

Saint Francis Solanus



FEBRUARY 2018

Our Upcoming Parish Mission to Form Intentional Disciples

As Fr. Charles Edwards prepares for our Parish Mission this month, he's setting a goal that this mission will form us into intentional disciples who make discipleship our way of life every day.

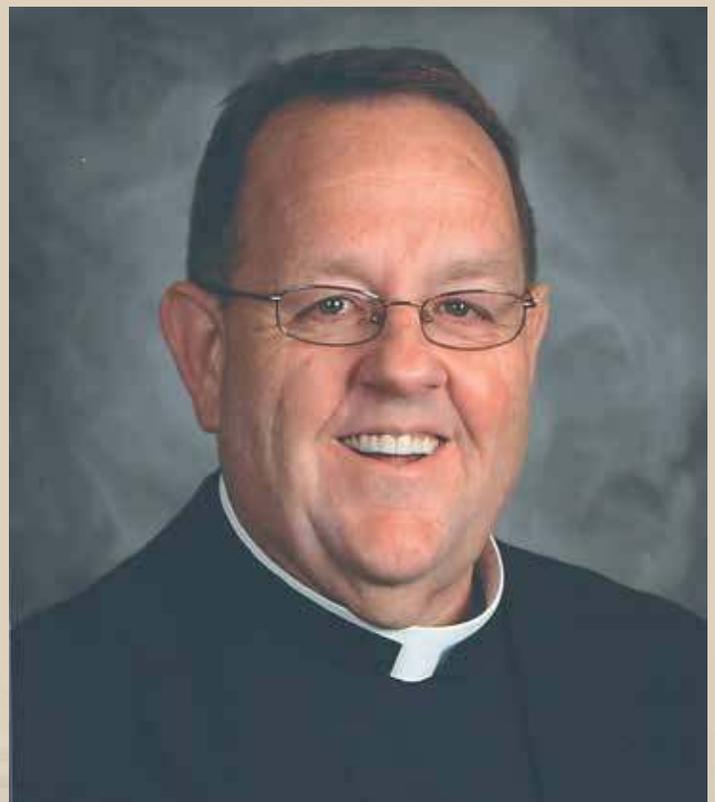
The Mission will open with Fr. Chuck preaching at all five of the weekend Masses Feb. 17 and 18. The Mission itself will be held at the church at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 18 through Feb. 20. A social hour will follow each night. All ages are welcome to attend and no registration is required.

With the theme, "Living as a True Disciple," Fr. Chuck leads each session that will include music, a prayer service and his mission talk.

"The first night will be 'Living a Sacramental Life,'" Fr. Chuck says. "The second night will be 'Forming Intentional Disciples,' and the third night will be 'Discipleship as a Way of Life as a Parish. We'll be talking about what does it mean to live in discipleship? It's based on the four 'ships' of true discipleship — Leadership, Relationship, Discipleship, and Stewardship."

On Sunday night, the focus will be affirming that we, as a parish, are sacramental people. On Monday, we will be invited to "travel on the four

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Fr. Charles Edwards will lead our Parish Mission Feb. 18-20. All ages are welcome and there is no registration.





THE SPIRITUALITY OF STEWARDSHIP

Following in the Footsteps of the Saints

The word “stewardship” has long carried with it the association of a financial obligation to the Church. Many believe that stewardship means “giving my time and money to the Church in support of its work, lest it is unable to survive and thrive.”

Indeed, stewardship does often require sacrifice of some kind. But the reality is that stewardship is not simply a guilt-laden obligation, or a “bill.” Nor is stewardship in any way comparable to a tax payment or a charitable networking opportunity at work. Instead, stewardship is a spiritual way of life – an active response to Christ’s invitation to unreservedly “come after me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Mt 4:19).

Stewardship is about how we respond to God’s call to discipleship, and there are many different ways we can respond to His call. We can, in turn, live the stewardship way of life simply by making small choices in our daily lives, under normal, everyday circumstances.

Nowhere in Christian history is there a more archetypal example of the variety of ways we can respond to God’s call, than in the lives of the saints. The saints represent a wide cross-section of individuals – old and young, rich and poor – living in different times in human history. Some were called to the religious life, focusing their lives on spirituality and material simplicity through prayer, and helping to form the tenets of faith. Others were individuals focused on charitable outreach, dedicating their whole lives to feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. Still, others faced great adversity and challenges to their faith, and ultimately suffered death and martyrdom in loyalty to Christ and His Church.

