

PARISHIONER SKYLER NEKOLICZAK REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY “HOME” THROUGH THE RCIA PROCESS

When Skyler Nekoliczak first met her husband, Trent, she not only encountered the love of her life, but she also came into touch with the One, True, Catholic, and Apostolic Church that was calling her soul to come home.

“My mom and dad were Methodists, and they went to church every now and then,” she says. “I was baptized as a baby in a Methodist church. When my sister and I got older, we started going more regularly. Then, when I started dating Trent, I knew I wanted to share the same faith with him, and he was Catholic, so I decided to become Catholic, as well.”

Skyler began the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) process in 2016 and received the Sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation on Easter in 2017. Over time, she came to know Trent’s loving Catholic family, who helped her on her faith journey in wonderful ways.



Skyler and Trent Nekoliczak with their daughter, Blaikely, and Fr. Antony, 2017

“Before we got married, I saw how close his family was and how close his parents’ relationship was,” she says. “They explained how grateful they were for their faith and how it made them better parents. Trent’s mother, Jackie, was my RCIA sponsor. She is so awesome! His father, Tom, came to my classes every week, as well. Trent’s family is such a big, awesome Catholic family, and they gave me a great example of what it means to live a good Catholic life.”

By opening her heart to all of the graces of the RCIA process and receiving the love that our parish family had to offer her, Skyler’s

“cup” was filled and she grew closer to Christ and His Church in amazing ways.

“In addition to Tom and Jackie, Patty Harris (who coordinates the RCIA classes), Fr. Antony and other devout Catholic couples came to the



ENTERING INTO LENT

How We Can Make the Most of this

SOLEMN, SACRED SEASON

How might we make the most of this solemn, sacred season? There are three main aspects to Lent in which the Church asks us to engage — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. We don't need to take on many things in order to make this season worthwhile, but it is important to consider how we might deepen our faith lives during this time of year.

Perhaps we might be inspired to take each aspect of Lent to heart, and pick something we can do within each category, so to speak, in order to truly enter into this sacred season. Each one — prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, provides us an opportunity to grow spiritually and prepare for Easter.

Prayer

Let us start with prayer. In order to grow our personal and communal prayer lives, we need not spend the entire day in the chapel. Rather, perhaps consider adding one new devotion to your prayer life.

For example, if you aren't already spending time each day in prayer, maybe it's time to start spending five minutes each morning with the Lord while enjoying your breakfast and coffee. If you usually start your day by opening your computer and phone to check messages and emails, start instead with a morning prayer or Scripture, offering your day up for the Lord and whatever may come. If you already have a regular prayer routine, perhaps you might consider adding a daily Divine Mercy chaplet at 3 p.m. during the hour of mercy, or a family Rosary after supper cleanup.

Fasting

While we often think of food when it comes to fasting, there are other ways we can fast during Lent. Fasting means abstaining from something in order to grow spiritually. This could mean giving up Facebook or cutting down on internet use. Perhaps you might consider fasting from watching your favorite TV series and instead watch daily Mass. Another idea of fasting is giving up takeout or delivery and instead using that extra money to give to the poor.

Almsgiving

Giving alms may be the less obvious of the three but is no less important for growing spiritually. Giving alms can mean a number of things. Perhaps this means giving a bit of extra money to charity during these 40 days. It might also mean visiting with a grieving friend, listening, and helping out those in need. You might also consider stepping out and helping in a new capacity, whether in a new ministry or volunteer effort.

Lent affords us a wonderful opportunity to renew our spiritual lives. While it may not always seem so easy, it is necessary to use this time to prepare our hearts and lives for Easter. We might be tempted to simply look ahead to the joy of Easter without considering the sacrifice of Lent, but in that way, we would be missing out on the chance to grow, learn, give, and pray. We cannot have the Resurrection without the Cross. Lent is a reminder not to be filled with sadness and dread over our sacrifices, but to take up practices that help us engage in our spiritual lives, purify ourselves with God's help and rejoice when Easter comes around.

