

St. Leo's

PARISH COMMUNITY



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES OFFER PRAYER AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR GIVING

The Advent and Christmas seasons at St. Leo's Parish will have numerous opportunities for us to enter this joyous time of year with prayerful hearts ready to celebrate the birth of Christ.

A prelude to the season is Advent Night, slated for 5:45 p.m. Nov. 28 in the Parish Hall. There will be prayer and family activities.

We will celebrate the Feast of Immaculate Conception with a vigil Mass on Friday, Dec. 7, at 5:30 p.m. Another Mass for the Holy Day will be celebrated on Saturday at 9 a.m. Saturday night's Mass is for Advent and does not fulfill the Holy Day Obligation. So mark your calendar carefully.

As we further prepare ourselves for the season, our Reconciliation Service will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 17 at the church.

During the Advent and Christmas seasons, we are called to reflect on the gifts Christ has given us — especially the gift of knowing His love for us. We can share in this love through the St. Leo's Giving Tree, organized by Donna Douglass, parish outreach coordinator.

"We put the tree up at the beginning of Advent," Donna says. "I've been here sixteen years and it was part of our parish long before that. It used to be the Birthright Tree that asked for items for babies. But Birthright closed, so now the tree is for residents of homeless shelters in town. Baby



Fr. Mark tells the story of the Nativity at our crib during the Christmas Mass.

DECEMBER 2018

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STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE

Giving to God First

Have you ever wondered why no one really becomes uneasy when someone brings up the first two “Ts” of stewardship – giving of your time or talents – but when the third “T” comes up, many of us become uncomfortable?

That third “T” is treasure, and some people simply become so annoyed by the subject, they tune out the words from the pulpit.

Why is there seemingly such an adverse reaction?

Our finances are such a personal subject. Discussing money issues with others is not easy, and having someone tell us what to do with our finances is even worse. We earn the money, after all. So shouldn't we decide what to do with it?

Of course, the answer is “yes” – we decide every day how to spend our hard-earned dollars. Indeed, the monetary choices we make will either keep our finances in check, or put us into the red. The average American family has about \$7,000 in credit card debt – so finances certainly represent a challenge to our current society. Tight budgets, trying to “keep up with the Joneses” or poor financial management may be to blame for

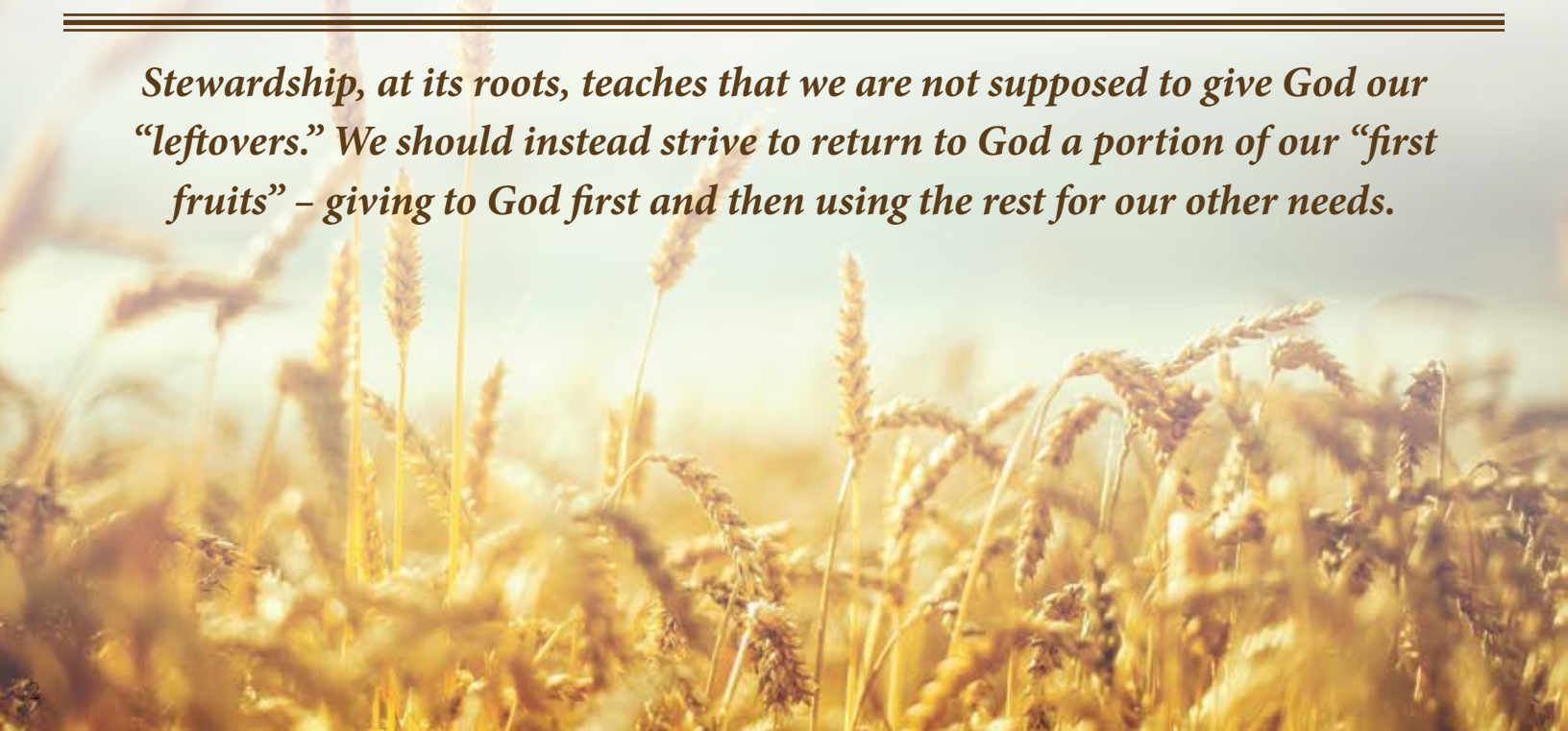
our tight resources. Does this mean we do not have anything left over for God?

