



Voice of St. Mary's
*Parish Monthly
Newsletter*

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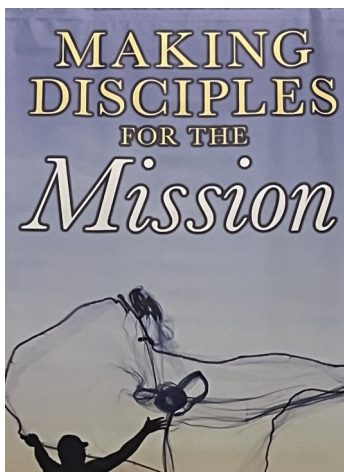
Karen Peissig

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Other Parish Voices

Increased Giving Appeal To Begin

"Making Disciples for the Mission"



Over the next few weeks, you will be hearing about our upcoming *"Making Disciples for the Mission"* Program at St. Mary's Catholic Church. This effort is very important as we move forward with the mission and vision of St. Mary's. We, as a parish family, have changed so many lives in our community! In order to continue our mission and ministries, we encourage all parishioners to spend time in prayer and discussion with your family reflecting on the work we do.

Father Adam will give a special Homily the weekend of January 29th & 30th introducing this stewardship initiative, and you will receive a brochure in the mail with additional information about the program. A special Commitment Weekend will be celebrated at all Masses the weekend of February 5th & 6th where we invite each of you to participate in this important program through your offertory giving and help us respond to God's great gift of love. We ask that you please review the brochure and prayerfully consider how you and your family can help St. Mary's Catholic Church by financially supporting our ministries, furthering our mission, and reinforcing our future.

If you have any questions regarding the *"Making Disciples for the Mission"* Program, please feel free to contact the parish office.

Unlocking the Mysteries of the Bible Free Study Program to Begin February 7



A BIBLE STUDY, *"Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible"* by Jeff Cavins, will begin Monday, February 7 at 7:00pm in the parish hall and meet for an hour and half, every other week for 8 sessions. *Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible* helps us get the "big picture" by showing how fourteen narrative books of the Bible tell the complete story from Adam and Eve to Christ and the Church. Jeff Cavins will also help us discov-

er the story of salvation history and understand how we fit into God's plan with these eight video topics (and tentative dates)

February 7	Introduction, <i>The Bible Timeline Chart</i>
February 21	Early World
March 7	Patriarchs
March 21	Egypt and Exodus, Desert Wanderings
April 4	Conquest and Judges, Royal Kingdom
April 18	Divided Kingdom, Exile, Return
May 2	Maccabean Revolt, Messianic Fulfillment - Part 1
May 16	Messianic Fulfillment - Part 2, The Church, Continuing the Journey

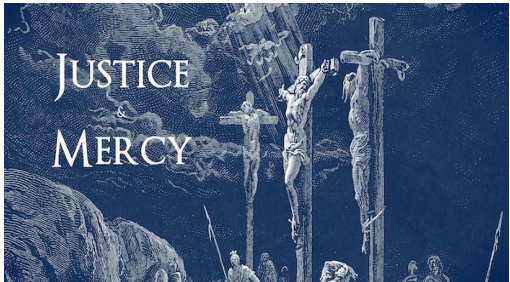
There is no cost for this Bible Study. If you wish to attend or have questions, please call Bryan Schweigert at 815-867-0958 or Margo Law at 815-579-5102. We look forward to seeing you there! Bring your Bible, please!

Jesus Teaches Us How to Temper Justice and Mercy



When I was in college studying history, I learned a lot about different ways that justice and mercy have been understood throughout history. While in seminary, the Church formed me by studying a lot of anthropology – the study of human beings. As a priest, I have come to a deep understanding through thousands of confessions and counseling sessions of how different people view the world.

