

Saint Francis Solanus



JUNE 2017

A Grateful Response to God's Love: *Mike and Sue Holbrook*

Our stewardship calling is ever changing and evolving. It grows with us, as our relationship with Christ develops and our sense of belonging to His Church deepens. It finds new outlets as we transition from childhood to young adulthood, and onward to the more seasoned stages of life. Yet, no matter what, say parishioners Mike and Sue Holbrook, it remains an expression of love and gratitude toward God and His Church.

"To me, stewardship is just a grateful response to God who has blessed us with every good gift that we could have in life," Mike says. "I know there is no way that we can repay Christ for what He did for us, but I think our stewardship journey probably reflects that gratitude."

Both born and raised in devotedly Catholic families, Mike and Sue were each blessed with living examples

of service and generosity long before they heard the term "stewardship." This made a particular impression on Sue, whose mother always worked hard to prioritize her faith and to give in whatever ways she could.

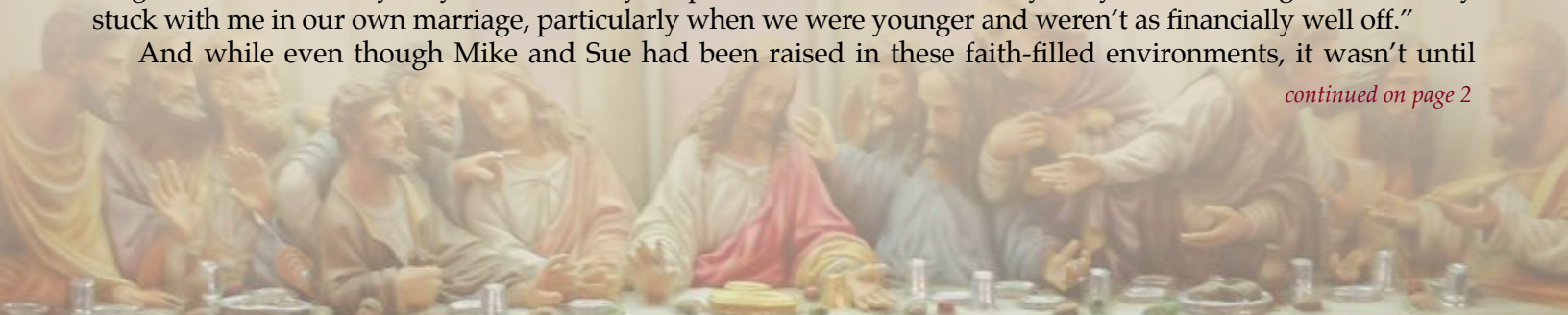
"Growing up, my parents didn't really have a lot of money, but my mom was someone who gave every single week through her time and talent," Sue says. "That was really such a wonderful example for me growing up. She taught me that not everybody has the money to spare, but that there are always ways that we can give. That really stuck with me in our own marriage, particularly when we were younger and weren't as financially well off."

And while even though Mike and Sue had been raised in these faith-filled environments, it wasn't until



Sue and Mike Holbrook.

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they attended their first Cursillo retreat in 1979 that the young couple's understanding of stewardship truly took off. A worldwide movement devoted to giving life to the teachings of the Church, this retreat brought the Holbrooks' faith alive in a life-changing way.

"That was the first time where I really saw Christ as a friend and someone I could talk to," Mike says. "It often takes a pivotal moment in your faith journey for a person to make the decision that they are going to be all-in with their time, talent, and treasure. Well, pretty much that's what Cursillo taught us 40 years ago. It opened our heart to the message of stewardship."

"It brought the Catholic faith alive for us, forming a personal relationship with Christ and making us part of this very caring family," Sue adds.

Growing their understanding of stewardship from this weekend encounter with Christ, the Holbrooks have since worked hard to keep their marriage and family Christ-centered. They made a point of sending each of their four children to Catholic school and have always sought to support the Church financially as much as possible. They joyfully serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and have belonged to many parish committees over the years. Mike has also been involved in the RCIA ministry for roughly 35 years and volunteers each Monday at the Food Pantry.

Yet, though this seems impressive, the Holbrooks feel that the blessings have far outweighed their offerings. They have been blessed with four wonderful children who each continue to practice and actively live out the faith. They've gained lifelong friends and an overwhelming force of support during times of sadness or struggle. This really became clear to the Holbrooks when their daughter, Brianna, now 19, became seriously ill when she was 6 months old.

