

*Quarterly*  
**QB** *lessings*

*Fall 2010*



*Sharing the  
Joy*



## *Sharing the Joy!*

*My dear friends,*

**Y**ou are the light of the world! Our Lord reminds us that we must never hide our light under the proverbial bushel basket. Instead, we are called to let our light shine for all to see (Mt 5:15). This is our mission, our calling. We are called to share our joy, the Good News of Jesus Christ with all the world (Mt 28:19).

Respectful of others and perhaps fearful of what others may think of us, we are sometimes reluctant to share our joy. Yet, isn't it great to be Catholic? I love our faith! I adore the Blessed Trinity - God the Father, Jesus my Lord and Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit - the source of all faith, hope, and love! I love the Sacraments. I live for the Eucharist - the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of our

Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I love the fact our Church was founded by Christ on Peter and the apostles. I am delighted to be part of an intelligent Church which embraces both faith and reason! I am so proud to be part of a Church which does more than any other organization in the world to provide food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and education to the poor, sick, elderly, oppressed, and marginalized of the world.

I am especially happy to be part of St. Stephen and to serve you as pastor. St. Stephen is such a wonderful community of faith. Our Sacred Liturgies are so profound and so meaningful. Our School and Religious Formation and Education ministries are the best. With over 100 active ministries, we do so much to reach out to those in need and to build our family of faith, hope, and love. Everywhere I go people come to me and share how they have been blest by our parish. I give thanks to God for all He is accomplishing in our parish. As Deacon Rick exclaims: "God is good!"

This issue of Quarterly Blessings is very special as we "share our joy" of how God is working in and through our parish. I hope and pray it will in-

spire you to become more involved in our parish - to open your heart and to share your God given time, talent, and treasure with your family of faith. I also pray that you will be encouraged to invite others to "share your joy" with others. Over 15% of our friends, family, coworkers, and friends do not belong to a faith community. Many are searching for the Lord and are simply waiting for you to ask them to join you next weekend for Mass. Share with them how much you love the Lord and His Church. Share your joy of being a Catholic Christian and member of St. Stephen. Let the light of Christ shine!

May God bless you and your loved ones! †

*Fr. Bill Swengros*

# Share the Joy of Evangelization

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

*Matthew 28: 19-20*

## By Colleen Chappell

For many Catholics, the word "evangelization" can be an awkward and sometimes-unnatural concept. In reality, evangelization at its core means "spreading Christianity with great enthusiasm." This simply means we passionately spread our faith - share our joy with others - as often as possible. This can be accomplished through everything from an example to a whisper to shouting from the rooftops. The common denominator of evangelism is actively spreading God's word to others.

To fulfill our mission to evangelize, we actively explain the truths of our Catholic faith. We invite and welcome people of all walks of life to learn more about the Word of God. How can we, as Catholics, feel more confident and natural in our call to evangelize our faith? The answer to this important question is as diverse as the ways we can spread His word. The numbers of ways we can share the joy our faith are as infinite as His amazing power. The secret is to look at your life - each and every daily action - as a way to spread our Catholic faith.

True evangelization rests in interactions that are as small as they are profound. It does not require special training or formal presentations. We can look to the Paul's 1st. Letter to the Corinthians for guidance, "For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied by its power." (1:17) The Bible clearly directs all Christians in their role to spreading

the joy of Christ's promise and it rests in everyday living.

On the 82nd Mission Sunday, His Holiness Benedict XVI, passionately invited all Catholics to actively - and proactively - spread the Gospel. His choice of words would become a powerful

our faith beyond the walls of church each week and become living, breathing ambassadors of our Catholic faith. Tonight, take time to trace the actions of the day you just spent. What interactions did you have at home, at work, in your neighborhood? How many people did you come in

contact with in a single day? Then, ask yourself, did I leave them with an impression of my joy that is a direct and sole reflection of my faith? From the way you carry yourself to the words you choose, consider the power in each and every interaction and if you fully leverage that moment as an active opportunity to exemplify or spread your faith.

The most powerful examples of true Catholic evangelism are not boisterous; rather, they have a quiet confidence and heartfelt desire to make a difference. Changing a life through sharing of our faith can happen in small moments of day-to-day life spreading the unconditional love of Jesus. From opening a door for a neighbor to opening a stranger's heart to His love, we must never forget that time is of the

essence. We know not how long we have on earth while we know that eternal life is forever. What are you waiting for? Go and spread the good news of our Lord today! †

*Colleen Chappell is a senior contributing writer for the Quarterly Blessings.*

and profound message to all Christians. "I would like to invite you to reflect on the continuing urgency to proclaim the Gospel also in our times. The missionary mandate continues to be an absolute priority for all baptized persons who are called to be 'servants and apostles of Christ Jesus' at the beginning of this millennium." Pope Benedict, XVI, proclaims a clear sense of urgency in our call to spread our joy as Christians.

