

Saint Francis Solanus



OCTOBER 2019

Our Annual Stewardship Renewal *Coming Together to Share Our Gifts as a Faith Family*

In the midst of this busy fall season, the stewardship renewal at St. Francis Solanus is a time to stop and reflect on the many gifts we have received from God and the ways in which we can come together as a church family and put them to use here in our parish and community. In what ways do we already share our time, talent, and treasure with God and His Church? And how are we able to continue, and perhaps even increase, our commitment to serving His people?

This annual renewal of our commitments to a rich spiritual life and to the parish takes place over several weeks. First, parishioners receive packets in the mail detailing the many opportunities for fellowship, faith formation, and service offered by our parish ministries. Next, the parish will have a lay witness talk at each of the Masses highlighting the

blessings of intentional discipleship. Finally, parishioners will be asked to fill out a commitment card indicating their desire to grow their faith through prayer and Mass attendance, participation in one or more of our parish ministries, and donation of treasure.

Stewardship Committee co-chair Marcia Steinkamp believes that re-evaluating one's commitments each year is essential to cultivating an active faith life.

"Sometimes you can avoid talking about what kind of steward you are," she says, "and by avoiding that self-examination, you might not plant the seed in yourself to see what you can do to serve your God. The point of the renewal is to recommit each year and try to keep up to date. Your time, health, or financial situation might have changed and you may want to join



a new ministry or leave one ministry to try something else. By having to reflect and recommit, you are being an intentional disciple."

As Linda Rull, also Stewardship Committee co-chair, points out, those who choose to actively serve our parish find that they always receive much more than they give.

"I don't know how you could enter into stewardship and not benefit from it," says Linda. "If

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The Stewardship of *St. Francis of Assisi*

He was born as Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in Assisi, Italy, in 1181 or 1182 and died at the age of 44 in 1226. In spite of his given name, his father was traveling in France at the time of his birth, so he opted to call him Francesco, which means “the Frenchman.” We, of course, know him as St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast day we celebrate on Oct. 4. To say that he is among the most revered of our Catholic saints would be an understatement.

In their pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops states, “After Jesus, we look to Mary as an ideal steward.” Our Catholic saints also provide us examples of what it means to be a steward, but perhaps none more than St. Francis of Assisi. Like the Lord and His Blessed Mother, St. Francis exemplified stewardship.

We were reminded of that fact when our Holy Father chose the name Francis. The pope explained his choice in this way: “For me he [Francis] is the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and safeguards Creation. He is a man who gives us this spirit of peace.” From the time he was a boy, Francis recognized that he was gifted — he also understood that he needed to put his gifts at the service of God and others. One of his followers, Brother Leo, was fond of telling that he could hear Francis praying at night, and that St. Francis used the same prayer over and over. It was, “Oh God, Who are You, and who am I?”

Striving to come to an understanding of his relationship with

God, and his role as a disciple of the Lord, St. Francis tried to rid himself of all the things that might prevent him from discovering his role in the Kingdom. Early on, he embraced poverty as a way of life. By eschewing possessions, Francis maintained that his voluntary poverty gave him freedom, freedom from owing anyone other than God, and thus giving him the complete freedom to serve God.

We speak of the Four Pillars of Stewardship — Hospitality, Prayer, Formation and Service. The life St. Francis embraced and the life he lived can almost be defined by those pillars. Francis and the community he developed did not accept money — they worked for enough food to eat for that day, or for water, or for a place to sleep. His example coerces us to ask, “Are there possessions that restrict us, that hinder our ability to be a disciple?”

St. Francis dedicated his entire life to imitating the life of Christ and to carrying out the work of the Lord as he, Francis, perceived Christ would do it. Of course, St. Francis had ultimate love of the Eucharist, and great respect for the priests who carried out this sacrament. As stated, poverty became a way of life for him. In fact, in his last written work, *The Testament*, Francis stated that personal and corporate poverty were essential as the lifestyle for the members of his Order.

Francis was a steward of all creation. He believed that nature and what it represented was the “mirror of God.” Most representations we see of Francis have animals with him and surrounding him. He



called all creatures his “sisters” and “brothers.” He had particular love of birds, and was known to preach to them. As a steward and a disciple of Christ, St. Francis viewed all people with love and respect. He said, “How can I be a friend of Christ if I do not cherish those for whom Christ died?”

