

St. Leo's

PARISH COMMUNITY



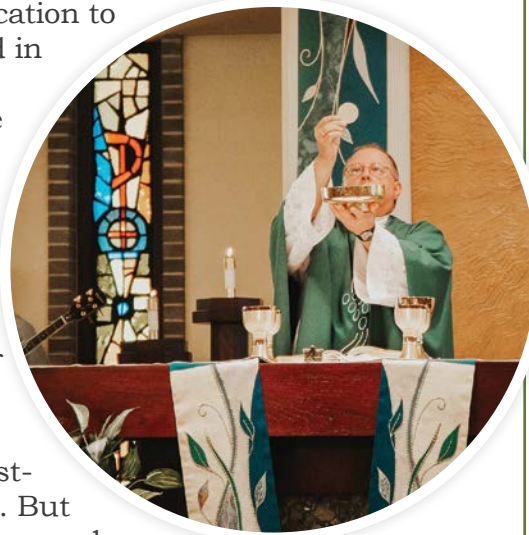
VOCATIONS MINISTRY TEAM WORKS TO BUILD AWARENESS

Our St. Leo's Vocations Ministry Team is working to make us aware that each of us has a special vocation to which we are called, which is always rooted in the call to be disciples of Christ.

Norbert Wenzl is the team leader for the group that is made up of 10 members, including Fr. Don and Fr. Mark. The group meets for about an hour at 6 p.m. on the first or second Wednesday of each month, usually in the Gathering Room.

"The team tries to create an environment to make everyone aware that each of us has a special vocation to which we are called," Norbert says. "When people hear the term 'vocations,' they think of the priesthood or the religious life, or the diaconate. But we want to create awareness of all vocations, and that includes married life and the single life. We feel that it is critical to help people realize that they have a special calling from God and that it is important to remain faithful to that calling."

The team creates the awareness environment by placing vocation messages in the weekly bulletin about the 31 Club vocations prayer project, and "did you know" fact about the parish priests, deacon and the sisters of the parish. The team also includes a "Sponsor a Seminarian" form that is inserted in the bulletin. The form invites parishioners to "sponsor" one



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VOCATIONS MINISTRY TEAM

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of our seminarians by perhaps writing a letter, letting him know he is in their prayers, or by sending a gift card.

The 31 Club project — taken from the Serra Club — invites parishioners to sign up for a day of the month and then pray in some way on that day for vocations. Parishioners are encouraged to choose a day with personal significance, such as their birthday.

“Our team also sponsors parish celebrations that promote vocations, such as parish potlucks to celebrate Priesthood Sunday and ordination anniversaries of our priests,” Norbert says.

The team takes part in the national Vocation Awareness Week that is celebrated during the first full week of November. On Priesthood Sunday during that week, the team made posters featuring our priests, the team also made cards for the priests expressing why the parish is praying for them.

“It was our turn to return the favor,” Norbert says. “And at the end of Mass, we blessed our priests.

“The Church is its members, the ‘flock,’ so to speak,” he adds. “As a flock we will always need ‘shepherds’ to guide us in our faith formation. The priests, and in some cases the deacons, are needed to perform the sacraments that allow the church members to receive additional grace from God.”

Team members pray not only for discernment for younger men considering priesthood, but also for those considering entering religious life, as well as married or single life.

Taking part in the team has enabled Norbert to deepen his own faith.

“I’m single, and this has made me more aware this is a calling God has for me,” he says. “I remain faithful to it. This encourages my prayer life so I can be faithful to that calling. It has deepened my prayer life and my support for the priests, sisters and deacons who have chosen

their vocation. Those who are married need to be supported in the vocation they feel they have been called to.”

The Vocations Ministry Team is involved not only in St. Leo’s Parish, but also works with other parishes to promote vocations. Last spring the team met with teams from other parishes to “brainstorm” about what each team has been doing.

“A future project is to host a vocations ministry conference or meeting among the parishes in the Grand Island Deanery,” Norbert says.

A project slated for this year is the Traveling Vocations Crucifix. Each weekend, a family will volunteer to take the crucifix home and during the week, pray together each day for vocations.

“We want to encourage prayer for vocations in the home,” Norbert says. “We want to instill more awareness of vocations and maybe inspire a child at the home to be open to a calling.”



Anyone interested in joining the Vocations Ministry Team may contact Norbert Wenzl at 308-381-8716, or Fr. Don Buhrman at 308-382-4753.

A Letter From Our Pastor

CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE

Dear Parishioners,

What is the most widely observed saint's day in February — the one that is kept even by those who aren't practicing Catholics? Undoubtedly, it would be St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

So who was St. Valentine? The saint we celebrate was a priest of Rome martyred in the late third century. But that doesn't explain how his feast came to be celebrated as the day for sending letters, cards and presents as expressions of romantic love.