However, the commonality that all of these individ-

uals share is that they responded to God’s call to discipleship by utilizing the unique talents that God had given them. They did so in ways that were conducive to their individual personalities, and that actively influenced the circumstances presented to them in their respective days and times. Contemplative spirituality, charitable giving, great courage – all of these roads have led to canonization and, ultimately, eternal life with God in His glory. We are all called to do the same.

As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states in its pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, “The challenge, then, is to understand our role – our vocation – and to respond generously to this call from God” (43). When thinking about the spirituality of stewardship, take some time to discern your talents, and how you can best respond to God’s call by naturally and effectively using the gifts He has given you. If you are a gregarious person, this might mean reaching out to a co-worker you don’t know very well, thus helping to create a hospitable work environment. If you are an individual who is often “on the go,” perhaps this means praying the Rosary while you are driving from place to place. If you have recently experienced a financial windfall or unexpected increase in income, this might mean sponsoring a little league team in your community by paying for their uniforms.

God has provided many roads to the Kingdom of Heaven, and in the saints, we see examples of the many roads that have been taken. Choosing the one that is best for us means that we can live stewardship as a spiritual practice and a way of life, and that we may answer His call to discipleship.

A Letter From Our Pastor

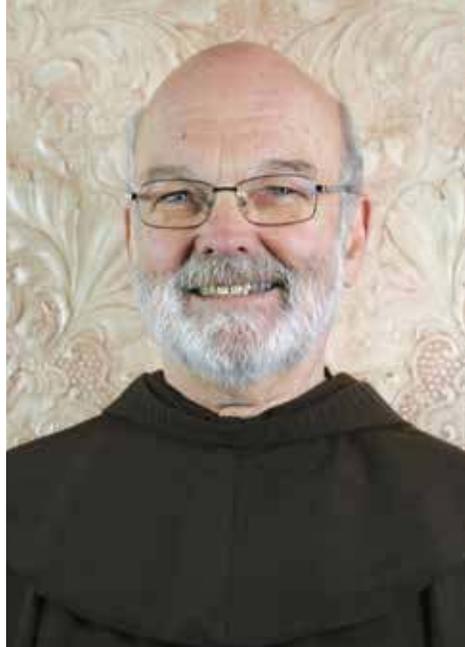
Preparing for Our Lenten Journey and Prioritizing the Gift of Time

Dear Parishioners,

Lent begins on Wednesday, Feb. 14, Ash Wednesday. Most of us are aware that Lent is a time of prayer, penance and giving alms. So, it would seem that Lent is a perfect time for stewardship. As we examine our lives and try to find ways to deepen our relationship with God, it is good to remember that whenever we give our time, talent, or treasure, we are living as better stewards.

For each of us, our relationship with God should be the first priority. God has given us the precious gift of time, so we need to thank Him for this gift by using it wisely. Stewardship of time is about how we spend every minute of every day. Most of us probably feel that we do not have enough time for all the things we hope to accomplish or achieve. However, each of us is given the same amount of time — 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week. So, how do we choose to use our time? We need to prioritize this gift of time, which means putting the most important things first.

If deepening our relationship with God is our first priority, then time spent in prayer, at Mass, in our personal lives through reading Holy Scriptures, and meditating on God's Holy Word should be paramount. Our second priority might be our relationship to our family. We need to spend time building a strong family unit filled with respect and love for life. And perhaps our third priority should be our relationship with our parish and our community of faith. Finally, we must spend time supporting others



in their faith journeys and ministering to those in need.

We must remember that first requirement for our Lenten journey — prayer. Our Catholic faith is full of prayer forms and traditions that are available to us all. Find a prayer form that works for you, and truly cultivate your prayer life in order to connect and build a real, personal relationship with the Lord. We all need to carve out time during Lent by dedicating time to prayer. Perhaps it is only 10 minutes each day for quiet reflection on Holy Scripture. Or it may be something more substantial — perhaps a reflective weekend retreat.

We might consider Lent our own personal Stewardship Renewal season. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving should be what we try to do the entire year. But we must make an intentional effort to practice these during the 40 days of Lent. After all, 40 days comprises just over 10 percent of the year — and that is remarkably close to our stewardship tithe of 10 percent, isn't it?

God bless you in all you do, and especially during this holy time of Lent.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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

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

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The Heart of the Classroom

Every once in a while, you get to meet someone with a special passion for his or her career. When you hear them talking about their job, and you can't help but think, "Wow, that person has really found their calling, and they've discovered what they were truly meant to do."

