

St. Leo's

PARISH COMMUNITY



The Sacrament of Matrimony: A LIFELONG VOCATION TO HOLINESS

Flowers, the dress, decorations, caterers and a venue — these are just some of the items needed for most modern-day wedding celebrations. While these things certainly add to the beauty and festive atmosphere of the event, they fail to capture the true heart of what a sacramental marriage is — namely, a lifelong vocation to holiness.

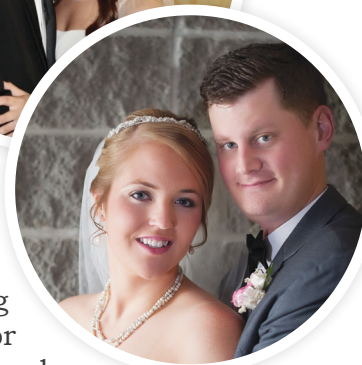
“The graces of the sacrament just add a whole new level of commitment and sincerity to the marriage,” says parishioner Kevin Walsh. “I think for many people nowadays, marriage continues as long as it is convenient for both parties. But incorporating the sacramental element of it — really committing yourself for life to someone before God — adds, for me, a sense of security, a sense of family and a bond that is unbreakable.”

Kevin and his wife, Amanda, were married at St. Leo's five years ago. Both cradle Catholics, it was important to both of them to be married in the Church. It added a gravity to the ceremony as they pledged themselves to one another before God in the church and the faith of their ancestors.

“I remember thinking on our wedding day of how many of our ancestors had been married in the Catholic Church before us,” Kevin says. “It made



*Kayla and
Nathan
Keep*



*Amanda
and Kevin
Walsh*

SEPTEMBER 2020

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SAFE AT HOME: *Building the Domestic Church Through the Children's Faith Formation Program*

Trying to plan the fall semester for the Children's Faith Formation program has certainly been a challenge for Jodi Stauffer, our Director of Children's and Family Ministries. With the main goal in mind of keeping our children and catechists safe, the current plan is to take the program off-site, and evaluate it in December/January for the second semester.

The plan follows a theme that has come to the fore as health and safety precautions have been put in place—reaffirming and developing the domestic church.

"We know we all have one, a domestic church," Jodi says. "Parents are the start of it with Baptism, when they commit to raise their children in the faith. We're working to let them realize they are the first teachers and they've always been the first. Religious education is there to help them as Catholic parents. We are trying to do things to strengthen their domestic church, which is the call God has given us at this time."

What most likely will be offered to parents is a box subscription plan at a minimal cost. The subscription will contain printed and multimedia material, providing the parents with talking points to spark discussion with their children at home.

"They'll be able to explain the material to their children and be able to expand, or tailor, the material as they know will work with their children," Jodi says. "It will follow the curriculum we have been using, so there won't be any lost ground. I can send messages to the kids about the material, and about things such as the Gospel readings. What we want to do is empower our parents to realize they do have the ability to be catechists for their children."

At this time of changed schedules and



new safety protocols, one might ask why faith formation is important for children. Jodi responds that she directs this question to parents when they begin the preparation to baptize their children — "Why do you want to baptize them?"

The answer, of course, that she hears is that they want to bring their children up in the Catholic faith.

"So we have that understanding, that this is the foundation of faith formation — wanting to bring their children up in the Catholic faith," she says. "If you are going to be a skilled dancer, for example, you practice and form yourself, do a repetition of skills so you can be better. It's the same with faith. It's not just *there*, but you have to explore it, develop it and learn it. That is what we do as Church, is to offer the best we can to help the parents. We want to form the children into the best Catholics they can be, the best Christians they can be, in the direction they want to go."

Once the semester plans are finalized, Jodi Stauffer will notify our parents about the program.

Passionate FOR THE Stewardship Way of Life

Dear Parishioners,

Often when reading the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles in the New Testament, I recognize that the writers were genuinely passionate about having an opportunity to put into words an expression of the faith they have in Jesus Christ. I am inspired by the passion expressed by those who live what they believe. Having the courage and the enthusiasm to express their thoughts, and to embrace and cherish it as if it were the most important thing in the world, translates into a passion for Christ and a passion to be His disciple.

I ask myself on a regular basis, do I have that same passion as Jesus' disciples? I pray that I do. But if I don't, I have to wonder why, and must reflect upon what is keeping me from being passionate about my faith. Without being genuinely passionate about our faith, can any of us genuinely embrace the stewardship way of life?

The Food Network broadcasts a program called *Chopped*, which features professional chefs who are challenged to use designated ingredients to prepare a dish. Using the time they have been given, and the skills and talents they possess, they must compete against each other while attempting to impress a panel of judges. In what they say and do, their passion for who they are and what they can do with all that has been given them is more than obvious. They demonstrate confidence, enthusiasm, creativity and a desire to use their talent. Even if they get eliminated, they know they have done their best — and will continue to do so, with an ongoing passion.

