

# St. Leo's

## PARISH COMMUNITY



### PREPARING TO RECEIVE JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST

#### *An Inside Look at First Communion*

Do you remember your First Communion — getting dressed up, welcoming family into town, walking up reverently to receive the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord for the very first time? Each year, a group of students prepares to have the same experience — receiving the Sacrament of First Holy Communion.

As Catholics, we hold the unique belief that in the Eucharist, Holy Communion, we are invited to receive our Lord, truly present — Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Our eternal God humbles Himself to be united with us in this sacrament. Unfortunately, for many of us, it's a gift that can easily be taken for granted.

However, if you're looking for inspiration in deepening your appreciation of the Eucharist, perhaps you need not look any further than our second-grade students. Each year, these children prepare to receive the gift of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament for the first time, and their excitement is contagious.

This year, First Communion will take place at St. Leo's on Sunday, April 19, at 2 p.m. The children spend the year leading up to the celebration learning about what it means to be Catholic, the Eucharist, the Mass, and more. Those who serve as catechists hope that this time of preparation will give children the foundation for a lifelong appreciation of receiving Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, as fuel for living the Christian life to the fullest.

"When we participate each week in the Eucharist, we are building our



*Keldrick Manivong and his grandparents, Jan and Tom Sorahan, at his First Communion two years ago.*

FEBRUARY 2020

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## *Stewardship*

# LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST

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As professed disciples of Christ, we are also stewards of our personal and communal vocations. When we declare Christ as our King and Savior, we also promise to exist as His earthly body. The universal Church depends upon its individual earthly members for evangelization and support. As stewards of Catholicism, we must respond to this call with living faith and heartfelt stewardship. We must employ our lives in Christ's service, allowing Him to vocationally use us to our fullest potential. God designed us with specific talents in mind — by closely communicating with Jesus, His Son, we can put our talents to proper use. As stated in John's Gospel, when we give our lives to Christ, He promises to ignite them accordingly: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

True life demands sacrifices, which are crucial in urging us onward and upward toward Christ. When we embark upon a lifelong path of stewardship — giving our time, talent and treasure in the service of God and His Church — we are effectively allowing Jesus to guide us along life's slippery slopes with the steady hand of a practiced master. Christ explains this concept in the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up

his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it" (Lk 9:23-24). Only after completely giving our lives over to Christ, will we experience the true majesty of life — the life each of us is destined to live.

As Catholics, we are urged to outwardly promote all stages of life, and to stand up in its defense. Considering the attention death has garnered within our society — whether we focus upon abortion, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment or euthanasia — an understanding and respect for life must be reinstated into our culture and lives. But we must first harbor a true, personal love for life within our very souls, and live our own lives to the fullest, through Christ, in the service and promotion of His Church. We must become stewards of faith, in order to truly live as Christ planned. And we must give our time, talents and treasure — all gifts God has given us through life — before we can really claim to be alive.

Let us promote the sanctity of life through personal conversion. Our deaths in Christ destine us to live in His glory, the ultimate expression of life. Let us become the disciples we claim to be, by adopting the essence of stewardship and melding it into our very souls.

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*A Letter From Our Pastor*

# PREPARING FOR LENT AS GOOD STEWARDS

Dear Parishioners,

Sometimes I get questions along the lines of “Do I have to go to Mass every Sunday?” or “Do we really still have to abstain from meat on every Friday during Lent?” You may have been asked those questions by other Catholics. Perhaps you’ve even asked similar questions yourself.

The simple answers to these two questions are “yes” and “yes.” But my major concern when I hear such questions goes beyond the correct answer to the specific inquiry itself. The more important matter to my mind is, why do people want to do as little as possible in their Christian lives?

Certainly we need the laws of the Church to teach us what our duties are to God, to other Christians in the Body of Christ, and to ourselves. But as we grow in our understanding of the faith and develop a more mature spiritual life, we should go beyond, “How little can I do and still avoid hell?” or to put it another way, “How little can I do and still get to heaven?” Instead, we have to ask ourselves, “Is that where I want to go?”