Such would be the case if you had the pleasure of meeting our St. Francis Solanus fourth-grade teacher, Mrs. Carla Slough.

But Mrs. Slough didn't start out at St. Francis as a teacher — her first years at the school were as a student.

"St. Francis is truly home to me," says Mrs. Slough, who grew up in Quincy and attended Quincy Catholic Schools all the way through college, "I received an excellent education, and it makes me proud to be able to be a part of passing that on to others."

Mrs. Slough's 31-year career as a teacher began at St. John the Baptist in Quincy, and included a short stint at St. Francis Solanus while her two children were young, and then several years at St. Mary's, before returning "home" to St. Francis, just over 10 years ago.

Although she's taught every grade from preschool through eighth grade in some capacity over the years, she currently serves as one of our fourth-grade teachers.

"Every grade has given me blessings that have helped me



Originally a student at St. Francis Solanus School, Mrs. Carla Slough has enjoyed the opportunity to teach and form our school students in the faith.

grow as a person and as a teacher," Mrs. Slough says. "Fourth-graders are curious, genuine and want to please. They are at a wonderful, moldable state for learning about any subject, and they are open to talking about God and their faith.

"There is not a day that goes by that, as I contemplate what took place, I don't have a grin on my face," she adds.

As a teacher, Mrs. Slough finds that her students aren't the only ones learning and growing during their journey together.

"I feel a good teacher not

only shares knowledge, but also continues to learn with their students," she says. "Teachers have to feel wonder, too, if they want their students to feel it. My students don't expect me to be perfect and they respect who I am, knowing that I love and respect them for who they are."

Through teaching the faith, Mrs. Slough has experienced deepening her relationship with God, as well.

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"Teaching at St. Francis and at the other Catholic schools has very much had an impact in my faith. Fellow teachers have been such good examples for me to emulate and to better practice my faith. And when we talk about our Catholic faith, I'm so inspired by these children and their openness to God. We all need to keep that child-like faith." — Mrs. Carla Slough

m: Meet Mrs. Carla Slough

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Although she and her husband, Dennis, who has always supported her, have made sacrifices for her to teach in Catholic schools, they wouldn't change a thing.

"Being a part of an institution where faith is shared every day means so much to me," Mrs. Slough says. "I can't imagine

teaching in a building where I was not allowed to mention Jesus or anything about God."

As for having the role of guiding our children, Mrs. Slough says that she is "the lucky one."

"I'm so blessed that the Lord guided me to do what I am privileged to do every day," she says. "Yes, some days are very difficult — however, it is still rewarding almost every day. Being a little part of your students' lives is something that I treasure and, I hope the students know how much I love them.

"Lifestyles have certainly

changed throughout the years, but children have not," she continues. "They all just want to be heard, loved and accepted for who they are — and yes, they do want to learn."

Mrs. Slough's hope is that the life lessons that occur in the classroom will stay with students as they proceed through school and onward into adult life.

"I hope their faith stays strong and whatever they choose to make as their careers and vocations will always include God, leading them along their paths," she says.

For more information on Catholic education at St. Francis Solanus School, please visit www.stfrancissolanus.com/school.

Our Upcoming Parish Mission to Form Intentional Disciples *continued from front cover*

'ships,' to get on board," Fr. Chuck says. On the final night, discussion will be centered on the Four Pillars of Stewardship — Hospitality, Prayer, Formation and Service.

"One of the key things covered in the Mission is that you can't become a disciple of Jesus without first having a personal relationship with Christ," Fr. Chuck says. "So we have to develop the second 'ship,' relationship, where we enter into this personal relationship with Christ before we can offer our stewardship to Him and become a disciple of Christ."

And while the focus of the Mission is on discipleship, the Mission can certainly have a role in our lives during our Lenten journey that begins Feb. 14.

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Anyone who would like more information about the upcoming Parish Mission may call the parish office at 217-222-2898.

A Significant Moment in Our Prayer

The Presentation of the Gifts

Occasionally, you might hear someone jokingly refer to “halftime” during Mass – the interval following the Prayers of the Faithful, as the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins. It can be easy, even tempting, to zone out as you sit, waiting for the collection basket to make its way to your pew.

But if you pay attention, you’ll have the opportunity to enter into something deeper – a significant moment in our prayer.

It’s mentioned by St. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest Christian writers, when describing the Mass in the second century, “Bread is brought up and wine and water...”