Should we not have the same kind of passion for being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Stewardship is the best way to passionately



express and live out our call to be a disciple of Christ. The New Testament is filled with passages that confirm the stewardship way of life. How passionate are we about being those faithful stewards using the gifts given to us by God, and using our precious time to use those gifts for the greater glory of God? How do we move from merely thinking that stewardship is something others do, to being passionate about it enough to live our lives as a committed disciple of Christ? It isn't possible to be truly passionate about something unless we are genuinely convinced it is God's will, and we know it and feel it in our hearts. Genuine passion begins in the heart. Through the gift of the

Holy Spirit, our hearts are ignited to believe that the Word of God is calling each of us to express our love and devotion to Him — and we can do this by living out the stewardship life. Do you think we are up to that? Well, to do so is to be passionate about it.

I pray and hope that we all become better and more passionate about being disciples of the Lord. I believe there is great potential for all of us. If we trust God enough to do what it takes to be passionate about the stewardship way of life, our lives will become the truest expression of discipleship. While the world tries to convince us there are other things to be passionate about, our hearts should be telling us loud and clear that the stewardship way of life is the most important. It always has been, and it always will be.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Donald A. Buhrman
Pastor

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT OUR

This has most certainly been a trying and unusual year, as we have navigated through uncharted waters. In the face of great uncertainty or difficulty, it is easy to become complacent. Yet, this is not what God calls us to do. We are called to live stewardship as a way of life — in the good, bad or uncertain times. In moments of trial, God raises up saints!

Our Stewardship Renewal reminds us that God's gifts never stop being poured out. In turn, we never should have reason to stop thanking Him. So, let us take this Stewardship Renewal as an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with God in the midst of our rapidly changing world.

*Commitment Weekend is
September 19-20. Don't forget to
return your Commitment Card!*

How do I use my Commitment Card?

Your Commitment Card allows you to make commitments to prayer, parish ministries, and offertory giving. It is designed to be used by the whole family.

Time Section: Everyone should be able to check the boxes to commit to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days or to view the Masses online during the crisis. In addition to those commitments, try to check at least a few other items. Daily prayer should be a priority for every person trying to grow closer to God. We recognize that the current crisis may impact your ability to carry out your commitments. Know the Lord sees what is in your heart and is pleased with your best efforts.

Talent Section: You can either sign up for new ministries or re-commit to your current ministries. Be sure to write your first name next to the ministry! This is especially important if the card is being used by more than one person.

Treasure Section: Clearly print how much money you plan to give each week or month to our parish. Try to take a step toward giving five percent of your income to St. Leo's.

Issues like my age, physical limitations, and the current crisis prevent me from being active in the parish. Should I still turn in a Commitment Card?

Yes! The first section of the card — Stewardship of Time — is the most important because it allows you to make commitments to prayer. Even if you can't join a ministry or make it to Mass on Sunday, you can still pray for our parish. Your spiritual support has tremendous value in the eyes of God.

One time I turned in a card, but no one ever called me when I signed up for a ministry.

If this happened in the past, please forgive us! And don't give up on filling out your Commitment Card! We have a very good plan to call every person interested in joining a new ministry. If for some reason the ministry leader does not call you within four weeks of turning in your card, let the parish office know.

How much should I give?

Your gift is entirely dependent on how much God has given you. At St. Leo's, we ask that you give five percent to our parish, one percent to the diocese, and four percent to other charities. Why a percentage of income? First, because the tithe (10 percent) is a scriptural benchmark that the Church has honored for centuries (see Malachi 3:10). Secondly, we give a percentage of income because it is a common-sense standard by which everyone can equitably support the parish. Most of all, we give because we believe God comes first in everything, even finances.

R ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP RENEWAL

What if I can't fulfill my financial pledge?

While our pledge is not a "contract," we should all make a good-faith effort to fulfill it. Of course, if your financial circumstances change — if you lose your job, for instance — then the amount of money you give the Church will change, too. Likewise if you get a raise or bonus. The biggest reason many people don't fulfill their pledge is that they attend Mass at another parish when they go on vacation, attend a wedding, etc. If you're out of town, just make up for the missed Sunday when you write your next check to the parish. Using your envelopes is a good way to see which Sundays you missed. You can also fulfill your pledge electronically through online giving or auto deposit. Please visit our parish website, www.saintleos.org, for more information.

Even before the crisis, I didn't go to Mass frequently. Why turn in a Commitment Card?

Because this is your chance to turn over a new leaf! Why not make a commitment to God to come to Mass every Sunday once the crisis is over, and until then, commit to viewing the Mass online each week, then write down that commitment? Even if that's the only commitment you make, take a step forward. Jesus Himself is waiting for you!

What happens if I don't return my Commitment Card?

