their parents have much to look forward to in the year ahead.

Principal Lori Shepard recently shared what our St. Francis community can expect from the school in the coming year.

The annual Taking Care of Business night, held in the gym on Aug. 16, allowed parents to meet with faculty, clergy and staff while completing paperwork for the coming year.

"We greatly appreciate our parents taking time out of their busy schedules to stop in and fill out all of the necessary forms for the school year," Ms. Shepard says. "It helps the ladies in the office tremendously so they can file all of the forms in an efficient manner, instead of waiting for weeks until they are returned. We also love the opportunity to see all of the students again who we have missed so much over the summer."

Those who attended also had the opportunity to meet two new teachers – Amy Wiewel, who will teach fourth grade, and Ben Klingner, who will teach Reading and Physical Education for kindergarten through eighth grades.

"Amy and her husband, Stephen, have their children enrolled in our school, so it will be a blessing for her to be able to instruct them in her classroom for years to come," Ms. Shepard says. "Ben was our long-term substitute for our former PE teacher during her recent maternity leave, so he is familiar with our school and our students, and did a great job while he was here. We are blessed to have them both."

In addition to staff changes, the school will also enjoy added security thanks to the acquisition of a Safety Grant from Marion Gardner Jackson Trust in order to purchase extra security cameras, keyless entry, and a



new phone system in each of the classrooms.

"In this day and age, now more than ever, security is one of our top priorities and it is more than our responsibility – it is our duty to keep our children safe," Ms. Shepard says. "We will do the best job we can, each and every day."

Ms. Shepard added that a new communication system called RenWeb has also been added that will enable parents to keep up with their student's progress on a daily basis.

"This system is very user-friendly and will allow parents to monitor student grades, assignments and recent test scores," she says. "We are pleased to make this improvement and hope our parents will appreciate the daily connection."

With an eye to creating an environment of kindness and managing unwanted behavior, the school has also adopted a new behavior policy. Ms. Shepard says all parents will receive a copy of the policy, which embraces the Scripture-based ideals of "Be Respectful. Be Responsible. Be Safe."

"We consider our students to be part of our larger family and hope to instill values that will last a lifetime," Ms. Shepard says. "We are very excited about the proactive approach we are taking with our students. Our teachers have been working on this document since

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St. Francis Solanus

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Stewardship, Safety and New Staff *continued from page 7*

last spring, and their input and ownership is crucial to the implementation of the program. We are confident the parents will appreciate the values and Scripture that it is based on.”

Finally, the new volunteer group, the Solanus Saints, will continue to allow opportunities for student support in the classroom.

“We are eager for this group to grow and are always happy to have new members,” Ms. Shepard says. “Parents may contact the school at any time and offer their services for this group. This is a wonderful way to show children what it actually means to serve. Our volunteers provide many hours of tremendous help for our teachers and have made such an impact already on our student population. Connecting with a student on a one-to-one

basis and being able to witness their academic progress is so rewarding.”

If you would like to learn more about St. Francis School, or if you wish to volunteer your time with the Solanus Saints, please contact the school office at 217-222-4077.

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.