This practice, of people bringing up the gifts, has been part of our Catholic tradition from the very beginning. Although we might think of this action as being merely practical, in reality, it serves a much deeper spiritual purpose.

Each Sunday Mass, someone is chosen, whether an usher, or another member of the parish, to bring forward “the gifts” – bread, wine, and in many cases, the collection of money that has been gathered moments before, from the generosity of the congregation. These gifts not only symbolize, but also in reality, are the work of human hands. The bread and wine are fruit of God’s creation, which, through the effort of human hands, are made into the gifts that we present to the Lord.

Certainly, the collection that is presented to the priest also serves to represent the work and sacrifices of the previous week. Sharing our monetary “treasures” is one of the ways that we embrace stewardship. It’s an opportunity to generously give back to the Lord, from the fruit of our work.

In his book *What Happens At Mass*, Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB explains, “...We should not think of the collection of money at this point as some sort of banal, dirty but necessary affair. Money is our work. Money is hours of our lives. And now we give it away, we sacrifice it, for the work of the Church.”

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul instructs Christians to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).

The physical act of carrying the gifts forward to the priest is meant to serve as a tangible reminder of the fact that we are all called to stewardship. We are all called



to present to God our lives – our work, our talents, the struggles and victories of the past week – as an offering and gift to God.

Those who bring forward the gifts each week have the privilege and responsibility of remembering what their action represents – that we are called to give generously of our time, talent and treasure to God, who gives us His very self, at Mass. And for those sitting in the pews, tempted to “check out” for a few minutes, seeing the gifts being brought forward should serve as a powerful reminder to offer our lives back to God, through serving and honoring Him.

So next week, don’t just sit back and wait for the “halftime show.” Come to Mass a few minutes early and approach an usher to ask if you and/or your family may bring up the gifts that week. Don’t be surprised if you start to notice a change in your heart and a desire to be even more generous with God in the coming week!

Shaping Christianity Through their Gifts and Talents: *The Pivotal Players*

What do St. Francis of Assisi, G.K. Chesterton, and famed artist Michelangelo have in common? Born in different time periods with radically different lifestyles and callings, you might first be inclined to answer, “Not much.” But according to Bishop Robert Barron’s new series, *Catholicism: The Pivotal Players*, each one of these historic figures have uniquely used their God-given talents and gifts not only to shape the life of the Catholic Church, but also to change the course of human civilization.

“It’s a DVD study series that covers a total of 12 individuals altogether,” study facilitator Nancy Venegoni says. “And they’re not all saints either. Michelangelo, for example, is the last figure of the first six covered. Bishop Barron is focusing on people that have been pivotal to the Catholic faith, making a tremendous impact on people’s faith over the centuries.”