It is difficult to assess all the ways that St. Francis has influenced our faith and our practice of it. His desire to be Christ-like provides a stewardship example to us that makes clear to us how to move toward holiness. He had the humility of a complete servant. He once said, “If God can work through me, He can work through anyone.” Although the famous prayer attributed to St. Francis is most likely not a direct quote from him, it well represents his philosophy and his sense of stewardship. In part it states, “Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive.” Through stewardship, we give — and what we receive in return, just as was the case with St. Francis of Assisi, is beyond our comprehension.

A Letter From Our Pastor

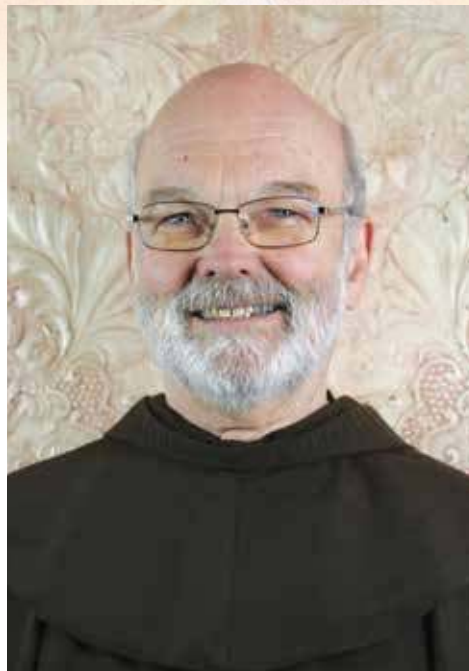
Being Good Stewards of Our Personal Harvest

Dear Parishioners,

In the United States, October is the month that brings the completion of the harvest. Although many Americans live in urban areas and seldom ever see a farm, the foods we all eat — fruits and vegetables, meats, milk, and the grain for our bread — come from farms and ranches across America and around the world.

Some of us may feel completely detached from farm life and think that the harvest has little to do with us, but we are all connected with agriculture more closely than we realize. The success of the harvest affects the prices we pay — and if the harvest were to fail completely, there would soon be nothing available to put on our grocery shelves.

In the Old Testament world, most people were farmers, and the Israelites were to bring offerings to God from the harvest of their fields and flocks. The success of the harvest directly affected their wellbeing during the next year. At



their agricultural festivals, “the measure of your own voluntary offering which you will give shall be in proportion to the blessing the Lord, your God, has given you” (Dt 16:10) they were told.

The same holds true for us. We may not have a harvest of fruits or

grains, but we do receive a return for our own labor, whether it is in a factory, an office or a classroom. We are also invited by God to return a portion to Him for His glory and our own spiritual welfare, in proportion to the blessings we have received.

It’s ultimately a choice we make. Are we going to hoard everything we get, or are we going to give back to God a portion of what He gives us? When we give back to God, will we return just what’s left over after everything else is paid, or will our gifts have a higher priority? Are we, as stewards, going to return the first fruits, rather than the leftovers, to God? What choice will you make?

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, O.F.M." with a flourish at the end.

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

Our Annual Stewardship Renewal

Answering God's

“As I have done, so you must also do.” These were Christ’s words after He washed His Apostles’ feet at the Last Supper. In this dramatic moment, Jesus called His followers to a life of humility and service. Helping others, especially the poor, is how our parish community follows Christ’s command “to love your neighbor as yourself.”

During our Stewardship Renewal we are focusing on the importance of service. Even more importantly, we are focusing on having the heart of a servant. With the right disposition we can be ready for action when opportunity arises.

As many of us have discovered, service to others leads to peace and joy; we find that we are truly blessed when we give of ourselves. God is always calling us forward. So, for this year’s Stewardship Renewal, we’ve adopted the theme, “Called to Serve.” Our stewardship way of life is about actively following Jesus — step-by-step, wherever He leads.

Periodically, we need to re-examine the ways in which we’ll answer this call, which is the reason for this Stewardship Renewal. You will be receiving in the mail your Stewardship Renewal packet. Enclosed in this packet is a “Called to Serve” brochure that will lead you through that self-examination. It is a time to ask how we can better use our time, talent, and treasure.