A Letter From Our Pastor

THE *Joy* OF LENT

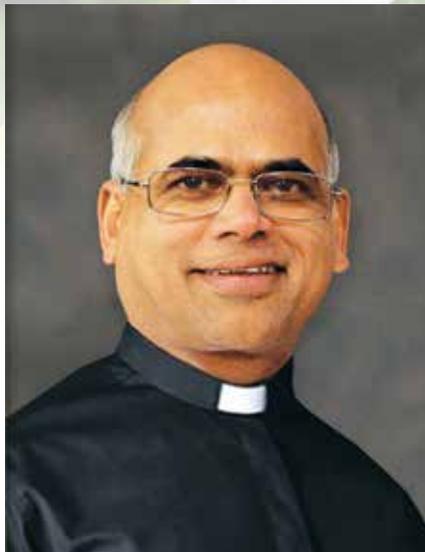
Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Have you ever thought about the joy in sacrifice that Lent provides? Most of us don't delight in sacrifice; in fact, in our daily lives, we often do our best to avoid challenges and practices that push us outside of our comfort zones.

In Christianity, there is a beautiful irony between joy and sacrifice, and we are presented with a wonderful opportunity to embrace this uniquely during Lent. In one of his Lenten messages, Pope Francis shared, "Lent is a fitting time for self-denial; we would do well to ask ourselves what we can give up in order to help and enrich others by our own poverty."

While giving up sweets in favor of healthy snacks for Lent is a common and noble endeavor, the goal of Lent should not only be a spiritual excuse to lose weight! In choosing acts of self-denial, we are saying "no" to things in order to get into the practice of saying "no" when inclined towards sin, ultimately deepening our faith and our relationship with the Lord. Victory can be found when we deny ourselves and pick up our crosses and hardships in order to grow closer to Christ!

Therein lies the joy. When we grow closer to God by denying our will, we say "yes" to a life of abundance with Him. Our God is a benevolent God; He will not hold back His grace from those



who honor Him and choose challenging things to grow and give Him glory. Christ even tells us Himself, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Without question, Lent is a time for conscious penitence and spiritual preparation for Easter. And it is important to remember that God loves us whether we make Lenten changes or not. At the same time, Lent provides us an opportunity to make God a greater part of our life, and to take our faith to new levels.

Stewardship is a God-centered way of life — a spiritual way of living that, above all, acknowledges God's presence in all we do.

Lent is a time for every one of us to do more than simply deny ourselves; we need to welcome God into our lives in greater ways so that when we get to Holy Week and Easter, we have an even greater appreciation for the sacrifice the Lord made for us. Talk about pure joy!

May you and your loved ones enjoy a holy and joyous Lenten journey.

Sincerely yours in Christ and His Mother,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Antony Hehler". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Antony
Pastor

CHURCH ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY

Reflecting Each Liturgical Season and

Every year, the decorations around St. Michael's Catholic Church change to reflect the liturgical seasons. Parishioner Theresé Cockerill has been the primary person behind the seasonal decorations — now, she is gathering a group of people to help brainstorm ideas and put time in towards decorating the church.

“Over 20 years ago, I was asked by the pastor at the time to help out with decorating St. Michael's for Advent,” Theresé says. “We have a big church, so creating a prayerful setting to acknowledge the liturgical seasons and foster a place of prayer has been a joy and a challenge to work on each year.”

Although Christmas and Easter require the biggest decoration efforts, Theresé and the members of the Church Environment Ministry hang quilted banners up for Ordinary Time, Advent, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. These banners were created over the years by Rosie (Glassmaker) Glaser and are reflective of the colors of the liturgical seasons — green, red, purple, and white.

“You cannot decorate a large church with small things,” Theresé says. “We are blessed Rosie has taken the time to create these quilted banners for us because we are able to use them year after year.”