We know from the Our Father, the prayer Jesus Himself taught us, one characteristic of heaven. In that prayer we pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” God’s will is always done perfectly in heaven. If we don’t want to do God’s will, He won’t force us to go



there — and you’ll realize you have chosen the alternative.

My point is, let’s do away with minimum Christianity! Instead of asking, “How little can I do and stay out of hell?” let’s begin asking, “How much can I do for God, Who created me, Who redeemed me, Who pours blessings out every day? How much do I love God, Who loves me enough to die for me?”

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which comes on Feb. 26. As you plan your Lenten rule of life, why not be as generous toward God as you can be? While I’m not suggesting that you shed all your other obligations, I am suggesting that you respond to God’s bless-

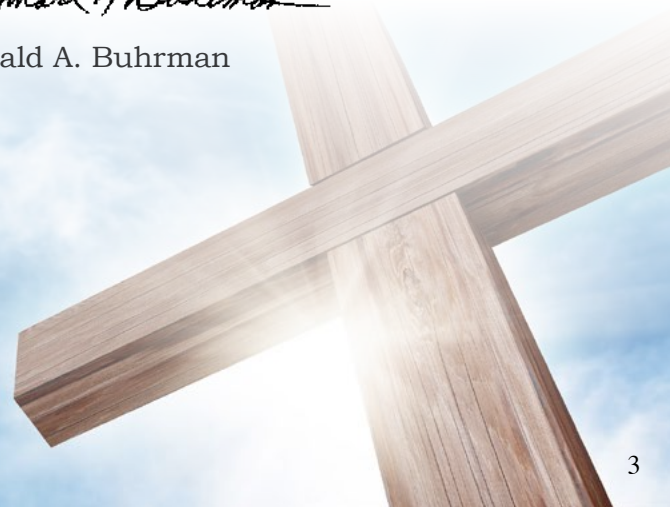
ings with gratitude, as fully as possible — rather than as grudgingly as possible.

So, let’s use this Lent to ask God to remove our attitude of “What’s in it for me?” and to replace it with the grace to become good disciples and stewards.

Have a blessed and holy Lent.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman  
Pastor



## THE TRAVELING VOCATIONS CRUCIFIX

### *Bringing Our Prayers for Vocations Beyond*

One of the greatest gifts we have in the Catholic Church is the number of faith-filled people who devote themselves to serving God's people through vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life. With the number of vocations to religious life on the decline, it is essential — now more than ever — for parishes around the world to spend time in prayer for vocations.

In addition to praying together as a parish for an increase in vocations, we are also called to pray as individuals and families. With the Traveling Vocations Crucifix ministry, our Vocations Ministry Team hopes to make prayer for vocations a natural part of everyday life for our parishioners.

Through this ministry, families, couples and individuals commit themselves to praying for vocations to religious life. After signing up at the vocations table in the narthex, participants receive the special crucifix and its accompanying prayer pamphlet from the priest during their chosen weekend Mass. They then pray throughout the week, asking for the Lord's guidance in discerning their own vocations, as well as for a worldwide increase in vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life.

As Vocations Ministry Team leader Norbert Wenzl explains,



*The St. Leo's Traveling Vocations Crucifix encourages ongoing prayer for vocations.*

the Traveling Vocations Crucifix is a great way to bring prayer for vocations beyond the church setting and into the home.

"We do a good job at St. Leo's praying for vocations," Norbert says. "We have a vocations prayer that we pray at every Mass. But our prayer life doesn't end when Mass ends — our prayer life is a continual work. So this ministry encourages people to continue to pray for vocations at home."

Having the eight-inch crucifix in one's home for a week is a

great way to remember to keep an increase in vocations in our daily prayers.

