

Saint Francis Solanus



DECEMBER 2018

Children's Liturgy of the Word Provides a Foundation for a Life of Faith

It's OK to admit it. If you're a parent, there's probably been at least a Sunday or two when you've felt anxious about going to Mass. Maybe it's after a particularly difficult week with a fidgety kindergartner, or maybe it happens when you start to doubt that your elementary student is getting anything out of the liturgy each week. It can certainly be a challenging task to keep young children engaged for an hour in the pew.

Here at St. Francis Solanus, we want Sunday Mass to be an opportunity for all our parishioners to pray and grow closer to God and their parish community. And we're aware that, for many children, trying to sit still for an hour may not be the best way to do that.

With this in mind, our young parishioners are invited to join us for Children's Liturgy of the Word, each Sunday — Labor Day through Memorial Day — at the 9:30 a.m. Mass. Children's Liturgy of the Word is designed to give young children, generally in kindergarten through fourth grade, an opportunity to listen to the Mass readings and learn about them at their level. At Children's Liturgy, catechists lead our young parishioners in age-appropriate reflections, prayers and activities, all designed to help them understand and apply Scripture in their lives, while gaining a positive experience of Mass.

Leaving the church after the opening songs and prayers, children listen to the Mass readings, read by their peers or a

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Kristy Henrichs serves as a catechist for Children's Liturgy of the Word, which is offered at the 9:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays.



Children's Liturgy of the Word *continued from front cover*

catechist. After the readings, children have the opportunity to learn more about Scripture in an interactive discussion, designed to answer their questions and help them understand God's Word.

Parishioner Kristy Henrichs, who currently coordinates the ministry, has been involved as a catechist for the past seven years. As a busy mom of four, with a background in education and daycare, it's the perfect way for her to give back to the parish.

"This way, I'm at Mass, I'm hanging out with kids, and I can teach them about God," Kristy says. "I want coming to church to be a positive experience in their lives."

Not only is Children's Liturgy an opportunity for kids to grow in their faith, but it can also give parents the opportunity to focus and enter into the Sunday liturgy more fully.

"At Mass, sometimes kids can get antsy," says Kristy, with a smile. "If you're antsy, you're not paying attention. Children's Liturgy is a smaller group and I ask them questions, I ask them to read, I get them more involved."

"Come back if you need to come back with them, that's fine," she adds. "That way, you're getting something out of Mass and they are too."

Through serving as a catechist, Kristy has found that her own faith has grown, as well.

"My faith has grown tremendously," Kristy says. "Now that I'm reading the readings, I pay more attention. You already know all the stories, but it helps to actually know what they mean, and know what you're supposed to do with them."

Kristy hopes that children's positive experience at Children's Liturgy will begin to lay the foundation for a life of faith, for years to come.

"I hope they take what we say as a group and go apply it in the world, even if it's something simple," she says. "If they do that week after week when they're adults, they'll keep doing those things and not have to think about it and maybe it will be a better world."

She also encourages fellow parishioners to consider serving as catechists.

"I would encourage people to do this, especially if you like children," Kristy says. "It's very rewarding."

If you would like more information, or to become involved as a catechist for Children's Liturgy of the Word, please contact Kristy Henrichs at 217-653-6181.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

The Immaculate Conception Mass Schedule

5:30 p.m. — Friday, Dec. 7

6:30 a.m. — Saturday, Dec. 8

8 a.m. — Saturday, Dec. 8

Christmas EVE Mass Schedule

4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m., 10 p.m.

Christmas DAY Mass Schedule

8 a.m., 10 a.m.

New Year's Eve, Dec. 31

5:30 p.m.

New Year's Day, Jan. 1, 2019

8 a.m., 10 a.m.



A Letter From Our Pastor

Stewardship Possibilities are Endless at Christmas

Dear Parishioners,

When I think of December, the first thing that comes to mind is Christmas. While that may seem to be the obvious topic, there really are a number of other possibilities. I could think of *Advent*, a season of preparation. I could think of the *Immaculate Conception*, as we celebrate God's gift to the world in Mary. I could think of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, whose popularity has spread far beyond the Hispanic community. Of course, December also holds the first day of *winter*. And because December marks the end of the civil year, I might be developing my resolutions for the New Year!

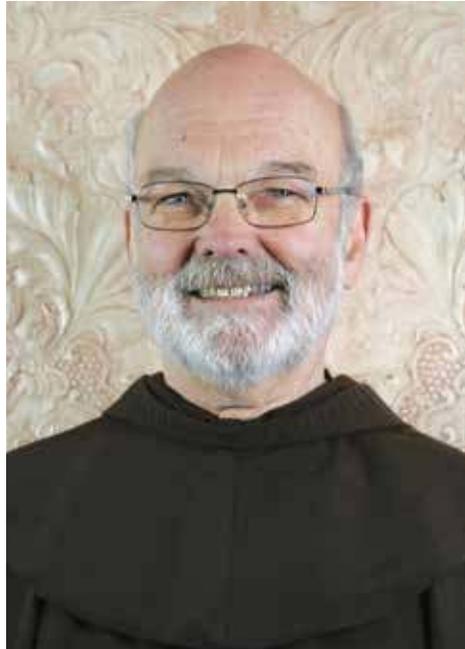
But instead, I think about Christmas. It is when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Babe in the manger in Bethlehem, who is the eternal Son of God made man.

