

Saint Francis Solanus



FEBRUARY 2020

Meet Our Couples Prayer Group *Praying Together, Staying Together*

We are likely familiar with the adage “the family that prays together stays together.” As it turns out, there is more than a grain of truth in that oft-repeated phrase — in 2011, a study took place that found a positive correlation between increased trust and prayer time between couples (*Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 4).

It’s this increased relationship success — as well as the chance for building relationships with fellow parishioners — that got Tyler and Emily Wellman thinking they should start the Couples Prayer Group. So, they asked Lee and Sarah Venvertloh to help kick it off back in 2015.

Any couple is invited to participate with the group from noon to 1:30 p.m. on the third Sunday of each month at the Parish Center — with the exception of June, July and December, when there are no meetings. This year, the group will follow the *Evenings with the Engaged* series. They will also receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation several times during the year.

As Sarah points out, this group has three overarching purposes. One is to give couples a dedicated and consistent opportunity to pray together.



Lee and Sarah Venvertloh enjoy participating and helping to lead the Couples Prayer Group. (Photo by Emily Wellman.)

“Another purpose is to embody the Stewardship Pillar of Hospitality as we gather together and share a meal,” she says. “A deeper purpose is to learn about our self and our partner. It also provides a social net to lift members up in prayer and support each other when life leaves us in need.”

With busy lives of working jobs, volunteering or raising children, it’s easy for prayer with your spouse

continued on page 5





Stewardship

Living Life to the Fullest

As professed disciples of Christ, we are also stewards of our personal and communal vocations. When we declare Christ as our King and Savior, we also promise to exist as His earthly body. The universal Church depends upon its individual earthly members for evangelization and support. As stewards of Catholicism, we must respond to this call with living faith and heartfelt stewardship. We must employ our lives in Christ's service, allowing Him to vocationally use us to our fullest potential. God designed us with specific talents in mind — by closely communicating with Jesus, His Son, we can put our talents to proper use. As stated in John's Gospel, when we give our lives to Christ, He promises to ignite them accordingly: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

True life demands sacrifices, which are crucial in urging us onward and upward toward Christ. When we embark upon a lifelong path of stewardship, giving our time, talent and treasure in the service of God and His Church, we are effectively allowing Jesus to guide us along life's slippery slopes with the steady hand of a practiced master. Christ explains this concept in the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23-24). Only after completely giving our lives over to Christ, will we experience the true majesty of life — the life each of us is destined to live.

As Catholics, we are urged to outwardly promote all stages of life, and to stand up in its defense. Considering the attention death has garnered within our society — whether we focus upon abortion, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment or euthanasia — an understanding and respect for life must be reinstated into our culture and lives. But we must first harbor a true, personal love for life within our very souls, and live our own lives to the fullest, through Christ, in the service and promotion of His Church. We must become stewards of faith, in order to truly live as Christ planned. And we must give our time, talents and treasure — all gifts God has given us through life — before we can really claim to be alive.

Let us promote the sanctity of life through personal conversion. Our deaths in Christ destine us to live in His glory, the ultimate expression of life. Let us become the disciples we claim to be, by adopting the essence of stewardship and melding it into our very souls.

A Letter From Our Pastor

Preparing for Lent as Good Stewards

Dear Parishioners,

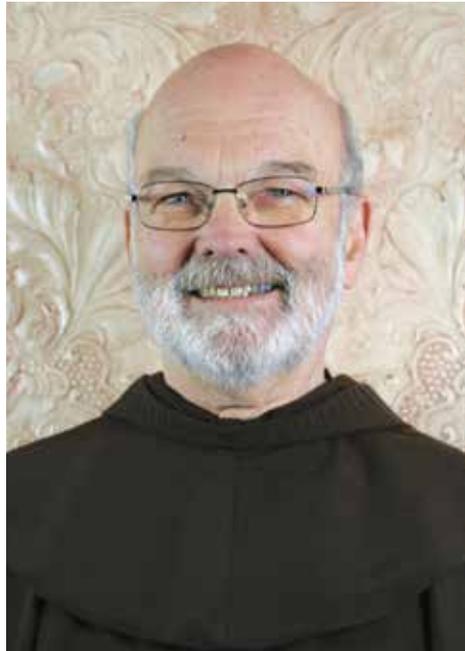
Sometimes I get questions along the lines of “Do I have to go to Mass every Sunday?” or “Do we really still have to abstain from meat on every Friday during Lent?” You may have been asked those questions by other Catholics. Perhaps you’ve even asked similar questions yourself.