Stewardship, at its roots, teaches that we are not supposed to give God our “leftovers.” We should instead strive to return to God a portion of our “first fruits” – giving to God first and then using the rest for our other needs. God gave us our talents that help us earn a living, after all. He should come first.

This idea can be worrisome for many. If our finances are already strained, how will we ever find enough to give back to God? Or, if we do try to give God our “first fruits,” will there be enough left over to cover our required expenses?

Taking the correct financial steps toward good stewardship simply boils down to trust – believing that God, who takes care of all of His creation, will take care of us. Trust that in giving to God first, we are both acknowledging that our multitude of blessings come from Him, and that we are thankful He chose to give them to us. And finally, trust that if we give to Him first, that all else will fall into place – because He is in ultimate control.

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STEWARDSHIP POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS AT CHRISTMAS

Dear Parishioners,

When most people think of December, the first thing that comes to mind may be Christmas. I've been guilty of that at times too. While that may seem to be the obvious topic, there really are a number of other possibilities. I could think of *Advent*, a season of preparation. I could think of the *Immaculate Conception*, as we celebrate God's gift to the world in Mary. I could think of *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, whose popularity has spread far beyond the Hispanic community. Of course, December also holds the first day of *winter*. And because December marks the end of the civil year, I might be developing my resolutions for the New Year!

But instead, I think about Christmas. It is when we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the Babe in the manger in Bethlehem, who is the eternal Son of God made man.

The basic truth of Christmas — celebrating the birth of Jesus the Messiah, God Incarnate — is plenty of reason for us all to rejoice and worship. But we've piled such an additional load onto our Christmas observance that worship may be lost in the shuffle.

Think about what weight Christmas has to bear. We have to put up the decorations or make travel plans to visit relatives. There is also the Christmas dinner to plan and cook. And then, we still have Christmas presents to buy. No wonder the Christ Mass becomes an afterthought!

Yet, we still have a wonderful opportunity this season — an opportunity to combine our Christmas activities with our stewardship commitments. Treasure, although challenging, is the simplest. Shouldn't the most expensive Christmas present we give be the one to Jesus, whose birthday we're celebrating? Risen and glorified,



He needs nothing we have. But His Body, the Church, continues Jesus' mission here on earth and always needs additional resources.

Time and Talent may be a little more complicated, but can't we spend a little more of our time in worship and prayer? Maybe you can attend Mass each day of the Christmas Octave. Have your family gather for prayers together in the morning or at dinner, in preparation for Christmas Day and through the Christmas season.

And there are so many opportunities to share our Talent! Sing in the choir for the Christmas Masses. Help decorate the Church. Cook or bake for someone who is shut-in. Invite someone who will be alone to share Christmas dinner with your family. Offer to work in a soup kitchen. The possibilities are endless.

With a little planning, we can make this hectic time one of real blessing both for ourselves and others. Pray for me that I can keep Christmas properly, and I'll pray for you. And by the way, have a merry Christmas!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman
Pastor



ADULT FAITH FORMATION: *Keep Growing*

As humans, we can always grow in a positive way — whether physically through exercise, mentally through reading, listening and learning, and even emotionally. But do we keep growing spiritually?