"The crucifix provides a visible reminder, so we encourage people to place it in a visible location in the home so they have that constant reminder to pray for vocations — not only reading the actual prayers from the pamphlet they receive, but even saying something as simple as a Hail Mary now and then," Norbert says. "After all, Mary had the greatest vocation as the mother of Christ."

Setting aside a little extra time to pray for vocations for a week brings many blessings to single individuals, couples and families alike.

"Sometimes just praying really helps you to discern your own vocation," Norbert says. "God may speak to you and validate that this is where you need to be. It also stimulates conversation among family members. If you are praying as a family, you might encourage one of your own children to discern a call to the priesthood or religious life, or to married life or life as a single person. It's never too early to start planting the seed."

The Traveling Vocations Cross has only been a part of our parish for about one year, but it has already blessed the lives of countless individuals and families who have spent

## the Parish Walls

a week in prayer for vocations. And the prayers of our diocese for vocations are already bearing much good fruit — this past year, the number of seminarians in the Diocese of Grand Island has almost doubled from four to seven!

We can all seek to help the Church throughout the world by praying fervently for vocations. Here at St. Leo's, the Traveling Vocations Crucifix provides us with the perfect opportunity to bring those prayers beyond the parish walls and into our homes.

"Sometimes, we don't have to do really big, public things in our lives," Norbert says. "Sometimes it's those private things that we do in the home that make a difference not just in our home, but in the lives of the ones we are praying for."

Would you like to bring your prayers beyond the parish walls and into your own home? Bring the Traveling Vocations Crucifix home for a week! Sign-up sheets are located on the vocations table in the church narthex. Please call Norbert Wenzl with any questions at 308-383-7829.

## AN INSIDE LOOK AT FIRST COMMUNION

*continued from front cover*

relationship with Jesus," says parishioner Jenny Manivong, a second-grade catechist who also has twin sons preparing to receive First Communion this year. "My hope is that our students will always have an excitement to learn about our Lord. I want them to have the desire to want to come to church without their parents forcing them to. I also hope that they share their love of Jesus with others and are always striving to be good Christians."

Fourth-grade catechists Alexis Linehan is a mom of four, with twins preparing for First Communion this year. Raised in the Lutheran faith, Alexis didn't come to an understanding of the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist until she was an adult. For her, there is something beautiful about sharing this belief with her children.

"From my perspective, learning why we have the sacraments and how they're placed in our lives at different points in our faith journey is very important," Alexis says. "When our oldest was getting ready [for First Communion], we told her, 'You're making a commitment to the Lord and you're doing it in front of the community, our church, and our family.' It's a very important, very special time where you have this preparation and then you get to participate in this part of the Mass!"

As an adult, Alexis has recognized the significance of the Eucharist in her own journey of faith and relationship with God. In turn she hopes that, over time, her



*Each year at St. Leo's, children prepare to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time.*

children will come to do the same.

"For me, that belief in the Eucharist is so central — that belief is the center of what makes my Catholic faith so important," she says. "Now, if I do not make it to Mass, because I'm home with a sick kid, I find myself seeking out Mass on another day of the week because I will miss the Eucharist. A few years ago, I didn't have that desire or that thought — now, I miss that spiritual food, that encounter every week. [Receiving the Eucharist] is definitely part of feeding the spiritual self."

