

“A BLESSING AND AN EMBRACE”

The Prayer Shawl Ministry

Do you feel like it's about time you got a really good "hug" from God?

If you do, you aren't alone. Many people feel that way, and that's where our parish's Prayer Shawl Ministry comes in.

"People really, really appreciate the shawls that we make for them," Coordinator of the Prayer Shawl Ministry Marlynn Scheef says. "Each shawl is supposed to represent a 'hug' from God. When you put a shawl around your legs, it signifies God giving you a blessing and an embrace. We usually send a card with the shawl, as well as prayers along with it, too. Some people have had wonderful experiences with it. One of my friends had stage 4 cancer, and I gave her a shawl after she had been in treatment for awhile, and it meant so much to her."

The Prayer Shawl Ministry not only provides a fantastic way to spread the love of God to those who need it most, but it also allows people to use their talents in a creative way that blesses others. The ministry usually meets once or twice a month, on Tuesday or Wednesday at 1 or 2 p.m. in the American Legion Hall. The ministry was founded by Marlynn many years ago, and since then has been a beautiful success. At this time, about 13 ladies are part of the group.



Gathering at the nursing home, with some of the residents stopping by to visit.

"My sister was involved in a prayer shawl ministry in Colorado, and she would tell me about it," Marlynn says. "I was kind of interested, and although I didn't know how to knit or crochet, I still felt like I could start a group. There were some ladies at our parish who were extremely talented at knitting and crocheting, and they were willing to help me learn. Now I can crochet up a storm! I find making the shawls so relaxing and rewarding."

One of the most beautiful aspects of our Catholic faith is that prayer can take on many

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forms. From a well-recited Rosary, to precious silent moments in adoration, to knitting a Prayer Shawl, a person can commune with God in heartfelt ways.

"We pray for the person who will receive the shawl as we are knitting it," Marlynn says. "I get goosebumps when the person who receives the shawl thanks me numerous times for it. Then I know the shawl has done what the ministry intends it to do – give the person a 'hug' from God."

Furthermore, members who give their time and talent to the ministry find themselves blessed in return.

"When we meet, we are as sisters in Christ, working for a good cause together," Marlynn says. "Some of the ladies I am in the group with now, I knew for many years before they joined, but I never really had a chance to visit with them. Now, I think so much of them and know them so well. The Prayer Shawl Ministry is an awesome way for us ladies to get together and bring happiness to others."

Clearly, God is guiding this ministry and its members every step of the way as they prayerfully serve those who need a special touch of His grace.

"It seems like God guides me, and His timing is amazing!" Marlynn says. "When it is the appropriate time for a person to receive a shawl, I feel led to give it to them. I love what the shawls do for people! Being part of this ministry has really built up my faith, and I am a strong believer in God. Through our hands, we are able to bring God into people's lives, especially those who are sick or have had a tragedy in their lives. This ministry reaffirms our belief that God is with all of us through the good times and the bad."

After each shawl is completed, Marlynn puts ribbons on it and has it blessed by our parish priest. The ministry usually hears by word of mouth about those who may need a shawl, or by receiving requests.

"We would absolutely love more members!" Marlynn says. "Those who do not know how to knit or crochet are welcome to come and learn."



Fulfilling a need for comfort.



Despite the seriousness of our group's endeavors, the ladies say they enjoy the camaraderie, good humor and fun.

Those who are interested in joining the ministry or donating yarn to it may email Marlynn Scheef at scheef7@gmail.com or call her at 308-223-9743.

A Letter From Our Pastor

GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR THE GIFT OF TIME

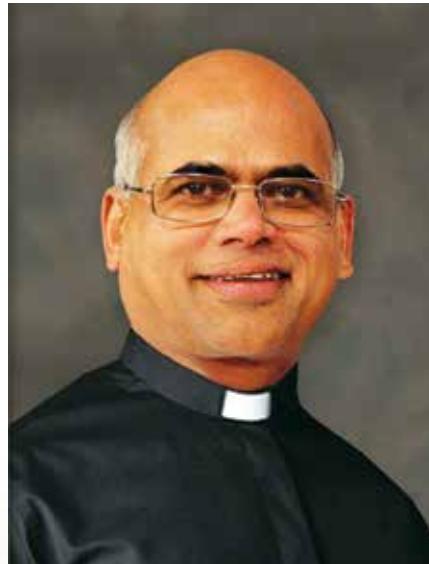
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The next several weeks are certainly a busy time for us as Catholics, good stewards, good citizens, and faithful members of the Church and our parish. There are celebrations and commemorations both inside and outside the Church that are momentous in terms of faith, citizenship, and living as people of thanksgiving and gratitude.