In 2022, the secular world is a world of extremes, where some folks are overwhelmed by justice, and when a wrong is incurred, there is never enough justice that can be done to an individual for his/her transgressions. There are other folks in the world overwhelmed by mercy, and when a wrong is incurred, there is never enough mercy that can be given to an individual. Most people fall somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. Yet, every person is battling how much mercy is necessary in a



situation and how much justice is necessary in a situation. As Catholic Christians, we are called to a different kind of moral system than the world tells us. We are called to follow the example of the pioneer and perfecter of our faith

– Jesus Christ – to understand justice and mercy. Jesus is the perfect combination of justice and mercy. He shows us over and over in the Scriptures how we are called to live that out.

A particular example of how Jesus shows perfect justice and mercy has emerged in my prayer. In John Chapter 8, there is a story of a woman caught in adultery. The woman is being threatened by a crowd to be put to death by stoning. The woman did do something wrong, but now her sin has been exposed to the public. It is impossible to imagine the kind of fear that must have been in the heart of this woman knowing of her looming death. Her accusers all want justice to be done and for her to be stoned to death.

The crowd of angry accusers approach Jesus and ask what should be done with her, and Jesus starts doodling on the ground. Can you imagine how angry the mob must have been that Jesus was not paying attention to their bitterness and vitriol? They were now even more furious with Jesus, than they were with the woman. What is Jesus doing?

He sees the complete and utter misery being placed on this woman in that moment. Had she sinned, yes, but what Jesus saw was what the crowd was choosing not to see. Imagine how afraid this woman must have been? How heavy her heart was and how overwhelmed she was? Again, what was Jesus doing? Jesus took all the pressure that was on this woman from the crowd and put it upon Himself. Which is what Jesus always does for us. Jesus took all the wrath of the angry mob and put their attention on Him, to get the attention off this woman. Now the wrath of the crowd was on Him, but Jesus had their attention now.

Jesus says to the mob, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." (Jn. 8:7) Then Jesus goes back to doodling on the ground and one by one they all disperse. Then Jesus looks at the woman and says, "Has no one condemned you?" The woman says, "No one, Lord." Imagine how much relief this woman received in the moment. Complete and utter forgiveness from the only one who can save her from her sins. Complete forgiveness after moments before dreading fear of death.

But that is not the end. Jesus looks at her and tells her, "Nor do I condemn you but go and sin no more." He forgives her and yet challenges her. This is what Jesus Christ teaches us about justice and mercy. That, yes, there is justice. Yes, there is mercy. They must be tempered, but Jesus is the one who shows us how to perfectly temper justice and mercy. Jesus is perfectly merciful and perfectly just. He always forgives, but he also challenges us to go and sin no more. This is how Catholic Christians are called to live out our faith when we feel we have been treated unjustly or when we have treated others unjustly.

All of us are sinners, and there is only One who can redeem us from our sins. Some sins are big, some sins are small, and some are in between. In 2022, we all like to be the arbiters of what we think are big, small or in between kinds of sins, and we all like to decide what deserves high levels of justice or low levels of justice, but Jesus is the one who ultimately decides.

As our world forgets this more and more, I challenge all of us to temper our justice with mercy and our mercy with justice. I challenge us all to not fall into the ways of the world and how the world seeks to impose justice or mercy, but to continue turning to the only one who tempers justice and mercy perfectly – Jesus Christ.

God bless you all as we begin 2022!

Father Adam

PRAY FOR OUR SCHOOL & CHURCH FAMILIES THIS YEAR

For 2022, we ask everyone to pray for specific church and school families each weekday. A list will be published each month in both the bulletin and in our newsletter.

Please remember these families in your prayers each day for them to grow in their faith this year. Thank you.

