

Saint Francis Solanus



JANUARY 2019

Angel Dusters Work Faithfully to Keep Our Church Tidy While Sharing in Fellowship

It's work that has to be done, and our Angel Dusters Ministry does it willingly and without fanfare — and that suits them just fine.

Jean Jesberg coordinates the group that usually numbers between 10 to 15 parishioners. The Angel Dusters traditionally gather after the 8 a.m. Mass on Thursdays. The group dusts the pews, cleans the holy water fonts and damp mops the floor. Jean usually takes care of the restroom. The janitor vacuums the aisles.

"Once a year, we wash down the benches and whatever needs to be done," Jean says.

All while the group is working, every member is mindful that they are in the church, working both in the nave and around the sanctuary.



"We're in church — we're respectful of where we are," Jean says.

New members generally join the group after signing up during the annual Stewardship Fair. Jean receives the names of those interested and follows up with a phone call.

"People sign up for Angel Dusters because it's something that fits their schedule," Jean says. "It's not too hard and doesn't take too long."

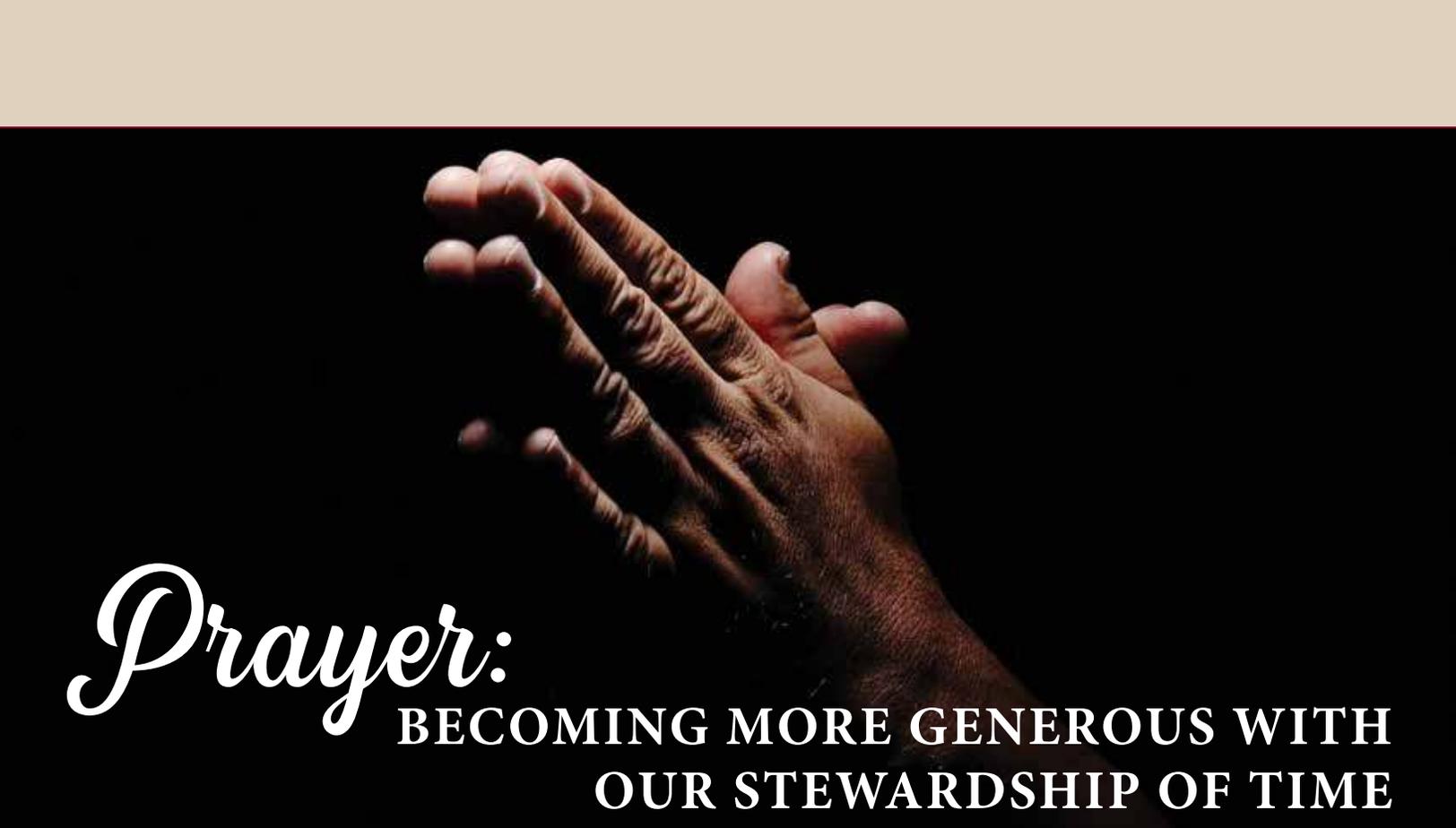
Jean herself has been an Angel Duster for 40 years — she joined when her youngest daughter entered school, and it perfectly suited where she was at.

