

# Saint Francis Solanus



JANUARY 2018

## It's Never Too Early to Change the World: Students Learn Value of Service

When we reflect on how important it is to serve as faithful stewardship, it is because we're really just following the ultimate example of service — Jesus, Who was the servant of all.

"He came to be a servant for everyone, and I think that's a good mission for us to share with our children," says Ms. Lori Shepard, Principal at St. Francis Solanus School. "Even when they're little, they can always find a way to help someone else."

This year, our school students have been taking part in Christ's mission in a number of ways, serving those in need, in our local community, as well as those suffering in other parts of the country.

Our whole school worked together to raise money for a Catholic elementary school devastated by Hurricane Irma, in Naples, Fla. In addition, students made cards and a care package that were sent to the students in need.

Throughout the school year, our students have been involved in collecting items for our St. Francis Solanus Food Pantry, which benefits families in need, especially during the holiday season.

We also collected funds and items to be donated to families in need in Haiti, which our Social Studies



*Change Cancer is one organization that our whole school supports, collecting donations that support not only important cancer research, but also treatment centers.*

teacher Mr. Jeff Zanger and his wife, Shannon, delivered while on a mission trip to Haiti.

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# Students Learn Value of Service *continued from front cover*

These past Advent and Christmas Seasons were filled with special opportunities for generosity and service, as our first and eighth-graders participated in a special collection, as well as shopping for our Advent Angel Tree, providing for those in need during the holidays. Our fourth-grade students made Christmas cards for a number of nursing home residents, while our fifth-grade students visited Bickford Senior Living to sing Christmas carols and bring the joy of the season.

"It becomes part of their awareness, that we really need to help other people," says Ms. Shepard of the insight that comes from involvement in these various efforts. "There are so many benefits for our children, as well as those they are helping. Our children feel empowered and they realize how they are blessed and how much they have to be thankful for."

From big efforts, such as donations to hurricane victims, to actions that are more "hidden," such as the second-grade's mission to serve through random acts of kindness to their family, friends and community, Ms. Shepard hopes that the spirit of generosity and stewardship is something that becomes integrated in the lives of St. Francis Solanus students in big and small ways.

"When we start when they're little, it just becomes a

way of life for them," she says. "It just becomes part of who they are."

According to Ms. Shepard, beginning to involve children in service from a young age can have a life-long impact.

"Planting the seed in the grade-school level — by the time they're adults, they are the ones who are your active participants in the church, they are the ones doing community service, helping with the Food Pantry, helping with various committees, being greeters at church," Ms. Shepard says. "They are the people who are actively involved because they're used to doing it. I think it becomes part of their lifestyle and part of who they are."

At the heart of it all is a desire to be a witness of God's love to others, to be His hands and feet in the world around us.

"Jesus said that when you help those less fortunate, you're helping Him," Ms. Shepard says. "Christ is in all of us, so when we're helping one another, we're really doing God's work."

"Sharing of their time, talent, and treasure has been part of their everyday life," she continues. "It is part of their Catholic education. It is part of our mission to help them live as Jesus did."



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*"It becomes part of [students'] awareness, that we really need to help other people. There are so many benefits for our children, as well as those they are helping. Our children feel empowered and they realize how they are blessed and how much they have to be thankful for."*

*— Ms. Lori Shepard, Principal*

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

## A Letter From Our Pastor

# Resolve to Give Back to God in 2018

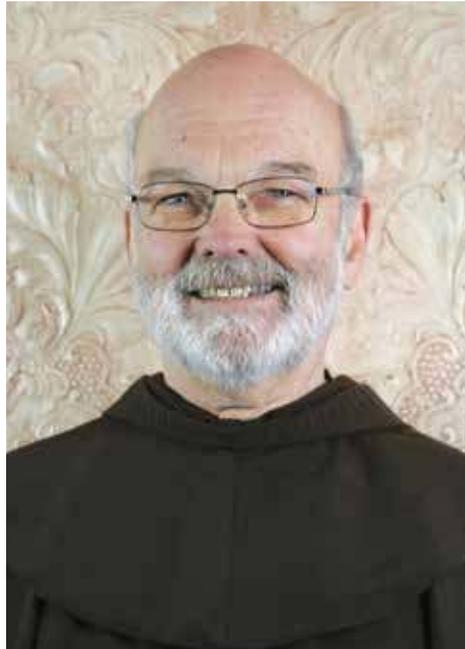
Dear Parishioners,

Another new year — 2018! There was a time in my life when this date (and others) seemed so far in the future. It is amazing how those dates start to pile up and stream by, isn't it? I have reached a point where measuring one's life by the years and dates is not as significant as many other things.