The basic truth of Christmas — celebrating the birth of Jesus the Messiah, God Incarnate — is plenty of reason for us all to rejoice and worship. But we've piled such an additional load onto our Christmas observance that worship may be lost in the shuffle.

Think about what weight Christmas has to bear. We have to put up the decorations, or make travel plans to visit relatives. There is also the Christmas dinner to plan and cook. And then, we still have Christmas presents to buy. No wonder the Christ Mass becomes an afterthought!

Yet, we still have a wonderful opportunity this season — an opportunity to combine our Christmas activities with our stewardship commitments. Treasure, although challenging, is the simplest. Shouldn't the most expensive Christmas present we give be the one to Jesus, Whose birthday we're celebrating? Risen and glorified, He needs nothing we have. But His Body, the Church, continues Jesus' mission here on earth and always needs additional resources.

Time and Talent may be a little more complicated, but can't we spend a little more of our time in worship and



prayer? Maybe you can attend Mass each day of the Christmas Octave. Have your family gather for prayers together in the morning or at dinner, in preparation for Christmas Day and through the Christmas season.

And there are so many opportunities to share our Talent! Sing in the choir for the Christmas Masses. Buy a gift for someone whose name is on one of our Giving Trees. Help decorate the Church. Cook or bake for someone who is shut-in. Invite someone who will be alone to share Christmas dinner with your family. Offer to work in the parish Food Pantry. The possibilities are endless.

With a little planning, we can make this hectic time one of real

blessing both for ourselves and others. Pray for me that I can keep Christmas properly, and I'll pray for you. And by the way, have a merry Christmas!

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



ST. FRANCIS SOLANUS

Promoting the Real Joy of Christmas



The church, filled to capacity during our school's annual Christmas Program.



Collecting items for families in need.

With all of the commercialism surrounding Christmas, it's far too easy for our children to lose perspective on the true reason for the season. This is why, says St. Francis Solanus School Principal Lori Shepard, special care is taken each year to help focus students on the Advent season through opportunities for prayer, service and works of charity.

"We try to remind our students through these projects that Christ is the true reason for the season and that it is better to give than receive," Ms. Shepard says. "Santa has become a major part of our culture and it is difficult to avoid the commercial influence, but through prayer, service and faith, our students prepare during the Advent season in the best way possible."

This begins by inviting the students and their families to share of their treasure to help fellow school families in need. Financial collections are made, and then students are able to shop anonymously at a local store.

"Students in kindergarten and eighth grade use the money collected to purchase clothing, games and toys for some of our families that could use a little extra support," Ms. Shepard says. "All work together for the good of the school, and to make sure that some less fortunate families have a reason to smile on Christmas morning. Not only do the families that enjoy the gifts have a benefit, but the students who give also have special blessings and joy in their hearts. What a great feeling it is to help and support those in need, just as Jesus did."

Building upon that spirit of giving, St. Francis Solanus School students are also encouraged to donate their change to support various cancer research programs through Change for Cancer. Past recipients have included Siteman Cancer Center in St. Louis, Illinois CancerCare in Peoria, and the Allison Holbrook Scholarship for St. Francis Solanus students. A special display is also set up as a way to remember school and parish members who have been afflicted by this terrible disease.

"A Christmas tree is decorated with the names of our loved ones that are currently battling cancer,

SOLANUS SCHOOL

Christmas Through Stewardship Gifts

or may have passed away due to the illness,” Ms. Shepard says. “It is a beautiful sight to see all of the colorful stars on the tree, but at the same time, it is a visual reminder of how many people we are helping with our donations.”

Students also work to support the Food Pantry during the season, and school families are also encouraged to take home a star from the parish Christmas tree in order to shop for and wrap presents for families in need.

“Our stewardship is strong here in our parish and in our school,” Ms. Shepard says. “Students learn early the importance of helping others and being a servant to all.”

Beyond all of these worthy acts of service, St. Francis Solanus students are also able to share their talents each year with their parents and faith community through the school’s Annual Christmas Program. Held within the church, each class is able to sing two Christmas songs — one spiritual and one from the traditional Christmas list. Always fun to watch, the children’s voices help us slow down a bit and focus our hearts more fully on the true spirit of Christmas. Afterwards parents and audience members are able to share hot chocolate and Christmas cookies together in the Parish Center.

“The church is always filled to capacity for this event and all are inspired with the Christmas spirit of the season as they leave,” Ms. Shepard says.

By incorporating the Advent season in these many ways, St. Francis Solanus School helps ensure that our children understand what Christmas is truly all about. And in the process, they bless us all through their unchecked generosity and love.

“Through these charity events and our Christmas Concert, our students shine for all the world to see,” Ms. Shepard says. “I am so very proud of the generous spirit of our children and our families that attend St. Francis Solanus School and Church. Many of our families could use a helping hand themselves, and yet they give of their resources very generously. You will always find a cheerful giver at our school who is ready and willing to spread the Gospel message through their actions.”