"To this day, it is just overwhelming to even think



*Mike and Sue Holbrook with their children,
Brianna, Katie, and Jared.*

about all the love and support that we received during that time," Sue says. "That was a very pivotal moment in our journey – it demonstrated to us how doing something with your time and talents can really touch other people. And receiving this outpouring of love ourselves really emphasized for us that we needed to pay it forward."

Both Mike and Sue feel so blessed to be part of the St. Francis Solanus community, and they are grateful for the many opportunities they've been given to pay that love forward to others. They hope that through their humble offerings they'll be able to inspire their children, grandchildren and fellow parishioners to continue carrying on the torch so that the blessings of stewardship continue moving forward.

"I truly feel that St. Francis has always had something special going for it – a special way of living stewardship out," Mike says. "But I think it takes a new generation of people stepping forward and carrying on the torch to ensure that fire doesn't go out."

"To me, stewardship is just a grateful response to God who has blessed us with every good gift that we could have in life. I know there is no way that we can repay Christ for what He did for us, but I think our stewardship journey probably reflects that gratitude." – Mike Holbrook

A Letter From Our Pastor

Time Is Limitless... Or Is It?

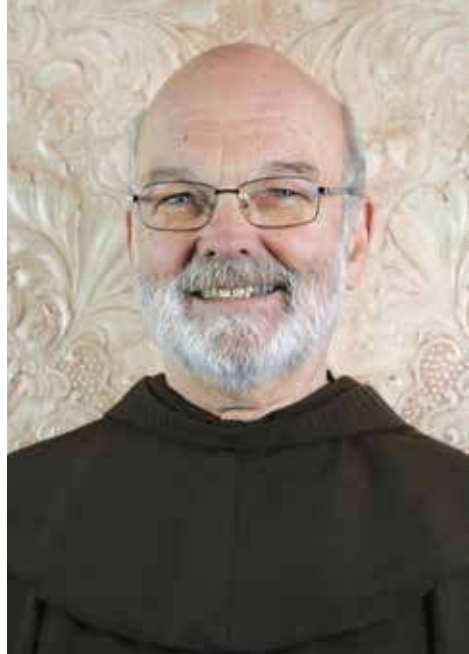
Dear Parishioners,

Some years ago, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI encouraged Catholics to renew their devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus during the month of June. In thinking about that, it made me realize that we all like to measure time – not necessarily in minutes and hours, but certainly in terms of what happens at particular times of the year. In the Church, we celebrate so many occasions that measure time – Easter, Christmas, Corpus Christi, Pentecost, Ordinary Time, the feast days of our saints, and much more, all of which give us that sense of moving forward.

In our own lives and the lives of our families, we mark birthdays, anniversaries, Baptism days, and more dates than we can possibly remember. These dates commemorate or remind us of a point in time. Time is also one of those gifts from God that we attach to the idea and life of stewardship.

We are fond of saying that time is the one thing given to all of us in equal amounts. However, we all know that is not necessarily true. Does a mother with several children have the same amount of time as a person with no family? Does a company manager who is expected to be available seven days a week have the same amount of time as someone who works a 9-to-5 job?

My point is that time is a valuable commodity, whether we feel like we have a lot or very little. God, on the other hand, is timeless. The Lord sees things in an eternal view, while we tend to look at it in shorter measures. The question is really “What do we do with our time to serve others and to increase



our relationship with God?” We have said many times that each of us needs to set aside time for both of those purposes – to serve and to pray. There is a reason it is called “prayer time.” Prayer should be a part of our lives, as much as eating, sleeping and working.

Another thing that June brings to mind is how life slows down for most of us. Young people are on summer vacation from school. Families and individuals take vacations. Unfortunately, some see it as a time to take a bit of vacation from worship. We can see it in declining Mass attendance and in the reduced number of activities within ministries and organizations.

We all mark time. We all know that it is limited, and can be fleeting. That is why even countries celebrate special days that mark time – throughout the summer season, Americans celebrate Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Labor Day. How do we mark time as individuals, as families, and as a parish? That may say more about our understanding of stewardship than anything else. Maybe now, as summer is upon us, is the perfect time to concentrate more on our spiritual habits, rather than less.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

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

Bringing the *Gift* of the

“It gives them strength that they can carry on for another week, because they know in another week they’ll receive Him again. They keep looking forward to that next time – it gives them a lot of hope.” – Carolyn Briddle

It’s easy to take things for granted when you have your health. From accomplishing what you want during the day to going to wherever you’d like, most of us don’t give a second thought to the ease and freedom that exists in our daily choices. But when someone is homebound due to age or illness, whether in their own home or a nursing home, they lose much of their independence. And for those who are unable to travel to Mass, they often lose their ability to be united with Christ in the Eucharist.