I recall reading somewhere, "The world around us asks, 'What does a person own?' But God asks, 'How does a person use what he or she has been given?'" This month of January is one filled with reminders of holiness — the official end of the Christmas season; the Epiphany of our Lord; the Baptism of the Lord; and the return to Ordinary Time, which, as we know, is not "ordinary" at all.

At Epiphany we hear, "Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts" (Matthew 2:11), a reference to the Magi and their visit to the Christ Child. The image of the Magi kneeling before the infant Jesus and opening their gifts for Him is one we should all try to follow. Each of us is called to open our gifts before Jesus and offer Him what He needs. I heard a suggestion once that if you have a problem with this thought, you should perhaps keep one of the Magi from your Christmas Nativity set and place it on your desk as a reminder.

During the Baptism of the Lord, God makes it clear when He proclaims from the Heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11). God



has given us the greatest gift He could give. He gave His only Son. When we think about the enormity of that gift of Jesus sent to save us, in addition to all the other blessings which God has entrusted to us, it is very humbling. God has given us so much. What do we give in return?

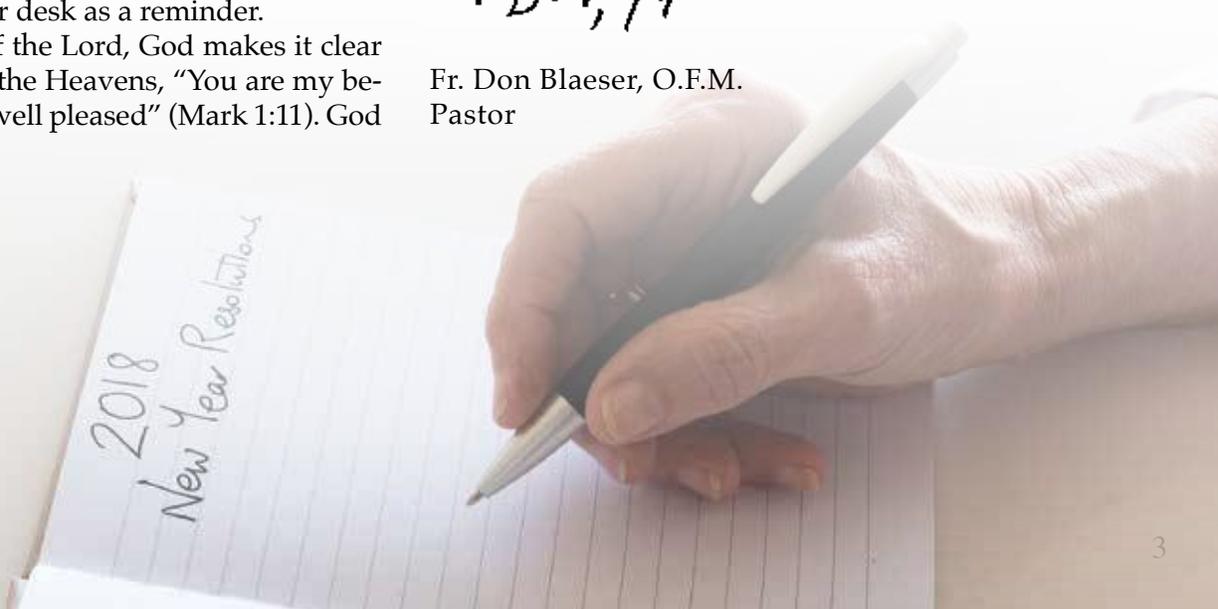
Making resolutions is common at this time of year. We will also hear this month about how Jesus called the first apostles. The Lord calls us as well to follow Him. Let us resolve to try to do that better — all of us. That does not mean we have to leave our work and our families behind, but we do need to put our service to Jesus. That should be our top resolution.