Students with some of the food items they’ve collected for the parish Food Pantry.



Students gathered together for the Change for Cancer assembly.

If you would like more information about St. Francis Solanus School and how to get involved, please contact either 217-222-4077 or school@stfrancissolanus.com.

Let Us Find the Many Opportunities to Share and Encounter Christ this Season

We all know classic stories of Christmas spirit instilling new life and bringing about a deeper sense of joy and gratitude — Dr. Seuss' classic character, the Grinch, whose heart grows three times its size; or Buddy the elf, who brings Christmas cheer by singing loud for all to hear; or even the cold and greedy Ebenezer Scrooge, who awoke on Christmas morning a changed man, sharing in joy and treating all with kindness. We enjoy certainly hearing these stories every year. But sometimes, even as Christians, it is so easy to forget the source of these lessons — the birth of Christ, the first Christmas itself. And there are so many characters from this ancient story that remind us how to embrace this season as Catholic stewards.

Let's start with the innkeeper, the first character Mary and Joseph encounter before Jesus even enters the world. He does what he can — there is no room, just a stable. He has little, but what little he has he gives away freely. And unknowingly, the Christ Child enters into this world in the midst of one man's humble offering. What a beautiful example of stewardship! Is there some small thing into which you could invite Jesus? Perhaps there is a new parishioner you could invite over for dinner, or a new mom for whom you could prepare a meal. In whatever way you might reach out, be sure to make a place at the table for your new guest and allow yourself to encounter Christ in them.

Next in this story, we meet the shepherds — the first

people to meet Jesus, to see their Savior face to face. Even in their poverty, they simply bring Jesus their very selves, this gift of their presence and eagerness to encounter Him. Consider visiting a nursing home to be with those who might not have company during this Christmas season. Or have a neighbor over who you haven't seen in a while. Sometimes, we forget that just taking time to be present to another person can be a gift of self.

And then there are the Wise Men. Though they are better off perhaps than the shepherds or the innkeeper with their offerings, they still chose to give their very best gifts, not out of excess or what was left over. Though such finery would not usually be seen in Bethlehem, the Wise Men went out from the comfort of their homes to encounter the newborn King. Consider starting a coat or sock drive in your parish to give to those in need in the community. Spend time serving in the local soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Go where the giving is not glamorous.

No one of these characters is better than the other — in fact, without even one, the story of the birth of Christ would not be the same at all. In turn, we all have something to offer, a way that we can allow the Lord to enter into our lives during this season, or to bring Him to others that we encounter. However we may choose to give this season, let us give with the same generous spirit as those who welcomed the Christ Child on that first Christmas.



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Christmas Card Shower

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Meaningful for Our Parish Family



The Christmas season calls us to come together with our families to celebrate the birth of Christ. We welcome relatives who return home and we travel to join our loved ones far away. But what about the members of our parish family who are no longer able to live at home? They are not forgotten during this joyous season — and there is a wonderful way we can bring them into our celebrations!

The annual Christmas Card Shower is one of the volunteer efforts of the St. Francis Community Assistance Ministry. The shower is for the benefit of the parishioners of St. Francis who are nursing home residents. Over the past several years between 2,500 to 3,500 cards have been distributed to our fellow parishioners living in nursing homes.

“My sister, Jane Gregory, and I assist with coordinating, collecting, sorting and delivering the cards to the nursing home residents,” says Susan Mast. “It is thanks to the parishioners of St. Francis, and, when time permits, some of the students at St. Francis

Grade School and the Scouts, who spend their valuable time during the busy holiday season to make the Christmas Card Shower possible.”

Susan and Jane assemble a list of parishioners for each nursing home that is published in our bulletin shortly after Thanksgiving. The list is published for three consecutive weeks, with the delivery of the cards set for the second week of December. We parishioners drop off the cards to collection bins in the back of the church and right beside the main entrance of the Parish Center.

“As we sort the cards, I enjoy seeing the students’ homemade Christmas cards,” Susan says. “Each one is unique and full of holiday cheer.”

Susan and Jane have carried on the volunteer work after helping their mother, the late Rosie Mast, and Marge Hufendick, in the past.

“I enjoy and look forward to this project because it also puts me in the holiday spirit and it makes my day to bring some happiness and well wishes to the

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St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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Christmas Card Shower *continued from page 7*

nursing home residents,” Susan says. “We deliver Christmas cards to parishioners in the Quincy nursing homes and they have been delivered to nursing homes in Mendon, Camp Point and Barry, as well.”

When the cards are delivered, the recipients spend time enjoying the cards and reading the holiday sentiments and wishes from our parish.

“Some spend time looking at them over and over,” Susan says. “The Christmas Card Shower is yet another wonderful demonstration of the thoughtfulness of the parish community to keep our parishioners who are nursing home residents feel like they are still a part of the St. Francis Community. We are fortunate to be able to volunteer with this project.”

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Anyone who would like more information on the Christmas Card Shower may call the parish office at 217-222-2898.

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.