



## VOICE OF ST. MARY'S

*Parish Newsletter*

### Pastor

Rev. Joseph A. Baker

### Permanent Deacons

Deacon Jim Wallace

Deacon Ray White

### Vicar Forane

Rev. David Sabel

### Parish Secretary

Patti Zehr

### Rectory/Parish Office

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# WELCOME FATHER JOE!

Right after Fr. Joseph Baker arrived in Pontiac and offered his first weekend of Masses in mid June, he took off on a much needed vacation with fellow priests that was planned before he arrived. Then in July, he spent a week at the Sacre Coeur Retreat Center for the mandatory Diocesan Young Clergy retreat. Fr. Joe is just now starting to settle into our parish and is enjoying meeting parishioners and getting to know our parish better through various meetings with leadership groups.

Fr. Joe was born in Peoria and grew up in Morton. He graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in Economics & Psychology. While at the UofI, he was deeply involved with the campus Newman Center and Opus Dei which helped him discern his calling to the priesthood, and lead him to Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. He was ordained a priest of the Diocese of Peoria on May 23, 2015.

Since ordination, Fr. Joe has served as a parochial vicar (assistant pastor) in Champaign, Urbana, Bloomington and Normal and has also served as a chaplain at Central Catholic in Bloomington and Alleman High School in Rock Island. He arrives in Pontiac after most recently serving as pastor at St. Ambrose in Milan and St. Patrick in Andalusia. Fr. Joe is also the Episcopal Vicar for Consecrated Virgins in our diocese.

Spending time with the kids at Totus Tuus in late June and working at the 4-H Fair kitchen has helped Fr. Joe meet many parishioners, young and old, and he is anxious for school to start and looks forward to spending time in the classrooms and at some extra curricular events, in addition to meeting other parishioners and participating in committees, bible studies and other groups in the parish.

We welcome Fr. Joe and pray that God will bless him with many grace-filled years here at St. Mary's.



## FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION A HOLY DAY OF OBLIGATION TUESDAY, AUGUST 15

**Masses will be offered at St. Mary's at the following times:  
Monday, August 14 at 5:30pm  
Tuesday, August 15 at 6am, 8:15am and 5:30pm**

**Flanagan & Lexington: Tuesday, August 15 at 5pm  
Chenoa & Chatsworth: Tuesday, August 15 at 7pm**



# FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



In the six weeks since I moved here to Pontiac there have been many changes and challenges I've faced. Foremost is simply the reality of having to move from one parish to another. We see Jesus using the example of plants regularly in the Gospel, and I think the image of being uprooted is particularly apropos for my situation.

When a plant is firmly set in its soil, well watered and cared for, with a strong root system, it can be very stressful and even threatening to the plant's future viability if it is simply pulled out of its soil. We know, though, that such an *uprooted plant, when re-potted in fertile ground, will in time set down new roots, continue to grow, and given the right conditions, may even flourish and advance beyond the level it had achieved in its prior environment.*

In my first article in this bi-monthly newsletter as the pastor at St. Mary's I wanted to share this image with you because it's something I think describes a bit of my personal feelings and emotions in these days. I was very happy at my previous assignment in the Quad Cities where I was privileged to serve so many in the parishes and schools in that beautiful community on the Mississippi River. To be honest, I was *so saddened to leave my former assignment and the many people I came to love there. When the bishop informed me of the move he desired for me, I felt as if he was uprooting me.*

When any of us undergoes a significant move in our lives, the temptation is to constantly look back on one's previous situation, comparing and contrasting the current circumstances to what we knew prior. I've certainly done a decent amount of that, particularly in areas where I feel my previous parishes did a good job and where I've found it to be a bit more challenging here. When things in a new environment are challenging, it can be easy to focus on those realities and not acknowledge, with a spirit of gratitude, the positive attributes of the new environment.

So with this article, drawing on my experience as a priest at 6 previous schools (4 elementary and 2 secondary) as well as 6 prior parishes, not to mention the 9 additional parishes I was formally assigned to serve at as a seminarian and deacon in Illinois and Maryland, I'd like to draw your attention to a few of the items at which St. Mary's in Pontiac seems to excel, over and above that of the average parish.

First: I have been very impressed with the programs devoted to the Catholic education of our youth, particularly the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) program. CGS is something I have familiarity with from the past. I feel so strongly about it being the best thing going in the realm of children's catechesis that I had actually initiated discussions about bringing it to one of my former parishes. So to come into an environment in which it is already present is a real highlight for me. I look forward to fostering the program and helping it grow even more!