"It was my first volunteer activity,"

The Angel Dusters Ministry works diligently after the 8 a.m. Thursday Masses to keep our church clean.

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Prayer:

BECOMING MORE GENEROUS WITH OUR STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

A professor stood in front of a class, and in his hand was a big glass jar. He put six big rocks in the jar, with the rocks up to the edge. He then asked his students, “Is the jar full?” And they replied, “Yes.”

The professor told the students, “No, it’s not.” Then, he pulled out gravel and put it in the jar. He then asked, “Now is it full?” The students once again replied, “Yes.” The professor responded, “No, it’s not.” He reached down and pulled out sand, which he poured into the jar with the same responses. Then, he reached down again for a pitcher of water, and poured water in, all the way to the brim. Then he asked, “Now is it full?” And the students replied, “Yes.”

The professor then asked, “Okay, what lesson do you learn from this?” The students responded, “No matter how many things you’ve got in the jar, there’s always room to put a little more in.” The professor told them, “No, that’s not the lesson. The lesson is, if I didn’t put the big rocks in first, they would have never fit!”

Most Catholics can appreciate this story — in particular, how it can apply to our own prayer lives. Essentially, every person has to decide what the “big rocks” are in his or her life. And, for us Catholics, prayer should be one of those big rocks in the jar.

As Catholics, we *know* that prayer is important, and we know that we can and should always pray more. Yet, connecting with God in this way often slips through the cracks of our busy lives.

The stewardship spirituality is about trying to become ever more generous with our Time, Talent, and Treasure. And there is a reason why “Time” is first in line. Time in a

stewardship context refers to the time we spend with God in prayer. We need to take time to talk to God and take time to be quiet and seek to listen as He expresses His love for us and wants us to know His inspiration in our life.

There are many different forms of prayer — from weekly prayer, such as the Mass, to daily personal prayer. A daily Rosary is one of the most universal spiritual practices that can enrich the lives of Catholics around the world. Even if the decades are spread out throughout the day, or even if you pray just one decade a day, you will find yourself growing closer and closer to the Lord each time.

Morning and night prayer are also important disciplines to maintain. Set aside a comfortable place in your home where you can find silence. Maybe focus on a spiritual image and take time to center yourself with Scripture or some other kind of spiritual reading.

For many, spending large portions of the day in silent prayer may not always be possible. But make it a priority to find those moments of quiet throughout the day, and to find ways to incorporate prayer in the midst of your busy schedule. When you get into a vehicle, pray — before a meal, after a meal, if you’re faced with a tough decision. Just pray!

Ultimately, the bottom line is this — just as in any human relationship, communication is a central aspect of a vibrant relationship with God. Prayer is fostering this communion of love with God. He loved us into existence and He wants us to enter into a loving conversation with Him. We’ve got to talk to Him. And we have to listen to Him. He will take care of everything if you just trust Him. He’s knocking at the door and waiting for us to open it in prayer.