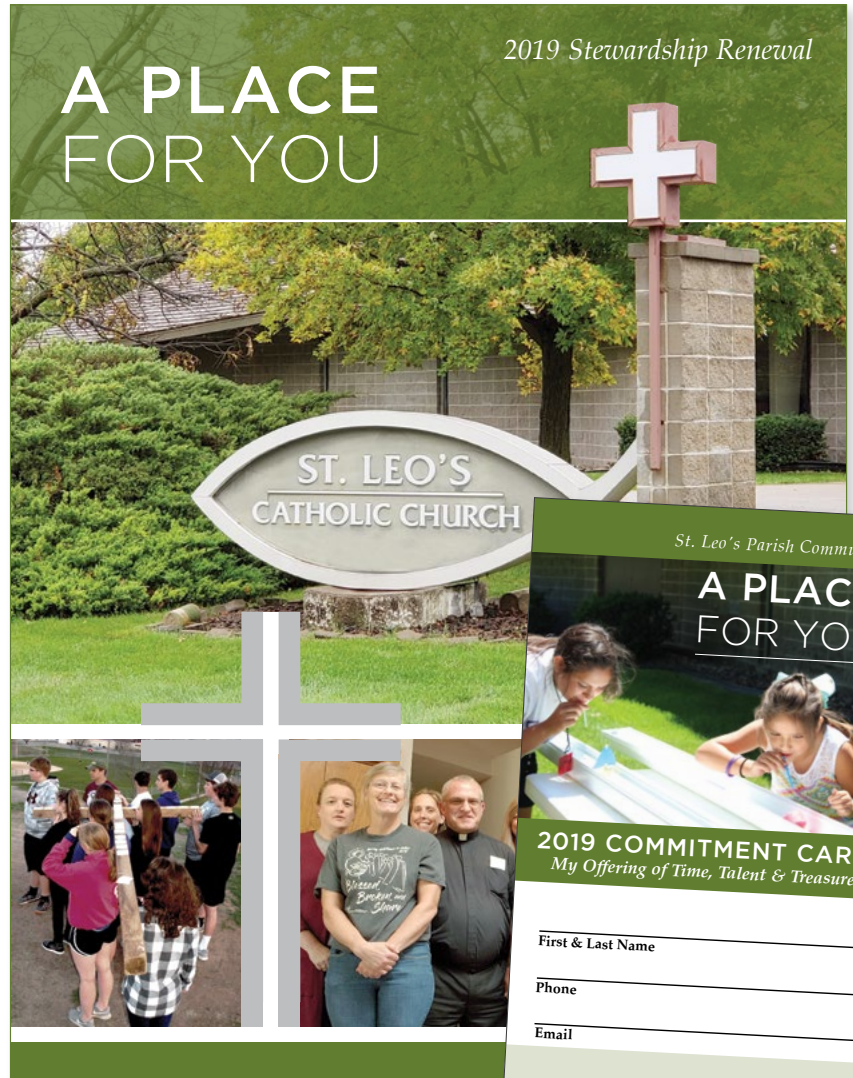
If you would like more information, or to register your child for First Communion preparation classes, please contact Director of Children and Family Ministries Jodi Stauffer at 803-382-4753, ext. 14 or [jodi@saintleos.org](mailto:jodi@saintleos.org).

We extend our gratitude to all of our second-grade catechists who help to prepare our children to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, for the first time.

# HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR 2019 STEWARDSHIP RENEWAL

This past autumn, our parish leadership at St. Leo's conducted the 2019 Stewardship Renewal. The Renewal gave our parish community the opportunity to discern how we are using our stewardship gifts of time, talent and treasure. This month, we are happy to share with you some of the results of the 2019 Stewardship Renewal.

- There were 305 commitment cards received from 63 percent of active parish households ("active" is defined as a household that has demonstrated a measurable participation in the parish by being assigned to a ministry or contributing at least \$1 in the past year).
- 84 percent of those who returned a commitment card made commitments to prayer — the stewardship of time — for a total of 2,205 prayer commitments.
- Some of the prayer commitments include: Attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day, 233 commitments; Pray for our priests, 185 commitments; Spend 15 minutes a day in personal prayer, 179 commitments.
- 85 percent of those who returned a commitment card made commitments to ministries — the stewardship of talent — for a total of 1,179 ministry commitments. Of these, 306 were new ministry commitments, while 873 were re-commitments to parish ministries.
- Some of the ministry commitments included: Hospitality (Greeters), 123 commitments; Knights of Columbus, 89 commitments; Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Eucharist, 83 commitments; Ladies of Leo's: (LOL) Leadership Board, 75 commitments; Prayer Chain, 59 commitments.
- 75 percent of those who returned a commitment card made a commitment to the offertory — the stewardship of treasure — for a total of 230 commitments, with an average pledge of \$2,375.



