

Saint Francis Solanus



JUNE 2019

MEET AUSTIN'S ARMY

Fixing "Anything They Can" for Our Parish Community

Sometimes, the requests are quite small. Sometimes, a teacher simply asks for help with a broken light switch. Other times, the project requires some collective brainstorming.

"We try to fix anything that we can in the school, church, rectory and around the parish walls," says Tom Rakers from Austin's Army. "I have to say that we've never come across anything that has stumped us. We like a challenge, and someone will come up with a solution."

The members of Austin's Army congregate every Monday morning at 8 a.m. in the school kitchen, where a list of requests hangs.

"It's a list of things that need to be repaired around the school and church, and anyone can add to it," Tom says. "Put what it is and where it is. We've changed light bulbs, fixed faucets, made cabinets and even built rooms."

Austin's Army is named for Fr. Austin Albers, a former pastor of St. Francis Solanus who started the "army." The original idea was to defray parish expenses, and by sharing their talents, these men directly contribute to the financial stewardship of the parish.

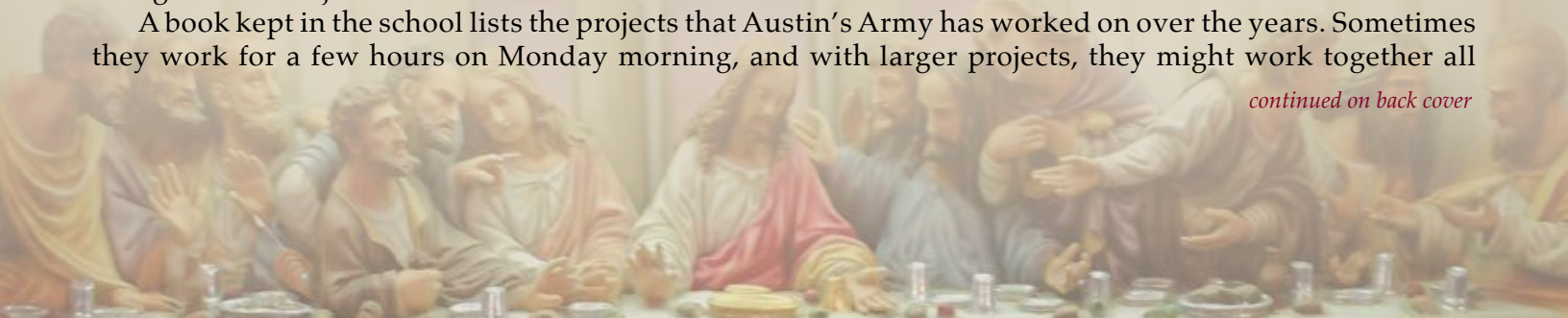
"In the group we have people like a plumber and an electrician and a whole bunch of men who are good at fixing things," says Tom, a former bricklayer. "We're trying to help the church save money by doing these little jobs."

A book kept in the school lists the projects that Austin's Army has worked on over the years. Sometimes they work for a few hours on Monday morning, and with larger projects, they might work together all



Together, the members of Austin's Army are proud to tackle whatever projects they can for our faith community.

continued on back cover



A woman with long brown hair is lying in a black hammock on a wooden balcony. She is holding an open book and reading. The background is a lush green garden with a wooden railing. The title "A CATHOLIC'S GUIDE TO Good Summer Reading" is overlaid on the image in white text.

A CATHOLIC'S GUIDE TO *Good Summer Reading*

Have you been wondering what to read during vacation this year? Why not give spiritual reading a try?

There are thousands of titles out there – too many for any one person – just waiting to make a positive impact on your faith life. Reading is a fantastic opportunity for general spiritual direction and good practice for every searching soul.

Choose a title from “you can’t go wrong” authors such as Louis de Wohl, G.K. Chesterton, Peter Kreeft, Francis de Sales, C.S. Lewis, and Scott Hahn. Their works alone should take you well into the summer, and possibly through to the next decade.

Or, choose from this list of great Christian books, in no particular order:

***The Story of a Soul* by St. Therese of Lisieux**

In this autobiography and all-time favorite Catholic book, St. Therese teaches her “little way” of spiritual childhood. Millions of copies have been sold worldwide.

***Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis**

One of the most popular introductions to the Christian faith ever published, this series of broadcast talks has been collected into book fashion. *Mere Christianity* sets out to “explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.”

***Rome Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn**

This offers a conversion story of a brilliant, anti-Catholic Scripture scholar and his wife to the Catholic

faith. Now well-known speakers and Catholic apologists, Scott and Kimberly recount their story with simplicity and love.

