

Saint Francis Solanus



FEBRUARY 2017

*“New Ways to Improve Our Relationship
With Each Other and God”*

St. Francis Couples Prayer Group

Emily Wellman and her friends realized that they were all looking for something – some way to better their marriages through God. Through dialogue and discernment, this desire became a new prayer group for couples in our faith community.

“We are always looking for new ways to improve our relationship with each other and God,” says Emily, leader of the Couple’s Prayer Group with her husband, Tyler. “Having a group really helps. It may be what you and your spouse are craving.”

St. Francis Couples Prayer Group was created for couples of the faith community to have a place to learn more about their faith and to pray with each other.

“We wanted something that would give us more,” Tyler Wellman says. “We wanted something that would strengthen our relationship with each other.”

The couples meet together on the first Thursday of every month in the parish center. They enjoy fellowship and eating together. They also learn about whatever the specific faith topic is for discussion that month and share prayer at the end.

“The topics vary from strengthening prayer together, learning about Catholicism or our Church and Reconciliation,” Emily says. “We take turns as couples



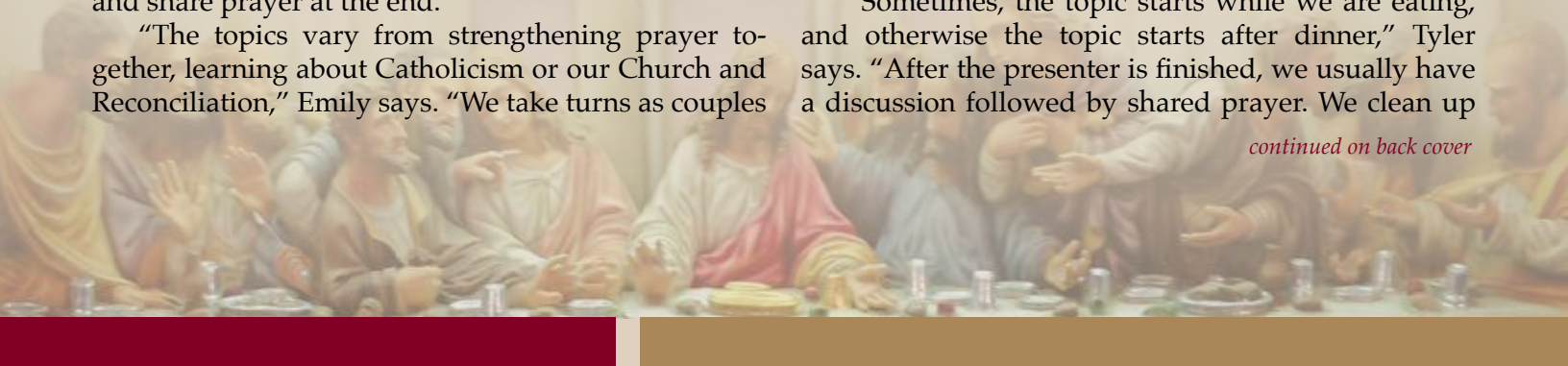
Tyler and Emily Wellman, leaders of the Couple’s Prayer Group

leading the monthly topics. That way, it isn’t just us talking all the time. It gets everyone involved.”

Though every meeting is different, they generally start with a before meal prayer and dinner with casual conversation.

“Sometimes, the topic starts while we are eating, and otherwise the topic starts after dinner,” Tyler says. “After the presenter is finished, we usually have a discussion followed by shared prayer. We clean up

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Service

The Fourth Pillar of Parish Stewardship

Throughout Sacred Scripture, there are numerous references to service. There is the parable of the vigilant and faithful servants who await their master's return from a wedding, "ready to open immediately when he comes and knocks" (Lk 12:35-40). There is the story of the good Samaritan who was moved with compassion to help the victim of a violent robbery (Lk 10:25-37). And there are several examples of Christ serving those around Him – feeding the multitudes, healing the sick, and even turning water into wine at a wedding banquet.