So, how can we go and become disciples of Jesus Christ? We must take

### *Making a Difference*

*Can I say today in honesty  
As the hours slip by so fast  
That I've helped a single person  
Of the many I have passed?  
Did I waste the day or lose it  
Was it well or properly spent  
Did I leave a trail of kindness  
Or moments of content?  
As I close my eyes to slumber  
I hope that God will say  
You have made the world a better place  
By the way you lived today."*

*Author: Unknown*

# Life Teen Experience

By Nancy Reynolds

God calls each of us to serve by sharing our own unique gifts ... to be salt ... to bring a Christian flavoring to everything we do.

For Billy Augensen, interacting with people he's never met before is a step outside of his comfort zone, so when a college friend suggested he become a counselor at Life Teen Covecrest summer camp, he was venturing into a new phase of his faith formation.

Not one to attend St. Stephen's Life Teen in high school, Billy's spiritual development began to take root when he arrived at the University of Central Florida and joined the Catholic Campus Ministry.

"There are so many unhealthy communities in college that can lead you in a bad direction," said the third-year mechanical engineering major. "I've really been blessed to find the right community here at UCF. It's a community that really leads me to Christ."

And it's a community that led him this past summer to Covecrest, a retreat center set against a backdrop of national forest and two magnificent waterfalls in the northeast Georgia mountains. Here, middle and high school students convene for week-long camps through June and July to retreat, relax and connect with God.

Each camp includes the perfect balance of time to encounter Christ and time to play. A lineup of dynamic hosts, talented musicians and dedicated priests serve along with camp staff to encourage a deeper relationship with Christ for any camper. And a series of physical challenges, including a giant rope swing, zip line and a massive climbing tower, offer a variety of team-building challenges for both learning and adventure.

Camp leaders like Billy – college-age summer staff – apply every year to work at Covecrest. Twenty-four staff members

are selected, in part, based on phone interview and self-made videos that show why they believe Christ is calling them to minister at Life Teen in the summer. They receive more than 400 hours of practical youth ministry training and experience during their six-week summer rotation.

The first week is a training week where the counselors, who come from various campuses around the country, get to know each other and prepare for



the campers who will converge over the next five weeks.

"You're interacting with people you've never met before and learning how to relate to young people," said Billy. "I think the campers really respond to us because we're giving them an example of young people living out our Catholic faith instead of what they may be used to, just hearing older people telling them to go to church."

The camp theme – Behold the Mystery of God's Love – unfolds throughout the week and counselors invite participants to embrace the messages of the theme through lively interactions, such as skits and other physically challenging activities, or prayerful meditation, adoration and confession.

"It was amazing to see how many people came out of the confessional a new

person. I saw many of the teens come out with tears in their eyes because they were so moved. That says a lot about how powerful the experience was," said Billy. "A lot of the campers said the experience changed their lives in a special way."

Billy said the experience changed him, too, especially the teachings about Mary's life, which the campers depicted in a skit.

"I came away with such a special devotion and love for Mary," said Billy. "I really fell in love with her on a whole new level. I really witnessed how she sets our hearts on fire with love for her Son. I really can't overemphasize the importance of having a devotion to Mary."

His favorite daily ritual was prayer time at night when the chaperones prayed over the teens.

"A lot of these teens had never been prayed over before, and the Holy Spirit filled us with the right words to relate to them," said Billy. "There were so many amazing priests guiding us who just really love those kids."

And Billy says the counselors continue to experience the joys of the brotherhood and sisterhood that developed among the summer staff who have now returned to their campuses across the United States.

"At first it was awkward with the 24 of us meeting in an airport and not knowing each other, but by the end of our time together, it felt like we had been buddies for years," said Billy. "I've never experienced that much love before, and the reason is because we are all united in our faith. We realized we can really have a lot of fun with our faith."

Learn more about Covecrest and camp counselor opportunities for summer 2011 at <http://www.lifeteencamps.com/covecrest.asp>. †

*Nancy Reynolds is a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# A Panama Mission



Summer mission to Panama exceeds expectations

By Anthony Tauceda

It seems like it was yesterday when my mom asked me, “Anthony, do you want to go on the Panama mission with me?” “Huh? What?”

