

## STRENGTHENING OUR PARISH FAMILY THROUGH THE PRAYER CHAIN MINISTRY

It is wonderful to know that whatever trials you may face in life, you won't have to face them alone. As a member of our parish family, you can be assured that prayer warriors, inspired by God's tender mercy, have "got your back."

"We have such a nice parish community, and it is great to be able to reach out to each other through the Prayer Chain Ministry," Betty Ondracek says. "I believe that prayer is one of the best ways to reach out to someone who is in need or is hurting, such as if they are sick or have had an accident. It is always good to know that others are praying for you, as well. The Prayer Chain is also a good way to spread the word about someone's needs, so that people can respond by visiting them or helping them in some way."

The Prayer Chain Ministry is a simple, but extremely powerful and effective outreach that sustains the lifeblood of our parish cluster family. When someone is in need of prayer, they may contact the leader of the Prayer Chain of their parish. In turn, this leader contacts a number of other Prayer Chain members, who then contact more members, etc. Upon receiving a prayer request, each member prays as they are able, and as they feel the Holy Spirit is leading them to.

"I say a few Hail Marys for the person in need, and pray for them throughout the day, commending them to Jesus, Mary and Joseph," says Mary K. Fairbanks, who co-chairs the Prayer Chain Ministry (of St. Michael's) with Darlene Pfeifer. "This ministry is very important, because

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# STEWARDSHIP

*The Wise Men's Gifts Symbolize  
Our Lenten Obligations*

We experience great joy when we celebrate the coming of the Magi at Epiphany each year. For many of us, it is the completion of Christmas. Yet, the gifts offered by the Magi — gold, frankincense and myrrh — can serve to guide us as we observe Lent this month.

It may seem strange to connect the joyful celebration of Epiphany with the penitential season of Lent. Yet, our spiritual life should not be divided into separate bits having no connection with each other. In the same way, the Church's liturgical year should also flow from one season to another. The different feasts and seasons certainly have different emphases, but they are intended to build on each other. So let's see if we can connect what the Magi gave Jesus with what we're going to offer Him this Lent.

The basic ingredients for our Lenten rule normally come from what are termed the Three Notable Duties – prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These in turn come from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

How do we connect the wise men's gifts with the notable duties? Actually, what the gifts symbolize matches up surprisingly well.

Frankincense is the basic ingredient in the incense used in the worship of God, in the ancient world and in the Church today. Offering it to Jesus points out His divine nature, and so it symbolizes prayer. Our Lenten rule needs to include prayer and worship. Of course, we are bound to worship at Sunday Mass year-round. Maybe during Lent, we might add a weekday Mass. Perhaps we can increase the time we devote to private prayer at home or at adoration. Devotional reading from the Bible or another appropriate book can be added. In addition, don't forget the possibility of adding family devotions during Lent, so that the whole family prays together.

When we offer our gold to Christ to build His Church and to help His poor, we are engaged in almsgiving. While giving from the treasure God has

entrusted to us is a duty throughout the whole year, maybe this Lent we can practice being a little more generous than usual. If our giving is a thankful response to the gift of eternal life that God has given us, we will find that the giving is indeed a means of grace.

For centuries, myrrh has been associated with fasting. Although myrrh comes from the same family of plants as frankincense, it has a more pungent scent and bitter taste. In the ancient world, it was regularly used in embalming. Generations of theological writers have seen the gift of myrrh as a foreshadowing of Christ's sufferings. And fasting strengthens us in holiness and prepares us to come into God's presence after our own deaths. St. Thomas Aquinas himself linked myrrh with repentance and fasting when he wrote that myrrh represents the penance by which we preserve our souls from the corruption of sin.

Fasting may be the most difficult of the three notable duties for modern Americans. After all, most of the advertising and many of the magazine articles we see are devoted to making us more, not less, comfortable. We usually think of fasting only under the heading of dieting to lose weight. Instead, try to think of fasting as a way to become more spiritually fit. Body and spirit affect each other. The whole sacramental system is built on the truth that we can receive spiritual grace through material things and physical actions. Our specific requirements of fasting are limited – abstaining from meat on Fridays during Lent, and a reduction in the quantity of food we eat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. But discipline of our physical bodies for our spiritual well-being does not have to be limited to Lent!