Why is service a running theme throughout the Gospels? Because service is at the root of living in imitation of Christ. Christ served others throughout His life on Earth, and His death on the cross was the ultimate act of service to mankind. And when we serve others, we are not only following in Christ's footsteps, we are also serving Christ Himself: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).

As a stewardship parish, service must be at the heart of everything we do. The parish community is the bastion of service within the Catholic Church, as we serve one another and are also served by our brothers and sisters in Christ. As the Diocese of Wichita's document, *The Pillars of Parish Stewardship*, states, "Like a blood family, the parish family stands ready and eager collectively to wrap their arms around their brothers and sisters when they suffer in trial and/or celebrate special events in their lives."



It is good to recognize the parish community as a place where service is appreciated and can be utilized for the good of the Church. However, it is not enough for us to simply serve other members of our parish family. As disciples of Christ, it is our obligation to serve people in need everywhere they exist – in our families, our greater community, our country, and throughout the world. This can be a challenging concept, as it is often much more comfortable and convenient to serve those who are close to us than it is to reach out to "outsiders." But, as *The Pillars of Parish Stewardship* eloquently points out, "Failure to have this understanding leads to a selfish parochialism, which is life draining to a parish stewardship way of life."

Think of ways that you can serve others around you, both within our parish family and in the greater community. Our many parish ministries offer a great place to begin offering your time and talents, but the opportunities for service don't end there. There are many civic and nonprofit organizations that do an immense amount to serve others across the globe and are always looking for volunteers.

Once you serve, you will find that you will reap numerous rewards in return, much like the faithful servants who doubled the talents their master had entrusted to them: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master's joy" (Mt 25:21).

A Letter From Our Pastor

The Word of God: How Do We Hear It? And How Do We Respond to It?

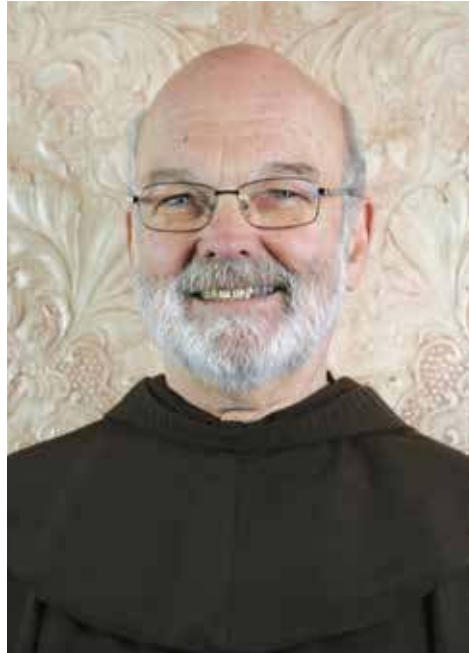
Dear Parishioners,

A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time – but before long, we will begin Lent. This is one of those rare years when Ash Wednesday is in March – so, Lent does not, of course, begin in February this year.

The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part – the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we consider that these readings are more than being about God, about the Church, about our faith, or even a history lesson or a nice story. We know they are God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets of how we ap-



proach the Word of God.

For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God’s Word.

However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act requires time,

practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us – that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

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



“A Wonderful Way for a Young **Our Altar Server Ministry a**



We are blessed at St. Francis Solanus to have a group of young people – and some valuable adults, as well – who give of themselves with commitment and dedication to be altar servers at Masses. These youngsters and their adult counterparts serve in the gathering of God’s people at Mass, and sometimes at prayer services, funerals and weddings. First and foremost, they assist the presider by helping to prepare the altar, lead processions during Mass, and ensure that what is needed for the celebration is brought, carried or moved into place. Outside of the priest and deacons, altar servers more than any other liturgical ministry are concerned with almost every aspect of the liturgy.