Mon. Jan. 24 Neveah Vogt's and Angelene Wertz's Family
Joel & Cindy Baker Family
Tues. Jan. 25 Henry and Jack DeYoung's Family
Barbara Barton Family
Wed. Jan. 26 Heidi Gregory's Family
Les & Josie Ahrends Family
Thurs. Jan. 27 Aden and Bevin Brummel's Family
Tracy Arduini Family
Fri. Jan. 28 Zach and Grace Becker's Family
Joan Baier Family
Mon. Jan. 31 Father Adam's Family
Ed & Andrea Bartolotta Family
Tues. Feb. 1 Francis and Carol Arnolts Family
Flynn Eggleston's Family
Wed. Feb 2- Mari Anne Arnolts Family
Bradli VonDerheide's Family
Thurs. Feb. 3 Joyce Ashcraft Family
Leo Kapper's Family

Fri. Feb. 4 Joseph and Mary Baker Family
Bryson Hall's Family
Mon. Feb. 7 Michael and Jane Barr Family
Cayden Masching's Family
Tues. Feb. 8 Berniece Barrett Family
Champ Daily's Family
Wed. Feb. 8 Tim and Virginia Bassett Family
McKenna Woodcock's Family
Thurs. Feb. 9 Jennifer Bauknect Family
Parker Casner's Family
Fri. Feb. 10 Frances Becker Family
MiKayla & Reid Gray's Family
Mon. Feb. 14 Jim and Pat Bednar Family
Camille Bohm's Family
Tues. Feb. 15 Peter Beebe Family
Adalynn Gardner's Family
Wed. Feb. 16 John Beller Family
Isaac & Cameron Mackinson's Family



News & Notes Around St. Mary's Parish



*** Be on the watch for WATCH (We Are The Church) this summer. The very popular retreat program here at St. Mary's plans to host a one-day session for interested parishioners sometime in June.



*** We are ALL sick and tired of COVID. But part of the hope we must have to end this pandemic is the sacrifice we are asked to make by wearing masks when attending Mass. Make that little sacrifice, if not for you, but your fellow parishioners.

*** Congratulations to our Triumvirate Music Directors—Marie Kane, Merryn Krenz, & Kathy Schulz—who will be collaborating in the near future to bring our music liturgy up to a different standard. The trio replaces Brandon Huffman, who has taken a new job outside of the state. In addition, SMS music teacher Ellen Yedinak will be preparing the students for their weekly Mass on Thursdays.

*** Our ADA for Covid 2021 was raised from \$79,000 in Covid 2020 to \$91,868 this year. And YOU—the parishioners of St. Mary's—responded with a record number. The latest numbers show us with \$94,190 pledged. And here's the kicker—if everyone fulfills their pledge, any amount we pay over that Pledge Goal will be returned to our parish. A huge THANK YOU to all of you who have pledged and donated to this year's campaign.



***SCRIP order are now on the 1st & 3rd Sundays of the month. Place orders in the box in the back vestibule after Mass, or contact Taryn Tissiere (815-979-7663) by 3:00 that day. Cash & Carry has been suspended during Covid.

*** The annual Blessing of the Throats in honor of St. Blaise (see right) will take place on the weekend of February 5-6.

*** A huge tip of the stocking hat and shovel to Ron Schulz who has been working with Mark Corrigan in snow removal around the parish property. Ice and wind have been the early challenge, and we really appreciate Ron & Mark making our walkways clean and safe.



***St. Mary's School is looking to hire a part-time custodial position. The job consists of only 20 hrs/week in afternoons and early evenings, helping with school maintenance and cleaning.

Contact the school office at 815-844-6585 for details.

Using YOUTUBE to Watch St. Mary's Masses & Activities

1. Be sure you have the YouTube app downloaded on your mobile device, computer, or Smart TV.
2. St. Mary's has a subscription on YouTube at no cost to those who want to join. Open the YouTube app, click on the upper left hand corner, click on Subscriptions, and add "St. Mary's - Pontiac" to your list. This allows you to go back and check on any past video that has been downloaded to YouTube from St. Mary's.
3. When you receive a text or an email, just click on the link, and the video will appear. If you want to watch it on your computer or big screen Smart TV, open YouTube and find the selection you want.
4. Reminders are sent via Flocknote of any upcoming program on YouTube. Contact Mick Peterson (815-822-1724) for assistance.

...the history behind St. Blaisé?