Gold, frankincense and myrrh were indeed valuable gifts for the wise men to present to the Child Jesus. When we look at their symbolism, we can see their relationship to the three notable duties of almsgiving, prayer and fasting. What gifts are we going to offer to Jesus this Lent?

*A Letter From Our Pastor*

## ANSWERING THE CALL FOR LENT

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

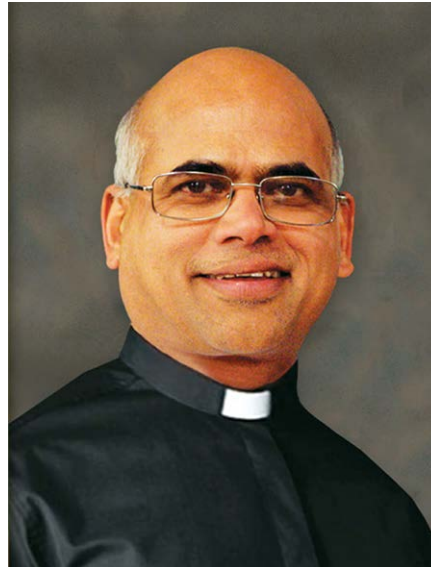
This month, as we proceed on our Lenten journey to Easter, every one of us should ask ourselves, “What does it mean to be a disciple of Christ and how well am I living that out each day?”

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops addressed what it means to be a disciple when they wrote their pastoral letter *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. “Who is a Christian disciple?” the USCCB asked and, in turn, they also provided the answer, “One who responds to Christ's call, follows Jesus, and shapes his or her life in imitation of Christ's” (9). So, as disciples of Jesus Christ, it is essential that we consider the true meaning of that answer.

The first step in the Christian life is responding to Jesus' call. Jesus invites every person to develop a relationship with Him. But obviously, not every person is a Christian disciple. Some people are too busy to even hear that invitation or don't make the effort to recognize it. Others make a conscious decision to reject the call because it demands that they can no longer place themselves at the center of their lives.

On the other hand, for those of us who make an affirmative response to Christ's call, the most meaningful life possible awaits us, both now and into eternity. However, saying “yes” to Jesus has consequences that affect the rest of our lives.

The first consequence of becoming a disciple is that we now follow Jesus. The Gospel accounts record that when He called His disciples, they left what they were doing and followed Him. The same is true for us today. Becoming a Christian disciple



does not necessarily mean that all of us will leave our present job, or enter into the consecrated life, or serve as a missionary in another country — although that might be where the journey leads you. But it does mean that we offer our work — whether as a doctor, homemaker, mechanic, farmer or teacher — to build up the Kingdom of God.

In following Jesus as His disciples, we should strive to more fully absorb His teaching and then apply it to our daily lives. As we do, we find that we attempt to imitate Him, treating others with the same welcoming and generous spirit. St. Peter was direct when he described how Jesus acted: “He went about doing good... for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38). That's the model for how we must live.

Discipleship leads naturally to stewardship as a way of life. The time we offer in prayer and worship will give us the strength and guidance for serving Christ. Using the skills and gifts we have, to build the Kingdom will direct our offering of talent. The support of all these endeavors with our treasure will ensure that our lives as disciples and stewards are genuine.

As a Christian steward this Lent, I encourage you to reflect on the changes you can make in growing as a disciple of Jesus.

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Antony J. Leheker". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Fr. Antony  
Pastor



# LITURGICAL PLANNING SETS THE STAGE FOR MASS

For Liturgical Planning Committee Leader Sister Mary Chamberlain and those who serve on the committees at St. Michael and Sacred Heart, it's important to help everyone at our parishes fully experience the liturgy.

"The liturgy is so important as Catholics," Sr. Mary says. "It requires full, active and conscious participation. Our goal is to have more people involved in the Mass."

The committees meet throughout the year, especially around Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. They do everything from recommend decorations, choose potential songs, and plan special ceremonies and processions for Mass. Each year, a special procession is planned for the Baptism of the Lord to celebrate all those baptized from the parishes in the last year. The committee also plans special ways to remember all those who have died in the last year for All Souls' Day.

The two committees are each comprised of a

representative from the Eucharistic Ministers, lectors, the Music Ministry, sacristans and the Environment Committee. Anyone interested in creating a meaningful liturgy is invited to participate. Sr. Mary hopes to soon start an organized Liturgical Planning Committee at St. Theresa.

"Mass is all about the Eucharist," Sr. Mary says. "We want to create a meaningful liturgy."

