

# St. Leo's

## PARISH COMMUNITY



### A NEW YEAR FILLED WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR STEWARDSHIP GROWTH

Surrounded by the flurry of activity that characterizes this time of year, it's hard to believe another year has almost come and gone here at St. Leo's. "Looking back," Fr. Don Buhrman says, "it's been a blessed year — one filled with growth and development."

"One of our big accomplishments was that we were able to complete our three-year capital campaign this year, exceeding our goal of raising \$800,000," Fr. Don says. "This allowed us to complete all three phases of our project, which was to pave the south parking lot and redo the entrance ways to the church, to replace the accordion walls in the Parish Hall and, finally, to install a new synthetic shingle roof over the whole building complex. Thanks to parishioners' generosity, each one of these projects has been completed and paid for, which to me is a real confirmation of this community's desire to take care of what we need to for the future of our parish."

Thanks to the results of last winter's parish surveys, Fr. Don and his staff were also able to learn about parishioners' desires for more Biblical study opportunities. This inspired the Evangelization Team to offer a Jeff Cavins study on the book of Wisdom, with four sessions taking place during the month of October and the other four occurring this January. Other notable



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## STEWARDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

### *for the Advent and Christmas Seasons*

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**I**t's the Advent and Christmas season. You've extended invitations, planned the menu and decorated your home. You are ready to be hospitable. But what does it really mean to live the Stewardship of Hospitality?

The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 4:8-11, "Above all, let your love for one another be intense, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever and ever."

When we read Peter's words, we see that hospitality is more than good manners. We see that hospitality is part of what it means to be a faithful steward. So, during the hustle and bustle of Advent and Christmas, how can we be hospitable?

**Open your home to strangers** — The holidays can be an especially difficult time for people. This year, do something about it. If you're already expecting strangers, welcome them warmly. Decide ahead of time that showing love is more important than passing judgment.

**Be truly cheerful** — When you open your home for the holidays, you may be a happy host, but are you a cheerful one? Believe it or not, there's a difference. A happy person feels happiness. A cheerful person causes happiness.

**Use your gifts to serve** — Hosting and serving go together. You bake the turkey, pour the drinks and slice the pie. To some degree, this is expected and normal. What's not normal is for a host to truly serve — to look for the needs in others and the gifts in themselves and find even a small way to help.

**Give God glory** — When family, friends and strangers enter your home, it's an opportunity for them to see Christ in you. You never know what's going on "behind the scenes" in people's lives or how much an encounter like this might mean to them. So when you welcome and serve your guests, remember that your ultimate goal is to give God glory.

This month, let us remember that Advent and Christmas give us the valuable opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word — and that through hospitality, we can live out that calling.

## A STEWARD'S RESPONSE TO THE *Ultimate Christmas Gift*

Dear Parishioners,

Christmas is America's favorite holiday. Consider for a moment the amount of effort we put into the holiday — decorating our homes with ornate light displays, buying boxes upon boxes of presents, addressing Christmas cards and attending seasonal get-togethers. When taken all together, it staggers the imagination. Whatever might happen to be next on the list of "favorite holidays" — Valentine's Day, Halloween or Thanksgiving — it can't hold a candle to our investment in Christmas.

Don't get me wrong — I love Christmas, too. But I'm afraid that many of us somehow miss the main reason for our Christmas celebrations.

I've sometimes heard people say things like, "Getting everything ready for Christmas becomes so hectic, I don't want to do it every year. But, you know, Christmas is really for the children." And occasionally, I've heard or read in a letter to the editor that Christmas is about the hope that a newborn baby brings to the world. Even in the early winter, when the days are short, we can celebrate babyhood, a new human life.

Both those sentiments are wrong because they're too limited. Of course, it's true that many of our Christmas customs are for the children — we might not get to hang our stockings to be filled by Santa Claus otherwise. And it's true that the birth of a baby, any baby, brings joy and hope to all those around. Yes, many of our Christmas celebrations are centered on the children, and the birth of a



child offers a promise for the future.

At Christmas, we celebrate not just any baby, but a particular baby. We celebrate His birth not because it's cute to see a baby in a manger filled with hay and surrounded by farm animals — instead, we celebrate this birth because of Who this baby is and what He did as an adult, for *all* of us.

A human baby is certainly a wonderful creation, made in the image of God. But Jesus is more than that, not less, for He is God the Son who took on human nature in order to redeem us from the results of the sin into

which we had fallen. He didn't stay a baby. He grew up and taught and preached and healed. Finally, He was put to death "for our sake" as the Creed affirms and rose from the dead. That's why we celebrate His birth more than 2,000 years later. That's why normal routines are suspended for a few joyful days each year.

In response to the gift the Father gave us with the birth of His Son, we joyfully exchange gifts with each other, share with the poor, and offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to the Church. God gives to us — and as stewards, we must do our best to faithfully use those gifts.