A typical response from me. I remembered her talking about it some the last few weeks and I had seen several slide shows at church about it. But me, on a mission trip? I just didn’t know. “It will be fun and a great experience for both of us,” she continued. “They are taking at least 10 young adults this summer and can we at least see if there is room for you?” “OK,” I said. The rest, as they say, is history.

I traveled this summer to Panama with Fr. Bill and 19 others on a mission trip that was one of the best experiences of my life. I didn’t know what to expect, but can honestly say it was so much more than I expected.

I was in charge of the soccer project. I love soccer so this was a good fit for me. We had 23 soccer balls donated and purchased the materials to build six soccer goals in Panama. The villages we visited had so little, sometimes just two rocks or sticks for goals. Many of their small soccer fields were pitted and

uneven. This, however, did not discourage the Panamanian children! They outplayed me almost every day and the look of pure delight on their faces after building soccer goals and being handed a new ball was amazing.

When I think of how much I have here at home, including state-of-the-art soccer equipment, large level playing fields and uniforms, I would probably never use two sticks for goals or be too excited to play on a small, uneven field. It all made me want to give them the very best and to play soccer for hours on end if they wanted me to.

I had so many great experiences in Panama. I was very proud to play a small part in all we did down there including medical care and skits that taught them about the love of God. Meeting new friends, stepping out of my comfort zone and being generous and selfless with others were all wonderful.

I gained so much more than I gave.

I am grateful my mom asked me that question six months ago. You should consider going with us! I say “us” because I plan on going back to Panama someday. The mission was awesome, after all, and an experience I will never forget. †

*Anthony Tauceda attended the summer mission to Panama.*



# Jesus' Mission

When participants complete their journey in the OCIA, their Christian journey of life in Christ in many ways has just begun.

By Ted Russell

**T**he process of faith formation, initiation and the celebration of adults being brought into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church is facilitated through the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults, or the OCIA. Because the OCIA is at the very heart of the parish community's evangelization mission, this article may be helpful as a guide to discuss with anyone who expresses an interest in learning more about the Catholic Christian faith.

The OCIA is a communal faith journey involving prayer, discussion, study and reflection for:

- Unbaptized adults (called "catechumens," a Greek term meaning to teach by mouth) who wish to learn more about the Catholic faith with a possibility of becoming Catholic

- Baptized Christians from other faith traditions (called "candidates") who would like to learn more about and possibly join the Catholic Church

- Persons who were baptized Catholic at some point in their lives yet not given any religious upbringing within the Catholic tradition. These persons are also called candidates.

Not a program of instruction but a sacramental process, the goal of the OCIA is to prepare participants for full communion into the Body of Christ: the Catholic Church. The focus of the OCIA journey is Christian conversion – a change of heart in which the individual (catechumen or candidate) turns toward God and away from whatever is in the way of living a full Christian life. The value that

the OCIA brings to those who wish to become part of the Catholic Church is that it enables them to begin to learn about the Church as it lives, prays, worships and serves in the world today before having to make a commitment to becoming Catholic. This faith journey is composed of four stages.

Stage 1, the Pre-Catechumenate, or inquiry period, consists of informal meet-



ings that explain the process and provide opportunities to answer questions that participants may have about the Roman Catholic Church. This is when the individual first expresses an interest in becoming a Catholic Christian. With the help of the parish community, the individual explores his or her relationship with Christ and how that relationship may be enriched and deepened by becoming part of the Catholic parish community. This period of inquiry may last months or even years and ends when the inquirer feels ready to move forward or decides against continuing in this direction.

At the beginning of the second stage, or catechumenate period, inquirers are formally welcomed by the parish com-

munity. For catechumens, this welcoming is called the Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens. For the candidates, it is called the Rite of Welcoming. This phase is a period of more structured preparation, listening to presentations and participating in discussions based on scripture readings and other important topics such as the sacraments, the meaning of the Mass, Catholic morality and social action.

This is also time for the catechumens and candidates to learn how to live as Catholic Christians on their faith journey with the support of the OCIA team, sponsors, godparents and the entire parish community. This stage ends when the catechumens and candidates express their desire to receive the sacraments of initiation (Baptism for catechumens, and Confirmation and Eucharist for all participants in the initiation process), and

the parish community acknowledges their readiness. The conclusion of this period leads to the Rite of Election or Enrollment of Names for the catechumens and the Rite of Calling to Continuing Conversion for the candidates.