***The Good News about Sex & Marriage* by Christopher West**

This down-to-earth application of Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is an easy to read yet insightful account of the Church’s teaching on sex and marriage.

***What Catholics Really Believe* by Karl Keating**

Addressing 52 of the greatest misconceptions of the Catholic faith, Keating draws upon Scripture and Tradition to dispel errors and explain the rationale behind Church teaching.

***No Greater Love* by Mother Teresa**

This anthology collects the teachings and sayings of St. Teresa of Calcutta. Founder of the Missionaries of Charity and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, Mother Teresa speaks joyfully about her work with the poor and God’s call in our lives.

***Surprised by Truth* edited by Patrick Madrid**

Eleven converts give their Biblical and historical reasons for becoming Catholic. These unique personal testimonies continue to transform hearts throughout the world in an insightful read for Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Happy summer! Happy reading!

A Letter From Our Pastor

Don't Take a Vacation From God This Summer

Dear Parishioners,

By now, many schools across America have let out for the summer. In almost no time, camp programs for younger students will be underway. Meanwhile, many older students are ready to trade their homework and notebooks for seasonal jobs until it's time to return to class in a few months.

Whether or not we're directly involved with schools — as students, teachers or parents — we find that the calendar for the school year also impacts our lives at work, at church and in our leisure time. And although some people are on vacation at any time of year, summer traditionally retains its place as *the* vacation season.

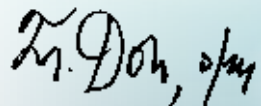
Vacations, no matter when or where we take them, provide us with a wonderful opportunity to refresh our lives by following a totally different daily pattern. Whether it's a day trip to the beach or hiking in the mountains, an excursion to the big city or a road trip out to the country, a visit to relatives or friends, or even a quiet and relaxing week spent at home, a vacation offers a break from our daily routines. We get to spend our time the way *we* choose.

A vacation also provides a good opportunity for us to make some permanent changes in our use of time. When we're free from the demands of everyday life, this is a perfect chance to try something that is not part of our regular routine, such as spending a few minutes a day in prayer or meditation. "Try it — you'll like it!" as the old commercial said. It may have some lasting, positive results in fostering a stronger spiritual life.

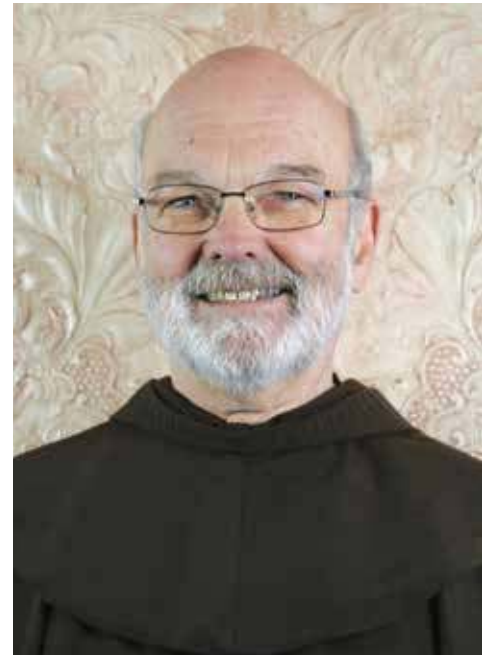
Importantly, we must also remember that this is a time of year when our parish will be welcoming visitors who are on vacation themselves — whether they are visiting family, spending time in the area, or just happen to be passing through on the way to their next destination. So, let us all uphold the Stewardship Pillar of Hospitality and provide a warm welcome to those visiting our parish.

Be sure to worship at Mass, wherever you happen to be each Sunday. You'll come back from vacation refreshed both emotionally and spiritually.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



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



AN INTRODUCTION OF GR

Restoring the Order of the

Perhaps you've heard the buzz about some of the changes that came out of the last diocesan Synod. Maybe you've heard that we're planning to confirm children before they receive their First Communion. Perhaps you're confused or curious, or even concerned.

So, what exactly is happening? St. Francis Solanus has embraced the Restored Order of the Sacraments in keeping with the Diocese of Springfield's efforts to begin returning those sacraments to the Original Order at all churches by 2025.

"In a nutshell, the Restored Order is the proper sequence of the Sacraments of Initiation for children and adults — Baptism, Confirmation, and then Eucharist," says Director of Religious Education Mike Holbrook. "During the Synod in Springfield in 2017, Catholics

from all over the diocese, representing every parish, voted overwhelmingly for Catholic schools and Parish School of Religion programs to move forward on the proper sequence of the Sacraments of Initiation."