In *The Theology of the Hammer*, Habitat for Humanity co-founder Millard Fuller wrote, "The only truly safe investment one can make in life is what is given away." First and foremost, God wants us. That should be our real resolution — to give ourselves to the Lord. May we all do a better job of that in 2018. God bless you all.

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 Life Built on Faith and Service

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms, parents are called to be the primary educators of their children in the faith (CCC 2223). Parishioners Tim and Debbie Beard know from personal experience how important the family can be to a child's faith formation — both were raised in strong Catholic homes, with parents and grandparents who modeled a life of active discipleship. Now raising two children of their own — Brexton, 15, and Delaney, 11 — the Beards know how important it is to

model a strong faith life to their son and daughter.

Both Tim and Debbie attended the same Catholic grade school before going on to different high schools. It wasn't until after they reconnected years later that their romance blossomed, although Tim claims that he had an unrequited crush on Debbie as early as the eighth grade! The couple first joined St. Francis Solanus when they became engaged in 1999, and they have been active in parish life together throughout their 17 years of marriage.

These days, one or more of the Beards may often be found helping out at a Mass — Debbie serves as a Communion Minister, Tim serves as an usher, and Brexton and Delaney are both altar servers. And for this family, parish life extends beyond the Sunday obligation, as Tim coaches the girls' volleyball team, and he and Debbie help with the parish Boy Scout troop. The couple has also spent time helping with Evenings for the Engaged.

In addition to the family's participation in various parish



*The Beard family — (from left) Tim, Debbie, Delaney and Brexton*

# Service: Meet the Beard Family

ministries. Debbie feels blessed to be in her sixth year of teaching junior high math at St. Francis Solanus School.

"I really enjoy the family-type atmosphere of the school and knowing the kids not only as their teacher, but also through the church and those activities as well," Debbie says. "Also, the staff is very close and we work well together. It's a small school, so you know everyone and it's nice to have the people there to pray for you and support you."

For both Debbie and Tim, service in the Church has been a way of life since they were very young. Debbie first joined our team of Communion Ministers because she had fond memories of serving in this ministry during her grade school years. As an adult, she has found that the opportunity to offer the Body and Blood of Christ to others has taken on an even deeper meaning for her.

Tim also drew on inspiration from his own childhood when he first chose to get involved in parish life here.

"I've just always seen people serve," he says. "As far back as I can remember, my family went to church on Sundays, and my grandpa ushered. I just thought it was pretty neat when he passed the basket. So, when we were new to the parish and our kids were born, we felt that we wanted to give back to the community that had taken us in as members.

"Remembering my grandpa, I thought ushering would be a good

way to get involved," Tim continues. "It also gave us the opportunity to be gift bearers, and it's just nice to be a part of the Mass. Now that Delaney is old enough to serve, we can all be involved."

Having benefited so richly from the example that was presented to them by their parents and grandparents, the Beards hope that they are able to inspire the same love for Christ and service in their own children.

"I feel like it's important to model for your children," Debbie affirms. "If they see you doing things for the church, they're more apt to follow in those footsteps and want to do more, so I feel like modeling that type of stewardship is important for them as they grow up."

Indeed, with their strong belief that actions should

accompany words, you might say that one of the Beards' parenting mottos is "do as I say *and* as I do!"

"We believe we shouldn't ask our kids to do anything we don't do ourselves, so we felt it was important to be an active part of the parish," Tim says. "We feel that if we're actively involved in the celebration of Mass, it keeps the attention where it's supposed to be and makes it feel more relevant than just sitting there and watching it happen. It's really just an honor to be involved in the Mass in any way."

Here at St. Francis Solanus, we are blessed to have so many parishioners devoted to making active discipleship a part of their families' everyday lives. A family built on faith and service is indeed a precious gift to pass down through the generations!

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# Stewardship Living in Love

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). As Christ’s disciples, we are called to live lives of love. When asked which commandment is the most important, Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” He immediately followed this command with, “Love your neighbor as yourself. No commandment is greater than these” (Mk 12:29-31).