We will send you a reminder letter to encourage participation. Please make every effort you can to participate. Our Stewardship Renewal is a very important annual event in the life of our parish. You and your family are part of what makes St. Leo's a great community! Most importantly, your commitments are actually promises to Christ Himself. All of us are called to give back to God a portion of what He has given us.



Every parish family receives a special "Stewardship Package" that further explains our parish's vision of stewardship. It includes a booklet that describes every ministry in the parish, as well as your Commitment Card.

Finding True Purpose:

It's a challenging time to be a teenager. With so much uncertainty in the world, our young people are looking for answers, security and a sense of purpose. They'll look for it in a lot of different places — in friends and relationships, sports, academic achievements, or maybe a job. Unfortunately, sooner or later, they'll have to face the reality that none of those things bring ultimate fulfillment.

Here in Grand Island, our young people have the opportunity to connect with the One Who can bring peace and meaning in the midst of all the chaos, through TEC — Teens Encounter Christ. A weekend retreat experience, TEC allows youth to get away from the noise and worries of everyday life so that they may grow in their relationship with God alongside other faithful young Catholics.

"TEC is for teenagers to have an encounter with Jesus Christ," says Eric Heckman, our diocesan Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry. "You can't manufacture an encounter, but you can create the setting that allows for it to happen.

That's ultimately what TEC is for. We create a way for them to get away, so we can lead them through a process of opening up to what God wants for them in their lives, and then being able to respond to that, and have an encounter with Jesus Christ."

The weekend is for sophomores through seniors in high school, and is typically offered twice a year at different parishes throughout the diocese. It includes many elements of a typical retreat experience, such as talks, small-group discussions, time for prayer, and lots of food and fun. Above all, it's an opportunity for young people to grow in their relationship with God and make new friends.

"Through hearing the reflections people give and their witnesses, kids' eyes are opened to the fact that there's more to life," says Megan Burkes, a member of the TEC Board, who first experienced the retreat as a teenager. "Coming away from the weekend, you see kids just wanting to know Jesus more."

One of the most valuable parts of the retreat is young people getting to meet other Catholics who



TEC is an weekend retreat opportunity for young people to grow in their faith and relationship with God.



Teens also have the opportunity to meet other youth and adults who are living their faith.

TEENS ENCOUNTER CHRIST

care about their relationship with God. In a world where faith is often not prioritized, it is particularly meaningful for youth to know they are not alone.

“It’s important for them to know there are other people out there who are believers, who are a support system, who will stand by their side — they’re not in this by themselves,” Eric says.

“I still talk to some of the friends I made in the very beginning,” Megan adds. “Those are the friends who have always been there for me.”

Eric hopes that TEC will provide young people an opportunity to engage in their faith and go deeper in a personal relationship with Christ. In a world full of “noise,” a weekend away is sometimes helpful in listening for the voice of God.

“Every once in a while, you need to press the ‘pause’ button,” Eric says. “We’re caught up in

so much stuff and life is so busy, so when you push the ‘pause’ button, and put aside the daily routine, it opens up a new opportunity for the Lord to work in your life.

“There’s only one goal,” he adds. “It’s that they would experience Christ in a new way that changes their hearts.”

Eric and Megan encourage young people to consider stepping out of their comfort zones and attending a TEC weekend.

“Here’s an opportunity for something new in your life,” Eric says. “Why not give it a try? It’s a great time. I all but guarantee that it will be a positive experience where you’ll walk away with something good. You’ll be happy you did it.”

“I just want everybody to experience it,” Megan says.

If you would like more information on the ministry of Teens Encounter Christ, or to see upcoming TEC weekends, please visit www.gidiocese.org/TEC.



Our youth are encouraged to consider stepping out of their comfort zones and attend a TEC weekend.

TEC offers an opportunity to engage in the faith and deepen your relationship with Christ.



The Sacrament of Matrimony continued from front cover

me feel connected to them, like I was keeping the custom alive. I think it's a way that we preserve our culture and it added so much to the ceremony."

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to receive that sacrament," Amanda says. "It just makes it so much more special and adds a layer of depth to everything."

Though not married at St. Leo's, parishioners Nathan and Kayla Keep echo the Walshes' sentiments in describing their own experience. For Nathan and Kayla, a key part to the process was the sacramental preparation beforehand, required for any couple desiring to be married in the Church. In their case, this took the shape of a weekend retreat at Kansas State University's Newman Center that included teachings and

testimonies from priests, couples and school counselors.

"This experience helped guide us through extra and more extensive relationship building," Kayla says. "We also got to listen to couples in different stages of life talk about the challenges they had faced and overcome in their own marriages."

Through these marriage preparation encounters, couples may focus on the true purpose of the sacrament, while building a foundation that will withstand the inevitable storms of life.

"Looking back, being able to be married in the Church has made everything deeper and made our connection more meaningful," Amanda says. "Though you receive the sacrament once, like Confirmation it's the beginning of a lifelong change."

Couples interested in being married at St. Leo's or learning about the sacramental preparation may call the parish office 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.