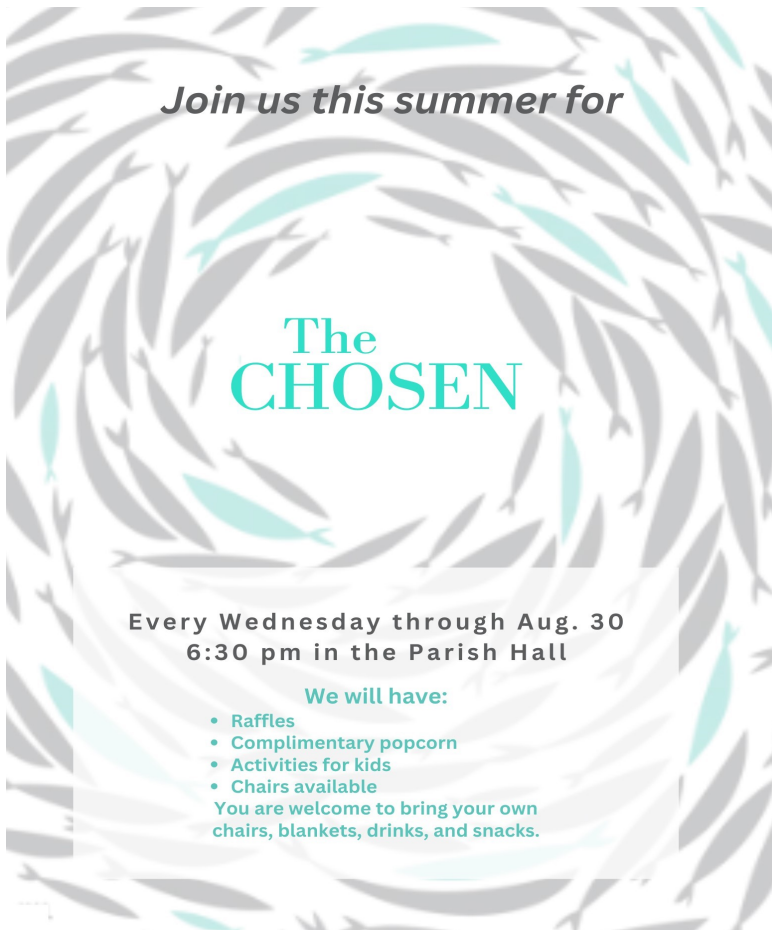
Second: Although school hasn't started just yet, I can tell from several conversations I've already had, St. Mary's School is an education environment centered around our Catholic faith. This isn't just highfalutin words, but it truly is the reality. From everyone in the school community with whom I've associated so far, it's clear the Catholicity of St. Mary's is very important. The school is known as the St. Mary's Saints not simply because we needed a mascot and logo, but in truth because people in our community want our children to be saints. I can tell the decisions made and the conversations had within the school are colored by that reality. Sadly, this isn't something that is found within every Catholic school community, but I can see that it is found here at St. Mary's in Pontiac. For that, I am very, very grateful.

Third: I have long felt the process of marriage preparation at most parishes, in which a couple simply meets with a priest 5 or 6 times prior to the wedding is insufficient. While I've enjoyed getting to know couples and sharing faith with them, it's been in my mind that we really need a system in which those preparing for marriage meet with other members of the parish and have an opportunity to sit down with one or two couples who have been married for many decades. Rather than just talking to a priest who's never been married, this would give future married couples an opportunity to interact with a devoted couple who know from personal experience what it is to be committed to the lifelong vocation of Holy Matrimony. I wanted to arrange such a system at my previous parish but various obstacles seemed to always get in the way of successfully getting it off the ground. Well, it is very exciting for me that here at St. Mary's, we have just such an arrangement! I know it has been and will continue to be beneficial to all those who approach Jesus in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony.

Fourth: There is great devotion here at St. Mary's, and a significant number of people truly have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I was once assigned to a parish with over 1,000 families in a town of over 100,000 people that only averaged 15-20 people attending Daily Mass. St. Mary's is a slightly smaller parish, and Pontiac is obviously a much smaller community, yet we tend to have 50 or so people at Mass each morning! Although our adoration chapel has not been perpetual since covid, we still have adoration with scheduled adorers every day except Sunday. Of many other characteristics of our parish which I could share, this is the fourth and final positive attribute I'll mention in these pages. There are many people here who have an active spiritual life who are really striving to know the Lord Jesus, particularly through His sacraments. This is, no doubt, our parish's greatest strength.

