

St. Leo's

PARISH COMMUNITY



WELCOMING HEARTS AND SOULS HOME THROUGH THE RCIA PROCESS

APRIL 2019
Inside

Every year at the Easter Vigil, our parish family acts as the arms of Mother Church and embraces those who, often after a trek up the steep mountain of faith, have finally come home. Through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults process, or RCIA, these courageous souls come to know not only the teachings of Catholicism, but also the Lord Jesus Christ, their Savior and best, eternal friend.

“My hope is that the RCIA process will nurture, enlighten and encourage all of the members who begin it,” Fr. Don Buhrman says. “This way, if they decide to become baptized or convert to Catholicism, they will not only be fairly well-informed, but they will also know enough to become actively involved in the Church.”

RCIA is designed for adults who desire to come into full communion with the Catholic Church by completing the reception of all of the Sacraments of Initiation — the Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. RCIA members include catechumens (non-baptized adults) and candidates (baptized adults) who are seeking full communion. RCIA sessions meet in the Gather Room on Thursdays from 7 to about 8:30 p.m. They begin in the fall and wrap up about five weeks after Easter. In addition to Fr. Don Buhrman, the RCIA Team includes Associate Pastor Fr. Mark Maresh, Michelle Matthews and Zac Peirce, a former RCIA member who



Gathering at a Thursday night RCIA session

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HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR 2018 STEWARDSHIP RENEWAL

Last fall, our St. Leo's parish leadership conducted the 2018 Stewardship Renewal. This renewal gave parishioners the opportunity to discern and make commitments of their time, talent and treasure.

This month, we are happy to share with you some of the highlights of our 2018 Stewardship Renewal.

- There were 298 commitment cards received from 40 percent of parish households.
- There were 1,572 prayer commitments — the stewardship of time — from 93 percent of participating households.
- Some of the prayer commitments included: "Attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day," 252 commitments; "Pray for our priests," 206 commitments; "Pray for an increase in vocations," 187 commitments.
- There were 1,064 ministry commitments — the stewardship of talent — from 84 percent of participating households. Of these, there were 275 new ministry commitments, while there were 789 re-commitments to ministries.
- Some of the ministry commitments included: Hospitality (Greeters), 105 commitments; Knights of Columbus, 92 commitments; Ladies of St. Leo's (LOL) Leadership Board, 86 commitments; Extra-ordinary Ministers of the Holy Eucharist, 84 commitments; Prayer Chain, 58 commitments.
- There were 224 offertory commitments — the stewardship of treasure — from 75 percent of participating households.

We thank all those who participated in the 2018 Stewardship Renewal, making

commitments to our parish, God and the community. If you did not have the opportunity to fill out and return a commitment card, we invite you to consider the ways you can share your gifts as a St. Leo's parishioner. After all, there is no time like the present to begin living out stewardship!



Grateful Stewards

St. Leo's Parish Community
2018 Commitment Card
My Offering of Time, Talent & Treasure

First & Last Name

Phone

Email

Spouse: *First & Last Name*

Spouse: *Phone*

Spouse: *Email*

CELEBRATING EASTER WITH GRATITUDE

Dear Parishioners,

Easter Sunday arrives later this year — April 21. The method for determining the date of Easter was settled by the ancient Church according to a complicated formula that allows it to fall anywhere between March 22 and April 25. However, most of us are content simply to look it up on a liturgical calendar!

One feature at this year's Easter celebration will be a dramatic contrast from what we have experienced in the winter months — the days will be noticeably longer.

As a matter of fact, the English word "Lent" is related to the Anglo-Saxon word meaning "to lengthen," for spring is the season when the days grow longer. Even though most Americans do not live in rural settings or agricultural environments like our ancestors did, we still find joy in the longer days that contrast with the early nightfall that we experienced at Christmas. So when Lent is over and Easter arrives, our spirits naturally delight as we leave the winter behind.