St. Thomas Aquinas said, “The celebration of the Holy Mass can be almost as valuable as the death of Jesus on the Cross.” The priest is a representative of the people of the parish, and in his ordained role serves as a surrogate Jesus Christ. It is the priest who presents the mystery of Calvary as it unfolds on the altar. For altar servers, what an honor it is to serve the Lord as part of His gift of love to us, the Eucharist. Servers have a solemn responsibility to do their assigned duties with dignity and reverence.

“Being an altar server is a wonderful way for a young person to be a good steward,” says Carol Seifert, Coordinator of Religious Programs who directs the altar servers. “In this ministry, they serve God, the parish and the celebrating priest, of course. It also helps them to understand and to appreciate the Mass. Currently, our servers are assigned by threes to each of our weekend Masses. Our adults may serve as substitutes, and they are invaluable for serving at daily Mass and funeral and wedding Masses.”

Young men and women in the fifth grade are given the opportunity to sign up and be trained as altar servers. Regardless of what school they attend, all young adults who are parishioners are eligible to serve, and many serve from fifth grade through high school.

As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops noted in the issued guidelines for altar servers, “Servers should be mature enough to understand their respon-

g Person to be a Good Steward” at St. Francis Solanus Parish

sibilities and to carry them out well and with appropriate reverence. They should have already received holy communion for the first time and normally receive the Eucharist whenever they participate in the liturgy... Servers carry the cross, the processional candles, hold the book for the priest celebrant when he is not at the altar, carry the incense and censer, present the bread, wine, and water to the priest during the preparation of the gifts or assist him when he receives the gifts from the people, wash the hands of the priest, assist the priest celebrant and deacon as necessary” (*Guidelines for Altar Servers*).

Among the more than 110 people involved in this ministry are three children of Chryssia and Ted Hea. These young people are outstanding examples of the kind of good stewards Carol Seifert described. Because they live very close to the church, the Hea children are often called upon to fill in for an absent or missing altar server. However, they do not mind that.

“I think it is a way for me to get nearer to God,” says Samuel, an eighth-grader. “Serving at the altar is not a burden. It is something I like to do, and in fact I like doing it.”

Samuel’s older brother, Aaron, agrees. A junior in high school, Aaron has been serving since he was in fifth grade.

“Being a server means something special to me,” Aaron says. “I am closer to the consecration and feel more involved in and a part of the Holy Mass.”

Although younger sister Elizabeth, a sixth-grader, has only been serving for a year, she also has a mature perspective of the meaning of serving.

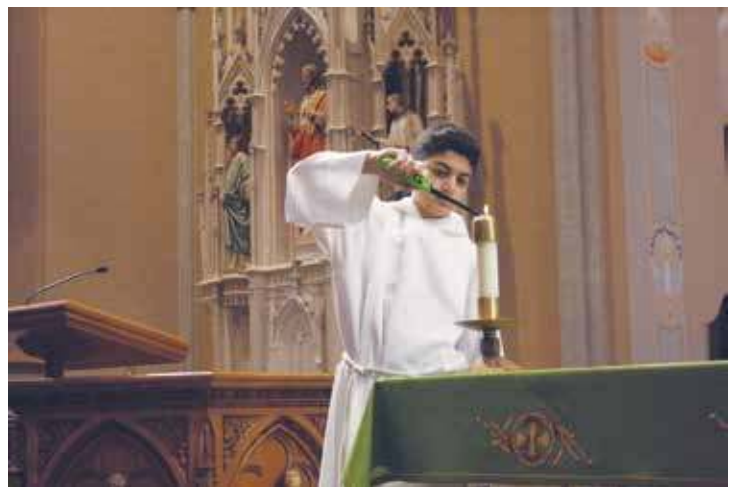
“I often serve at daily morning Mass because I go to St. Francis School,” Elizabeth says. “It is a very spiritual thing to do for me. You are so close to Jesus. I know that He is everywhere, but being right there is very nice.”