We celebrate Veterans Day to honor and thank all those men and women who served in the United States Armed Forces in one capacity or another. Indicative of the importance of this day, every year at 11 a.m. Eastern, the President of the United States lays a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

On Sunday, Nov. 20, we culminate the Jubilee Year of Mercy on the Feast of Christ the King. In this Jubilee Year, our Holy Father Pope Francis has invited us to love, be kind, be generous, and to forgive boundlessly. How have we done? We all understand this is what we are supposed to be doing every day and every year, but this year reminds us of that, and hopefully renews us all in that reality and that hope.

We all understand that Americans celebrate a day of Thanksgiving on Nov. 24. What more can we say about this? It is a day that was faith-based from its very beginnings, and it is an indication of how much we have to thank God for in terms of the gifts we have received — our lives, our families, our Church, our Lord and Savior — everything we are and everything we have.



No sooner are Thanksgiving Day celebrations concluded, than we begin that glorious season called Advent on Sunday, Nov. 27. This prepares us for and leads to Christmas. Indeed, this is both a busy and extraordinary time of year! There is, of course, much more on which we could focus and about which we could think, meditate and pray, but that is more than enough for us to consider and absorb.

From a stewardship perspective, I would like you to not only participate and focus on all the particular things that are about to happen, but also on one of our special gifts — the gift of time. The gift of time, which we all receive from God in equal amount, is precious because it is a non-renewable resource. Although some of our time is committed because of family responsibilities, work responsibilities or simply personal needs, we have an element of freewill with how we spend a certain amount of it. We need to spend some of that time in prayer, in thanksgiving, in worship, and in works of mercy and ministry. Our time is perhaps more precious than any material gifts we receive from the Lord. How are we doing with that gift?

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

Fr. Antony
Pastor

"ASK GOD How

Sometimes we encounter God in the “usual” places, at Mass, in prayer, or when reading His Word. And sometimes, He shows up in a place we least expect.

This past July, four adults – including Fr. Antony – and eight students from the Families in Faith, traveled to Chicago to work with the Missionaries of Charity, serving the poor.

Julie Landgren, who has served with the Confirmation program at St. Theresa Parish for the past 10 years, was one of the adults who went on the trip. Although she was initially hesitant, she felt that God was calling her, and she said “yes.”

“When I signed up to do this, I thought, ‘This would be a great service project for these kids, I’ll go with them,’ ” Julie says. “I have to be honest though – when I saw a homeless person, I was judgmental. So before we went, I spent a lot of time praying and telling God, ‘I don’t like the feelings I have when I see a homeless person, I need your grace to help me be compassionate.’ ”

The group drove out to Chicago on Monday, July 11, and returned home Thursday, July 14. They stayed with the Missionaries of Charity. Together they served meals at a homeless shelter and delivered meals to the homeless living in various places around the city. They also helped the Missionaries of Charity with their summer youth program.

It wasn’t long after arriving, that God started showing up in surprising ways.

Julie, a cosmetologist who has a local salon, assumed that she would be serving food with the students and other volunteers, but plans changed when she arrived.

“[Someone] asked, ‘Is there anybody in the group who knows how to cut hair?’ ” Julie says. “And I said, ‘I do. I came to serve – I’ll do whatever I need to do.’ ”

They set up a simple station, with a folding chair and a pair of clippers, and people lined up for haircuts.

“The first man sat down and I was behind him



Those on the mission trip had an opportunity to work with the Missionaries of Charity at their summer youth program.

and I didn’t really look at him, just asked what he wanted,” Julie says.

Upon finishing his haircut, she walked around to face him for the first time, to check the cut. And then it happened.

“When I looked into his eyes, Jesus’ face appeared and in my heart, I heard ‘thank you for helping me,’ and then (Jesus’) face went away, and it was this man, and he was smiling at me,” Julie says. “And I was in tears. I actually saw Jesus’ face in this man’s face.”

She admits that, had she known ahead of time that she would be cutting hair, she might not have agreed to do it, but in the moment, the Holy Spirit gave her the grace to say “yes,” and then God showed up in an amazing way.

