

SENIORS DINNER BRINGS GENERATIONS TOGETHER

Last year's Seniors Dinner brought back wonderful childhood memories for Paula Heinz as she watched our Spalding Academy students in Pre-K through 12th grades interact with their senior guests.

The dinner Paula experienced last year brought her back to her childhood memories of going to the nursing home in Spalding with her family. "My parents taught me to open my heart," she says. She's reminded of Matthew 25:35-40 that starts out, "When I was hungry..." The dinner experience reminded her of being a little girl, "It made us feel more connected with the older generations. This reminded me about how connections are made. This is where God has told us to serve."

The Senior Dinner is an annual event to host the older members of our Families in Faith Parish at Spalding Academy to connect our youth with the older generations. The students of Spalding Academy serve the seniors to help bridge the gap between the different generations.

"None of the seniors had to get up and get in line with their tray," Paula says. Each of the students got a tray and filled it with a delicious meal and dessert, and served it to them. Many members of the parish came together with the students to provide the homemade meal and dessert.

The dinner was initiated last year because Fr. Antony wanted to let our seniors know they are important to the parish. Father made sure each senior had transportation to the dinner.

"Some have a harder time [getting around] and this was a lot easier for them," Paula says. "It



None of our guests for the seniors dinner had to stand in line for their meals. Our Spalding Academy students got the meals for them, and served them to the seated guests.

SENIORS DINNER BRINGS GENERATIONS TOGETHER *continued from front cover*

brought the kids in to help the older generation, and they had an opportunity to spend time together. They showed their service to the older people, and the older generation has been serving younger people through the years. It was really neat to see.”

Many of the students had grandparents and great-grandparents attending the dinner.

As a smaller community many of the seniors are related to the students. Pictures were taken with three and four generations present. Paula believes that having the students host the seniors in our parish is an excellent way to teach the youngsters about stewardship.

“Our Catholic school is greatly involved in our seniors and community service,” she says. “So this is an added focus for them.”

The Seniors Dinner also helps the students to live a more selfless life.

“By sharing their service to all ages in our community, the students can look back and see how the community has supported them, with sports events, Christmas programs, and other programs,” Paula says. “The older generation rallies around our kids, and I think this shows the kids how to be selfless. In giving back to the older generation, they can provide service to them. The students can have an appreciation for the older generation and what they’ve done for them.”

To transform the society we live in we adults need to take the initiative to educate our younger generations and pass on our faith through discipleship and stewardship from generation to generation!



Our Spalding Academy students serve dinners to their guests, senior members of our parish, during the inaugural seniors dinner last April. Plans are underway for a dinner this spring.



The Shades of Velvet, high school students at Spalding Academy, entertained our dinner guests.

If you would like more information about the dinner, please call the parish office at St. Michael at 308-497-2662.

A Letter From Our Pastor

A NEW YEAR, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

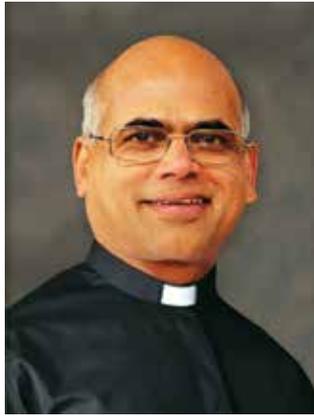
It is a new year, and it is my prayer for all of you – and for me, as well – that we can take new steps on our faith journeys, and seek new ways to live out discipleship and stewardship.

Pope Francis once commented on his perspective of our modern approach to life. He said, “Certainly, possessions, money and power can give a momentary thrill, the illusion of being happy, but they end up possessing us and making us always want more, never satisfied. I have learned that the most important thing is to put on Christ in your life, place your trust in Him, and you will never be disappointed.”

The pope has been called “the world’s parish priest.” As we pray for one another in this New Year, may we all ask the Lord to help us appreciate Pope Francis’ approach to life, his simple way of seeing things, and his very basic way of appreciating things. I would hope that we see this year as a time for opportunity, a time to deepen our relationship to Christ, and for that matter to one another.

If we really wish to change our lives and the lives of others, there are two easy ways to do it. We are blessed with many opportunities in this parish to pray, but as much as it is important for us to take advantage of those, we also need to develop a strong personal prayer life. Recall the young Samuel, who was not quite sure what to do with his life, or what direction to go. When he finally settled on that one important prayer, “Speak, Lord, for I am listening,” Samuel gave us the hint as to what we need to do. Prayer is a two-way street, and part of that is taking the time to listen to God.

The second important way is to exude joy. Christ certainly called us to do that. Pope



Francis has had much to say about joy, as well. The Holy Father says, “Joy cannot be held at heel; it must be let go. Joy is a pilgrim virtue. It is a gift that walks – walks on the path of life, that walks with Jesus... proclaiming joy, lengthens and widens that path.” We must seek that joy and then we need to share it. That is truly our call. Joy translates quite easily into “love your neighbor.”