The truth is that the custom of sending tokens of love comes not from any direct connection with St. Valentine, but from the ancient belief that birds begin to pair off on Feb. 14. And if courtship in the natural world occurred then, it must be appropriate for humans, as well. The association between St. Valentine and love notes is a later development.

Nevertheless, it's not wrong to connect the two. Love has many aspects, and our conception of it is richer if we keep more than one of them in mind. Martyrdom is the result of loving God more than our earthly lives. St. Valentine was a martyr because of his love — his love for Jesus Christ and the Church. If he had not loved God so much, he could have repudiated his Lord and saved his life. We, in turn, express our love by sending cards



and gifts on St. Valentine's Day.

But isn't that what stewardship as a way of life is, a little martyrdom? Not to push the image too far, but when we are faithful stewards, we give up a little portion of our lives out of our own love for Christ. Most Christians will not be called on to be martyrs, in the sense of forfeiting our physical lives for God. But we are called to give up some of our comforts, indulgences and riches because of our love for Him.

So then, as you prepare to celebrate and share your love with your valentine this month, remember St. Valentine and his love for Christ. As well, keep in mind that God loves us, and return that love with your

own toward Him. Loving God will be reflected in how you prioritize your use of the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted to you. As St. John wrote (1 Jn 4:19), "We love because he first loved us."

Happy St. Valentine's Day!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman
Pastor



STRENGTHENING THE COVENANT

Through Marriage

When parishioner Jodi Stauffer and her husband, Steve, would go on a Marriage Encounter weekend, their children described it in a uniquely insightful way — “Mom and Dad are taking the weekend to go fall in love again!”

“It’s not that we ever were ever ‘out of love,’ but life gets so filled with taking care of the kids and paying the bills and going to work, and our kids recognized the importance of us needing to have time together,” Jodi says.

“You have the initial joy of being married and then life hits and you’re wondering, ‘What does the future hold?’” Steve adds. “Marriage Encounter is really good for marriages that are doing all right. It’s an opportunity to get together and learn how to communicate better.”

Steve and Jodi attended their first marriage encounter weekend in 2002 and they credit the experience as being one of the most significant moments in their life.

“Besides getting married, it’s probably one of the best



Marriage Encounter weekends are an opportunity for couples to strengthen their marriages and communication skills.

decisions we’ve made in our life,” Jodi says. “I didn’t understand the impact that it could have until he and I made our weekend and it just had a ripple effect into our marriage, into our family, into everything.”

Over 15 years later, Steve and Jodi continue to be involved, and have served in a number of different ways in the organization, which is a worldwide

movement, seeking to help couples strengthen their marriages.

“It’s like a workshop — just like you might go to a professional workshop, this is a workshop for your marriage,” Steve says.

“It’s about making time for yourselves,” Jodi adds. “This is ‘continuing education’ of how to fall back in love and find that spark again.”

One of the primary ways that

“We’re challenged on the weekend to focus on how are we bringing God into our sacrament. God is a part of everything you do. So, if I’m going to honor my husband and he’s going to honor me, we’re honoring God. It’s a covenant that we made to God. You walk away from the weekend realizing that God is part of your relationship.” — Jodi Stauffer

IT WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

Marriage Encounter

couples are encouraged to grow during the weekend “retreat” is by learning tools to enhance their communication.

“Couples listen to presentations, and then they write journals to each other about what they’ve heard,” Steve says. “Once they leave the weekend, they have a new way to communicate with each other through what we call ‘Daily Dialogue.’ You pick a topic and you write about it, and then you discuss it afterwards. When you do that daily, it’s productive and it draws you closer together.”

“Whatever you have, Marriage Encounter is going to make it better,” Jodi adds. “If you have a good marriage, it’s going to make a great marriage. If you have a great marriage, it’s going to enhance it. It gives you the tools to learn to communicate, and you’re going to communicate whatever is going on — it reflects whatever marriage you have.”

Throughout the course of the weekend, couples are encouraged to delve into the idea of what it means to make God the center of your marriage and fully live the Sacrament of Matrimony.



Parishioners Steve and Jodi Stauffer hope to help other couples build stronger marriages through Marriage Encounter.

“We’re challenged on the weekend to focus on how are we bringing God into our sacrament,” Jodi says. “God is a part of everything you do. So, if I’m going to honor my husband and he’s going to honor me, we’re honoring God. It’s a covenant that we made to God. You walk away from the weekend realizing that God is part of your relationship.”

The experience is also a chance to get to know other couples and find support through the highs and lows of marriage, both on the weekend and beyond.