“Sometimes we get complacent and think, ‘Well, going to church is enough,’” says Fr. Don Buhrman. “But we have to keep learning. Going to church would be much more enhanced if we had a personal relationship with the Lord and also a greater understanding of our God. That’s what theology is, the study of God. So what do we do to keep growing on this journey of faith?”

Along with our Bible studies and men’s and women’s groups, St. Leo’s now offers additional weekly opportunities to grow in faith with other adults. On Sunday mornings and evenings, as well as Wednesday mornings and evenings, we will be offering various book studies and video series, designed for adults who want to deepen their relationship with God. The same “course” will be offered at all four weekly sessions.

According to Fr. Don, “The whole purpose of the Evangelization Team and trying to provide adult faith formation is to help people continue to grow in their faith.”

Many of the studies that will be used come from the FORMED.org library of online resources, which is now available to all parishioners at no cost with our parish subscription. Fr. Don hopes that people will participate in the Wednesday and Sunday groups at the parish, invite others to join

a study in their own homes, or even use the resources individually or with one’s family.

“It’s an incredible resource for people to do catechesis for themselves or start their own small group,” Fr. Don says.

Just as in any relationship, coming to know and understand God more fully allows for love to grow deeper and stronger.

“When people are attracted to each other, they date and court and find out more and more about each other,” Fr. Don notes. “(Knowledge) enhances their love for one another.

“Keep forming yourself in the ways of faith,” he adds. “I think God wants us to know that He loves us and that His love is unconditional.”

Fr. Don suggests that Advent is the perfect

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time to reevaluate one’s priorities and make time to grow in understanding of the faith.

“Advent is the new liturgical year — what are your ‘New Year’s Resolutions’ going to be?” he says. “This is the perfect time to try to annually evaluate your priorities. It’s a new year; you can ask, ‘What am I going to do differently this year from what I did last year?’ I think it’s healthy to reprioritize periodically. Just like we do with our New Year’s resolution, we should do that with

“The more you learn about your relationship with God and the Church, the more it enhances your practice of the faith. Take advantage of the opportunities that are available right now to help enhance your personal life and relationship with God and the Church. Keep growing in the faith.” — Fr. Don Buhrman



This Advent Season and Always

our spiritual life, asking ‘Am I living the life God wants me to live?’ It gives us an opportunity to reset.”

This Advent, we will be offering a four-part Advent series during our Wednesday and Sunday sessions. All are invited to come and join us to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior at Christmas.

“I’d encourage every adult to come be a part of the Advent series,” Fr. Don says. “The more you learn about your relationship with God and the Church, the more it enhances your practice of the faith. Take advantage of the opportunities that are available right now to help enhance your personal life and relationship with God and the Church. Keep growing in the faith.”

For more information on current and upcoming adult faith formation opportunities, please contact the parish office at 308-382-4753. The weekly studies will be held on Wednesdays after the 9 a.m. Mass and also at 5:30 p.m., as well as on Sundays at 9 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

To access the resources that can be found on FORMED.org, please visit the website and create your own account, using the parish code: FPH4JQ. All parishioners are invited and encouraged to access these videos, studies, books and more, which are available free with our parish subscription.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES *continued from front cover*

items are still accepted, though.”

The items requested are listed on stars hanging on the tree and include underwear, socks and personal hygiene items for adults. We are invited to take a star and purchase the item listed on the tag. When we return the items to the church, they may be either wrapped or unwrapped.

Donna places several hundred stars on the tree, with that number reflecting the need.

If all the stars are taken, she adds more.

“Our parishioners respond so well to the Giving Tree because Advent and Christmas get our hearts in a place of gratitude,” Donna says. “And we want to see those hurting taken care of. This is an easy outlet to do that.”

There is another way to give to others at this time of year.

“We have a blood drive from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Dec. 27 in the parish hall,” says Sue Kohles, parish office manager. “It’s the St. Leo’s Winter Red Cross Blood Drive. You can plan to give the gift of life this holiday season.”

THE CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE IS AS FOLLOWS:

- ✝ **Christmas Eve, 4:45 p.m.** — in the church, especially for families with children
- ✝ **Christmas Eve, 5 p.m.** — at the hall in back
- ✝ **Christmas Eve, 7 p.m.** — in the church proper
- ✝ **Christmas Day, 10:30 a.m.** — in the church

“The 5 p.m. Christmas Eve Mass is the ‘overrun’ Mass because we usually get so many people at the earlier one,” Sue Kohles says. “It’s the same great Mass, but held by a different priest.”

Anyone with questions about the Advent and Christmas schedules may call the parish office at 308-382-4753. Parish nurse Julie Gortemaker directs the blood drive — anyone with questions about the event may contact her at 308-382-4753, ext. 20.