“We have many people involved in this ministry, but we still have a problem at times because they forget that they are assigned,” Carol adds. “If everyone would be there when they need to be, we would have a much more comfortable time. All our servers are a great blessing.”



“Being an altar server is a wonderful way for a young person to be a good steward. In this ministry, they serve God, the parish and the celebrating priest, of course. It also helps them to understand and to appreciate the Mass.”

– Carol Seifert, Coordinator of Religious Programs



If you would like more information on this wonderful ministry, please contact Carol Seifert at 217-222-2898.

A History of Lent and Lenten Practices

When we approach the start of Lent on Ash Wednesday, we look toward a season of preparation, sacrifice and penance, culminating in Holy Week and the joyous celebrations of Easter. And while the liturgical season of Lent offers us a time for solemn reflection, it is also widely welcomed each year as an opportunity to be drawn closer to our faith.

But just how did this penitential season come to be? And how did the reverent hallmarks of Lent – such as fasting and prayer – become so deeply ingrained in our observance of this season?

To understand the Lenten season, it is important to understand the word “Lent” itself, which is derived from two Anglo-Saxon terms: *lencten*, meaning “spring,” and *lenctentid*, which is the term for both “springtide” and “March” – of course, Lent often falls throughout most of the month of March, and during the transition into (and renewal of) the spring season. In Latin, the corresponding term for “Lent,” *quadragesima*, refers to its dating from the 40th day before Easter.

This brings us to another hallmark of the Lenten season – its length of 40 days. However, Lent was not originally observed for this length of time. During the first three centuries of the Christian era, Easter preparations consisted of three days of fasting and prayer. In some places, this preparation was extended into the entire week prior to Easter – which we now observe as Holy Week. There is also some evidence that, in Rome, Easter preparation was as long as three weeks.

In its early form, Lent was an intense period of spiritual and liturgical preparation for catechumens who were to be baptized at Easter. At the time, many members of the community observed this period of preparation alongside the catechumens. But, as time passed and more people were baptized as infants, the connection between catechumens and Lenten preparation gave way to a focus on the themes of repentance and fasting during Lent for *all* Christians.

It was not until the fourth century – upon the legalization of Christianity – that Lent developed into its current length of 40 days, which mirrored the length of Jesus’ fast and temptation in the desert, as chronicled in Luke 4:1-13.

Yet, interestingly, the Lenten observations of fasting and prayer did not always take place for 40 *consecutive*



days. For instance, in Jerusalem, fasting was observed for 40 days, Monday through Friday, but not on Saturday or Sunday – thus, Lent lasted for a total of *eight* weeks. In Rome and the West, fasting took place for six weeks, Monday through Saturday, with Lent being observed over *six* weeks. The practice of fasting for six days over the course of six weeks eventually prevailed, with Ash Wednesday being instituted to account for 40 fasting days prior to Easter.

And as the length of Lenten observance developed over time, so did the observance of fasting itself. At first, some areas of the Church abstained from all meat and animal products, while others made exceptions for certain foods, like fish. And while a person was to only have one meal a day, a smaller repast would be allowed so that manual laborers could maintain their strength throughout the day. Eventually, eating meat was allowed throughout the week, save for Ash Wednesday and on Fridays.

In fact, two of our most common and beloved Lenten and Easter traditions – the Shrove Tuesday meal and Easter eggs – developed from these early Lenten observations. Initially, abstinence from dairy products was observed during Lent, with dispensations given if pious works had taken place. Eventually, this particular rule of abstinence was relaxed entirely. Today, pre-Lenten pancake breakfasts, Easter egg decoration and egg hunts remain as enjoyable seasonal opportunities for fellowship and fun within our parish families!