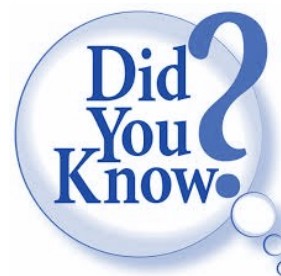
We know that Bishop Blaise was martyred in his episcopal city of Sebastea, Armenia, in 316. The legendary *Acts of St. Blaise* were written 400 years later. According to them Blaise was a good bishop, working hard to encourage the spiritual and physical health of his people. Although the Edict of Toleration (311), granting freedom of worship in the Roman Empire, was already five years old, persecution still raged in Armenia. Blaise was apparently forced to flee to the back country. There he lived as a hermit in solitude and prayer, but he made friends with the wild animals. One day a group of hunters seeking wild animals for the amphitheater stumbled upon Blaise's cave. They were first surprised and then frightened. The bishop was kneeling in prayer surrounded by patiently waiting wolves, lions and bears. **The legend has it that as the hunters hauled**

Blaise off to prison, a mother came with her young son who had a fish bone lodged in his throat. At Blaise's command the child was able to cough up the bone.



One reason for St. Blaise's popularity arose from the fact he was a physician who cured, even performing miraculous cures. Thereby, those who were sick, especially with throat ailments, invoked his intercession. Eventually the custom of the blessing of throats arose, whereby the priest held two crossed candles over the heads of the faithful or touched their throats with them while he invoked the prayer of the saint and imparted God's blessing. In our present *Roman Ritual*, the priest prays, "Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This practice continues in many parishes on St. Blaise's feast day.

While we invoke St. Blaise for his protection against any physical ailment of the throat, we should also ask his protection against any spiritual ailment—profanity, cursing, unkind remarks, detraction, or gossip. St. James reminds us, "If a man who does not control his tongue imagines that he is devout, he is self-deceived; his worship is pointless" (1:26) and later, "We use [the tongue] to say, 'Praised be the Lord and Father'; then we use it to curse men, though they are made in the likeness of God. Blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. This ought not to be, my brothers!" (3:9-10). Therefore, may St. Blaise protect us from all evil, physical, and spiritual, which may attack the throat.



From the Principal's Desk...



National Catholic Schools' Week 2022: January 30th -February 5th



The CSW 2021- 2022 theme is "Catholic Schools: Faith. Excellence.

Service." Catholic schools have a specific purpose to form students to be good citizens of the world, love God and neighbor, and enrich society with the leaven of the gospel and by example of faith.

As communities of faith, Catholic schools instill in students their destiny to become saints. Academic excellence is the hallmark of Catholic education intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person – mind, body and spirit. Finally, service is fundamental to Catholic education and the core of Catholic discipleship. Service is intended to help form people who are not only witnesses to Catholic social teaching, but also active participants through social learning.

The CSW logo emphasizes that the Catholic school, like the Catholic Church, is not a building or an institution, but it is the people. As the people of God, we work together to bring the Kingdom of God to Earth and raise up the next generation to do the same. The image of teachers and students forming the foundation of the school shows that they are active people of faith who serve others and God. May we all strive to live in active service of Jesus and his mission as we nationally join together during Catholic Schools Week and *always*.

During Catholic Schools Week, we begin with students taking part in the January 30th Mass at 9:30am.

Mon. Jan. 31 Community Day: Dress like a Community Business Person

Tues. Feb. 1 Faculty/Staff Appreciation Day: Switch Dress Day, Students dress like teachers, and teachers dress like students.

Wed. Feb. 2 National Catholic Schools Day: Dress in Red, White, and Blue, along with a prayer service

Thurs. Feb. 3 Vocations Day: Dress like a nun, priest, or a saint

Fri. Feb. 4 Student Appreciation Day: Dress in pajamas

There will be other activities as well throughout the week to celebrate Catholic Schools Week!

Bishop Barron — "We are all Priests!"