A joyful and blessed Christmas to all of you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*Rev. Donald A. Buhrman*  
Rev. Donald A. Buhrman  
Pastor

# FINDING FORGIVENESS: *The Sacra*

Do you remember that very first time you went to Confession? Perhaps you walked into the confessional trembling, nervous — would you remember all your sins? How would the priest respond? And hopefully, you walked out, minutes later, after perhaps timidly reciting from your mental list, feeling free, the weight of the world lifted from your shoulders, knowing you were truly forgiven and loved by God.

It can be easy to think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession, as something negative, akin to a punishment — but nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than an encounter with an angry judge, it's the merciful hand of God, reaching for us, in an invitation to receive His love and forgiveness.

"God desires forgiveness for us," says Fr. Mark Maresh, our Associate Pastor. "He desires for us to be reconciled with Him and with other people."

The Sacrament of Reconciliation gives people an opportunity to confess their sins to the priest, who stands *In persona Christi* or "in the Person of Christ," and hear the words of absolution, bringing forgiveness and healing.

"The priest isn't there to judge the person, but to be an instrument of forgiveness, to bring healing to the person going to Confession," Fr. Maresh says. "[Confession] can take away from the pain and hurt we have, letting go of past sins, hurt or anger."

In addition to forgiveness of sins, the graces gained in the Sacrament of Reconciliation also serve to help the penitent avoid sin in the future. Although, Fr. Maresh assures, God's mercy is abundant, even in situations of repeated or "habitual" sin.



*Fr. Mark Maresh hopes parishioners will come and receive God's mercy and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.*

"God does give you the grace to persevere through challenges, there's nothing that's unforgiveable," Fr. Maresh says. "He's there to help us."

Fr. Maresh says that he's heard people express concerns about going to Reconciliation, worrying that the priest will share their sins outside of the confessional or judge them for the things they say. He assures them that the Seal of Confession is something that priests take extremely seriously, and Fr. Maresh even believes there's a special grace that allows him to forget the things that are brought to him in the sacrament.

"I hope they have a sense of freedom, leaving Confession,"

Fr. Maresh says. "I hope it's a freeing experience, a load being lifted off their shoulders. There's nothing that can't be forgiven."

For many who have been away from the sacrament for an extended period of time, the return to Confession may feel especially daunting. However, Fr. Maresh reminds that God welcomes them back with open arms, just as the father rejoiced in the return of the prodigal son in Scripture.

"The priest is not there to judge you, but to welcome you back," Fr. Maresh says. "If someone's been away for 10, 20, 30 years, my first words are, 'Welcome back, it's great to have you here, I admire you for your willingness to come now. You can't change the past, but let's look into the future.'"

Fr. Maresh hopes that more people will take the opportunity to receive mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, especially during the season of Advent as we prepare for the birth of Christ. He recalls a friend, who works

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as a counselor, telling him of the impact of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on her clients.

“She told me if more people went to Confession, she would have a lot less business,” Fr. Maresh says. “She said the power of stating our sins and getting rid of them helps a lot of people. That’s not to say people don’t need counseling, too, but the forgiveness and the beauty and grace of the sacrament can help us a lot. My hope and goal is that more people come to Confession.”

Parishioners are especially encouraged to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the season of Advent. All are invited to attend our parish-wide Reconciliation service, which will be held at St. Leo’s on Monday, Dec. 16, at 7 p.m. in the church. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is also offered every Saturday afternoon, from 4-4:30 p.m. and by appointment. Please call the parish office to make an appointment, 308-382-4753.

## A NEW YEAR FILLED WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES *continued from front cover*

accomplishments included the expansion of the parish’s Prison Ministry to include men and women, as well as a noticeable increase in sacramental participation both through daily Mass attendance and sacramental preparation opportunities.

Reflecting with sincere gratitude, Fr. Don hopes to continue building upon the momentum of these successes, working together continuously to more fully embrace the stewardship lifestyle.

“My hope for 2020 is that we can continue building upon these many accomplishments, growing together further in stewardship and working to enlighten people — especially through the newsletter and our various ministries — so that even more parishioners become actively involved,” Fr. Don says.

To that end, Fr. Don hopes to continue cultivating an overall spirit of hospitality within the parish, fostering a true sense of welcome so that each person who walks through St. Leo’s doors is filled with a deep sense of belonging.

“We want everyone to feel like this is a place for them,” Fr. Don says.

That’s why the parish has already initiated monthly fellowship meals following the 10:30 a.m. Mass as a way of bringing parishioners together and fostering a more familial feel. The parish will also soon be offering a program from Ascension Press

called *The 99: An Evangelization Mission Series*.

Still in the preparatory process, this will be an opportunity to both form and support parishioners within a more intimate setting.

“It will start out with a parish-wide mission and then afterwards we’ll begin offering small-group book studies either here at the parish or in people’s actual homes,” Fr. Don says. “Our hope is to really help parishioners learn about the faith — again, responding to what they said they wanted through last winter’s surveys.”

In all of these endeavors, both past and present, Fr. Don remains deeply grateful to be part of this blessed community, witnessing parishioners’ continued openness to the stewardship message and their willingness to continue growing together.