“This is a different way of living — it’s somewhat contradictory to the secular world,” Steve says. “We get together with other like-minded couples to reinforce our values and talk about our challenges and continue to support each other and continue to grow.”

Steve and Jodi encourage other parishioners to consider attending a Marriage Encounter weekend.

“Your marriage is worth investing in,” Jodi says. “It would be the best gift you could give your spouse. We even offer free babysitting, if that’s the thing that’s holding you back.”

“The return on investment is so high,” Steve adds. “Marriage Encounter made such a significant impact on our marriage and I absolutely encourage couples to make the time. I procrastinated and put it off, but when I finally agreed to go, afterwards I was like, ‘Why did I wait?’”

If you would like more information on upcoming Marriage Encounter events, please contact Pat and Janelle Benson at 308-940-0670. A Marriage Encounter weekend will be taking place March 29-31 in Hastings. You can find more information about Worldwide Marriage Encounter, and other upcoming events at www.wwme.org.

STEWARDSHIP

Hannah, the Good Steward

What should we do when our prayers are answered?

Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead, God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her

young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her faithfulness,

God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”



TANGIBLE REMINDERS OF GOD'S LOVE:

The Prayer Shawl Ministry

When a person is sick or suffering, few things feel more comforting than a warm blanket. And when it's a blanket that has been carefully made by loving hands and heartfelt prayers, that warmth only grows, serving as a tangible reminder of God's love for that person. "This," says parishioner Elaine Janulewicz, "is what makes the Prayer Shawl Ministry so meaningful to our St. Leo community."

"It is such a beautiful thing to be able to give to someone in need," Elaine says. "Prayer shawls are tangible symbols of love and it just warms the heart to know that they are going to somebody in need — especially when that is someone we know personally, as is often the case."

Hand-knit or crocheted by generous volunteers, each shawl is blessed by Fr. Don Buhrman. This transforms them into holy articles, representing the support and intercessory prayer of the entire faith community. The shawls are then distributed to parishioners for a variety of needs such as illness, recovery from surgery or an injury, and even mental distress — as Elaine notes, "anyone in need of comfort."

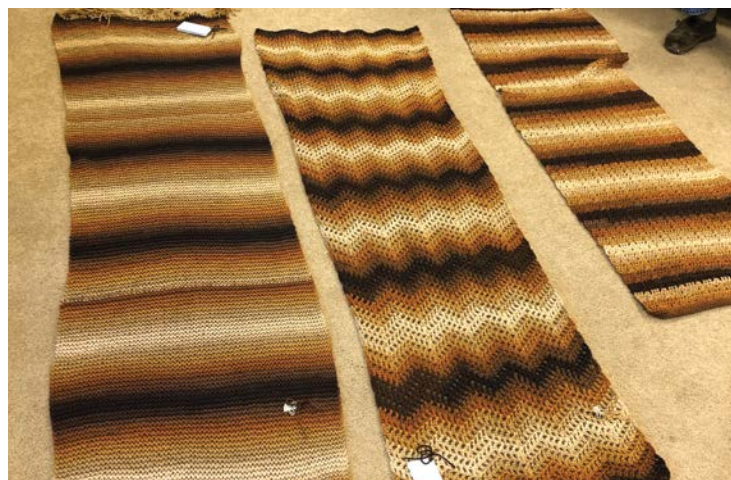
Prayer Shawl Ministry members gather weekly on Thursday afternoons at 1 p.m. to knit or crochet together. During this time, members pray for the recipients of their shawls, enjoy fellowship with one another, and gather supplies to work independently at home throughout the week.

"The prayer involved helps us draw closer to God, asking that our work be blessed," Elaine says. "The fellowship, too, is a great blessing."

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Parish ladies gather together Thursday afternoons to work and enjoy fellowship with one another.



Some of the completed prayer shawls.

If you would like more information about the Prayer Shawl Ministry, please contact either Elaine Janulewicz at 308-381-1313 or Karen Denne at 308-391-1425.



THE PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY *continued from page 7*

We've become so close over the years that someone can bring up areas that they struggle with in terms of the Church, and it becomes an opportunity for us to all grow. I think that is one of the things we value the most — our friendships with one another. That's a big part of why our members come so faithfully week after week."

The Prayer Shawl Ministry always welcomes new members. No prior knitting or crocheting experience is needed and members have the freedom to work at home around their schedules. Parishioners can also support this ministry by donating knitting and crocheting supplies.

"We welcome anyone wanting to participate and we will teach them," Elaine says. "It truly gives that feel of comfort and love to both the people receiving the shawls and those of us who are able to make it."



Prayer Shawl Ministry members have enjoyed the opportunity to learn and improve their knitting and crocheting skills together.

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.