In our efforts at St. Mary's to focus upon becoming a parish of unceasing prayer, Bishop Robert Barron provided some insights in a recent Sunday homily for all of us that just might prove beneficial. Consider these viewpoints and questions he presented:

- ◆ "If you've been baptized as a Catholic, you were indeed anointed as priest. What does that "mean? First of all, it means you must be a person of prayer...not prayer for your own sake, but intercessory prayer for the sake of others."



- ◆ *Our prayer should* "intercede on their behalf before the Lord. Parents, Catholic parents, do you pray for your kids on a regular basis? Children, do you pray for your parents? You're a priest too if you're baptized. Intercede on their behalf before the Lord."

- ◆ *For us adults,* "Husbands, do you pray for your wives? Wives, do you pray for your husbands? That's a priestly obligation you have. Parents, do you bless your kids before they go to bed at night?"
- ◆ "Families, do you pray before meals, or when you are out a restaurant when it becomes a bit more challenging? When you pray, you're giving witness, that's true, But you're also exercising your priesthood; you're interceding."

- ◆ "And here's a challenge I'll throw out to everybody...**Are you going to Mass?** Roughly 20-25% of baptized Catholics go to Mass on a regular basis. 75% of baptized priests are staying away from the central prayer of the Church where your priesthood is most fully expressed."



- ◆ "(At Mass)...we take up the collection. The collection is not just a little pause in the middle of Mass. No, it's part of Mass because we are sacrificing something. You're giving for the sake of others. You're expressing a priestly act in the donation that you give."
- ◆ *And, finally,* "Don't stay away from the source and summit of the Christian life (Mass). That's when your priesthood is most fully expressed."

We are baptized Catholics. We are priests, called to intercede for others through prayer. We may not be ordained ministers, but are priests by the fruits of Baptism. So many opportunities for us to pray are neglected, forgotten, or overlooked. Number 1 on that list is the "source and summit of the Christian life" – the Mass. Let's take steps to answer the questions Bishop Barron raises in the proper manner. God is waiting.

GONZAGA Retreat scheduled for March

Happy New Year!

I hope that everyone has had a wonderful start to 2022! Youth group still continues to be in full swing with our weekly meetings on Sunday from 6:30-8:30. And, along with those regular meetings, team meetings for the Gonzaga retreat are starting up! It is an exciting time as we start to plan and prepare for this weekend retreat for the high schoolers. I am so excited to see this retreat return after a brief hiatus because of Covid. The retreat will take place here at St. Mary's on March 11th and 12th. All high school students are encouraged to attend. Application forms can be picked up in the back of the church. Completed forms and registration fee can be turned in at the

GONZAGA

parish center or to me, Megan Lauritsen. We are a few weeks into team meetings, and I am already so excited to see the great things coming together from this team. The Gonzaga team is blessed to have Monte Andrews as the Adult Director and Andy Krenz as the Youth Director. Both wrote notes for this month's newsletter. Here are some thoughts from Monte:

"I have been blessed to be a part of the Gonzaga youth retreat on and off for more than 10 years. This year I am doubly blessed to have been asked for the third time to be the adult leader of this always-incredible retreat. Of course I said yes. Thank you Jesus!

Gonzaga to me means sharing with young adults how Jesus has changed my life, and helping them, through God's grace, to attain the kind of joy I have in my life through Jesus-- despite whatever life's

challenges may bring them. The retreat itself has brought great joy to me and many others through the years. Often times you see the 'candidates' (first or second time attendees) transform in just one weekend from "shy about their faith" to shouting "I love Jesus!" from the mountaintop! Well, maybe not the mountaintop here in Illinois, but from the parking lot! There are always tears, laughter, music, fun, and self-discovery. And love.



The Gonzaga retreat is a wonderful chance for high school kids to be themselves with other kids who open up about their faith and about the challenges they've faced. It lets the kids know they are not alone in dealing with the problems and adversities of high school life. The team of young and older adults who lead the retreat have all been there and come out with a brighter life through Jesus. The one thing we all share is having called on Jesus and our Catholic faith to get us through our life's ups and down.

Simply put, the Gonzaga weekend is joy and Christ's love personified!"

