

Saint Francis Solanus



FEBRUARY 2019

Teens Encounter Christ Offers a Faith-Filled and Life-Changing Weekend

St. Francis Solanus parishioner Kim Knotts was 16 when she attended her first Teens Encounter Christ (or TEC) Retreat. Not really knowing what to expect at the time, she couldn't anticipate the profound impact it would have on her life — how it would shape her relationship with Jesus Christ and form her identity as a Catholic young adult.

"I cannot imagine where my life would be without having the support of the people who I met in this program," Kim says. "In many cases, these people are my very best friends. I think that's the real difference here. TEC provides a place and people who young adults are able to talk to about Jesus without ridicule. No matter how many times you are on a weekend, your life is affected by each experience, by the people, by Jesus. I don't know how to put it into words. There is just something that keeps us all coming back. I mean, it's Jesus. We have to share Him. We have to be disciples."

Teens Encounter Christ is an international program designed to help 16-21 year olds encounter the



A group of St. Francis Solanus youth at the recent Great River TEC Retreat.

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Teens Encounter Christ *continued from front cover*

Person of Jesus Christ. The retreat focuses on the Paschal Mystery — the life, death and resurrection of Jesus — over a three-day weekend.

“Each day is focused on a part of the Paschal Mystery,” Kim says. “The first day is called Die Day, and we are called here to look at the places and things in our life that we can offer up, or die to, to move closer to a relationship with Jesus and others. The second day is called Rise Day, where we focus on the Resurrection of Jesus, and when we are able to experience and show Him to others. The last day is Go Day. This day is all about discipleship. Where can we be good stewards in our faith, how do we live that out in relation to our encounter of Jesus Christ? The beautiful thing about this program is it offers the candidate, and the team, as well, a place for hearing others talk about their encounters and relationship with Jesus, to reflect on their own relationship with Him, and learn ways to foster it. It really is a way to learn more than anything that Jesus died for us, and we should live to reflect that in our daily lives as best we can.”

Built upon what Kim describes as a “love, serve, lead” model,



Forming young adults into active disciples through TEC Retreats

TEC helps young adults experience the life-giving love of Christ. This then strengthens them to go out and share that love with others, embracing a life of active discipleship in the Church.

“There aren’t a terrible amount of opportunities for the young adults in our communities to be given positive and loving examples of trust and faith in the Lord in a way that they can see, experience and understand,” Kim says. “Ideally, it causes the young adult to take that step and become involved in their parishes through ministries, Bible studies and other parish life activities. Maybe if

they haven’t been attending Mass regularly, they change that to attending every week.”

Over the years it’s been incredible for Kim to witness Christ work through TEC time and time again in the hearts and lives of our youth.

“It’s bigger than any of us!” Kim says. “We do this and give to this and love this because of Jesus and who He is and what He has done for us. It is just crazy beautiful to see Him work throughout a weekend and in us to change lives and lead others to Him. It’s all because of Jesus and His amazing, unrelenting, unending love. We just have to share it!”

TEC retreats are offered six times a year at the Franciscan Retreat Center of Quincy University. Retreats always begin Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m. and end Monday evening between 6–6:30 p.m. The cost for candidates, ages 16–21, is \$50; for observers, ages 22 and older, is \$100. To sign up or register, please visit greatrivertec.org.

A Letter From Our Pastor

CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE

Dear Parishioners,

What is the most widely observed saint's day in February — the one that is kept even by those who aren't practicing Catholics? Undoubtedly, it would be St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

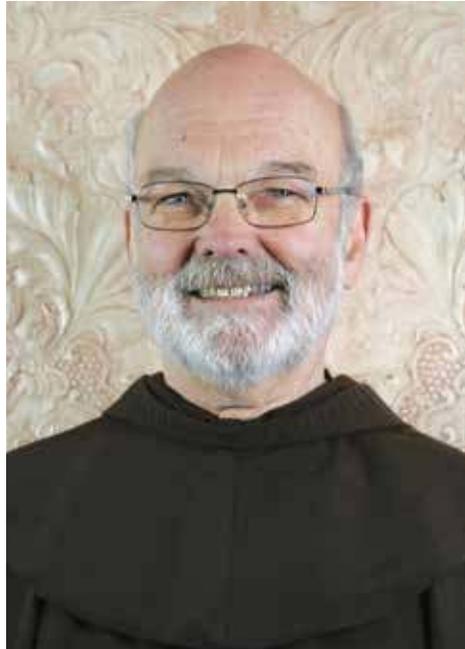
So who was St. Valentine? The saint we celebrate was a priest of Rome martyred in the late third century. But that doesn't explain how his feast came to be celebrated as the day for sending letters, cards and presents as expressions of romantic love.

The truth is that the custom of sending tokens of love comes not from any direct connection with St. Valentine, but from the ancient belief that birds begin to pair off on Feb. 14. And if courtship in the natural world occurred then, it must be appropriate for humans, as well. The association between St. Valentine and love notes is a later development.