Finding inspiration to put together the

“Many hands make these transformations easier and more beautiful. We make every effort to create an atmosphere where parishioners can respect where they are and appreciate the beauty of our church — where each individual is able to more fully enter into the celebration of the Mass and the wonder of the liturgical seasons.” — Theresé Cockerill



Creating a Prayerful Setting for Our Worship

different displays comes from dialogue with the pastor and observing other parishes.

“I am always very observant of other churches when I travel,” Theresé says. “When I see a great idea, I am able to bring that idea back to St. Michael’s and tweak it to fit our sanctuary. Each pastor over the years has their own visions. Sometimes, he will bring something up to me as a project he wants accomplished. Other times, I will bring my ideas to him and get his approval.”

Recently, the Church Environment Ministry decorated for Advent and Christmas. This included wrapping three trees outside on the west side with purple lights and one with pink, and lighting them according to the Sundays of Advent. All four were also wrapped in white lights, and once we celebrated Christmas, the white lights were lit up. It was a small way to

bring the liturgical seasons beyond the walls of the church and share the anticipation and joy of these seasons with the community.

This Lent and Easter, Theresé wants to create an environment that reflects the reason for parishioners’ preparation — Jesus’s Paschal Mystery. Lent includes purple decorations but also is meant to evoke the desolation of the desert during these 40 days. However, once we arrive at Easter, the church will be transformed for the beauty of Christ’s Resurrection.

“Many hands make these transformations easier and more beautiful,” Theresé says. “We make every effort to create an atmosphere where parishioners can respect where they are and appreciate the beauty of our church — where each individual is able to more fully enter into the celebration of the Mass and the wonder of the liturgical seasons.”



The Church Environment Ministry will soon be transforming our sanctuary for Easter. If you would like to help with this or other decorating efforts, please reach out to Theresé Cockerill at tacockerill@gmail.com.

THE STORY OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

The Feast of the Annunciation, now recognized as a solemnity, is one of the most important in the Church calendar. First, it celebrates the actual Incarnation of Our Savior — the Word made flesh in the womb of His mother, Mary. Second, it is a principal Marian feast. Two other feasts honoring Our Lord's mother, the Assumption (Aug. 15), and the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), are celebrated as Holy Days of Obligation in the United States. New Year's Day, Jan. 1, is observed as a Solemnity of Mary.



The feast of the Annunciation was first celebrated around the fifth century. It is the reason why we celebrate Christmas on December 25. Christmas comes exactly nine months after the Archangel Gabriel invited the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God, an event we commemorate on March 25.

The biblical account of the Annunciation is in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke, which describes the news given to Mary that she was to become the mother of the Incarnation of God, records the “angelic salutation” of Gabriel to Mary, “Hail, thou who art highly favored. The Lord is with thee” (this is the origin of the repeated “Hail Mary” prayer of the Rosary) and Mary’s response to God’s will, “Let it be done to me according to thy word.”

Her exultant hymn, the Magnificat, found in Luke 1:46-55, has been part of the Church’s Liturgy of the Hours, at Vespers (evening prayer), and has been repeated nightly in churches, convents, and monasteries for many centuries.

On this special day, we reflect upon the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Virgin Mary as the antecedent to the explosion of joy, caroling, gift-giving, eating, drinking, love, and family unity that surrounds the birth of the

Savior. With the incarnation, God has become one of us. From all eternity God had decided that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity should become human. Now, as Luke 1:26-38 tells us, the decision is being realized. The God-Man embraces all humanity, indeed all creation, to bring it to God in one great act of love. Because human beings have rejected God, Jesus will accept a life of suffering and an agonizing death: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

Mary has an important role to play in God’s plan. From all eternity, God destined her to be the mother of Jesus and closely related to Him in the creation and redemption of the world. We could say that God’s decrees of creation and redemption are joined in the decree of Incarnation. Because Mary is God’s instrument in the Incarnation, she has a role to play with Jesus in creation and redemption. It is a God-given role. It is God’s grace from beginning to end. Mary becomes the eminent figure she is only by God’s grace. She is the empty space where God could act. Everything she is she owes to the Trinity.