The simple answers to these two questions are “yes” and “yes.” But my major concern when I hear such questions goes beyond the correct answer to the specific inquiry itself. The more important matter to my mind is, why do people want to do as little as possible in their Christian lives?

Certainly we need the laws of the Church to teach us what our duties are to God, to other Christians in the Body of Christ, and to ourselves. But as we grow in our understanding of the faith and develop a more mature spiritual life, we should go beyond, “How little can I do and still avoid hell?” or to put it another way, “How little can I do and still get to heaven?” Instead, we have to ask ourselves, “Is that where I want to go?”

We know from the Our Father, the prayer Jesus Himself taught us, one characteristic of heaven. In that prayer we pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” God’s will is always done perfectly in heaven. If we don’t want to do God’s will, He won’t force us to go there — and you’ll realize you have chosen the alternative.

My point is, let’s do away with minimum Christianity! Instead of asking, “How little can I do and stay out of hell?” let’s begin asking, “How much can I do for God, Who created me, Who redeemed me, Who pours blessings out every day? How much do I love God, Who loves me enough to die for me?”



Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which falls on Feb. 26. As you plan your Lenten rule of life, why not be as generous toward God as you can be? While I’m not suggesting that you shed all your other obligations, I am suggesting that you respond to God’s blessings with gratitude, as fully as possible — rather than as grudgingly as possible.

So, let’s use this Lent to ask God to remove our attitude of “What’s in it for me?” and to replace it with the grace to become good disciples and stewards.

Have a blessed and holy Lent.

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



The Ministry of Communion

Sharing Christ with

When a person is sick or homebound, it's easy for them to feel disconnected from the Church. Physically prevented from attending Mass or parish events, they can feel forgotten or alone, separated from the community they once served faithfully. This is why, says parishioner Carolyn Briddle, it's so important that we continue bringing them Holy Communion through St. Francis Solanus' Eucharistic Ministry to the Sick and Homebound.

"We're there to bring Holy Communion to people who can't physically get to church," Carolyn says. "We bring them the weekly bulletin and come to just be with them, allowing them to keep up with what is going on in the parish and to feel like they are still connected."

Involved in this ministry of care since its inception over 35 years ago, Carolyn is now blessed to coordinate the delivery of Holy Communion to our homebound parishioners. This includes people recovering from recent surgeries, suffering from long-term illnesses, or simply prevented from traveling due to old age. This is done weekly on whatever day works best with the minister's schedule. Her friend, Geri McMillen, coordinates Communion delivery to the Catholic residents of Good Samaritan Home,

bringing them the Eucharist every Sunday on a rotating volunteer schedule.

"We come on Sundays to bring them the Body of Christ, which the residents are always so looking forward to," Geri says. "Usually, it's between 40-50 people and they are always very grateful for the fact we show up. Many of us have been doing this for so many years now, too, and so they've come to know us."

Through this ministry, parishioners are able to truly become the hands and feet of Christ, bringing His Body to those who oftentimes suffer greatly — be it from physical ailments or loneliness. That's why ministers try to bring as much love and care as possible into their visit with each homebound parishioner. They'll spend time talking with them, bring them parish bulletins, and even invite them to pray for upcoming parish events. All of this is done in the hopes of making the homebound individual or nursing home resident feel more connected with their faith community.

"Yes, we're there to bring people who can't get to church Holy Communion, but we also bring them the weekly bulletin and come to just be with them," Carolyn says. "Our hope is to allow them to keep up with what is going on in the parish and to feel like they are still connected."

"We are their connection to Christ on Sundays," Geri adds. "Even though they can't physically get to Mass, we help them feel like it's Sunday by bringing them Communion."

In the process, the sick and homebound aren't the only ones who benefit from the ministry. Both Carolyn and Geri agree that they often receive far more than they give through the great reverence and joy demonstrated by those they've come to serve. It rejuvenates their own faith, reminding them of how incredible of a gift the Eucharist



Not only are Eucharistic Ministers able to bring Christ to the sick and homebound, but they are also able to become a connection between them and the parish community.

Ministry to the Sick and Homebound

with Those in Need

truly is — it makes them feel good knowing they are doing something for a brother or sister in need.

“It is just a joyous thing to see so many wonderful, loving people reaching out to Christ — people who are so grateful for what we do,” Geri says. “It brings me closer to Christ knowing that I can do that for them, that I can help their relationship with Christ by allowing them to receive His Body in this way.”



Some of the faithful Catholic at Good Samaritan Home.

Any trained Eucharistic Minister is welcome to join this ministry. Those interested in bringing Communion to the homebound may contact Carolyn Briddle at 217-222-0725, while those wishing to serve the residents of Good Samaritan Home may contact Geri McMillen at 217-222-6739.