“I’m so thankful for the parishioners’ openness to the message of stewardship as a way of life,” Fr. Don says. “It gives me confidence to keep looking carefully at future projects, to really discern what we need to do in order to meet the needs of our community. And finally, it really encourages me to continue doing the best that I can as the Pastor of St. Leo’s — to be a good steward myself of the funds and gifts entrusted to me and to do my own part in living out the stewardship life.”

## RECOGNIZING THE SEASON OF ADVENT, WE CAN CREATE FAITHFUL AND LOVING TRADITIONS

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As the season of Christmas approaches, it is all too easy to get swept up in the frantic commercialism that tells us that Christmas is already happening — from now up until the 25<sup>th</sup>, and not a day more. To combat this misguided understanding, and to embrace what this time of year truly means, we might consider how to enter into the sacred quiet and careful preparation of the Advent season with our families.

Starting new Advent-centered traditions within our homes is a simple way to differentiate between the two seasons and embrace the grace that comes with this season of preparation. While hanging up the stockings, consider hanging up a stocking for Jesus. Family members can place their “gifts” for Jesus there. These can be sacrifices like giving up desserts during the week or committing to doing one extra chore for another family member. Advent can be as much of a time for fasting and almsgiving as the season of Lent — after all, both seasons are preparing our hearts for a great feast of the Church.

A similar activity is to create a manger bed for Jesus. For every good deed that a family member does, have them place a little straw in a small

manger in a prominent place in the house. By Christmas, there will be a fluffy bed in which the Christ Child can be placed.

If your parish has an angel tree or participates in a gift outreach, be sure that the whole family is included in the shopping by making it a family outing, or make a card for the child together. It's easy to see those activities as a quick good deed, but anything that helps emphasize that there is another person on the receiving end helps to make the act much more meaningful.

While there are lots of activities that can help to prepare our hearts to celebrate Christmas, nothing centers us securely in this season of Advent quite like participating in the liturgy already prepared for us. As you are able, go to any penance services or live nativities, or take part in service opportunities on offer in our parish. Spend some time with your kids in the adoration chapel or in front of the Blessed Sacrament, reminding them that the Christ Who dwells there in the monstrance is the same Christ Who came to this world as a tiny baby — for it will be there in the presence of Christ that we can truly sing, with hearts ready to receive Him, “Oh come let us adore Him, oh come let us adore Him.”



# POUR INTO THEOLOGY ON TAP

## DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS, DEEPENING FAITH

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Young adulthood can be a challenging time of life. Whether you're in college, a young professional or newly married, it's often a time of transition and significant decisions as you discern the direction of your life and your faith. It can be challenging to "find your place" in the Catholic community — but for young adults in Grand Island, we hope to offer support and encouragement along the journey.

Theology on Tap is a national Catholic program, sponsored by RENEW International. The local chapter of the group, Grand Island Theology on Tap, is led by a core team of local young adults from parishes around the diocese who meet and plan the sessions. The group meets each month at a local pub for fellowship and formation in their faith.

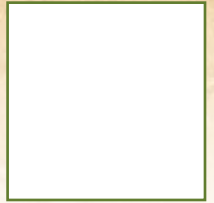
"Theology on Tap is a faith experience for young adults in the 20s and 30s to discover how faith can give sense to their everyday lives," says Rita Hemmer, who coordinates Youth and Young Adult Ministry at St. Leo's. "We invite a dynamic speaker to inform and challenge us in a comfortable and relaxing atmosphere."

Grand Island Theology on Tap meets at the Chicken Coop Sports Bar and Grill on the second Monday of each month, at 7 p.m.

"Theology on Tap meets at a comfortable place for young people to gather and feel welcomed," Rita says. "The Chicken Coop has become the home of Grand Island's Theology on Tap because of the welcoming atmosphere."



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## THEOLOGY ON TAP *continued from page 7*

Young adult James Holys serves as part of the core team who plans and hosts the Theology on Tap events each month.

“The goal of Theology on Tap is to provide a place for young adults to learn more about their faith, and also have some good fellowship,” James says.

With guest speakers each month, Theology on Tap is an opportunity for young adults to dive into their Catholic beliefs and learn more about how to apply their faith in daily life. The events provide a chance for discussion in a

casual setting with others in similar situations. Especially during this phase of life — which often includes significant transition and life decisions — it is important to build connections with other like-minded Catholics who can support and encourage you in faith.

“It is important to have fellowship with other young Catholics so we can support each other in the faith and be there for each other,” James says. “I hope that people gain lifelong friendships and a deeper understanding of their faith.”

All young adults in their 20s and 30s are invited and encouraged to come and see what Theology on Tap is all about, meet some new friends, and enjoy good food and engaging speakers. The next event will take place on Dec. 9, focusing on the role of Mary, the Mother of God, in our lives, as Catholics. The Chicken Coop is located at 120 E 3rd St, Grand Island. For more information on Theology on Tap, or if you would like to become involved on the young adult planning core team, please contact Rita Hemmer at [rita@saintleos.org](mailto:rita@saintleos.org).

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### 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.