Andy had a much simpler, yet still powerful response for his reason to be a part of this Gonzaga team - "because it is a way for me to be myself and experience God in a way I never thought possible. It's a great time to get away from the world and truly hear what God might have to say to you."

We are so blessed to have two such great leaders who are so excited and on fire for their faith ready to IGNITE in high schoolers that same fire. St. Mary's IGNITE group invites all HS age teens to register today!

Megan Lauritsen



St. Mary's Parish is now offering Online Giving.

Online Giving can be used to give to:

- Sunday Offering
- School Collection
- Food Pantry
- Building Maintenance Fund
- Memorials/Gifts
- School Annual Fund
- Scholarships

Start giving online today!

1. Visit our website at www.stmaryspontiac.org and click on the online giving link.
2. Create an account.
3. Schedule your gift. Gifts given via checking or savings account have no service charge. Debit and credit card gifts will be assessed a 3% fee.

Please prayerfully consider giving online. If you have any questions, contact the parish office at 815-844-7683. Online Giving is provided by Our Sunday Visitor, a Catholic not-for-profit organization serving parishes for more than 100 years.

Join Our Family

LITTLE DISCIPLES PRESCHOOL

NOW REGISTERING
4-year-old students
for the 2022-23 school year!

- Full-day 8:00 am - 3:00 pm
- Combined 3 & 4-year old classroom
- Structured & creative playtime
- Music, art, physical education, & technology
- Character formation & teaching of the virtues
- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program
- Minimum one hour daily rest time
- Flexible tuition payment plans

Visit school.stmaryspontiac.org
or call (815) 844-6585
for more information.

REGISTER for KINDERGARTEN

Why choose us?

- Full, state private school recognition
- Certified teachers
- Scholarships available
- K - 8 building, one class of each
- Music, Art, PE, and Computers
- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd religion program

We are...

- providing a safe and welcoming environment for all,
- partnering with parents in the faith formation of their children,
- setting high standards for student achievement,
- preparing students to be productive citizens and future leaders,
- instilling the value of service to others in our students.

New family registration
for the 2022-2023 school year
begins Monday, January 31!
Register online at
school.stmaryspontiac.org
or call (815) 844-6585
for more information.

Funeral Dinners— “Quiet, Efficient, Respectful Ministry

The ladies go about their task, quietly, efficiently, and respectfully. They seem to know that nobody really wants to be there, to be involved, yet they willingly give their time and their talents. They never ask for fanfare, yet, each time they are needed, St. Mary's can always count on them to provide a service necessary for proper closure.

Funerals are hard enough for families to bear. Death brings out all kinds of emotions that relatives and friends of the deceased display and perhaps share with one another. The Mass, the incense, the music, the homily, maybe a eulogy, and then perhaps a trip to the cemetery all test the mettle of the faithful. And when it's all over, folks are invited back to the Parish Hall for fellowship and a meal... prepared by the Women's Guild of St. Mary's.



Parish Hall to drop off their dish, sign a sheet acknowledging their donation, and head home. It's then that the real work begins.

A group of maybe 6-7 ladies from the Guild begin to organize, cut or slice, chill or heat up the food items, making sure that everything is ready to go at the proper time. Tables are set in the hall area. A buffet line is prepared. Drinks are made and poured—coffee, tea, lemonade, and water. Nothing is taken for granted. Main course meat items are purchased from a local restaurant. Everything else... the ladies get ready.

When a funeral dinner is requested, phone calls are made to their members, asking for various dishes to be prepared for the upcoming meal. It might be a salad, a casserole, pasta, desserts— you name it— and the vast majority of those asked willingly comply. (Why would you say NO to this?) On the morning of the event, cars readily pull into the parking lot outside the

As the guests arrive, those folks notice right away that anything and everything is organized. The ladies always make everyone seem welcome, regardless if the person is a St. Mary's parishioner or not. Many visitors from out of town or from another local church have remarked how comforted they've felt and how well they've been treated.