“I believe that Mother Teresa interceded for me, because I asked that I would be able to see Jesus in the homeless, like she did, and every one of my prayers were answered,” Julie says. “I truly believe that Scripture came alive for me, where it says, whatever you do for the least of my brothers, you do unto me. When we are helping people less fortunate than us, we are serving Jesus.”



“He Wants You to Serve”

As with many who serve in this way, Julie found that God more than rewarded the sacrifices she made.

“As stewards, I think time is our most valuable gift,” she says. “I spent time preparing in prayer, I spent a week away from my family, and I think God really blessed me for giving my time.”

The group also experienced many blessings from being able to spend time with the Missionaries of Charity. They slept on the same meager cots as the sisters and rose before 5 a.m. each morning to join the sisters in prayer.

“The prayerfulness and the joy that those women have, it’s unbelievable – it just radiates from them,” Julie says. “That is where we got our strength, from time in prayer, in front of the Blessed Sacrament.”

Between the examples of the Missionaries of Charity, and the homeless people they encountered, those who attended the trip were overwhelmed with gratitude, as well as the beauty of simplicity.

“It was amazing to see how joyful they were, even though they had nothing,” Julie says. “The material things that we have don’t bring us the peace and the joy that only Christ can give you. I realized that I need to simplify my life, because it’s not stuff of this world that makes us happy.”

For Julie, although the trip itself only lasted four days, the lessons she gained from it will stay with her for a lifetime.

“Now when I see a homeless person, I have a feeling of compassion and I want to find ways to help,” she says. “Everyone has a story. I’m more willing to serve because I think we truly are serving Jesus when we help those who are less fortunate. My heart really got changed throughout the whole process.

“I helped that person for that day, but for the rest of my life, I will remember the face of Jesus in that man,” Julie adds. “And I realize, when I help others, I’m being the hands and feet of Christ. Mother Teresa said, ‘If you are busy

judging people, you have no time to love them.’ That really hit me, because I was judgmental before I experienced all of this.”

Julie also learned an important lesson in bringing the broken parts of our hearts to the Lord, and asking Him to heal them, as she did with her struggle with homeless people.

“I think if people knew, you can take anything to our Lord, no matter how broken, and say, I need your help and He will help you,” Julie says.

She encourages other parishioners to find ways to step out and become involved in service, even if it’s just within the parish or local community.

“It doesn’t have to be a big thing,” Julie says. “Step out of your comfort zone and welcome somebody in. If it’s somebody new at the church, smile and say, ‘I’m glad you’re here.’ Just in those little things, we’re serving Christ.”

“Spend time in prayer and ask God how he wants you to serve and He will show you,” she adds. “If we give of our time to serve and pray and give our heart, you receive so much more than you give.”

For young people hoping to find ways to become involved in local service or upcoming mission trips, please contact your parish directly:

Maria Glaser (DRE – St. Michael Parish) –

402-740-4798 or stmichael.dre@gmail.com

Jaci Palmer (DRE at St. Theresa Parish) –

308-201-0341 or jacipalmer@hotmail.com

Angie Erikson (DRE at Sacred Heart Parish) –

785-410-7285 or erikson.angela@yahoo.com



Got Talent? Bring It to the SPOTLIGHT!

The word “talent” often conjures up images of stage performers in the spotlight, captivating awestruck audiences with their impeccable musical or acting skills.

While these talented performers are certainly deserving of applause, the majority of the population sits hidden in the shadows, staring on in amazement while feeling overlooked — and perhaps wishing to possess such talents themselves. But even when we feel overlooked and untalented, God knows better. As Christians, we are all called to dig deep and trust that we are specially blessed with valuable talents and abilities, even if our talents aren’t so obvious or don’t garner applause and accolades.

Along with “time” and “treasure,” “talent” is one of the “three Ts” of stewardship. Exploring our natural inclinations and preferences, especially when guided by

the intricacies of our unique personalities, can unearth God-given talents.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit,” writes St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians. “There are different forms of service, but the same Lord.”

Some people have the gift of working peacefully with children. Equipped with patience and gentleness, they are able to guide young souls to the Lord. Yet, others shudder at the thought of a classroom full of 5-year-olds, and instead seek the quiet solace of behind-the-scenes tasks — cleaning the church, sewing altar cloths or stuffing envelopes.

Our interests and abilities are varied, and our volunteer options are endless, as we are called to give our talents back to God in loving service. Examine your heart and prayerfully discern your gifts, then direct those gifts towards serving the people of God.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr., author of *Life’s Little Instruction Book*, once said, “Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if it is going to be forwards, backwards, or sideways.”