Don't get me wrong — I am not saying that Easter is some sort of spring festival. The central theme of the Christian festival of Easter is clear. It celebrates what happened once for all over 2,000 years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross and was raised back to life on the third day by God the Father. This event took place during the Jewish observance of Passover, which comes during the spring, which is why we celebrate Easter then.

So, then, we have two reasons to celebrate at Easter. Primary, of course, is our yearly



remembrance of the victory of Jesus Christ over sin, Satan and death. But we can also rejoice in the coming of spring, which melts the snows of winter and brings us beautiful flowers in bloom.

In its pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops gives a definition of who a Christian steward is. It has several parts, but the first noted aspect is that a Christian steward is "one who receives God's gifts gratefully" (9). The bishops don't distinguish between gifts from God that are spiritual and ones that are material.

After all, "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). The first step in becoming a good steward is to receive what God gives, to recognize that these gifts come from God, and to be grateful for them.

So then, as we celebrate Easter with gratitude for what God continues to do for us in both the material and spiritual spheres, we can resolve to use all we have received — the time, the talent and the treasure entrusted to us, the beauty of the natural world, and the hope of eternal life — as stewards who use them for God's glory and the welfare of His people.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman
Pastor



CELEBRATING THE TRIUMPH OF LIGHT OVER DARKNESS

“The Easter Vigil is the liturgy of the whole year — the peak moment of our liturgical celebration. So why would you go to the Super Bowl and sit there for six hours before it even started? You do it because it’s the one time that we find out who will be the champion of that year. The Easter Vigil is the one time of the year that we celebrate that Jesus conquered sin and death and gave us hope for eternity.” — Fr. Don Buhrman

One of the most beautiful traditions in the Catholic Church is the Easter Vigil liturgy. Following simplicity and fasting of Lent, the Easter Vigil Mass represents the reawakening of hope and light as we celebrate Christ’s resurrection. It is also this Mass that allows us, as parishioners, to share in a very special step in the faith journey of our parish’s catechumens and candidates as they receive the Sacraments of Initiation.

As Catholics, we are truly blessed to have the opportunity to come together in worship in such a momentous way each Easter season.

“The Easter Vigil is the culmination of the Triduum,” says Fr. Don Buhrman. “We celebrate the Last Supper on Thursday, the passion and death of Jesus on Friday, and the Vigil is the celebration of the resurrection. The Easter Vigil is the supreme celebration — to use a sports analogy, it’s like the Super Bowl of Masses.”

Considering the great importance of this liturgy to the life of the Church, it is not surprising that many sacramentals are used during the Easter Vigil — fire, water, anointing oil and, of course, the bread and wine that become the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

All of these sacramentals come together to draw the faithful even more deeply into the beauty and mystery of life in Christ.

“It all begins with the new fire,” Fr. Don says. “We gather after sunset to light the fire, and the fire literally illuminates our experience. The fire is blessed and the Easter candle is lit from it, and from that candle the fire is shared from one person to another. To see the light multiply through the room is a beautiful depiction of what the faith of one person can do.



St. Leo's newest Catholics and their sponsors gather with Fr. Don Buhrman, Fr. Mark Maresh and Deacon Bill Buchta following last year's Easter Vigil Mass.

“There is the oil of the catechumen for baptism and the chrism oil for confirmation,” Fr. Don adds. “New water is blessed for baptism, reminding us of the significance of water throughout our salvation history. Water is a very powerful symbol for our Church.”

In addition to the various sacramentals used at the Vigil Mass, God’s unbroken covenant with His people is also brought to the forefront through the readings from the Old Testament, beginning with Genesis, that recall the highlights of our salvation history.

Although the number of readings and the sacraments dispensed at the Easter Vigil make this Mass a little longer than most, Fr. Don hopes that parishioners will not let that stop them from being a part of this amazing worship experience!

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MARKNESS: *The Easter Vigil Mass*

tion,” he says. “So why would you go to the Super Bowl and sit there for six hours before it even started? You do it because it’s the one time that we find out who will be the champion of that year. The Easter Vigil is the one time of the year that we celebrate that Jesus conquered sin and death and gave us hope for eternity.”