A Letter From Our Pastor

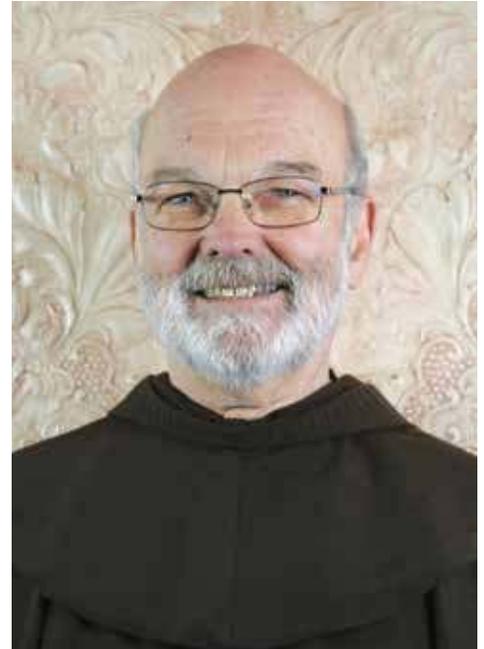
New Year's Resolutions

Dear Parishioners,

As we arrive at the New Year, it is customary that we make resolutions, which hopefully will be carried out during the course of the year. So many times these resolutions pertain to our physical lives — we resolve to exercise more, build a healthier diet, become more organized, etc. These resolutions may also involve the mental aspect of our lives — reading more, attending more cultural events, and so forth.

Too often we forget about the spiritual part of our lives. Our souls need to be tended to, and we need to make sure that we are deepening our relationship with God throughout the entire year.

I would like to give you a list of possible spiritual resolutions. While it might seem difficult for one person to undertake *all* of these, hopefully anyone can try several of these resolutions at one time or a number of them throughout the year.



- Attend Mass once a week over and above weekend liturgies.
- Spend a hour (or any amount of time) in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament once a week.
- Pray the *Liturgy of the Hours* (the *Divine Office*) at least once a day.
- Read and meditate on a chapter of Scripture a day.
- Take up a devotion of the Church (e.g. Rosary, Stations, novena, other prayers, etc.) and pray it daily.
- Read a spiritual book once a month.
- Make a morning offering as you begin your day, then an examination of conscience as you end your day.
- Offer a prayer of blessing / thanksgiving before / after a meal.
- Take time to pray daily with your spouse / family.
- As an individual or a family, take time once a week to do some form of charitable work — visiting those who are homebound or in a nursing home, do some work for an elderly friend or neighbor, bring food to someone in need, etc.

This is not an exhaustive list, but hopefully it gives you an idea that the small things done with great love can make a world of difference — both in your life and the lives of others.

Do not try to overdo any of these, but build up to doing them on a regular basis, thus laying a reasonable foundation upon which to build. Enjoy doing these resolutions, and see what a blessing they are for you and others.

Let us pray that 2019 will be a year of grace and favor from God. I wish you and yours a very happy New Year!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, OFM".

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



St. Francis Solanus School Celebrates During Catholic Schools Week



One highlight of St. Francis Solanus School's annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week is always Grandparents' Day.



Throughout Catholic Schools Week, students are invited to enjoy various activities and special dress days — Pajama Day is just one example. Ms. Lori Shepard, Principal, says the week is a great opportunity to celebrate the school's mission of stewardship and thank the students for their hard work.

Jan. 27 through Feb. 2 has been set aside by the National Catholic Educational Association as Catholic Schools Week. While the week can mean something different for schools across the country, one thing that will unite them all is taking time out to focus on the value a Catholic education provides for young people everywhere.

"Catholic Schools Week is a wonderful opportunity to affirm our identity as a Catholic school, showcase our values, and share what great things our students are doing," says Principal Lori Shepard. "We are very proud of all the stewardship projects that we have been doing this year, and that is something that we hope will continue throughout their lives, long after they leave St. Francis Solanus."

Among the special things the students have gotten to do is collect and send letters and cards to police officers, firefighters and first responders. Earlier in the school year, the cards were sent to stations throughout the city to show appreciation for public safety officials' commitment to their community as heroes.