At St. Francis Solanus, however, a dedicated group of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion – EMHCs – work hard to ensure that in the midst of their suffering and loneliness, our homebound parishioners know that they are not forgotten, either by the Lord, or their Church family.

Carolyn Briddle brings Holy Communion to our homebound parishioners, and has been doing so since the ‘80s, when the ministry first began.

“My health has been good and I just thank the Lord,” Carolyn says. “I think He gives me that good health for doing what I’m doing... He wants me to keep going!”

Carolyn, who coordinates the ministry to homebound



Steve and Geri McMillen serve as EMHCs bringing Communion to those living at Good Samaritan Nursing Home in Quincy.

parishioners, visits several people each week in their homes. She prays with them and brings them the Eucharist, as well as a copy of the bulletin. She also spends some time visiting and chatting with them.

“They are so grateful and so thankful,” she says.

Geri McMillen, and her husband, Steve, serve by bringing the Eucharist to the 40-50 Catholics who reside at Good Samaritan Nursing Home. They are one of eight teams who rotate, ensuring

that the residents receive the Eucharist every Sunday.

“It’s an honor to get to bring Jesus to these people who would otherwise not be able to receive Him on a Sunday,” says Geri, who has been part of this ministry for 17 years, and currently serves as the coordinator of the EMHCs to the nursing home.

For Geri, the inspiration to serve in this way came from her own family.

“My mother and my two aunts

Eucharist



were in a nursing home, and when they passed away and I was able to do more volunteer work, I knew I wanted to go to the nursing home," she says. "After they all passed away, I realized that's where my heart is, that's where I want to go. I wanted to do what someone did for my mom."

For many people who are homebound or in a nursing home, the visit from an EMHC is the highlight of their week.

"They're so hopeful, they're just waiting for us to arrive on a Sunday," Geri says. "They're so grateful."

"Their faces just light up because they're going to receive Christ and they're just so happy," Carolyn adds.

Not only do the EMHCs bring Communion, but they also bring friendship and a reminder that, even when someone is homebound and not attending Mass regularly, they are still a valuable part of our community.

"So many of them are lonely, all you have to do is start a new conversation and you have a new friend," Geri says.

Although many of those who are homebound or in a nursing home may be facing difficult circumstances, Carolyn finds that receiving the Eucharist gives them hope in the midst of their suffering.

"It gives them strength that they can carry on for another week, because they know in another week they'll receive Him again," she says. "They keep looking forward to that next time – it gives them a lot of hope."

Not only is the visit a blessing to those who are homebound, but it's also a gift to the EMHCs who volunteer.

"They think that we're doing them a favor, but we are the lucky ones because we get to minister to them," Geri says.

"It has impacted me and my faith has grown deeper as I have done this ministry," Carolyn adds.

Geri reminds those who are able to attend Mass of the value of receiving the Lord, in Communion, and to remember those who don't have the same privilege.

"When we really understand the true meaning of receiving the Eucharist, it's powerful," Geri says. "Receiving Communion could be even more powerful for them because they aren't able to go to Mass."

For Geri, and many who serve in this way, their appreciation for the Body of Christ – both in the Eucharist, and in the parish family – grows as a result of being involved.

"It's very humbling – it touches your heart and makes you appreciate what you are able to do every day," Geri says. "I think all the people who do this grow more in Christ. We all love going there, bringing Christ to others."

To learn more about becoming involved in this ministry, or if you have a loved one who is homebound or in a nursing home and would like to receive Communion, please call the parish office at 217-222-2898.

Stewardship

Don't Take a Vacation From Stewardship This Summer

Everyone deserves a vacation. After nine grueling months of school, kids get to enjoy the summer to relax and regroup before beginning a new grade. Employees, after diligently working long hours and dealing with stressful situations, deserve time away from the office to enjoy their favorite getaway.

No one would argue that we need to mentally refresh our minds and bodies from time to time so that we can come back rejuvenated and ready to do our best.

Taking a break from some things, however, is not a possibility.

Take stewardship, for example. Imagine saying to yourself, "Well, this month I think I will not pray, not share any of my talents with anyone in need, and I will hoard my treasure." What would doing this accomplish? You certainly wouldn't feel refreshed, rejuvenated and ready to be at your best. Instead, feelings of greed, selfishness and spiritual unrest may occur. Stepping back from being a good steward just doesn't make sense.

So, now that summer has arrived in full force and our leisure time each day has increased, how can we remain good stewards?