With a true understanding of the significance of this special liturgy, Fr. Don encour-

ages all parishioners to come to the Easter Vigil Mass with an openness to fully experiencing our Catholic faith, and giving praise and glory to God in gratitude for the great price He paid for us in the passion and resurrection of His Son, Jesus.

“Come with an attitude of gratitude, rejoicing in that gift,” Fr. Don says. “This event is powerful, it is grace-filled, and it is very uplifting.”

THE RCIA PROCESS *continued from front cover*

converted to Catholicism along with his whole family.

The RCIA process at our parish informally incorporates the five standard stages — Inquiry, Pre-Catechumenate, Catechumenate, Neophyte and Mystagogia. Throughout the year, each member proceeds through a number of steps in the process — the Rite of Catechumens, which is the commissioning of those to be baptized; the Rite of Election, which is the presentation of the elect to the bishop; and the Three Scrutinies, which are prayers of support and deliverance for those inquiring about the Catholic faith. The inspiring weekly sessions use an excellent video series produced by the Augustine Institute, called *Symbolon*. In a clear, simple format, the series covers topics such as the Seven Sacraments, the Church, the Scriptures, the Saints, the End Times and the Final Judgment. On one of the Saturdays before Easter, RCIA members participate on a retreat from about 9 a.m. until 1 p.m., so they can prepare their hearts and souls to become fully initiated Catholics.

“We really try to nurture their relationship

with Jesus all throughout the RCIA process,” Fr. Don says. “Towards the end, we encourage them to evaluate what RCIA was like for them, and the personal experiences they have enjoyed. We help them look at where they are at spiritually, and how they can go on to be involved with the parish. We end the RCIA process with a barbecue and fellowship in the backyard of the rectory.”

Overall, Fr. Don, the other team members and the sponsors are truly grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside the RCIA members.

“It is wonderful to see them join the Church and become so actively involved with their faith,” he says. “I love to witness their enthusiasm. For some of them, RCIA is a real conversion experience. Even though I have done this for 30 years, every year, I seem to learn something new and different that highlights my own personal faith journey. Being involved with the RCIA Team or being a sponsor for a member is a great way to get involved with our church.”

This Easter, we will welcome RCIA candidates Cody Reynolds and Alisa Ryan into the Church. May our heartfelt prayers and love be with them!

Those who are interested in being a sponsor or joining RCIA as a member may contact Fr. Don Buhrman at 308-382-4753. Jesus may be calling you to come home!

HOSPITALITY: *THE CORNERSTONE OF STEWARDSHIP*

The dictionary defines “hospitality” as “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.”

A Christian worldview can refer to hospitality as “Christian kindness.”

We see the effects of hospitality – or the lack thereof – time and time again throughout the Bible. Christ speaks of hospitality in Matthew’s Gospel when He says, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The Old Testament told of the Israelites, as they wandered the desert for 40 years in search of hospitable environs. Even the Holy Family spent ample time searching for shelter before the birth of Our Lord.

It is safe to say that hospitality is, and most likely has always been, of great importance to people everywhere. Modern hotels and hostels often use the image of a pineapple to advertise their special brand of hospitality. There is no doubt that in ancient times, the distant lights of an inn or tavern struck a chord of hope within weary travelers’ hearts.

Indeed, hospitality’s meaning has not diminished at all over the years, decades and millennia.

Christians view the presence of hospitality as meaning the difference between calling others “guests” and “strangers.” Guests are welcomed with open arms and warm smiles, but strangers aren’t. Guests feel the genuine love present in a hearty welcome, but strangers don’t. Guests often return for second or third visits, while strangers don’t.

As a parish, do we find ourselves surrounded by guests, or burdened by strangers?

Hospitality is, in many respects, a mindset. The same person may be treated as guest at the church just down the road, but as a stranger here.

Matthew’s Gospel tells of Christ as He reveals a profound truth about hospitality: “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.” That is, “I used to be

a stranger, but you fixed that when you welcomed me.” It’s a classic example of before-and-after. All it took was a change of heart.