Although in recent years we've become familiar with the practice of children receiving their First Communion in second grade, and then being confirmed several years later — even into high school — this was not the original design.

For centuries, in the early Church, all three Sacraments of Initiation — Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist — were received altogether. For a variety of reasons, over the years, the sacraments became separated. And in 1910, when Pope Pius X lowered the age for the reception of First Communion to the age of reason, generally understood



Second-grade students are pictured performing The Lost Sheep skit during First Reconciliation this past spring. St. Francis Solanus is in the midst of embracing the Restored Order of Sacraments beginning this year.

RACES TO OUR CHILDREN:

the Sacraments of Initiation

to be about 7 years old, Confirmation suddenly became the last sacrament to be received.

Unfortunately, along with this reversal in the intended order of the Sacraments of Initiation also came an element of misunderstanding of the meaning of the sacraments. People began to see Confirmation as a Sacrament of Christian maturity, becoming an “adult” in the Church, and one choosing to “confirm” their faith for themselves. In addition, there was also a lack of emphasis on the Sacrament of the Eucharist as the “source and summit” of our faith and the culmination of our initiation into the Church.

“The Sacrament of Confirmation has been seen as a coming of age, but that wasn’t its intention,” Mike says. “It was intended to be a sealing of the baptismal graces. It was never intended to be seen like it is now.”

Mike says statistics about Catholics’ relationship with the faith has helped support the movement.

“It turns out that in the current order, 77 percent of Catholics never get confirmed,” he says. “The average age that Catholics fall away from the church is 13. Now, they still might be at home, but as far as where their hearts are at, wanting to belong to the church, that’s the average age that the kids make the decision that they don’t want much to do with it.”

Contrary to what has often become a common understanding, the Sacrament of Confirmation binds the person more closely to the Church, strengthening them with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and empowering them to live and bear witness to the faith. In contrast, it is the Eucharist that celebrates full membership into the Body of Christ and provides continuous nourishment on the journey of faith.

This year, second-graders received the Sacrament

of Reconciliation in April. Next year, as third-graders, they will begin preparations to receive the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation at the same time. Children in fourth through higher grades will “catch up,” so to speak, by receiving Confirmation as eighth-graders.

“So how does Confirmation in third grade help?” Mike asks. “Our kids are inundated with negative news, a false sense of reality through social media, porn, drugs, violence. Our children need the gifts of the Holy Spirit much sooner.”

Fr. Don Blaeser agrees, saying he’d like parishioners to know that the Restored Order truly is the diocese’s way of setting things right for the next generation of believers.

“It’s two sides of one coin,” Fr. Don says. “One side of the coin is that this is nothing new. It’s called ‘restored’ because it goes back to what was done for centuries until it got changed. They have a right to receive the sacrament, since the kids were baptized already, and then Confirmation follows. It’s part of being fully initiated as a Catholic Christian.

“The second side of the coin is the idea that they have a right to it, which is to say when we confirm kids in eighth grade, we kind of give the impression that they have to earn it,” he says. “They have to go through all kinds of procedures to prove their worth. If we gave that impression, we shouldn’t have done it because they are worth it.”

Although change can certainly come with its challenges, we hope that through prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit, all people within the Diocese of Springfield will be able to welcome the wisdom of this decision.

If you would like to learn more about the Diocese of Springfield’s decision to restore the Sacraments of Initiation to their original order, please visit www.dio.org/catechesis/restored-order.html. Those with questions about Sacramental Preparation at St. Francis Solanus are invited to call Mike Holbrook at 217-222-2898, ext. 108.

St. Francis Solanus School Concludes Academic



Our students collected gifts and toys for soldiers to give to children at Christmas.



Relay races during Catholic Schools Week were exciting to watch — and take part in!

St. Francis Solanus School has dismissed for the summer, prompting many of us to think, “Lucky staff! Now they can take a break!”

But that is certainly not the case!

“Every summer is an opportunity to update our handbooks, crisis and safety plans, parent forms, and materials for the following school year,” says Principal Lori Shepard. “We order books, supplies, and prepare for our upcoming classes and enrollment. Our maintenance staff thoroughly cleans the building and waxes the floors so that our building is in top condition when the students arrive in August. We work on end-of-the-year reports, writing grants, and long-range plans. We hire new teachers, if needed, and complete class lists with any late enrollment information.