Yes, there may be challenges ahead in 2017, but we must focus on the opportunities, and then exert the effort to benefit from those opportunities.

I am more and more convinced that as Families in Faith Parish, we need to get back to prayer life. Joy is the result of a deep prayer life. Look at anyone who has a genuine prayer life and how joyful they are. Joy is a manifestation of that interior life!

Whenever we walk into a New Year, we are invited to enter into the unknown. We do not know what events will surprise us along the way. We can only see life for today, but we can risk the road because we have the tremendous assurance that God goes with us on the journey. “Do not fear nor dismayed, for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go.” (Jos 1:9)

As we enter the New Year, we trust God with our lives. We trust that there will be enough strength and beauty amid all the pain to sustain us and to urge us forward in the New Year — 2017.

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Antony Stehlik".

Fr. Antony
Pastor



MAKE A DIFFERENCE RESPECT LIFE

All life is sacred – and as Catholics, we have a responsibility to protect life and educate others about this truth. We must always respect life, from the tiniest unborn lives to the basic well-being of others in our community. As we commemorate the 44th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s Roe vs. Wade decision in January, the Respect Life Ministry here at Families in Faith hopes to give parishioners of all ages an opportunity to get involved in this important cause.

“We are all God’s creation, and it is our job to protect that, no matter what stage of life,” says parishioner Savannah Short.

In the past, the Respect Life Ministry has held “baby showers” – collecting items for expectant mothers and babies – and has organized various pro-life speaking engagements. Ministry members also devote an hour to pray for life at the parish’s 24-hour adoration each month.

In addition to action and prayer, education is an important aspect of the respect life cause. The ministry hopes to be able to reach the youth of our parish, who are at a critical point in their spiritual formation.

“Kids can be led in so many different directions, so I think it’s important to get out there and educate these kids,” says parishioner Shirley Glaser. “There can be such

pressure out there, and they can get caught up with that. There is so much education that needs to be given.”

And as Savannah notes, since young people are the future of the Church, they must “own it” and be aware of what is happening.

“If they are educated, they can be involved,” she says. “And if they are involved, they’ll be surprised at what they find.”

“I am a teacher, and when I have taught at Catholic schools, I do a spiritual adoption program, which was created by [Venerable] Fulton Sheen,” Savannah continues. “I let the kids name an unborn baby, and we make crafts with the name, make prayer cards, and go month-by-month and talk about how the baby is developing. At the end of the year, we have a birthday party for the baby. This way, they are aware of what is happening at every stage of development. I have really seen it make an impression on them.”

This year, through the ministry, Shirley hopes to bring high school seniors to Lincoln in order to pray in front of an abortion clinic.

“I think that high school kids should really be aware of these things,” she says. “You can talk about it and pray about it, but I think that seeing the place would really make an impression on them. We’re killing our population, and God doesn’t want this. It’s

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— Savannah Short

CE THROUGH THE E MINISTRY

against everything we stand for. You don't know what these babies could grow up to be, or do.

"We also need to support the parents," Shirley continues. "I remember when I was young, and one of my classmates had a baby out of wedlock. She was shunned by a lot of people, and she was all alone. It was really hard for her to raise that baby by herself. We really need to support those moms, and remind them that no matter how it happened, this baby is a gift from God."

In the future, Savannah would like to see more educational events organized through the ministry, on a variety of topics. The more people understand about today's life-related issues, the better they can fight for these causes.

"We need to get involved in different things, and to educate ourselves," Savannah says. "For example, the death penalty seems to be a common discussion here, since our state didn't have it and then it came back. There are a lot of people in our community who don't know how we are supposed to be debating that issue. I think it would be really good to get educated on how the Church sees it.

Another important issue to discuss is contraception.

"I think a lot of Catholics don't understand [the Church's teaching]," Savannah says. "I got married in April, and I am expecting a baby in March. Before we got married, we learned Natural Family Planning [NFP], and it has really taught us how to be open to life. It has also taught us how to fix certain things

that 10 years ago I would have thought were impossible. There are different things you can do with NFP that can help medical conditions, so that you don't need to use artificial birth control. I think it is very empowering for women to learn about their fertility and how their body works – there is a lot that I know about myself now that I didn't know before!"

Five years ago, Savannah was able to attend the March for Life in Washington, D.C. She would love to see the ministry organize a group to attend the march.

"The Lincoln Diocese was looking for an adult to go with their group, and so I got to go!" she says. "We were there for three days, and it was amazing. I don't even know how to describe it.