"Later in the year, we learned of a house fire that took the lives of two children," Ms. Shepard says. "We held a collection and gathered over \$1,000 in cash donations for the family. We offered our prayers of support, as well as a way to help the grandmother who was raising the other two children in the family that survived. Our stewardship activities reflect our Catholic service to

Celebrating a Legacy of Stewardship Catholic Schools Week

others, as Jesus would have us do. This happens not only during Catholic Schools Week, but for anyone who needs a helping hand.”

Throughout Catholic Schools Week, students will have the opportunity to enjoy special dress down days, activities and games, and a Grandparents’ Day celebration that is loved by all. Ms. Shepard says it provides a break from the students’ normal routine and makes for a great way to say “thank you” for all their hard work and the dedication of our faculty and staff.

“We have been blessed to have this tremendous school for our children, and we are so proud of each and every child that graduates from here after their eighth-grade year,” Ms. Shepard says. “We do our

very best to mold our students into responsible, faith-filled members of our community to carry on the traditions of our Catholic faith. Celebrating in a special way every year is a tremendous way to remind everyone in the community of the great things our school has to offer!”

Ms. Shepard says she’d like the parish to know that the school is continually looking for volunteers from the larger parish community through the Solanus Saints Volunteer Program.

“We have many programs in place to accommodate a variety of talents,” she says. “As students grow and mature, they learn not only from their teachers in the classrooms, but from adults that work with them, as well.”

If you would like to learn more about St. Francis Solanus School, please visit stfrancissolanus.com/school or call the office at 217-222-4077.

Angel Dusters *continued from front cover*

she says. “It fit my schedule and I could do it with my kids in school. I had time to do it.”

An added benefit of volunteering time to help the parish is that the Angel Dusters not only enjoy working together, they usually go out for coffee and fellowship after their work is done.

“We make light work of something that has to be done,” Jean says. “It’s such a good group — so easy to work with. We all get along. It’s probably the easiest ministry we do, and it has to be done.”

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Anyone with questions about joining the Angel Dusters may call the parish office at 217-222-2898.

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS:

A Powerful Prayer Tradition in the Catholic Church

Since we say and make the Sign of the Cross so often, it may easily become a rote, perhaps even thoughtless, action. However, it is important to remember that the Sign of the Cross is much more than a simple gesture. Even in its most basic form, the Sign of the Cross — accompanied by the spoken or unspoken words “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” — is a prayer, a creed stating our belief in the Holy Trinity, the dual nature of Jesus Christ, and the dependence of our salvation on His crucifixion and resurrection.

In addition, making the Sign of the Cross is an indication of a willingness to take up our own cross and suffering for the sake of Christ. The prayer is considered one of the greatest weapons against Satan and all demons, and an added strength against the temptations of the flesh.

In the Roman Catholic Church today, the Sign of the Cross is typically made with either three fingers or an open hand touching first the forehead, then the chest, followed by the left shoulder and then the right (in the Eastern Church, the right shoulder is touched before the left). The concept of making a sign, or “setting a seal,” upon the forehead of those who place their faith in the Lord appears in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible — see Ezek. 9:4 and Rev. 7:3, 9:4, and 14:1.

Early versions of the Sign of the Cross were traced on just the forehead, using the thumb and forefinger held together in the shape of a tiny cross. We still see this version of the blessing performed during Baptisms (with the cross traced on the infant’s forehead) and on Ash Wednesday (with the cross traced in ashes on the foreheads of the faithful). Similarly, when the Gospel is read during the Liturgy of the Word, the priest or deacon leads the congregation in forming this small cross on the forehead, mouth, and chest, indicating a willingness to keep the Word of the Lord in our minds, on our lips, and in our hearts.

There is no doubt that our early Church fathers were strong believers in the sanctifying power of the Sign of the Cross. A second-century ecclesiastical scholar, Tertullian, and a third century saint, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, both wrote about the necessity of performing the Sign of the Cross at one’s wak-



ing and one’s lying down, at entering and leaving a room, at mealtimes, and more. St. Augustine also referenced the importance of marking the cross on the faithful’s forehead during the administration of the sacraments.