This very significant step is celebrated at the Diocesan Cathedral, led by the bishop. All of the catechumens and candidates, their godparents (for catechumens) and sponsors (for catechumens and candidates) gather together for this occasion. The bishop, on behalf of the entire Catholic Church, formally confirms their decision. The catechumens (from this point forward called the "elect") and candidates may now begin their final preparation for



being received into full communion with the Catholic Church.

The third stage is the period of purification and enlightenment. During this time the “elect” (catechumens) and the candidates enter into a period of intense preparation, prayer and reflection. This period is intended to be one of increased introspection in coming closer to God. During this period the participants undertake a number of public celebrations with the parish community called the scrutinies (which ask God for healing and forgiveness), and presentations of the creed and the Lord’s Prayer. This period ends with the catechumens receiving the sacrament of Baptism, Christian candidates making a profession of faith and all receiving the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist.

The fourth stage is the period of post-baptismal catechesis or mystagogy – derived from the ancient Greek meaning “mystery.” This phase challenges the newly initiated (called neophytes) to explore the mystery inherent in the sacraments just received, and how they relate to the participants’ life in the Church. Beyond catechesis, mystagogy is really a lifelong process, one in which all Catholic Christians are engaged, as we all work to deepen our sense of what it means to live the Christian life.

As previously mentioned, the entire Christian community has a role to play in the initiation of its newest disciples. While there are many ways parishioners can help, here are a few specific examples.

Every baptized parishioner is part of a mentoring community that apprentices its new disciples. By observing our prayer, words, deeds and actions in the parish community, our newest members can learn what it means to live and serve as a Catholic Christian in today’s world. We are the role models for newly initiated disciples.

In addition to prayer, we can offer and the example we can provide for catechumens and candidates, there are other specific ways parishioners can be involved in the OCIA. Baptized members of the community can serve as sponsors for the candidates. A sponsor is an active member of the parish who walks with the candidate on the journey to a new, fuller life in Christ, supporting and guiding the candidate along the way. The sponsor can be viewed as the candidate’s personal connection with the parish.

Members of the community can also serve as catechists (teachers) in the faith formation process. Others are needed to serve as coordinators and assistants for the various aspects of the initiation process. The more parishioners become personally invested in the process of initiating others into the life of Christ, the more the community itself will be renewed in its own life with Christ!

There is one final way that every worshipping parishioner is involved in the OCIA process – through active, prayerful participation in the liturgical celebrations that mark the progress of the catechumens and candidates who are in the initiation process during Sunday

Mass. These celebrations are not only for the participants in the initiation process, they are also for the entire parish community. As members of the faith community, we are all invited to pray with and for those in the initiation process. As members of the Body of Christ, we make manifest Christ’s presence in the community. We all are a sign of Christ to the new disciples in the OCIA.

When participants complete their journey in the OCIA, their Christian journey of life in Christ in many ways has just begun. The new Christians are called to go forth to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. The celebration of the sacraments of initiation is not a graduation exercise, but a calling for all in the parish community to carry out the mission of the entire Church throughout the world. Through the OCIA, the very life of the parish community is renewed by making new disciples and renewing old, faithful ones. When we commit ourselves – our time, talents and resources – to the OCIA, we continue the mission of Jesus in the Church and in the world.

If you know anyone who is interested in learning more about the Catholic faith, share this article with them and encourage them to contact the religious education office. There’s no time like the present to act when God knocks! †

*Ted Russell is a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# The Parent-Evangelist

By Nancy Reynolds

Parents wear many hats: breadwinner, cook, laundress, driver, teacher. The list is endless. As Catholic parents, we sometimes overlook the main role that God asks us to play in our children's lives: parent-evangelist.

We learn early on in our Catholic teachings that we're accountable for the opportunities we have to aid in the salvation of all of society. But for many parents, the blessing of a child is often our first soulful reflection of how we can affect not only our own spirituality, but also the spirituality of others.

Because children learn mostly by example, parents must have an active faith. Merely attending Sunday Mass is not sufficient for children to truly make the connection between the tenets of their Catholic faith and their faith in action.

For example, when children see their parents feeding the hungry, praying the rosary and attending Sunday Mass, they are more likely to imitate the parents' love of neighbor and God. This is especially true if the parents do these things with a cheerful attitude and involve the child in these activities at the earliest age possible.

For me, this parental faith example came before I even entered the world.