If our gifts of talent are not guided by the discipline of prayer, just like an octopus on roller skates, we will get nowhere fast! Yet, if we keep our eyes on the goal of heaven and serve the Lord with joyfulness, our efforts will produce a bountiful harvest. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”

The next time you sit quietly in the shadows behind a glaring stage spotlight, rest assured that your talents are no less impressive in the eyes of God, and will always be “applauded” when directed to the service of His people.

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THE PARISH ENVIRONMENT

An Invitation to the Prayer of the Season

Everything we do at Mass holds meaning. Everything.

From the Introductory Rites, which gather the community to worship, to the Concluding Rites, when we are sent forth to go and serve the Lord, every response and prayer is full of meaning and tradition. Sitting, standing and kneeling play a role – in sitting, we are waiting to hear Sacred Scripture; in standing, we are following the proper posture of praying that has been used since before the time of Christ; and when kneeling, we are demonstrating the most reverential form of respect by surrendering our very selves to God. And if you’re wondering about the role of the church environment, just ask parishioner Theresé Cockerill, who works behind the scenes at St. Michael’s to decorate with flowers, color and symbolism to call attention to the different liturgical seasons of our faith.

“Preparing the church environment is another way to bring Christ in our life in an artistic way so as to grab our attention when the liturgical seasons change,” Theresé says. “So, whether we use a bed of sand during Lent to remind us of Christ’s journey through the desert, a Bethlehem scene during Advent or banners during Ordinary Time, the environment is meant to enhance the Mass experience and to invite us to enter into the season.”

Indeed, how we set up the church is an invitation to actively respond to our faith. Sometimes the reaction is internal, such as when the décor or art inspires us to think, reflect and pray, but sometimes the response is external, such as when we are invited to become part of the environment through a ritual or action.

One example of this is the annual Advent Peace Tree, which Theresé says is “one of her favorite activities” as part of the parish environment ministry. Each week during Advent, parishioners are invited to write and offer prayer intentions on purple or pink cards. These cards are then collected and placed on the altar during



Mass, offering those intentions to God. After Mass, they are then placed on the Advent Peace Tree.

“By the end of Advent, we have a beautiful tree – decorated with purple and pink – which not only reflects the season of Advent, but one that means all the more because we all helped decorate it.”

Theresé says that she loves decorating, but has learned that art environment is never a “finished” design – that it changes or is adapted as new ideas are thought of and then implemented. The different priests through the years who have been assigned to our parish have also added their own touches to the church environment – Fr. Frank who was the first priest Theresé worked with, Fr. Joe who inspired the Advent wreath wheel and loved candles (the more, the better), Fr. Don who started the tradition of the Advent Tree, Fr. Matt who wanted the bed of sand, and it was Fr. Antony who introduced the idea of moving the Bethlehem scene to the front of the altar. And because the seasons are ever changing, Theresé is always planning ahead.

“I was just thinking the other day that tumbleweeds would work well with the desert theme during Lent, but I will have to go out and gather them now because they won’t be around in the springtime,” Theresé says. “Also, since the interior of our church is large, we have to scale

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FAMILIES IN FAITH

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accordingly. I can't use 12-inch wreaths because they will be lost in the space, so when Hobby Lobby has a buy-one-get-one-free offer for 36-inch wreaths, I'll stock up on those."

Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time. Theresé – who usually has help from her daughter, Tara, and anyone else she can talk into helping – has each season covered. And she has to only think back of the period following the church fire to realize how important the environment is to our faith.

"During those 18 months when we celebrated Mass in the school gym, a lot of work went on behind the scenes to transform the gym into a place of worship," Theresé says. "We did whatever we could to make the surroundings recognizable

as a church and familiar as a place of worship."

Ultimately, a tradition is a wonderful thing, a time-honored practice that connects the past to the present. It is both something to hold on to, as well as something to look forward to – and as Catholics, we are blessed with the richness of our faith that offers so many beautiful traditions that reflect the different liturgical seasons of the Church. This month, as we approach the Advent and Christmas seasons, we will again celebrate those traditions that bring us together as a faith community, and we appreciate Theresé, who works quietly working behind the scenes to transform our church to reflect the liturgical seasons of our faith, thereby inviting all of us to enter into the prayer of the season.

*If you are interested in helping decorate the church, please contact
Theresé Cockerill at 308-497-2557 (home) or 308-850-1000 (cell)*

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