While the family members and friends mingle, go through the line, sit down and eat, visit afterwards, the Guild ladies go about their business as well...making sure all the buffet items are maintained, refilling drink glasses, cleaning up as necessary. Once everybody has been served, the ladies themselves partake in a little nourishment before the final task of their day begins.

As the family slowly begins to leave, the ladies provide “Take Home” food from all the “leftovers,” if desired. Any other leftover food is either frozen for later use (like desserts) or given to others there who might want them. There's never a charge to the family; they might want to give a donation back down the road to the church, but nothing is expected. Dishes are washed, dried, and organized for the donors to retrieve when available. Tables are cleaned, ready for the next activity in the hall. Their task...wonderful in everyone's eyes...is over.



Funeral Dinners Long Standing Part of Women's Guild Ministry

Funeral dinners are just one of the many ministries at St. Mary's that often is taken for granted. The Women's Guild has provided this service for well over 40 years when the late Rosie Duffy was in charge. For a long time, meals were served at the KC Hall up on Aurora Street; later,

after that building closed in the 90's, the Legion Billet (until it closed) and the VFW Hall hosted the events. Parish Secretary Patti Zehr remembers that when she was in school at SMS, sometimes it was “a weekly occurrence to eat (lunch) in our classrooms due to a funeral meal” in the SMS gym.

But when the huge renovation took place at St. Mary's back in 2005-06, a parish hall, designed to serve our parish needs, was one of the top priorities. “The ability to host funeral dinners was one of the reasons for building the parish hall,” Guild member Katie Wille remembered.

With current conditions, the Guild has been able to host any number of people for the dinners. “We've



had up to 300 or so,” Guild member Margaret Legner remarked. “A few times, Blaze Masching, John Panno, Tim Murphy, Hunter Gerdes...were all in that area.” And they've sometimes had fewer than 50. The number

is never important, however; the service to the needy family is.

When a funeral dinner is approaching, phone calls are made to a number of Guild members, asking for a donation of some type of food item. Most times, the volunteers prepare their selection in their kitchens from a favorite recipe. But... “It doesn't have to be homemade,” Margaret noted. “A salad or dessert purchased from a store is welcome, too.” If nobody answers the phone call, then a voice message is left. Sometimes, however, that creates a problem.

“We just ask that you return the (phone) call, indicating ‘yes, I will,’ or ‘no, I can't.’ When people don't return the call,” Margaret said, “we call someone else so we have enough food. And, then, if the original call DOES bring something without letting us know, then we sometimes have too much food.”

All women of St. Mary's parish are in the Guild, so everyone has an equal opportunity to help out. Yet, not everyone gets on the same page. “We try not to call the same people each time,” Margaret remarked, “But sometimes, we have no choice.” Also, phone numbers, for one reason or another, have changed. Landlines have been dropped, and/or cell phone numbers get updated.

Keeping a proper line of communication established will maintain this valuable ministry to our parish. If you wish to volunteer your services to work an event (either as a donor or one who can actually help serve), if you would like to be included on the call list, if you need to update your phone number with the Guild, or if you would like to volunteer to call members when they are needed, contact Margaret Legner at (815-674-9705). Your service will definitely be appreciated.

We Want To Hear From Our Readers

St. Mary's parishioners have received a monthly newsletter for over 20 years, one of the longest publications of its kind in the Peoria diocese. As we continue our efforts to maintain a quality product that best serves our parish, please take a few moments to answer these few questions. Just tear off this page, fill it out and deposit it in the collection basket by **January 30**. Results will be posted in the February edition. Thank you for your cooperation, and thanks for reading.