Sr. Mary is thankful to use her master's degree in Church Music and Liturgy from St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Ind., to lead the Liturgical Planning Committee. She took over the committee after moving to the area about a year ago.

"Our culture nowadays is all about 'entertain me,'" Sr. Mary says. "We need to ask ourselves about the Mass, 'What can I be doing to get more out of this?'"

Sr. Mary believes it's essential for all parishioners to pray for God to help them find the ministry to which He is calling them.

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*Sacred Heart Liturgy Planning Committee members Sister Mary, Fr. Antony, Mary Bauer, Patty Harris and Vicki Harvey gather to make preparations for Lent.*



# NG COMMITTEE ANINGFUL WORSHIP

“If you recognize your gifts and use them, you will feel more complete,” she says. “To sit passively in the pew is not where God is leading us.”

Sr. Mary recently visited Jamaica and specifically planned the dates of the trip to be there for a Sunday Mass. She was amazed at the beauty of the liturgy and the music.

“It was so uplifting,” she says. “The liturgy was alive and it was so powerful.”

It’s that powerful experience that encourages Sr. Mary to continue her work on the Liturgical Planning Committee. Her favorite Masses in our parishes are during Advent, when a candle for each of the four weeks is processed through church, while the David Haas song “Prayer for Peace” is played.

“There is something so powerful about that,” she says.

Sr. Mary continues to pray to see opportunities to serve her fellow parishioners through the liturgy.

“I just pray to know the special needs of our parishes, and then address those needs,” she says.

All are welcome to serve on the Liturgical Planning Committees for our Families in Faith community. To join the committee at Sacred Heart, please contact Patty Harris at 308-428-5595. To join at St. Michael, please contact Sister Mary Chamberlain at 308-708-1791. Sr. Mary can also be contacted if you are interested in a potential committee at St. Theresa.

## PRAYER CHAIN MINISTRY

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the prayers are truly helpful and it is comforting for people to know they can contact someone via text or email to intercede when they or someone they love needs help. It shows that our parish community is a family whose members really care about one another.”

Over time, the Prayer Chain Ministry has borne forth beautiful fruit for the Kingdom of God — much of which will only be revealed in eternity.

“Throughout the years, we have definitely seen the power of our prayers at work,” Mary K. says. “The more prayers you can send up for someone, the sooner their situation is going to get better. There have been so many responses to our prayers!”

Given that prayer is one of the four essential pillars of stewardship, the Prayer Chain Ministry is a wonderful way to bring the stewardship vision to life.

“People really need our prayers, and they appreciate them,” Darlene says. “When I get a prayer request, I immediately pray Our Fathers and Hail Marys, and sometimes a Rosary. People on the Prayer Chain thank me all the time for contacting them with requests. They are thankful to be part of this ministry, and I feel that doing it is a good stewardship of my time.”

*Those who would like to submit a prayer request or join this beautiful ministry may contact:*

*Sacred Heart — Betty Ondracek, 308-223-0099  
St. Michael — Mary K. Fairbanks, 308-497-2568,  
or Darlene Pfeifer, 308-497-2269  
St. Theresa — Sharon Swett, 308-653-5402*





# THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION: *Returning to the Father*

Those of us who have children know what it's like when they come to us apologetically after having done something they know is wrong. As parents, it melts our hearts, and we can't help but forgive them freely, and take them into our arms – sometimes squeezing them with tears in our eyes! At times, we may even feel closer to them than we did before the event occurred.

This, we can assume, is how God feels, being our most clement Father. In His magnanimous love, He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to redeem the world, freeing it from the haunting grips of sin and death. Christ instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation through His Church to offer sinners forgiveness for the offenses they committed against God.

As the Angelic Doctor St. Thomas Aquinas writes so beautifully, “[The Sacrament of Confession is a] sacrament of healing and a sacrament of conversion, returning us to the Father after we have sinned. In the life of the body a man is sometimes sick, and unless he takes medicine, he will die. Even so in the spiritual life a man is sick on account of sin. For that reason he needs medicine so that he may be

restored to health; and this grace is bestowed in the Sacrament of Penance.”

As far as the details for the reception of this sacrament are concerned, three conditions are necessary – contrition, which is genuine sorrow for sin, together with a purpose of amendment; confession of sins without any omission; and satisfaction by means of good works. Priests are gravely bound to keeping total confidentiality for all confessions they hear.