"This is the town I grew up in, and I just moved back here," Savannah continues. "If the ministry got a group together to do the March for Life, I would definitely want to do that again."



In 2017, the Respect Life Ministry is hoping to bring parishioners to a greater understanding of these important life issues, and to inspire action in our community. If you would like to be involved in the ministry as either a planner or a participant, please contact Shirley Glaser at 308-223-9668 or sglaser@gpcom.net.

STEWARDSHIP OF TREASURE

GIVING TO GOD FIRST

Have you ever wondered why no one really becomes uneasy when someone brings up the first two “Ts” of stewardship – giving of your time or talents – but when the third “T” comes up, many of us become uncomfortable?

That third “T” is treasure, and some people simply become so annoyed by the subject, they tune out the words from the pulpit.

Why is there seemingly such an adverse reaction?

Our finances are such a personal subject. Discussing money issues with others is not easy, and having someone tell us what to do with our finances is even worse. We earn the money, after all. So shouldn't we decide what to do with it?

Of course, the answer is “yes” – we decide every day how to spend our hard-earned dollars. Indeed, the monetary choices we make will either keep our finances in check, or put us into the red. The average American family has about \$7,000 in credit card debt – so finances certainly represent a challenge to our current society. Tight budgets, trying to “keep up with the Joneses” or poor financial



management may be to blame for our tight resources. Does this mean we do not have anything left over for God?

Stewardship, at its roots, teaches that we are not supposed to give God our “leftovers.” We should instead strive to **return** to God a portion of our “first fruits” – giving to God first and then using the rest for our other needs. God gave us our talents that help us earn a living, after all. He should come first.

This idea can be worrisome for many. If our finances are already strained, how will we ever find enough to give back to God? Or, if we do try to give

God our “first fruits,” will there be enough left over to cover our required expenses?

Taking the correct financial steps toward good stewardship simply boils down to trust – believing that God, who takes care of all of His creation, will take care of us. Trust that in giving to God first, we are both acknowledging that our multitude of blessings come from Him, and that we are thankful He chose to give them to us. And finally, trust that if we give to Him first, that all else will fall into place – because He is in ultimate control.

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“THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GIVING BACK AND CONNECTION”

RICK AND NANCY ESCH

For Rick and Nancy Esch, lifelong Catholics and members of St. Michael’s for over 20 years, stewardship connected them with other members of the parish community in a rich way.

“There is a direct relationship between giving back and connection,” Nancy says. “The more you give back, the more connection you receive, and for me, that is a great feeling.”

Rick and Nancy were married in 1992 and joined St. Michael’s, Rick’s parish and the church where he was baptized.

“We discussed our religious backgrounds while dating,” Nancy says. “Sharing the same religious beliefs is, of course, a positive in any relationship.”

Before joining St. Michael’s, Nancy had been a member of St. Ann’s in Giltner, Neb., where women automatically became members of St. Ann’s Altar Society.

At St. Michael’s, Nancy observed the women are active in the Altar Society as they helped with funerals, fundraisers and church cleanings, among other things. She wondered why she hadn’t been contacted.

“My advice about how to become more involved in the parish would be simply to ask,” Nancy says. “After a year or so, I mentioned to my mother-in-law that I hadn’t been contacted, and the next week I was a member!”

One way that Nancy and Rick are currently involved in parish life is through working with others to maintain and landscape the parish playground and grotto. Throughout the year, they spray and pull weeds, trim branches and overgrowth, paint, fertilize plants and trees, and add gravel to the playground as needed.

They’d encourage others to embrace a sense of ownership for our parish.

“If you see something that needs fixed or improved, don’t walk away from it,” Nancy says.



Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto



The Esch family – (from left) Rick, David, Anna, Maddie and Nancy; (front) Michelle

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“We noticed areas of concern and then began a plan to change those areas.”

Getting involved in parish life leads to connecting with others, and it also gives our children an example to follow.

“Anything that parents can do that is positive for their parish and community is a lifelong gift to their children,” Nancy says. “Stewardship becomes a natural part of their lives, and positive growth is awesome.”

One of the most important things for the Esch family is what giving back does for their four children – Anna, 21; Maddie, 18; David, 15; and Michelle, 8. The three older kids have all served as altar servers and given hours of volunteer service as students through Spalding

Academy. Anna has also participated in several mission trips and helped with, as well as led, two fundraising activities.

“Maddie designed the shamrock and cross, and painted it on the sidewalk approaching the steps of Spalding Academy,” Nancy says. “She also painted the Mary statue, benches and cross in the grotto. Michelle helps by bringing water to the volunteers in the grotto and playground area during the summer.”

Rick and Nancy would like to thank all the members of the parish for being a part of their lives and their stewardship journeys.

“Thank you so much for helping Rick and I raise our children in a wonderful faith community!” Nancy says.

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*