So yes, I still feel a bit uprooted, but with each passing day I'm feeling more and more comfortable and at home. It's clear to me the bishop has re-potted me in fertile ground. In time, my roots will grow and expand in this new pot. I'm confident that together we will grow, and I pray that in time we will flourish into the saints God wants us to be.

Praise be Jesus Christ! Now and forever! *Fr. Joe*



2 TIMOTHY 1:6-7

**FANNING THE FLAME.**

**FANNING THE FLAME** returns in August – 1 Day Only!! We would like to invite you to attend a one day renewal retreat: **FANNING THE FLAME** sponsored by WATCH. The day is open to everyone even if you have never attended a prior WATCH retreat. Bring a friend and join us Saturday, August 26 from 9am-3:30pm at St. Mary’s Parish Hall. A light lunch will be provided and there is no cost to attend but free will offerings will be accepted. For more information and to RSVP please contact Sherri Hatzler at (815) 848-6787.



## HIGH SCHOOLERS RELISH TIME WITH GOD THIS SUMMER



It has been an exceptional summer for St. Mary’s Youth Group. We have taken advantage of the longer days and beautiful weather by meeting outside to soak up the beauty of God’s creation. The summer is always an excellent time to be able to slow down and reflect on the ways that God works in our lives during the times that we may not be as attentive in the busyness of the school year. It was also an incredible blessing to have another year of the Totus Tuus program! It is always an incredible week to encounter the love of Jesus!

After many great evenings around a fire pit, we were able to go and enjoy another year at the Steubenville Youth Conference in Springfield, Missouri! It was an amazing experience for both teens

and chaperones alike. We were very blessed to be able to join up with the youth group from Streator for the weekend and it was a wonderful opportunity to build community with teens who are nearby! Getting to watch the teens experience this weekend is always such a gift, and hearing what they have to say after really shows the beauty and power of the weekend. “Steubenville was such an amazing experience for me to grow closer to Jesus, and changed the way I think about my relationship with him completely.” “It was an opportunity that opened the door to a deeper relationship with Jesus, and a great way to build relationships with our peers as well.” These are just a few of the things that teens have shared about the way the weekend has impacted their life.

The youth group will continue to meet on Monday evenings from 6:30-8:30 through Labor Day weekend, when it will switch to Sunday evenings from 6:30-8:30. All high school students are welcome to join any week they can! Since it is never too early to get something on your calendar, please share with any high school student you know that the annual Gonzaga retreat will take place January 6th and 7th in 2024! More information will follow in the next newsletter issue! Please know of our prayers for all of you and keep the teens of St. Mary’s in your prayers! God bless you!

# SCHOLARSHIPS at St. Mary's School



*We strive to ensure that Catholic education is affordable for all families.*

**\$446,297.25**

awarded since 2018



Tuition assistance  
provided to 34 students  
(annual average)

**\$2,188**

average award



Tuition assistance  
provided to 23 families  
(annual average)



## SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

### EMPOWER IL, INVEST IN KIDS ACT

Available to **ALL** income-eligible families, based upon availability of funds on a first come, first served basis, pays up to 100%. \$235,976 has been awarded.

### ST. BLAISE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Available to **ALL** income-eligible families; partial scholarship based upon fund availability. \$184,317 has been awarded,

### JOHN LANCASTER SPALDING, DIOCESE OF PEORIA

Available to income-eligible **CATHOLIC** families, partial scholarship based upon fund availability. \$10,004 awarded since 2018.

### OTHER SCHOLARSHIPS

Available to **ALL** income-eligible families; partial scholarship based upon fund availability. \$16,000 has been awarded.



Every student, regardless of faith, receives a tuition subsidy from St. Mary's Parish.

- Operating expenditure per pupil St. Mary's: \$6,968 (2021-22)
- Operating expenditure per pupil Dist. 429: \$15,817\*
- Operating expenditure per pupil Dist. 90: \$15,069\*
- Operating expenditure per pupil State of IL: \$16,029\*

\*Data Source: Illinois Report Card (2021-2022).