“Most people don’t realize the amount of work that is left to do in the summer, but every day is busy,” she adds. “Even before school is out in May, we are already preparing for the following year.”

The school year began last August with the theme “Forever Rely On God,” with “FROG” reminders in the classrooms on bulletin boards. Each student was given a prayer card with that slogan for their backpack during the opening prayer service in August for the school year.

“It was a unified effort to remind all students and teachers to trust God no matter what situation arises,” Ms. Shepard says. “That set the tone for our faith journey this year.”

Looking ahead to the new school year this coming August, St. Francis School is ready to launch online enrollment.

“This has been a tremendous challenge, but we feel that our parents will greatly benefit from the opportunity to fill out all of the necessary ‘paperwork’ at their own discretion,” Ms. Shepard says. “Going online will also help our documentation process in the main office for various forms that need to be turned in by a certain deadline. The first year may have a bit of a learning curve for some parents, but we will offer as much technical assistance as necessary.

The school year is not without its challenges for both students and staff. Students who face domestic issues need support, and St. Francis Solanus School

Year, Prepares to Welcome Students in August

has been able to provide that support.

“We were blessed this year to have the services of two counselors that are at St. Francis part-time to offer a listening ear when needed,” Ms. Shepard says. “Many times, there are issues that happen outside of the school day that do affect how a student performs in the classroom and if they are able to focus and learn. Unfortunately, stress and related issues have become more and more prevalent in the classroom and we are seeing more and more behavioral consequences in students that require some assistance. We do our very best to nurture and support each and every student, but when the stress from home situations becomes overwhelming, we can now offer assistance. That has been our greatest challenge, but our greatest blessing at the same time. The Lord watches over us — and helps us as we watch over the children.”

St. Francis Solanus School students have many opportunities to grow in stewardship throughout the school year under the guidance and example of their teachers. A number of projects enabled the students and their teachers to share their time, talents, and treasure. In September, the students sent “thank you” cards and prayer letters to our local emergency responders. In October, the students collected over \$1,000 for a family in the community that lost two children in a fire. In November, they sent food and care boxes to service men and women overseas. In December, they collected over \$6,000 for cancer research and shared those funds with area agencies. In January, the students collected items for our food pantry, and in February, they collected money to help a family with medical bills.

“Recently, as part of our Lenten Journey, every child in our school attended a local nursing home and spent time visiting the residents,” Ms. Shepard says. “Songs were shared, coloring and craft projects were completed, and some even had music and a dance party! Some students are planning to go back for a return trip, since they had such a wonderful

connection with the residents.”

In addition to enjoying growing in stewardship, the students also took part in several successful events this past school year such as Trunk or Treat, the Christmas Music Program, Winter Carnival, Mardi Gras, Spring Dance, STEM Night and the School Play. The students embarked on various field trips that offered a variety of educational experiences from the historical to the fine arts.

St. Francis Solanus School sports programs went to the state level twice this year in girls’ sports, with great success. In addition, the new Builders Club was organized this year, and it will eventually lead the members as they advance in age into Key Club and Circle K.

“The list could go on and on of what has been accomplished at St. Francis this past year,” Ms. Shepard says. “We are most proud of the individual student growth and progress. Our students thrive and go above our expectations — and for that, we are truly grateful.”



Students worked diligently on their STEM projects.

If you would like more information about enrolling a child at St. Francis Solanus School, please call 217-222-4077.

St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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(217) 222-2898
stfrancissolanus.com



Austin's Army *continued from front cover*

week or as long as necessary.

Recently they constructed a guitar case cabinet for the school's music room.

"It was going to be very expensive to buy this stand, so we thought we could make it ourselves," Tom says. "It holds somewhere between 10 and 16 guitars."

Anyone is welcome to come to the school kitchen on Monday morning to join Austin's Army.

"You don't need to bring tools, and you don't need to commit to coming every week," Tom says. "Just show up when you can. We always really need people."

Other parishes in the area have reached out to Austin's

Army, asking how to start such a group in their parish.

"They've called us to ask how we do things, and I know other parishes are starting their own groups," Tom says.

Tom would like to thank all the people who have given their time and talent to Austin's Army. Together they're proud to tackle whatever projects they can for our faith community.

"We all just really enjoy doing this," Tom says. "Most of us tinker with projects at home. It's unbelievable the kind of talent that this group has, and I appreciate them all."

If you would like more information about Austin's Army, please reach out to Tom Rakers through the parish office at 217-222-2898 or simply come to the school kitchen on Monday morning.

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.