The life of a Christian is, essentially, all about love! This doesn’t mean that Christ preached an abstract Gospel, or that we need to love simply because “it feels good.” The reality is quite the opposite. Indeed, Christ’s Gospel of love is one of dramatic action, and living in that love calls each of us to action.

What is this love, then, of which Christ speaks? How are we to live it out today?

Christ, the God who, as John tells us, “is love” Himself, came to Earth out of pure love for us. So that we might have everlasting life, Christ took the punishment for our sins. He, the Lord of all creation, was mocked, scourged and ultimately murdered on the cross to atone for the sins that we, His creatures, have committed. Now, that’s love! And it is the love that we are called to imitate throughout our lives.

Notice the selfless nature of Jesus’ act. He gained nothing in return for what He did, and He calls us to love in the same manner. How do we do that here and now? Do we die on our own personal crosses? The answer, in a way, is “yes.” We don’t necessarily die on the wood of the literal cross as Christ did, but we must die

to self for the sake of others. That is the love of Christ, and that is the love He calls us to every day. If we want to truly love God, we must love others. God Himself showed us the reality of this need when he commanded that we love our neighbor just as we love Him. And then Christ explained, “Whatever you do to the least of those, you do to me.” If we are called to love God, then we are called to love our neighbor, for Christ resides in each one of us. It must be a love like Christ has shown us – one of selflessness. We should want for nothing more than the good of our neighbor.

There are many ways that we can show our love to others, particularly through prayer and service. Here at our parish, there are many ministries that offer us the opportunity to serve our neighbors. If we offer a little bit of time, we can help out in the parish office doing seemingly menial yet important tasks, such as stuffing inserts into the bulletins so that fellow parishioners are aware of news and events within the parish. Those of us with an aptitude for teaching may be called to serve others through RCIA or our Religious Education program. There is also always a need for more lectors and Eucharistic Ministers to aid the priest in bringing Christ to other parishioners at Mass.

These are but a few of the countless opportunities we have to serve our parish and local community. However we are called to do so, one thing is for certain: the love of Christ calls us to action. How will we show our love for God this year? Remember, “Whatever you do for the least of those, you do for me.”

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## Rosary for Peace Embracing the Promises of Mary

Much is made these days of meditation. Countless psychosocial studies have shown that people who meditate are calmer and handle stress better than people who don't meditate. Within our own faith, we are fortunate that the idea of practicing meditation through repeated prayer is a gift given to us in the form of the Rosary. As we reflect on the mysteries of our faith, we breathe out our concerns to the Blessed Mother, and breathe in her promises of grace and protection.

The Rosary for Peace is a group that meets each Monday evening at St. Francis to pray together in the quiet, contemplative surroundings of the priest's choir area. Members of the group ask collectively for Mary's intercession for peace on earth and sometimes make rosaries for those who need them.

"We pray for protection of our pope, for guidance of all leaders of the world that all peoples of the earth may live in peace," says group coordinator Philip

Kemner. "Hence, this is called the Rosary for Peace"

Additional petitions include prayers for the conversion of the enemies of our Holy Faith and the protection of human life from conception to natural death.

"We pray for priests, and to be protected from war, civil upheaval and terrorism," Philip adds.