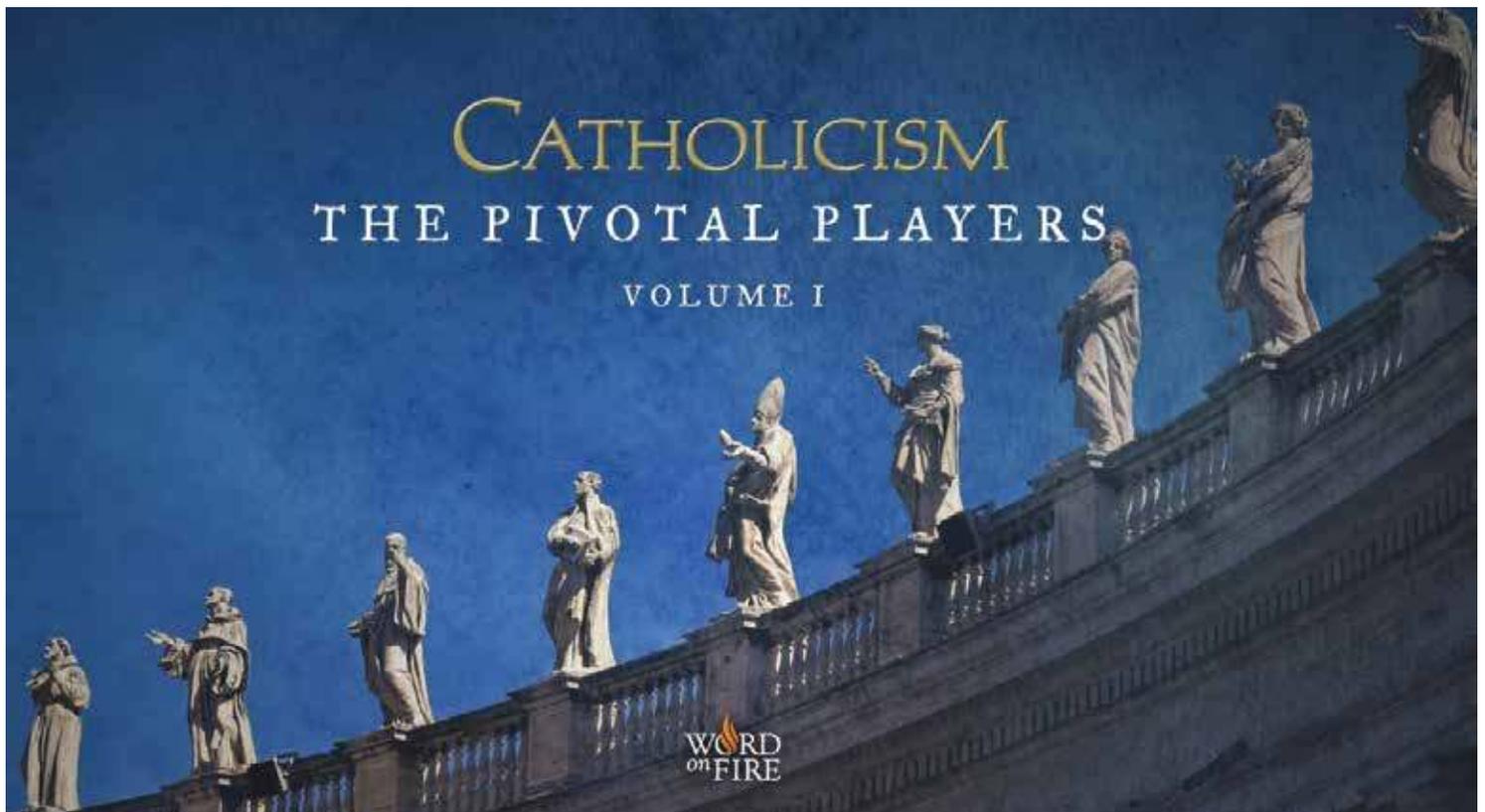
Nancy and her husband, John, have been leading this series for roughly a year. Broken up into mini sessions in order to make the time commitment more manageable, the series’ last session on G.K. Chesterton was concluded in mid-December. And though each pivotal player is

wholly unique, the couple has found immense joy in learning about each person’s contributions to our Catholic heritage. It inspires them to evaluate their own gifts and talents, seeking new ways to use them for God’s glory.

“Every one of us has a very unique set of gifts and talents,” Nancy says. “I think too often people think, ‘There isn’t anything that I could do to help,’ but there are truly so many ways to share your talents. John and I feel truly blessed that we’ve been given the gifts that we have and we feel very called to use those gifts to spark and encourage others to examine and use their own gifts for others.”

“How do you know someone has faith?” John asks. “It’s always expressed through one’s good works. Faith and works must go hand in hand. And we see this over and over again through the lives of these pivotal players — some who are canonized saints, and some like Michelangelo, who show that the Holy Spirit was working through them, through the beautiful masterpieces he created; works which I’m sure have brought many people to the faith.”

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St. Francis Solanus

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The Pivotal Players *continued from page 7*

The couple is particularly excited to begin the next session of *The Pivotal Players* series, which will focus on the life and artistic contributions of Michelangelo. For though he wasn't a priest or mystic, he used his incredible gifts to reveal God to man in a way that continues to impact Christians everywhere today.

"Michelangelo shows his faith in a very different way than any of the other previous people we've studied," John says. "He's not a saint, but he answered the call through his mission in life, which was to flesh out in his artistic work through stone and the paintings that he

created to reveal the beauty and glory of God."

The Michelangelo session will begin on Tuesday, Feb. 20, and will continue the next two subsequent Tuesdays. Gatherings will take place in the St. Francis Parish Center from 7-8:30 p.m. Each session includes a video presentation from Bishop Barron followed by opportunities for discussion and sharing amongst participants within small groups. This is an important part of the series, John explains, because it allows the study members to form relationships with one another as they grow in and share the faith with each other.

All parishioners are invited to join the Venegonis for this special series. You can sign up by calling the parish office at 217-222-2898, by emailing the couple at jvenegoni6808@comcast.net, or by filling out a registration form located in the parish bulletin. In order to ensure that you receive a study booklet, please register no later than Feb. 4.

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.