Couples Prayer Group *continued from front cover*

and prayer in general to fall by the wayside. But having dedicated time can make prayer and your spouse a priority, Sarah says.

“There is a beautiful, vulnerable intimacy that is shared when you let your spouse hear your conversation with God,” she says. “Your spouse learns so much about you, more than just the words you say, when they listen to you pray. Lifting your needs and thanksgiving to God together in prayer as a couple is powerful.”

Sarah says that being a part of the Couples Prayer Group has been very important in their marriage and sends a message to their four children of how important

prayer is in marriage.

“Our marriage is stronger because we pray together,” she says. “Our tie to our parish is stronger because we pray with other couples there.”

Childcare can be provided if it is requested in advance. Sarah recommends all couples consider attending Couples Prayer Group.

“You do not need to be married, but it is a group for couples,” she says. “You don’t even need to be part of our parish. It is a great place for engaged couples, newlyweds, parents of young and not-so-young children, and even older couples.

Interested couples may contact Emily Wellman at 217-257-3536 or Sarah Venvertloh at 217-577-6490. This month’s meeting takes place on Feb. 16. In addition, upcoming gatherings are listed in the weekly bulletin. And don’t forget, February is the Celebration of National Marriage Week and the Feast of St. Valentine!

Lenten Practices

Penance and Abstinence

For many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say "goodbye" to meat on Fridays and "hello" to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hard-wired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing that Catholics definitely understand, it's adhering to the laws of tradition. Indeed, the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the Scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence, and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence.

First, all humans are sinners. Second, penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God. Third, the Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance. And finally, Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.

The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ — they are not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, which falls on Feb. 26 this year, and Good Friday, falling this year on April 10. And, because Christ died on a Friday, we are to abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent.

Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation



for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.

But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others — just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind — "by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own" (*Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence*, 15).

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time, talent and treasure. The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.

Parish Nursing Program

Caring for the Body and Soul

There is something special about those who respond to a call to the field of nursing. Each and every day, these dedicated medical professionals find themselves in situations of caring for the needs of others, in a variety of ways. Whether they're drawing blood, listening to a grieving family, or helping to provide support and education, nurses often find themselves in a position to act as the hands and feet of Christ.

Here at St. Francis Solanus, our Parish Nursing Program hopes to embody Christ through serving the members of our parish family.

"I see it as a huge blessing," says Helen Zimmerman, RN, BSN, who coordinates the Parish Nursing Program. "We do our jobs as nurses, but when you're doing it in the parish, it's just different. You're doing it for the love of caring for God's people."

Helen has worked as a nurse in a variety of different capacities, from critical care and surgery, to now working in education, training new employees at her hospital.

"There's so much variety in what nurses can do — it's not cookie-cutter," Helen says. "I feel like people respect nurses overall. I like knowing that

people have trust in us."

The monthly blood pressure checks are certainly the most visible aspect of our Parish Nursing Program. Taking place on the first weekend of every month, parish nurses volunteer after each Mass to help their fellow parishioners in checking this insightful health metric.

"Blood pressure checks are open to everybody," Helen says. "It could be somebody that does it regularly every month or it could be somebody that just wants to get it done 'this one time.' I think sometimes it's easier for people to talk to us because we're not the doctor — we're just there to listen.

"It's non-invasive, it's an easy thing and it can alert you to if there are any kind of issues," she adds. "Just spending a couple minutes with a nurse is an opportune time to check in, and someone might be able to give you a little help and education and support."

In the future, Helen hopes to be able to expand the Parish Nursing Program to include home visits to parishioners and educational events, such as a parish health fair. She sees the role of parish nurses as not just one of caring for physical health, but also of helping address emotional and spiritual needs as well.

continued on back cover



One Sunday each month, parish nurses volunteer their time to take blood pressures of their fellow parishioners.

St. Francis Solanus

ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH

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



Parish Nursing Program *continued from page 7*

“It can be helpful to have [a nurse] that can check in with someone and have some knowledge about health care and also spiritual care,” Helen says. “A lot of times, people’s spiritual life and faith guides decisions they make about their health care. [It can be helpful] to be able to encourage them and give them a little bit of education or maybe just pray with them.”

Helen encourages medical professionals in any field to consider how they may be able to use their

gifts and skills to serve the parish community. She also hopes that other nurses will consider becoming more involved — including assisting her in a coordinator role. For other parishioners, she encourages people to take advantage of the opportunities offered, and to be good stewards of their bodies.

“Our health is a gift from God, and we want to be able to take care of them, as with any gift we’re given,” Helen says.

*If you would like more information about our Parish Nursing Program,
please contact 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.