- Do I make time for prayer? By myself and with my family?
- Is my talent at work in our parish actively building the Church?
- Do I give a proportionate amount of my treasure to the weekly offertory?

*Commitment Weekend is October 19-20.
Don't forget to bring your Commitment Card to Mass!*

How do I use my Commitment Card?

Your Commitment Card allows you to make commitments to prayer, parish ministries, and offertory giving. It is designed to be used by the whole family.

Time Section: Except for the ill and homebound, everyone should be able to check “Come to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days.” Try to check at least a few other items. Daily prayer should be a priority for every person trying to grow closer to God.

Talent Section: You can either sign up for new ministries or re-commit to your current ministries. Be sure to write your first name next to the ministry! This is especially important if more than one person is using the card.

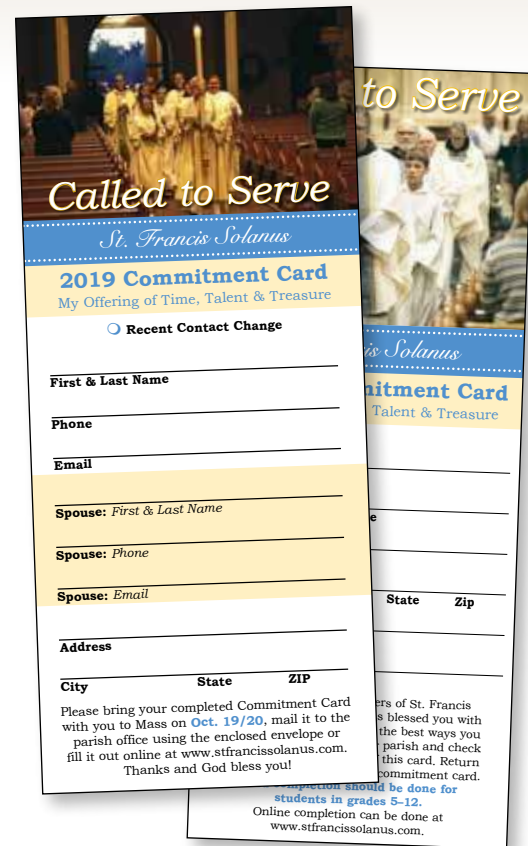
Treasure Section: Clearly print how much money you plan to give each week or month to our parish. Try to take a step toward giving five percent of your income to St. Francis Solanus.

Is your prayer life in need of a tune-up?

Honestly ask yourself, “How much time do I spend in prayer each week?” The answer is probably a bit embarrassing. Everyone wants to spend more time in prayer, but there’s just never enough time to do everything we want to do. Good intentions are just that: intentions. This year, as you’re discerning how you will offer your time to God, resolve to follow through with your commitments. Consider each moment you spend in prayer as nourishment for your soul. The spiritual health of our parish is only as strong as the sum of its parts (individual parishioners).

Is your level of parish involvement in need of a boost?

We give our talents back to God when we get involved in ministries at St. Francis Solanus. And, with a host of ministries to choose from, there’s something for everyone. Sure, ministries give parishioners opportunities to