Stewardship holds hospitality as an immensely important concept. Remember the “three Ts” of stewardship – Time, Talent, and Treasure? Well, there are also “four Ps,” the Four Pillars of Stewardship – Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service. Hospitality is mentioned first. Why? If not for hospitality, none of the other pillars will ever take hold. Hospitality is the cornerstone of stewardship, because it opens the door to a person’s heart and allows them to receive joy, grace, and love.

Hospitality must become second nature, if stewardship is to truly take hold within a parish. So, when a stranger visits our parish, welcome them as a guest. Perhaps one day, they’ll pay us a second visit.

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Church Environment Ministry

Bringing Out the Beauty of St. Leo's



The drama of Holy Week comes to life on the altar through the work of the Church Environment Ministry. Coordinators Chris and Rhonda Riha say before any decorating is done, the ministry takes into account making parishioners feel welcome while considering how to best bring out the message of the liturgical season.

If you really think about it, a church isn't just a building — it's a place separate from the rest of world meant to shelter the faithful and inspire belief. Westminster Abbey, the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica in Rome are just a few of the amazing structures in our world that at once awe and inspire.

The Church Environment Ministry is charged with inspiring that same sense of awe and wonder — albeit on a much smaller scale — by creating a space at St. Leo's that celebrates both the liturgical seasons and the weekly celebration of the Eucharist.

"We want not only our parishioners, but also our guests to feel welcome and at home and leave at the end of the celebration with some sense of satisfaction that this is a good place to not only worship on Sunday, but come together as a family any time of the week," says Chris Riha, ministry coordinator.

Along with his wife Rhonda, Chris and a team of other parishioners spend time choosing flowers,

plants, banners and décor that befit the current liturgical season. While it's important to make our worship space appealing and tidy, the Rihans say it goes a step further and nothing is left to chance.

"We take into consideration the environment of the church and the gathering space," Rhonda says. "We really focus on making it welcoming."

"We work really hard to make sure the symbols and the décor speak to our parishioners and that they comply with the norms of the celebration of the Eucharist," Chris says, adding that the ministry often consults with Fr. Don, the parish staff and other ministries. "Sometimes it's Music Ministry, sometimes it's Parish Council. We get good feedback from each one of the committees."

The ministry takes much of its direction from the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, or *GIRM*, a text that provides guidance on the rules and traditions of the Mass. Rhonda says when the ministry meets, they'll often consult the *GIRM* before moving forward with any plans.

"It's almost like a Bible session, but a session

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CHURCH ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY *continued from page 7*

to where we were able to learn more about the Mass; and it's really deepened our theology in being part of this committee," she says. "It's a big difference between preparing for a birthday or an anniversary. This is the preparation for a sacramental celebration. I think we are much more aware and meticulous about our décor and the meanings behind everything that we do."

"It's more than just decorating — you're decorating your faith," Chris says. "My theory in life with anything is that you get more out of something when you're involved. If you're in any ministry, including decorating the altar, you get more out of it."

The Church Environment Ministry currently meets on the second Tuesday of each month. The Rihass say they're happy to have a number of

volunteers helping, but that more — particularly young parishioners — are always welcome.

"I want to see the younger generation involved — not as a hardship, but as something they want to do," Chris says. "It's one hour out of the month for the meetings, and then every season requires different hours for decorating, preparing and evaluating. Lent and Advent are our busy seasons, and you want to do it right."

"We also would like parishioners to know that if it speaks to them and it's in their heart and they'd want to donate to the ministry, then please feel free to contact us," Rhonda says. "If they have any ideas, communicate that with us. Our job is to get to everyone in hopes to stimulate the spirit of Jesus in His love."

If you would like more information on the Church Environment Ministry, contact the parish office at 308-382-4753 or the Rihass via email at R3560@charter.net.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Daily Mass: 9 a.m., **Saturday:** 5 p.m., **Sunday:** 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.

Confession: Saturday 4 - 4:30 p.m. **Adoration:** First Friday of the Month, 9:30 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Abide Adoration: Fourth Sunday of the Month, 7 - 8 p.m.