## WAYS TO HELP

- Donations made to Empower Illinois are eligible for a 75% tax credit on State of IL tax return. Matching gifts may be available.
- Donations to the St. Blaise Scholarship Fund may be deductible as a charitable contribution on Federal tax return.
- Many employers, including Caterpillar, Exelon, and State Farm, will match gifts made to St. Mary's School and Empower Illinois.

# From the Principal's Desk...



August....a new school year is about to begin, new families and students to welcome, new goals to set, and new friends to meet. In addition to these new things, I want to welcome our new school secretary, Jordi Cavanagh to St. Mary's School. Please stop in to say hi to Jordi! I want to also welcome Father Joe to our school. I look forward to working with him to make our school and parish a place of belonging for you and your family.

With the new school year beginning, I pray that we will build stronger school and parish relationships in the coming year. Look for the many opportunities to connect to our school either by coming to an event or looking at our social media pages. We invite you to volunteer to help with lunch duty. As the new school year begins, I would ask for your prayers for a safe and successful school year for our students, faculty/staff, and our families.

I found this prayer and think it is very fitting for this time of year:

Loving God, thank you for the joys that summer brought to us. You have blessed us with time to spend with family and friends, rest and relaxation, and a break from school work. As we return to our studies, inspire us to take on a new interest in new classes and new topics. Be with us as we discover old friendships and start new ones. Amen.

Mrs. Jones



Mrs. Karen Jones

*I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13*



As school begins on August 16, we pray that God will be with all our teachers and students and that they will be blessed with a safe, fruitful and holy school year. Please be mindful of students as you enter our back parking lot. Those attending morning Masses may wish to park elsewhere on school days to avoid morning drop offs at the MPR doors.

## ST. MARY'S PARISH JUNE 2023



*"They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which he has given you."  
~ Deuteronomy 16:16-17*

### WE THANK YOU

We continue to be truly humbled by the generosity of our parishioners. We invite you to support our church and school to the best of your ability, sharing the gifts that God has given you. Every contribution is greatly appreciated. Prayerfully consider the impact you can have.

## A QUARTERLY UPDATE ON OUR FINANCIAL JOURNEY

	Previous Fiscal Year July 1 - June 30, 2022	Current Fiscal Year July 1 - June 30, 2023
<b>REVENUES</b>	<b>\$1,443,576.86</b>	<b>\$1,695,714.40</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$1,452,591.56</b>	<b>\$1,520,058.63</b>
<b>GAIN/(LOSS)</b>	<b>(\$9,014.70)</b>	<b>\$175,655.77</b>

- Report covers both Parish and School Operations

We continue to rely on your prayers and generosity to provide what we need to run our operations, and we work hard to be good stewards with the gifts we have been given. Our investments recovered from the previous year, we qualified for a Retained Earning Credit due to Covid and received a substantial refund, and we received a generous parishioner gift at the end of the calendar year which gave us a healthy finish to the fiscal year. We kindly ask everyone to use your weekly envelopes or use Online Giving through our website: [www.stmaryspontiac.org](http://www.stmaryspontiac.org)

## 4-H FAIR THANK YOU

What an awesome turnout this year for the St. Mary's 4-H Kitchen! We want to thank our many workers for their teamwork and dedication in making this another successful year. We had well over 100 volunteer workers along with over 50 volunteer bakers, and others who filled in adoration for workers, donated money, or said prayers for the success of the kitchen. We served 800 ribeyes, 600 hamburgers, over 480 hotdogs, over 425 pork chops, plus bbq pork burgers, nachos, fries, and so much more.

We raised over \$13,000 this year! We had many donations this year which included: cups, buns, meat, propane, water, eggs, and napkins. Without everyone's help it wouldn't have been possible. The camaraderie amongst the workers, young and old, was great to see. Many stepped up and helped out a little longer than their regular shift to get us through the busy time of the day or night. It was truly a blessing to see parishioners and non-parishioners helping out. We are truly blessed to have a great community of volunteers who are working for God's kingdom here on Earth.