Together with Jesus, the privileged and graced Mary is the link between heaven and earth. She is the human being who best, after Jesus, exemplifies the possibilities of human existence. She received into her lowliness the infinite love of God. She shows how an ordinary human being can reflect God in the ordinary circumstances of life. She exemplifies what the Church and every member of the Church is meant to become. She is the ultimate product of the creative and redemptive power of God. She manifests what the Incarnation is meant to accomplish for all of us.

LECTORS PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS AND DRAW ALL OF US CLOSER TO THE LORD

We are all called to share the Good News of the Gospel and Bible in our daily lives and actions. And within our own parishes, there is a special way of sharing the Word of the Lord with others. Lectors within the parish proclaim the Word of God for all to hear.

Julie Landgren is one of the lectors at St. Theresa's Parish. For her, being a lector is about more than just standing up and reading the words from the Bible.

"The way I go about being a lector is that I ask the Holy Spirit to work through me," Julie says. "I pray that He uses me as an instrument so that others can truly hear God's Word."

Being a lector is a simple way to be a part of the Mass and serve others.

"The way I go about being a lector is that I ask the Holy Spirit to work through me. I pray that He uses me as an instrument so that others can truly hear God's Word."

— Julie Landgren

Pauline Marker is a lector at St. Theresa's and also coordinates the ministry. For her, participating in this ministry for the last 10 years has truly impacted her faith

"For me, I have never had the feeling that I could contribute with singing," Pauline says. "So when I found out that I could be a lector, I felt like that was something I could do. In the last few years, I haven't been able to be active with some of the other groups, but being a lector is one way that I can fulfill my desire to serve the parish."

The parishes have Youth Ministry Masses each month, during which children serve all of the roles within the liturgy, including proclaiming the readings.

"It is fun to see how eager these kids are to be a part of the Mass," Julie says. "My



Anslee Wright has served as a youth lector.

granddaughter, Anslee, was a lector one weekend. I prayed over her to have courage when she read. She said, 'I was so nervous before, but when I got up there, I was not nervous at all!' She also told me how meaningful that Mass was to her."

When we are involved in the roles of the Mass, it can help us be more active and engaged in the liturgy. We experience the Mass in a different way and take responsibility for the liturgy more than when we simply sit in the pews. Being a lector is one way to help others hear the Word of God and live lives of holiness.

"If you go in with the mindset that you are being used by God and it is the Holy Spirit speaking through you, it really makes it meaningful," Julie says.

If you would like more information, or if you are interested in becoming a lector, please contact Pauline Marker at 308-654-3351.

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SKYLER NEKOLICZAK REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY “HOME” *continued from front cover*

classes, even though I was the only one who was actually going through the RCIA process,” Skyler says. “We worked through a whole faith formation program together. I felt so much support, and I really enjoyed the fellowship.”

Overall, Skyler found RCIA to be an enriching, inspiring process of growth and discovery.

“The RCIA process was something I needed to go through to learn more about the Catholic faith and how to apply its principles to my everyday life,” Skyler says. “A lot of helpful in-depth information was shared during the classes, and it was wonderful to hear from people who have lived out the Catholic faith themselves.”

Now that she is a fully initiated Catholic, Skyler savors the opportunity to raise a beautiful Catholic family alongside her husband, Trent. Together, they have three children — Blaikely, 5; Haidyn, 2; and Dak, 4 months.

“It has been a really great experience to be Catholic, and I have definitely grown in my faith over the years,” she says. “As a family, we have become more consistent about going to Mass and praying together, as well. I really look forward to going to Mass every Sunday and I love our parish family. I am so grateful we can raise our children in such a close-knit community with so many young families.”

If you would like more information about the RCIA process, please contact Patty Harris at 308-380-0402 or the parish office at 308-497-2662.

MASS SCHEDULE:

7 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