Nevertheless, it's not wrong to connect the two. Love has many aspects, and our conception of it is richer if we keep more than one of them in mind. Martyrdom is the result of loving God more than our earthly life. St. Valentine was a martyr because of his love — his love for Jesus Christ and the Church. If he had not loved God so much, he could have repudiated his Lord and saved his life. We, in turn, express our love by sending cards and gifts on St. Valentine's Day.

But isn't that what stewardship as a way of life is, a little martyrdom? Not to push the image too far, but when we are faithful stewards, we give up a little portion of our lives out of our own love for Christ. Most Christians will not be called on to be martyrs, in the sense of forfeiting our physical lives for God. But we are called to give up some of our comforts, indulgences and riches because of our love for Him.

So then, as you prepare to celebrate and share your love with your valentine this month,



remember St. Valentine and his love for Christ. As well, keep in mind that God loves us, and return that love with your own toward Him. Loving God will be reflected in how you prioritize your use of the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted to you. As St. John wrote (1 Jn 4:19), "We love because he first loved us."

Happy St. Valentine's Day!

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



Preparing for

The dress. The flowers. The menu. There are usually a million things to accomplish between “Will you marry me?” and “I do.” But for couples preparing to be married at St. Francis Solanus, we hope to help not only in preparing for the details of the big day, but also in supporting couples as they plan for a marriage that will last a lifetime.

Parishioners John and Jayne Lammers have been married for 49 years and serve as the coordinators of our Evenings with the Engaged program, which helps

prepare couples to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony.

“You prepare for your career, for any job,” Jayne says. “This is a ‘life career.’ You want marriage to be a lifelong commitment so you need to be prepared, and you need to really know each other.

“The Catholic Church wants us to know that this is a sacrament,” she adds. “This is important enough to God that it is a sacrament. When you make that commitment to each other, in the Church, in front of God and the priest and your family and friends, I think it’s a



Jayne and John Lammers have found that serving with this ministry has strengthened their own relationship, even after nearly half a century of marriage.

Forever:

EVENINGS WITH THE ENGAGED

more solid foundation for the couple. They know by doing it this way that God is there with them, and He's an important part of their lives and they can turn to Him."

In addition to meeting with the priest, couples also have the opportunity to participate in Evenings with the Engaged, meeting with a married "mentor couple" for three to four sessions prior to their wedding. The evenings, which take place in the mentor couple's home, cover a variety of different topics.

"The topics range from how marriage is a sacrament to managing money," Jayne says. "The big thing we stress is communication, talking to each other. Share the good things and the bad things, share everything! Laugh together, cry together, the whole gamut. Communicate with each other."

Jayne appreciates the one-on-one nature of the sessions, and hopes that it gives the engaged couple the freedom to be more open.

"I like the one-on-one with the couple," she says. "We can share more with them and they may be more willing to ask questions, whereas they might not want to do that in a group of people.

"We've watched many couples go through this program and most at the beginning are kind of hesitant," Jayne adds. "A lot of times they're saying, 'Why do we have to do this?' But by the end of the sessions, they're more relaxed and they seem happy that they've done this, and they've gotten something out of it."

Jayne and John have also found that serving with this ministry has strengthened their own relationship, even after nearly half a century of marriage.

"We're still learning things about each other," Jayne says. "Every once in a while, one of us will mention something and the other will say, 'I didn't know about that!'"

"This is important enough to God that it is a sacrament. When you make that commitment to each other, in the Church, in front of God and the priest and your family and friends, I think it's a more solid foundation for the couple. They know by doing it this way that God is there with them, and He's an important part of their lives and they can turn to Him."

— Jayne Lammers

"You've always got to have room for growth," she adds. "You can't be stagnant or things won't progress and it'll get old. I think you need to continue to find out new things about each other and I think we've done that through these Evenings with the Engaged."

Jayne hopes that the couples that go through the marriage preparation program at St. Francis Solanus will realize that they are supported by a community who believes in the value of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

"I think it's very settling to these engaged couples to see that there are still people out there who value this, value marriage, as a sacrament, as a way of life," Jayne says. "You hope that they always remember, they're very close now, but they'll get closer. On their wedding day it feels like, 'Well, there's just nothing that's going to be better than this,' but there is. There are going to be good times and bad times, but we hope they realize that they have God behind them and they can progress forward into a happily married life."

If you would like more information about our marriage preparation program, or if you are engaged and would like to be married at St. Francis Solanus, please contact the parish office at 217-222-2898.

An open checkbook with a pen resting on it. The checkbook is open to a page with a grid for recording transactions. A silver pen with a gold band is lying across the checks. The checkbook has a dark cover.

Is Christ the Lord of Our Checkbook?