A SIGNIFICANT MOMENT IN OUR PRAYER

The Presentation of the Gifts

Occasionally, you might hear someone jokingly refer to “halftime” during Mass – the interval following the Prayers of the Faithful, as the Liturgy of the Eucharist begins. It can be easy, even tempting, to zone out as you sit, waiting for the collection basket to make its way to your pew.

But if you pay attention, you’ll have the opportunity to enter into something deeper – a significant moment in our prayer.

It’s mentioned by St. Justin Martyr, one of the earliest Christian writers, when describing the Mass in the second century, “Bread is brought up and wine and water...”

This practice, of people bringing up the gifts, has been part of our Catholic tradition from the very beginning. Although we might think of this action as being merely practical, in reality, it serves a much deeper spiritual purpose.

Each Sunday Mass, someone is chosen, whether an usher, or another member of the parish, to bring forward “the gifts” – bread, wine, and in many cases, the collection of money that has been gathered moments before, from the generosity of the congregation. These gifts not only symbolize, but also in reality, are the work of human hands. The bread and wine are fruit of God’s creation, which, through the effort of human hands, are made into the gifts that we present to the Lord.

Certainly, the collection that is presented to the priest also serves to represent the work and



sacrifices of the previous week. Sharing our monetary “treasures” is one of the ways that we embrace stewardship. It’s an opportunity to generously give back to the Lord, from the fruit of our work.

In his book *What Happens At Mass*, Fr. Jeremy Driscoll, OSB explains, “...We should not think of the collection of money at this point as some sort of banal, dirty but necessary affair. Money is our work. Money is hours of

our lives. And now we give it away, we sacrifice it, for the work of the Church.”

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul instructs Christians to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Romans 12:1).

The physical act of carrying the gifts forward to the priest is meant to serve as a tangible reminder of the fact that we are all called to stewardship. We are all called to present to God our lives – our work, our talents, the struggles and victories of the past week – as an offering and gift to God.

Those who bring forward the gifts each week have the privilege and responsibility of remembering what their action represents – that we are called to give generously of our time, talent and treasure to God, who gives us His very self, at Mass. And for those sitting in the pews, tempted to “check out” for a few minutes, seeing the gifts being brought forward should serve as a powerful reminder to offer our lives back to God, through serving and honoring Him.

MINISTERS OF HOSPITALITY:

Nurturing a Warm and Welcoming Environment

A church is so much more than the bricks and mortar from which it is constructed. It's meant to be a place of communion as members join together in worship of our Eucharistic Lord — a place of warmth and love where our relationships with Christ and each other are nurtured and deepened. “And this begins,” says Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry Rita Hemmer, “with each one of us in the pews.”

“You never know what the person in the pew next to us has been through that day,” Rita says. “That’s why we are all called to become ministers of hospitality — to become that light of Christ to them.”

And while we are all called to extend hospitality throughout our parish community, some of our members have chosen to take it a step further by becoming Ministers of Hospitality for St. Leo’s Parish. Open to any parishioner, young or old, this ministry is dedicated to ensuring that each and every person who enters our church feels welcomed and cared for.

“Our goal is to greet every single person who walks through our doors with a friendly, welcoming smile,” Rita says. “We have a lot of visitors and guests come to our church, some of whom might not have been to church in a while. So we want to make sure that we do everything we can to make them feel welcomed.”

Often serving as a first representative of the parish, Ministers of Hospitality are there to greet parishioners and guests as they enter the church building, assist them in finding a



St. Leo’s Ministers of Hospitality, creating a more welcoming environment within our parish

seat when needed, facilitate the parish collection, distribute bulletins at the end of Mass and send people out once again with another friendly smile. In so doing, they work to spread the love of Christ,

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— Rita Hemmer



MINISTERS OF HOSPITALITY *continued from page 7*

helping guests and parishioners alike feel more at home here within our parish.

“It’s our human nature to want to belong,” Rita says. “We want people to know from the moment they enter our doors that St. Leo’s can be their spiritual home.”

Rita says that becoming a Minister of Hospitality is a great way for those with “natural gifts” for making people feel welcomed and invited to serve the Lord — a way to help encourage others to enter more deeply into communion with Christ. And in the process, ministers are also often blessed as their overall connection with the parish is strengthened.

“Through this ministry, you get to meet everyone who walks through the door,” Rita says. “Just being able to say ‘hi’ to our brothers and sisters in Christ is a great gift. Then you start to see people out in the community and you know them from church, increasing that overall connection.”

This ministry is a great way for individuals or families seeking to get more involved in the parish, particularly as it requires very little extra time. Volunteers are scheduled for the Sunday Mass that they already attend and serve approximately once every two months. To learn more about the Ministry of Hospitality or to sign up, please contact Rita Hemmer at 308-382-4753.

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.