St. Leo's Parish Community

## A PLACE FOR YOU

2019 COMMITMENT CARD  
*My Offering of Time, Talent & Treasure*

First & Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: First & Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

We thank all those who participated in the 2019 Stewardship Renewal. If you did not have the opportunity to fill out and return a commitment card, we invite you to consider the ways you may share your stewardship gifts with God and our faith community!

# ST. LEO'S WISHES

## MAINTENANCE DIRECTOR JOHN SCHWIEGER

### *Many Blessings* IN HIS RETIREMENT

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For a true example of a humble servant of Christ, one need look no further than our very own church. Parishioner John Schwieger, who is newly retired from the position of Maintenance Director, has served St. Leo's for years with a generous and humble spirit. While we look forward to continuing to see him in the pews at Mass, our parish family will certainly miss having John on staff!

Donna Douglass, St. Leo's Outreach Coordinator, has worked with John for many years, and knows just how much his kind and gentle presence will be missed in the parish office.

"John's just the best," she says. "He's incredibly thoughtful and caring. If he knows you drink tea, he'll have the hot water ready for you when you come to work. He notices those extra things and always goes out of his way to do things for people. He takes a lot of pride in his church and in his work, and he's just incredibly selfless."

In addition to the regular duties of Maintenance Director —



*After many years of service to the St. Leo Parish community as our Building and Grounds Supervisor, John Schwieger retired on Dec. 31, 2019.*

including cleaning and maintaining the interior and exterior of the church building — John always went above and beyond. He consistently noticed extra tasks that needed to be done and completed them quietly and efficiently. You might find him polishing votive candles to a shine, spreading salt on an icy sidewalk, or even washing over 100 coats during our annual coat drive.

While John has always been extremely hardworking and con-

scientious in his role at the parish, there were two times during the year when he would take a few well-earned vacation hours.

"Usually in the fall and in the spring, John would approach me and say he thought he was coming down with a 'fever' and wondered if he could take some hours off the next day," Fr. Don Buhrman says. "I learned that this meant he was going out to hunt a turkey. So now I know what 'turkey fever' is!"

*continued on back cover*

*"John has long been living out his stewardship in his work, in his giving, and as a minister of Communion to the homebound. He does not just show up — he truly cares for all of his brothers and sisters. We want him to enjoy his retirement — to hunt and fish and travel — but we also want him to come back and visit us often. Not only will we miss his work, but we love John — he brings a great presence to our church." — Donna Douglass*



## **JOHN SCHWIEGER** *continued from page 7*

With his gentle and humble spirit, his prayerfulness and witness to a life of faith, John has been a beloved member of the St. Leo's staff for many years. Fr. Don recalls how, over a year ago, John let him know that he was going to retire in January 2019. The staff was anxious about finding a suitable replacement when John let them know that he had prayed on the matter and decided to stay on one more year. When this announcement was made at a staff meeting, the room erupted in cheers and words of affirmation —

everyone was overjoyed that John would continue serving our parish through 2019!

Now, following his retirement as Maintenance Director, John will be greatly missed. However, there is no one more deserving of a restful retirement than this hardworking servant of Christ.

“John has long been living out his stewardship in his work, in his giving, and as a minister of Communion to the homebound,” Donna says. “He does not just show up — he truly cares for all of his brothers and sisters. We

want him to enjoy his retirement — to hunt and fish and travel — but we also want him to come back and visit us often. Not only will we miss his work, but we love John — he brings a great presence to our church.”

Fr. Don shares in the office staff's well wishes for John.

“My prayer for John is that he can stay healthy and active for many more years,” he says. “I wish him many hours of dealing with ‘turkey fever’ and many master angler catches! God bless you, John, a good and faithful servant.”

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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.