It is likely that the sign transformed from the tiny cross on the forehead to the larger, full-body cross used today sometime in the fifth century, when heretics began questioning both the dual nature of Jesus Christ — fully human and fully divine — and the unity of the Holy Trinity. Believers in these crucial Church doctrines began forming the cross with three extended fingers (representing the Trinity), keeping the ring finger and little finger pressed down into the palm (representing Christ’s dual nature), and tracing a cross on their entire upper body so there could be no mistaking the gesture.

Today, the Sign of the Cross still figures predominantly in our prayer life as Roman Catholics. We commonly perform it upon entering a church; at the beginning and end of the Catholic Mass, a Benediction, or the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament; when opening and closing our personal prayers; at mealtimes; and when passing by a Catholic Church (in recognition of Christ, present in the tabernacle). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, the frequent, intentional use of the Sign of the Cross can help the faithful dedicate each day to the glory of God and provide strength in the face of trial and temptation (2157).

“Exercising Our Discipleship” as We Enter the New Year at St. Francis Solanus

Fr. Don Blaeser would like us to consider a question — how will you exercise your discipleship this year?

“We often use the term ‘volunteering,’ but we are only doing what is expected of us as baptized Christians,” Fr. Don says. “We are exercising our discipleship, which Jesus expects of all His followers, and that is to put the kingdom of Christ first.”

The New Year gives us a symbolic opportunity to take some small step to start living stewardship as “a way of life” or to take advantage of a new opportunity to deepen our commitment to stewardship.

“I first heard those words — stewardship as a ‘way of life’ — from a parishioner, and it has stuck with me,” Fr. Don says. “I want to emphasize stewardship as a way of life this year, and I’m looking forward to having some ‘new people’ step forward to be involved in parish ministries.”

This year our faith community will be focusing on a particular Pillar of Stewardship — Formation — while continuing to exercise the Stewardship Pillar of Hospitality. Fr. Don describes hospitality as both passive, meaning welcoming people who walk into our church, but also active hospitality, as in reaching out to others.

“I’d like to see us reach out, especially to our absent members, those who have not been attending Mass regularly,” Fr. Don says. “I’d like to see us welcome many more who are not Catholic and have a larger number initiated at the Easter Vigil.”

Our formation in the faith fosters our intimate relationship with Christ. To deepen this relationship, our parish offers many materials from Lighthouse Catholic Media and several opportunities for us to have fellowship while studying the faith.

“The more we make a commitment to living and growing in our faith, the deeper it becomes a part of the fiber of our being,” Fr. Don says. “So all of these ideas are ways for us to be more deeply committed to the faith which is part of us through our Baptism.”

The parish will continue offering a Bible study, and in the new year a particular series will begin on the book of Revelation.

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St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

1721 College Avenue
Quincy, IL 62301
(217) 222-2898
stfrancissolanus.com



“Exercising Our Discipleship” *continued from page 7*

“I plan on attending this study, since I love that book and want to keep learning more about it,” Fr. Don says. “We will also have a series called *The Mass*, by Bishop Robert Barron, which was given during Advent, and will also be given during Lent.”

At Christmas all faith community members received another opportunity for our continuing education and formation through

Matthew Kelly’s book *The Biggest Lie in the History of Christianity*.

“This is a wonderful book to help us appreciate how great our faith is and how it has withstood so many attacks over the years,” Fr. Don says. “It’s an easy read, and I want to encourage everyone to read it.”

Lately Fr. Don has been very encouraged to see the number of stewardship commitment cards

growing and exceeding previous years. Make this the year when you and your family take a step to exercise or to further your commitment to discipleship.

“The spirit in our parish is great, and it’s growing,” Fr. Don says. “People love it here. They find this a friendly parish, and they enjoy each other’s company and love working with each other in ministries and various events.”

If you would like more information about how you can become involved with opportunities for stewardship at St. Francis, please reach out to 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.