There is a humorous proverb that says at the end of our lives, there will be two books that determine who we have been — the Book of Life and our checkbook. It sounds a bit ridiculous, but the fact is, how we spend our money says a whole lot about where our hearts lie. Jesus Himself told us, “Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Matt. 6:21). Our actions are supposed to glorify God. How many of us are eager to show God the glory we have given Him in our checkbooks? Are we ordering our finances responsibly, and is our stewardship of treasure truly Christian?

For the majority of Americans, Christian stewardship of finances is virtually non-existent. Consider the following statistics:

- 49 percent of Americans don’t pay their bills on time.
- 65 percent of Americans don’t do a good job of staying out of debt.
- 82 percent of Americans don’t save adequately for the future.
- On average, Americans give less than 2 percent of their income to charity, and Catholics give about 1 percent of their income toward charitable causes.
- A majority of those getting divorces point to finances as one of the primary causes of their breakup.

What we do reflects who we are as persons — therefore, there can really be no separation of our personal finances and our spiritual lives and our relationship with God. As much as we would like to hide our less-than-ideal financial situation, hiding that from God would be like running away from the well when we are dying of thirst. The mark of a Christian steward

is that we recognize God as the source of everything we have and that Jesus is the answer to all our problems, including our financial woes.

In short, financial freedom consists in putting God first, and allowing Him to be Lord over all our actions. It means praying for the grace of the Holy Spirit in our financial dealings, and responding to that grace by spending responsibly.

One of the most effective ways to manage money well is to budget — to figure out what you are spending your money on and how much you are spending, to look for areas that need improvement — where you should spend more, less or not at all — and then to draw up a practical plan for spending more wisely and more Christ-like in the future. If you aren’t doing this already, now is a great time to start. The following can serve as a guide:

- Be realistic about income and expenses.
- Distinguish between wants and needs.
- Avoid unnecessary debt, especially credit card debt. If you have too much debt, make a plan of monthly payments and stick to the payments.
- Make charitable donations and savings a priority even though your first instinct may be to let them go (remember, tithing is a tangible way to show God that He comes first in your life).
- Designate a time and day each week to address financial matters, including paying bills.
- Most important: Pray for God’s guidance and grace to manage your finances according to His will.

“Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and the power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil — this is the gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19).

Bringing Hearts Home Through the Catholics Returning Home Ministry

About nine years ago, Michael and Karla Fesler began a beautiful spiritual journey — one that would fill them with divine peace, hope and joy for years to come.

“Neither of us came from solidly Catholic homes, as both of us had one parent who was Catholic, and one who was non-Catholic,” Karla says. “When we first got married, we weren’t certain about our religious affiliation. However, we wanted our girls to be baptized, and have a Catholic identity. So, when I was pregnant with Kathryn, we started coming to Catholics Returning Home Ministry meetings.”

Through the Catholics Returning Home Ministry, they encountered the love of Christ in an authentic way that gave them the courage to move forward in faith.

“Catholics Returning Home gave us an inviting, pressure-free way to talk about our interest in the Catholic faith,” Karla says. “It was a very open, cozy, supportive environment where we could ask whatever questions were on our minds. It definitely made us want to go through the Rite of Christian Initiation

for Adults [RCIA] process afterwards. Deacon Wayne Zimmerman was so wonderful and helpful as well.”

At the Easter Vigil in 2011, after fulfilling the RCIA process, both Michael and Karla were fully initiated into the Catholic Church.

Over the years, their three daughters — Addelyn, 12; Eleanor, 9; and Kathryn, 8 — have been abundantly blessed by their decision to integrate the truth and beauty of Catholicism into their family life. Their daughters have received their First Sacraments, and had the privilege of attending our parish school.

Michael and Karla are just two of many souls that have been touched by Catholics Returning Home, a highly influential ministry based on a national program first started in the Diocese of Minneapolis. The ministry utilizes a book written by Sally L. Mews titled *Inviting Catholics Home: A Parish Program*, along with opportunities for fellowship and faith sharing.

Catholics Returning Home is offered at our parish on a flexible basis, whenever there are people

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St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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Catholics Returning Home Ministry *continued from page 7*

who have expressed interest in attending. Its meetings usually take place six weeks in a row, such as on six consecutive Monday or Tuesday evenings. They are conducted by a team of six volunteers.

“As team members, we want to help the participants in any way we possibly can,” says Deacon Wayne Zimmerman, who serves as Coordinator of the Catholics Returning Home Ministry. “We are there to listen to their questions and answer them the best that we can. They have our phone numbers and they can call us any time.”

Essentially, the Catholics Returning Home Ministry team seeks to be the open arms of Christ to those who are thinking about coming “home” to Mother Church.

“We want to welcome them and give them a sense of belonging so that they can become part of the Church once again,” Deacon Wayne says. “If they have been away for a while, we refresh them on the basics of the faith, such as the Mass, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Creed. We see if they want to talk about what issues caused them to leave the Church, and encourage them to come back.”

All of those who come to Catholics Returning Home meetings are promised confidentiality. For more information about this ministry of God’s tender mercy, please contact Deacon Wayne Zimmerman at 217-222-4836.

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.