Church law requires Catholics to confess mortal sins – the most serious kind of sins – to a priest at least once per year, and to confess them before ever receiving Holy Communion, as well. However, this is by far the minimum; Catholics are encouraged to receive the sacrament freely and frequently since it is so extremely beneficial to the health of the mind, soul and spiritual life in general.

To honor the Sacraments is to honor God and the entire Christian community. To receive the Sacraments is to live in God's love and to strengthen our love for each other. Christ, our tenderhearted, Paschal Lamb, awaits us, His beloved children, to come to Him with all of our hearts.

# Meet the Heinz Family

## EMBRACING A POWERFUL LIFE OF PRAYER

There is no doubt about it — prayer is the heart of the Heinz family’s way of life. From attending daily Mass and praying the family Rosary each evening, to going to Confession monthly and adoring Jesus at First Friday Adoration, the Heinz family strives to follow Christ with a beautiful, contemplative spirit. He is their All in All, their King of Kings and Lord of Lords — the One Who makes peace abound in their domestic church and beyond.

Travis and Paula live out their vocation to married life by bringing God’s love to their four children — Elijah, 12; Olivia, 9; Faith, 6; and Sophia, 4.

“Planting the seeds of faith in a child’s soul starts in the home,” Paula says. “The Church says that parents are the ‘first teachers,’ and the earlier you start, the better. We try to show our children the Catholic faith by how we live our lives. This is our greatest act of stewardship. We pray a lot as a family, and receive the sacraments frequently, which fills us with so many graces.”

Travis and Paula have also

chosen to supplement the religious formation of their children on a daily basis with enriching, inspiring Catholic materials.

“Bringing your children to CCD is very important, but parents can also have such a positive influence on their child’s faith formation,” Paula says. “I buy religion texts used in homeschooling courses and I work through them with my children in addition to what they are learning in CCD.”

By honoring their God-given family roles, they find serenity and strength.

“When I was growing up, my mom was able to be at home with us kids, while my dad worked,” Travis says. “I really loved it. I am so glad that my wife and I can do this as well. It may not be able to work this way for everyone, but I am so grateful it has been working for us. Paula is a great stay-at-home mom! She does everything with the kids and prays with them so much. She is the rock of the family. I could never do her job!”

Furthermore, Travis and Paula truly enjoy being an active part of our parish family. As a



*The Heinz family — Travis, Paula, Elijah, Olivia, Faith and Sofia*

member of the Parish Council, Travis has forged bonds of friendship with a number of faithful members of our community.

“I like being on the Parish Council because we all get along well and our meetings are meaningful times of togetherness,” he says. “We enjoy working together to solve problems and help the parish.”

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### *Meet the Heinz Family* continued from page 7

Paula serves as a representative for St. Theresa's for the annual Generations of Faith meal, and is a member of the Altar Society. Furthermore, she is deeply grateful to be a member of the Seven Sisters Ministry, and loves praying for our parish priest one hour a week in front of the Blessed Sacrament. In fact, being a Seven Sister has recently inspired her in a profound way to seek Christ even further.

"Once I started fulfilling the hour-long prayer commitment, I found myself wanting to stay even longer," Paula says. "Even though I had only really pledged to pray for Fr. Antony, I also began desiring to remain after the hour was over to pray for my family, for strangers and for those on the Prayer Chain. I felt that God was speaking to me and saying, 'You need more of Me, now that you see I am here.' I was not expecting this to happen at all. It

was amazing! I feel more and more drawn to embrace the stewardship pillar of prayer."

Naturally, witnessing their parents living their faith with joy and devotion, their children have also followed in their footsteps. Elijah is an altar server, and all four of the children enjoy praying with their mother before the tabernacle, savoring God's presence.

"All of my children regularly experience Eucharistic Adoration, and they often come with me when I pray my hour as a Seven Sister," Paula says. "All of my kids know that Jesus is truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, as well as at Mass. I believe it is so important to instill this love for the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist because there are so many Catholics that don't even believe in Transubstantiation. It is so important for us to share this belief with them when they are young."

### MASS SCHEDULE:

**5 p.m. Saturday** - St. Michael in Spalding | **7 a.m. Sunday** - St. Michael in Spalding  
**9 a.m. Sunday** - Sacred Heart in Greeley | **11 a.m. Sunday** - St. Theresa in Ericson