1. Our parish newsletter is an important communication tool for St. Mary's

_____ Agree _____ Disagree

2. I read the newsletter when it arrives online.

_____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ I didn't know that it came online.

3. I read the newsletter on our parish website.

_____ Agree _____ Disagree _____ I didn't know it was on the website.

4. I read the newsletter when it is delivered in the mail.

_____ Yes, I do _____ No, I don't _____ I didn't know it comes in the mail

5. I read the parish newsletter

_____ Online only _____ In the mail only _____ Both online & the mail

_____ On the parish website only _____ I don't read the newsletter

6. When the newsletter arrives, I look at THIS section first:

_____ Upcoming Parish Events _____ Events that have occurred recently in our parish

_____ St. Mary's School News _____ Father Adam's Monthly Article

_____ Back Page _____ Photos

_____ Did You Know Article _____ Front page Story

7. I would like to see more:

_____ Photos of Parish Activities _____ Catholic Faith articles

_____ Youth group info/photos _____ Lay columnists

_____ School info/photos _____ Keep it as it is

ST. MARY'S SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

St. Mary's Parish strives to ensure that our youth are able to receive a Catholic education, despite a family's inability to pay. Through the Invest in Kids Act, K-12 students have the opportunity to receive Illinois tax credit scholarships to attend private schools. This scholarship opportunity is available to all income eligible St. Mary's families. Scholarships cover up to 100% of private school tuition and are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications for the 2022-2023

school year are currently being accepted. SMS families with financial need are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this scholarship opportunity. Confidentiality is maintained throughout this process. For complete details on income eligibility guidelines or to submit an application, visit the EMPOWER ILLINOIS website. You may also contact the school office for more information.



From The Back Page

by Mick Peterson

"You're either getting' better, or you're getting' worse. Nobody ever stays the same."

I wish I had a dollar for every time I either heard a coach, a teacher, or a parent say this to me, or said it myself to others. Regardless, it's true. I know it; YOU know it; THEY know it. No matter what we are talking about, it's a fact.

In our work. In our play. In our hobbies. In our relationships. In our families. Oh yeah, in our Faith.

Ironically, some people are very "religious" about physical training, going to work out at a local gym up to five days a week. Why? To get bigger...faster...stronger...can't take a day off! Others are "dedicated" to their jobs, often working extra hours to ensure they don't leave a matter unsettled or a project not completed. Still others in the academic world spend countless hours preparing for an exam or completing a book or studying a philosopher. Scientists might burn the midnight oil trying to develop the next vaccine, a better electric car, or a new way to cure cancer.

To get the rewards, we have to put in a little bit extra ---time, effort, work. To reach that goal, we have to be willing to do things others (and there are plenty of them) aren't willing to do. To get to the top, we have to be willing to sacrifice. Sound familiar? So much energy spent!

So, if this is true, then why don't we take the same approach with our spiritual lives? Why? Because we can't "see" the benefits? Because we can't get a raise, get recognized, or climb the corporate ladder? Because, like Mick Jagger said a long time ago, we "can't get no satisfaction?"

Let's stop and think. The "reward" we seek in our spiritual lives is eternity with God in heaven. Period, end of conversation. That seems to carry a little bit more weight than some of these other things, doesn't it? Shouldn't that be a priority then...each and every day?

Shouldn't we be striving to achieve that goal? We're either getting' better, or we're getting' worse. Today...tomorrow...the next day.

Father Adam has maintained that one of our parish goals is to be a people of unceasing prayer. Our road to improvement MUST start there. Just think if we prayed five times a week...just like the guy who goes to the gym. Imagine if, before we went to bed at night, we spent a little extra examining our consciences. What if we read a chapter from one of the gospels and meditated on Jesus' teachings, just like the person who would be deep in thought on a philosopher.

The opportunity to make daily choices that better our lives or worsen our lives is a crossroad we must face. It's important we make strong, moral decisions if we are to maximize our potential. If we need to go to the gym, let's go to the gym. If we have to work overtime, let's stay longer. If we must study harder, by all means, let's do it. And... if we are plan on reaching the heavenly kingdom...the most important part of our journey...let's be sure we take those proper steps as well. Pray...it's the

best way to start. Spend time with Jesus...so worth the investment. Ask for Mary's intercession...she's our Mother.

We're either getting better or getting worse. Nobody ever stays the same. Happy New Year!



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