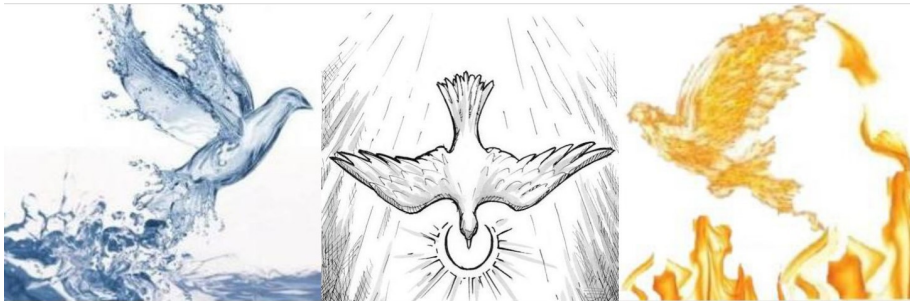
Thank you again! Mark & Anne Corrigan



## SMS GOLF OUTING

What a beautiful day on the golf course for the St Mary's Golf Outing! It was a fantastic time seeing some of our students, staff, parents, parishioners and even a priest enjoying themselves while raising money for St Mary's School. The event brought in a little over \$4700! A huge THANK YOU to all our Hole Sponsors and our teams for joining us!

Above: The green filled with kids for the putting contest. Below: A Flight Winners, Jeff Gray, Mick Peterson, Brennan Krenz, & Fr. David Sabel. B Flight Winners (Family Flight), Nick, Adelle, Callum, Parker & Eva Masching.



# RCIA

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

**Have you been thinking about joining the church?**

**Do you have friends you would like to introduce to the Catholic faith?**

**Want to learn more about the depth and beauty of a 2000-year-old faith tradition?**

**Do you desire to grow closer to God with the support of a faith community?**

The next session of RCIA will begin this September.

To join, be a part of the team, or ask questions, please contact  
the Parish Center (815-844-7683),

Kate Harrold (815-848-1705, [kate.russow@gmail.com](mailto:kate.russow@gmail.com)),  
or Tyler Shrewsbury (815-674-5569, [tshrewsbury94@gmail.com](mailto:tshrewsbury94@gmail.com)).

RCIA will meet Wednesday evenings from 6:15 - 8:00 pm  
in the Parish Hall on the following dates:

September 13, 27

October 11, 25

November 8, 15, 29

December 13

January 10, 24

February 7, 14, 28

March 13, 20

April 3, 10



## PRAY FOR OUR PARISH FAMILIES THIS YEAR

We ask everyone to pray for specific church and school families each week-day. Please remember these families in your prayers each day for them to grow in their faith this year. Thank you.



Mon Aug 14	Emmanuel & Maximina Romero Family Jeanette Ruiz Family	Thurs Sept 7	Bill & Karen Schulz Family Kasen Ward Family
Tues Aug 15	Ed & Rose Romonosky Family Jesus Ruiz Family	Fri Sept 8	Chris & Jan Schneider Family Emmett Fornero Family
Wed Aug 16	Julian & Agustina Romero Family Paula Rosenbaum Family	Mon Sept 11	Brad Schwahn Family Knox & Tucker Grundler Family
Thurs Aug 17	Jose Ruiz Family David Ross Family	Tues Sept 12	Ray & Sue Schnell Family Addison & Leo Hassinger Family
Fri Aug 18	Paula Ruiz Family Elizabeth Roybal Family	Wed Sept 13	Theresa Schopp Family Annie Vogt Family
Mon Aug 21	Scott & Suzanne Runyon Family Laura Russell Family	Thurs Sept 14	Marianne Schwahn Family Henry Schopp Family
Tues Aug 22	Trevor Sancken Family Teri Salinas Family	Fri Sept 15	Bryan & Susan Schweigert Family Liam, Brooks & Finley Lawrence Family
Wed Aug 23	Mary Sanders Family Kathy Russow Family	Mon Sept 18	Mike & Brenda Shaughnessy Family Case & Oliver Owens Family
Thurs Aug 24	Richard & Mary Lou Salvator Family Richard Sargent Family	Tues Sept 19	Madhu Shrivastav Family Charlie Popp Family
Fri Aug 25	Larry Russow Family Joanne Sancken Family	Wed Sept 20	Peggy Scott Family Alex Ralph Family
Mon Aug 28	Diana Salinas Family Travis & Heather Sancken Family	Thurs Sept 21	Richard Lois Shelby Family Harper & Scarlett Regnier Family
Tues Aug 29	Nick & Caroline Sartoris Family Chuck & Carol Schopp Family	Fri Sept 22	Al & Jill Seal Family Elaine Runyon Family
Wed Aug 30	Richard & Karla Schultz Family Rita Schaefer Family	Mon Sept 25	Kelly Shoemaker Family Crew Spaniol Family
Thurs Aug 31	Jacob & Jessica Schopp Family Kathy Schulz Family	Tues Sept 26	Harry & Pat Simpson Family Nora, Wilson & Otis Sweitzer Family
Fri Sept 1	Joe & Donna Schopp Family Zara Bartnik Family	Wed Sept 27	Humberto & Rosa Serna Family Josie & Noah Wenger Family
Mon Sept 4	Ron & Kim Schulz Family Chase, Rhys & Olivia Carley Family	Thurs Sept 28	Karen Sholders Family Olivia & Eli Miller Family
Tues Sept 5	Nancy Schneeman Family Parker & Kash Casner Family	Fri Sept 29	Tim & Rebecca Shafer Family Sophia & Jozie Brannan Family
Wed Sept 6	Mary Lynn Schopp Family Caroline & Evelyn Cavanagh Family		