It is likely that the regimented opportunities available during the school year are no longer available. Youth ministry and parish religious education formation may also be on summer break.

So, where do you turn? How can you keep your faith alive?

First and foremost, don't stop praying. The slow-paced days of summer are a perfect time to quiet ourselves for a few moments and try to reconnect with God. Why not take a moment of your free time each day to read the Gospel or a spiritual reflection while lounging in a hammock?

Next, try to participate in an outreach program over the summer. Think of the life of Christ – everything He did on Earth was an act of service. Now, think

of the gifts God has bestowed on you. He wants you to share them with others like He did, and summer gives us the time to do just that.

If you like working with kids, you can volunteer at the Vacation Bible School by helping to decorate, organize or being a team leader for the younger children.

If you are handy with tools, you may call Habitat for Humanity to see how you can help build a home for a family in need.

Or, if you are musically inclined, you can share your singing or instrumental gifts with a local nursing home. Maybe you are good in the kitchen. If so, you could offer your culinary skills to a local soup kitchen or food bank.

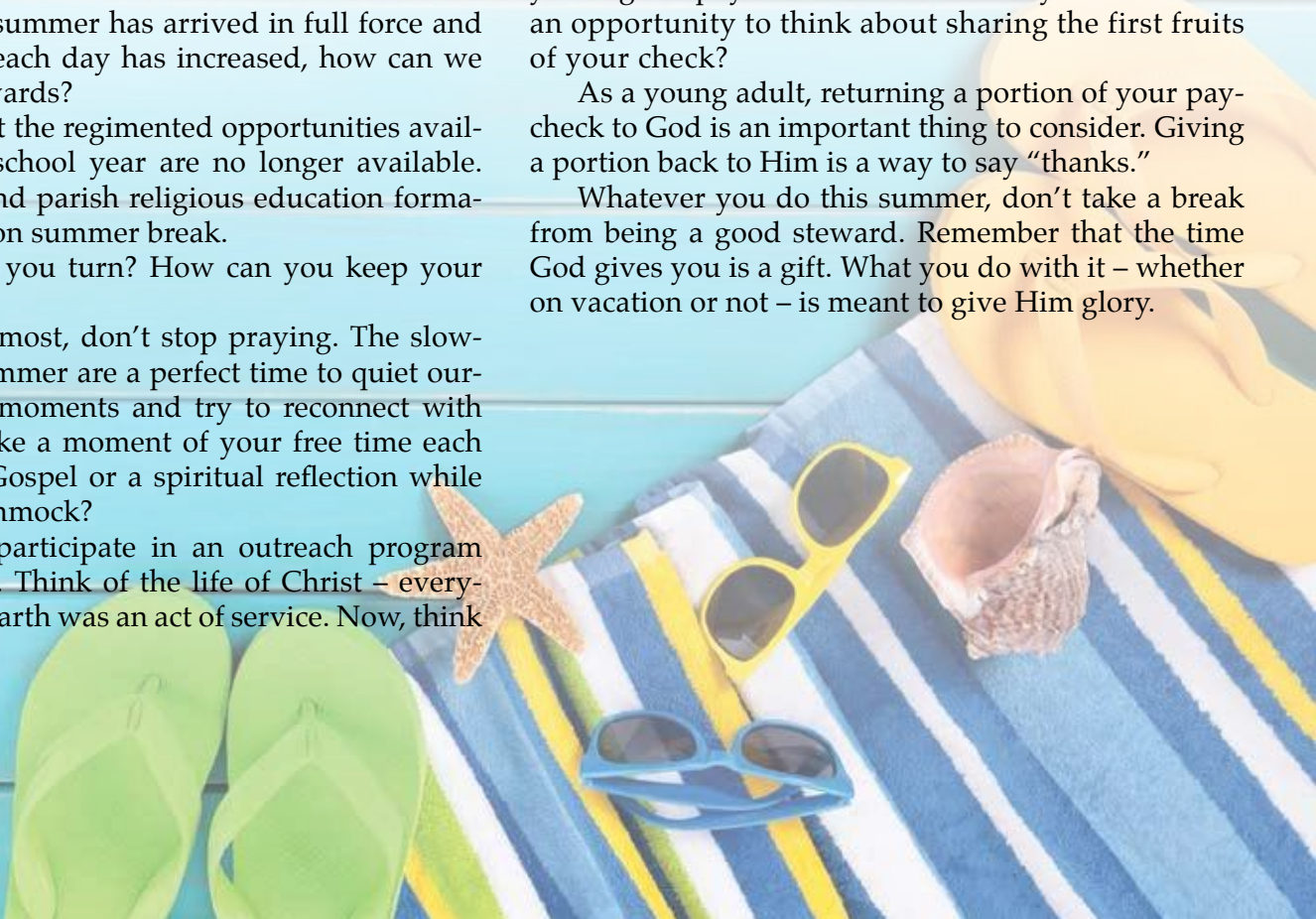
If you are a strong student, you could offer tutoring services to neighborhood kids to help prepare them for the next school year.