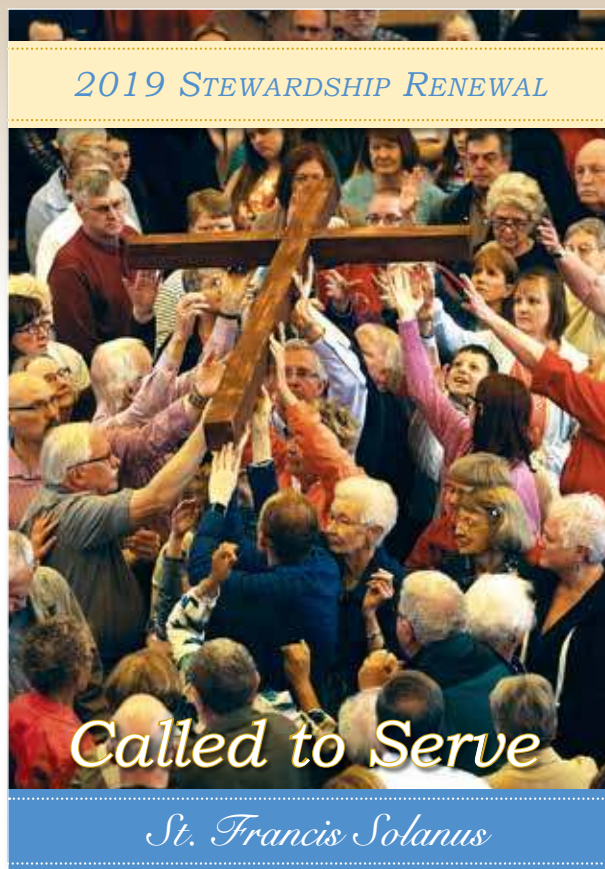
Call to Serve

serve others in the community, but they also benefit those in the ministry itself. Ask anyone who actively participates in a ministry at St. Francis Solanus, "Why do you enjoy serving in this way?" They'll probably say, "I get more out of the ministry than the people I serve." This year, as you're discerning how you will offer your talents to God, consider signing up for a ministry that may benefit you, like a Bible study, prayer group, or retreat. Or, contribute to an outreach ministry, where your good deeds not only help others in the community, but also give you feelings of satisfaction and thankfulness.

Do you give a percentage of your income to the offertory?

It may be hard to see offertory giving as a way to "help yourself," but when we approach the subject from a spiritual viewpoint, it can lead to individual spiritual growth and an increase in faith. Even the savviest businessperson worries about his or her personal finances from time to time. Adding a weekly offertory check to the list of monthly bills may seem crazy but, ultimately, sacrificial giving forces us to cut unnecessary spending, create a budget and have faith that God will help us make it through the month. All of these are good things for each of us, individually. After faithfully giving to the offertory for a few months, many Catholics find that it's not only possible to give a weekly offering, but that the fruits of their gift far outweigh the expense.

At St. Francis Solanus, we ask that you give five percent to our parish, one percent to the diocese, and four percent to other charities. Why a percentage of income? First, because the tithe (10 percent) is a scriptural benchmark that the Church has honored for centuries (see Malachi 3:10). Secondly, we give a percentage of income because it is a common-sense standard by which everyone can equitably support the parish. Most of all, we give because we believe God comes first in everything, even finances.



Every parish family receives a special "Stewardship Package" in the mail that further explains our parish's vision of stewardship. It includes a booklet that describes every ministry in the parish, as well as your Commitment Card.

Our Annual Stewardship Renewal *continued from front cover*

you're able to open your heart and embrace it at all, the rewards you get back extend far beyond whatever time, talent, and treasure you have given. For me, it has provided a whole new outlook and view of my spirituality and my faith. It's meant everything to me."

Here at St. Francis Solanus, there is certainly a place for everyone, with numerous ministries suited to the individual gifts and talents of our many parishioners. This year, our parish is even reaching out to parishioners in grades 5-12 with a special youth commitment card.

By coming together as one body in the Lord, we are

able to increase our own faith and, in turn, bring the light of Christ to everyone we encounter.

"Each of us has a talent that will benefit our parish," says Linda, "if we can just find that element of time to benefit and participate and connect with Christ. This year we are also focusing on the youth component, because they are the future of the Church. If we can engage them in a life of stewardship, what a gift that would be!"

As the parishioners at St. Francis Solanus continue to become more and more invested in our faith family, our parish is sure to receive countless blessings in return!

Praying the Rosary Before Mass as a Parish Family

Coming to church a little early in October or May to pray the Rosary might just happen to be a life-changing experience for you. That is, if you are open to the wonderful things that the Blessed Mother wants to do in your heart, as well as in our parish family.

“The Rosary is a very powerful intercessory prayer to our Blessed Mother, who leads us to Christ,” says Director of Religious Education Mike Holbrook. “Thus it only seems fitting that we should pray it before Mass, because then she can lead us to Him during the liturgy. When people start coming in early before Mass and join in on the praying of the Rosary, the whole community prays together, and our prayer grows stronger and stronger as Mass approaches. It joins us all together, and solidifies our Catholic identity.”

Our parish gathers to pray the Rosary before Mass in October, because it is the month the Church dedicates to the Holy Rosary, as well as in May, because May is the month that the Church dedicates to honoring the Blessed Virgin Mary. Various volunteers sign up to take turns leading the Rosary. At times, they use a Scriptural Rosary, which features brief meditations with Scripture verses to accompany each mystery.