### THE PARISH DIRECTORIES ARE FINALLY HERE!!

*If you had your picture taken, you can pick up your free directory at the parish office, Monday-Thursday 9am to 4pm, Friday 9am to noon.*

*Extra copies are available to purchase for \$20 each.*

**BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP** will be held this fall for parishioners and others in the vicariate who have experienced the loss of a family member or a friend. The group will meet in September and October and end with the All Souls' Mass on November 2. Those interested should contact Margo Law or the parish office for more information.

**LAY MINISTERS NEEDED** for St. Mary's Parish in the bereavement ministry, nursing home ministry, and homebound ministry. Bereavement ministers work with those who have lost loved ones by sending cards, visiting them, and supporting them in other ways. Nursing home ministers are needed to take Holy Communion to and visit with the residents of local nursing homes one day a month. Homebound ministers take Holy Communion to and visit with those who are homebound temporarily or for an extended time. If interested in these ministries, please call Sue Smith, 815-307-4647, Katie Wille, 309-531-1233, or the parish office.

# From The Back Page

by Kim Cheek

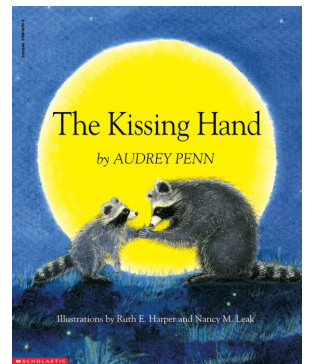
It's that time of year when things start to change. If you are a parent, you may be facing your child going to day-care, preschool, kindergarten, high school or college for the first time. These moments are exciting but also daunting. If you are past those years of child rearing, then maybe you are dealing with health issues, an ailing parent, a divorce, a new job, remarriage, anything really and these issues and everything that comes with them can be overwhelming.

This time of year I always think about the book, "The Kissing Hand" by Audrey Penn. This book was a lifesaver when my son was little and had fear about the unknown of all day kindergarten. The book is about a baby raccoon named Chester who is fearful to leave his mom and start school. He is afraid of the unknown, so the mom tells him she has a solution. She kisses his hand and tells him any time he is feeling scared or unsure to hold his hand to his heart and he won't be alone. I did this with my kids so many times through the years, and I believe it helped them because it reminded them that I was with them and loved them whether they could see me or not. As in the book, my kids would kiss the palm of my hand, so when I missed them, I could remember they were with me. It is quite simply about having faith that you are loved and not forgotten. A pretty simple concept but oh, so powerful.

I believe "The Kissing Hand" concept is useful in the above situations, especially for adults. We need to feel loved, heard, cared for, appreciated. We also know that the kissing hand is a children's book with a simple message. Your love and faith in someone doesn't go away when you aren't with them. This ties directly into our faith in Jesus. We can't see him, but we know he is there. Some of us treat him as a silent partner. Some of us treat him as our best friend and confidant. Some of us fluctuate back and forth depending on how things are going in our lives. He is steadfast and true and never leaves our side. Isn't this what our kids are fearful of when they are little and going to school for the first time? Isn't this what we want our kids to remember when they are heading into high school or college and leaving home? Isn't this what we want our mom or dad to remember when hard choices are being made on a daily basis about the best care for them? Isn't remembering God's role in our lives and doing our best to respect those around us while honoring our loved ones with our faith our ultimate goal?

I believe one could make the connection with "The Kissing Hand" to Isaiah 41:10 - "Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."

Whatever journey you or your family find yourself on, always remember you are not alone. You are loved and will not be forsaken. God Bless.



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