Sharing the Gift of Music: The Funeral Choir Ministry

Music is an essential part of worship here at St. Francis Solanus, enriching our liturgical celebrations by providing us with a beautiful and comforting form of prayer. We are perhaps never more in need of that beauty and comfort than when we are laying a loved one to rest. For this reason, our parish has had a Funeral Choir Ministry for well over two decades. Honored to share their time and talent in this way, more than 20 parishioners regularly participate in the ministry.



Members of the St. Francis Solanus Funeral Choir gather to provide music for parish funerals.

Parishioner Mary Lou Rakers primarily coordinates the Funeral Choir, and Mary Ann Vonderhaar takes over most of the coordinating duties while Mary Lou is in Florida for the winter. The parish office informs the coordinators when funeral Masses are scheduled, and the coordinators then call the Funeral Choir participants to let them know about upcoming Mass times. Of the 25 parishioners on the call list, there may be anywhere from eight to 18 who are available to sing at a funeral Mass.

"I remember years ago, lots of times you would have Masses and you would only have the parishioners singing, and they don't always join in," Mary Ann says. "So, people often say how much they appreciate this choir."

For Mary Ann, the Funeral Choir is a great way to serve those who have lost a loved one by doing something she truly loves – singing.

"I love music and I just think it adds a lot to the service when you have beautiful music to go along with it," she says. "I like going to Mass and I like singing with other people. They say you're supposed to bury your dead, and

this is a way of helping to do that. I think most of the volunteers do it because they have the free time and want to give back, and this is something they can do and enjoy doing."

Music Director Roger Begley, who accompanies the Funeral Choir on organ, greatly appreciates the dedication of parishioners who participate in this important ministry.

"These people volunteer, and it's a wonderful service that they do because at the funeral Mass – we need help singing the hymns and

Mass parts," he explains. "We've had as many as five funerals a week, so a lot of people might even do two or three funerals a week."

Because many funeral Masses incorporate the same hymns – "Be Not Afraid", "On Eagle's Wings", and "How Great Thou Art" are among the most popular – the Funeral Choir does not meet for regular practices. The choir always strives to meet the needs of the grieving family, and when a request is made for a song that is not in our *Glory & Praise* hymnal, Roger is often able to provide the requested music from one of his other hymn books.

The Funeral Choir here at St. Francis Solanus is a wonderful example of parishioners coming together to use their time and talent in service to the Church.

"I'm glad they are doing it, because they really are like unsung heroes," says Roger of the Funeral Choir members. "I don't know what we'd do without them!"

What a great gift God has given us in music, lifting our hearts and prayers to heaven! We are thankful for the parishioners who bring the beauty and comfort of worship music to all of our funeral Masses.

The Funeral Choir is always looking for new members! If you are interested in joining this ministry, please contact music director Roger Begley at pipesounds@gmail.com or 573-406-3933.

St. Francis Solanus

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St. Francis Couples Prayer Group *continued from front cover*

together afterwards, and then we are done.”

At the parish center, one side is reserved for the adults, and one side is reserved for the kids and the babysitters, who are from Notre Dame and volunteer for service hours.

“We just ask that you let us know when you are coming and if you are bringing children,” Emily says. “That way, whoever is in charge of the main dish knows how much to bring. Everyone brings a side dish too.”

During the meetings, a space is provided for couples to pray together without distraction. Emily and Tyler have found that as an effect of the prayer group, they have started praying together more throughout the week.

“We take time to let each other know that we are praying for each other as well,” Emily says. “It is nice to know that when you are nervous about a meeting at work, or just having a bad day, that your spouse is praying for you.”

Everyone is welcome to come to the Couples Prayer Group. Try the group, and see if it will foster your relationship with each other and with Christ, as it has for the couples involved.

“God sends us signs all the time on how to improve our lives and our relationship with Him,” Tyler says. “This could be a time for you to focus on your relationship with God along with your relationship with your spouse.”

If you would like more information about the St. Francis Couples Prayer Group, please reach out to Tyler and Emily Wellman at 217-257-3536.

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.