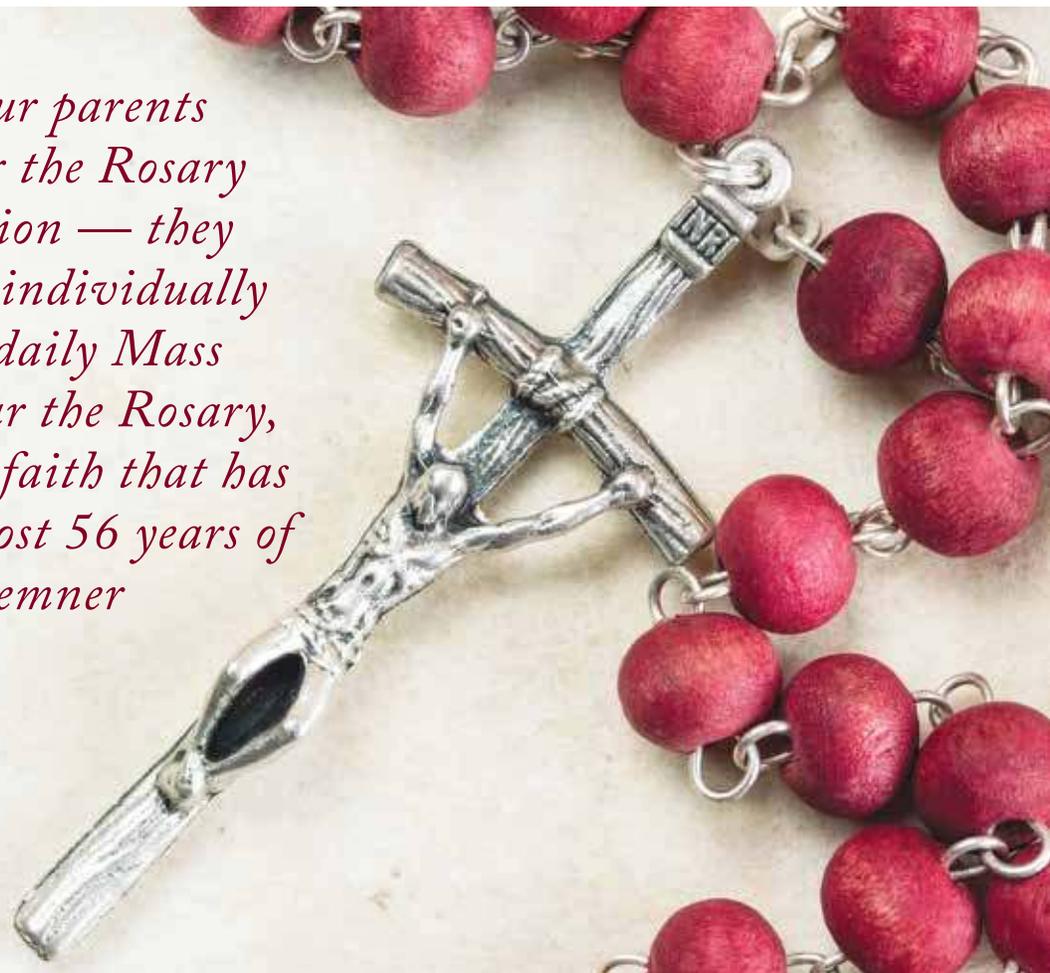
Philip and his wife, Sherry, have been leading the Rosary for Peace at St. Francis for approximately 30 years. The group is open to anyone and Philip says attendance has often varied from those of college age to senior citizens.

"The first Iraq War stands out in our minds, as the body of the church was full," he says of the group's first years. "Sad to say, even though war and strife continue, the Rosary prayers have diminished."

To encourage others to practice praying the Rosary, members of the group will sometimes make rosaries that are later donated not only to members of our parish, but also to parishioners at St. Rose of

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*"We remembered how our parents instilled in us a love for the Rosary by practicing this devotion — they prayed the Rosary both individually and in the family. The daily Mass and prayer, in particular the Rosary, has been a staple of our faith that has sustained us in our almost 56 years of marriage." — Philip Kemner*



# St. Francis Solanus

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## Rosary for Peace Embracing the Promises of Mary

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Lima, Catholics at local hospitals, those in mission areas, and our First Communicants.

“Through this activity, and the one we sponsored at St. Francis Solanus School for many years, thousands of our rosaries have been circulated throughout the world,” Philip says.

For Philip and Sherry, the benefits of praying the

Rosary have had a deep impact on their spiritual lives.

“We remembered how our parents instilled in us a love for the Rosary by practicing this devotion — they prayed the Rosary both individually and in the family,” Philip recalls. “The daily Mass and prayer, in particular the Rosary, has been a staple of our faith that has sustained us in our almost 56 years of marriage.”

*The Rosary for Peace meets each Monday evening from 7 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.  
All are welcome. Those with questions can reach Philip Kemner by phone  
at 217-242-5911 or email [pskemner@comcast.net](mailto:pskemner@comcast.net).*

### *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.