No matter what gift God has given you, there is a way to share it.

Getting paid for volunteering sometimes happens. And, if you have a summer job while on break, you'll get a paycheck for sure. Have you ever taken an opportunity to think about sharing the first fruits of your check?

As a young adult, returning a portion of your paycheck to God is an important thing to consider. Giving a portion back to Him is a way to say "thanks."

Whatever you do this summer, don't take a break from being a good steward. Remember that the time God gives you is a gift. What you do with it – whether on vacation or not – is meant to give Him glory.



“We Are Blessed to Have so Many Wonderful Students”

A Look Back at the Past Year at St. Francis Solanus School



Our St. Francis Solanus School has served our parish and community for more than 150 years. Established in 1862, the school has a mission of providing the finest religious and academic education to students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. The philosophy of the school is based upon Catholic tradition, which stresses the education of the whole child. This past year is indicative of the effort to fulfill that philosophy.

“Our school year has been filled with activities too numerous to mention,” says Ms. Lori Shepard, Principal. “But the students have been able to increase their faith, academic growth, social interactions, and create memories that will last forever. We are blessed to have so many wonderful students as part of our St. Francis Family.”

As Ms. Shepard notes, faith, prayer and liturgies are always at the heart of life at our school.

“For example, although school had officially begun a few weeks earlier, I felt we began our school year as a community all coming together for the City-Wide School Mass at QND on Sept. 26, with Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki, Bishop of Springfield, celebrating,” Ms. Shepard says. “Later, we celebrated a liturgy with former mayors speaking to our students about serving their community in political office and beyond.”

Other essential events activities took place throughout the year, and these served to guide our students as they learned more about living out the faith.

“November brought Youth Day for our upper grade students, and that retreat allowed them to experience their faith with their peers in a supportive way,” Ms. Shepard says. “Our second-graders were given the opportunity for First Reconciliation in December and families also participated in this wonderful sacrament. In January, we celebrated Catholic Schools Week with many activities that gave our students an enriched experience and memories that will last a lifetime.”

During the Lenten Season, students visited local nursing homes, participated in Stations of the Cross, Holy Thursday Prayer Service that included foot washing, and collected generous donations for the missions and our local food pantry.

Importantly, our second-grade students experienced the Eucharist for the first time.

“That was a treasured day for them,” Ms. Shepard says. “On Wednesday, May 24, our eighth-grade students were confirmed by Bishop Paprocki.”

It has also certainly been a busy year for our teachers. Through the year, our teachers have attended Quincy Conference, Reading Conference, Technology Conference, DAEC Conference in Decatur, and the NCEA Conference in St. Louis.

“They provide the best education possible for our stu-

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If you would like more information on St. Francis Solanus School, please contact the school office at 217-222-4077.

St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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A Look Back at the Past Year continued from page 7

dents and are dedicated to high standards,” Ms. Shepard says. “We have increased the technology in fourth and fifth grades with Chromebooks, and sixth through eighth grades are 1:1 with iPads that go home with the students for every-day assignments.”

The safety of our students has been improved in the parking lot with a new routine for drop-off in the morning. A crosswalk has also been added in the parking lot, with teachers providing supervision as students enter the building. The firemen were here early in the year with their Smoke House to remind students of fire safety, as well as a presentation on what the firefighters actually experience. The local police also came to speak to the students.

We had a great opportunity for students to learn the skill of tennis in PE with the Retired Judge Mark Schuering. Our students also enjoyed the play Little Red Riding Hood with

participants from Quincy University during a morning assembly.

Speaking recently to a group of Catholic schoolteachers and students, Pope Francis said, “Catholic school is one of the educational environments where one grows by learning how to live, how to become grown-up, mature men and women... Following what St. Ignatius teaches us, the main element in school is learning to be magnanimous... This means having a big heart, having a greatness of soul. It means having grand ideals, the desire to achieve great things in response to what God asks of us and, precisely because of this, doing everyday things – all our daily actions, commitments and meetings – with people well. [It means] doing the little everyday things with a big heart that is open to God and to others.”

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.