“I really enjoy praying the Scriptural Rosary because it brings the mysteries to life, and it helps us meditate on the Scriptures,” Mike says.

Overall, this communal prayer effort is a beautiful



If you would like further information, please contact the Parish Office at 217-222-2898.

symbol of our parish family’s love for Mary, and our appreciation for all she has done for us.

“Mary was the first Christian — she was the first one to say ‘yes’ to the Angel Gabriel that came to her during the Annunciation,” Mike says. “When she agreed to carry Christ in her womb, she became the first disciple. She was such a good example for the rest of us. We, in turn, ought to say ‘yes’ to God as she did.”

During this time in the Church and in the world, the Rosary is an especially important devotion to embrace with humility and trust.

“Nowadays, many people look at the Rosary as an ‘old person’s prayer,’ or just ‘something their grandma did,’” Mike says. “But even if so, our elders had a lot of wisdom, and much of this wisdom was lost when so many Catholics stopped praying the Rosary. We need the Blessed Mother’s intercession more now than in any time in the history of the world because morality is really declining, and the things of the world are taking precedence over spiritual things. We are constantly being pulled away from Jesus, and Mary is the one who can bring us back to Him.”

Throughout the history of Catholicism, a multitude of canonized Saints have encouraged devotion to the Rosary and spread its marvels. St. Pius X once proclaimed, “The Rosary is the most beautiful and the most rich in graces of all prayers; it is the prayer that touches most the Heart of the Mother of God. Say it each day.” St. Teresa of Calcutta liked to say, “Cling to the Rosary as the creeper clings to the tree — for without Our Lady, we cannot stand.” By praying it together as a parish family, we can take their words to heart and grow in holiness as they did.

Quest: The Fast-Paced, 24-Hour Experience that will Change Your Life

Current program coordinator Caroline Wiewel can still vividly recall her own first Quest experience as a 12-year-old. It was a pivotal moment in her faith journey, transforming religion from something she was expected to do by her family to something she personally desired, helping her understand her own unique place within the Catholic Church.

“It’s difficult to put into words,” Caroline says. “The adults who are involved just make the faith seem more exciting. And their enthusiasm makes you want to be excited in and desire to grow in the faith too. It really shows youth from a young age the many ways they can get involved now in their own — and even outside of their — church.”

Part of the Teens Encounter Christ program (TEC) Quest is a “fast-paced, 24-hour Christian experience” for 13 to 15-year-olds. It’s a designated time for teens from all backgrounds and schools to come together and learn more about God, friendships and even themselves in a fun-filled, supportive and



Quest helps teens personally encounter Christ in a truly life-changing way.

spiritually uplifting environment. Each possessing its own unique theme, a Quest weekend typically includes Mass and Reconciliation, talks on teen relevant topics, music, games, small-group discussions and personal prayer time. This allows teens to grow deeper in their own personal faith journey while also

forming lasting friendships with both their peers and adult mentors.

“It just really reveals to youth how fun and exciting the faith truly is,” Caroline says. “It shows them not only how they can grow in the faith themselves, but also how they can grow within the context of their family and friends — how they can be actively part of the Church now.”

Not only is this a great opportunity for parish youth, but Quest is also an excellent way for adults to help support and form the next generation of Catholics. Older high school and college-age students who have previously attended Quest have opportunities to help

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— Caroline Wiewel

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St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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Quest:

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out as table leaders, while adult team members are always welcome to observe and/or volunteer.

“This isn’t exclusively for youth,” says Caroline. “We welcome adults who are interested in observing to come as well. And we always welcome new volunteers, too. They just need to have completed a Quest, TEC or Cursillo weekend first to see how things run. It truly is so rewarding as an adult when you see others growing in their faith journey because of your example.”

All Quest weekends occur at the Franciscan Retreat Center of Quincy University and last from 6 p.m. on a Friday to 6 p.m. the following Saturday. The cost is \$45 per candidate and includes food, lodging, and other weekend surprises. The next available dates are Oct. 11-12 and Dec. 13-14. All parish youth and interested adults are encouraged to register at <https://greatrivertec.org/minutequest/> For more information about Quest, please contact Caroline Wierwel at either 217-430-6086 or grquestcoordinator@gmail.com.

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.