My mother recently penned the following story about the events leading up to my birth. I grew up hearing this story told many times and often thought about how difficult this decision must have been for her. As a young girl, I wondered if I could make the same choice if I were one day in her shoes. As I got older, the circumstances of my birth bolstered my belief that God put me on this earth with a definitive plan for me to be a voice in the advocacy for the protection of the unborn.

I am the daughter of a parent-evangelist, and a member of St. Stephen - not by consequence, but by example. What follows is my mother's story:

## A Special Daughter

By Shirley Dilley

It would never be the choice for me. The medical and religious communities felt it was the right thing to do, but their string of reasons made me even more resolute in my decision.

"Your thyroid cancer has spread to 10 lymph nodes." The surgeon appeared stricken. It seemed he was delivering the message to himself rather than the patient sitting in front of him. "You will need a radical neck resection and will need to be under anesthesia for seven or eight hours. The four-month-old fetus you're carrying could be severely deprived of oxygen during that time, so a therapeutic abortion is recommended. Otherwise, you could be delivering a child with multiple deformities or health problems."

Spreading cancer, abortion, deformities. This can't be happening. Why me? Why these horrible things for my child? Spinning out of control, my mind felt like it was whirling on a runaway carousel. Quietly, I was begging to be let off the ride so my life could settle back to a normal pace.

The doctor exited the examining room,

leaving me with only disturbing thoughts for companionship. My husband joined me moments later to assure me any decision I made he would support.

A nurse practitioner entered the room along with my parish priest and she began a litany of reasons why the therapeutic abortion was being recommended.

"Whenever there is a pregnancy involved, cancers spread more rapidly."

"You will need radiation immediately after surgery and it shouldn't be delayed for the four or five months until you deliver the baby. You're 24 with four other children at home under the age of 5. Who will raise them if you're gone?"

My parish priest, Father Bill, stepped gingerly into the conversation with tears in his eyes. "Shirley, if you're worried how the Church feels in this situation, don't be concerned. The Church makes exceptions in all situations, and this is certainly justified."

I listened and went over each argument carefully in my mind. I believed in a good and loving God, not a cruel, punishing God. I would put him in charge of my health and my family. Believing this was best, I decided to carry my much loved child to term no matter the consequences. He or she deserved all the love and opportunity I had been given by my mother.

"Schedule the neck surgery." I said to

the nurse practitioner. "I'm keeping my baby."

My husband and Father Bill looked at each other with concern, but both knew I had to be the one to make the decision.

After the surgery, the surgeons and obstetricians were surprised my pregnancy continued without problems. A beautiful baby girl, Nancy, was delivered and placed in my arms five months later.

Before we left the hospital, the pediatrician came in to tell us the status of our daughter. He explained that she appeared in good health, no deformities of any kind. But there was a problem. My breathing stopped and I felt sure my heart must have discontinued beating also.

"Her cries are shrill and piercing and she stays tightly curled in the fetal position. These are generally definitive signs of spastic cerebral palsy. There is no cure for this condition and the child will probably need lifetime care. It affects the nervous system, brain and muscles. Every facet of her life may be affected: learning, eating, walking, talking."

The doctor's manner was detached, and I felt he wanted to break the news and hurry from the room so he wouldn't have to deal with a devastated parent.

"What caused this? How did it happen? Are you sure? Are there any tests we can run to be positive?" I had a thousand questions and refused to let him get away

until he answered all of them.

"No one knows for sure how it happens. Generally something goes wrong in the womb. Lack of oxygen to the baby's brain sometimes," he answered.

The very second he put a period on that sentence, the guilt train arrived in my brain. How could I have been so selfish? What kind of life have I subjected this child to?

The next several weeks, I held and cuddled my baby trying to assure her how much she was loved, how I would always take care of her and mostly, how sorry I was for being responsible for her condition. Guilt never was more than one thought from my mind.

When Nancy cried, it sounded like a shrieking noise. Her arms stayed pulled in close to her sides, little fists balled up

continually. Diapering her was difficult. I had to pry open her little knees just to get the diaper on and secured.

One morning, after her bottle, I placed my sleeping baby in the crib on her side. She was lying in her constant tight fetal position. When I didn't hear her cries for attention after a couple hours, I tiptoed into the bedroom to check on her. She was lying on her back, with her arms and hands open. Her legs were spread-eagled like a little frog.

I was in a panic. My little girl must have died. When I grabbed her, and pulled her up to my chest, I realized she was smiling at me and her little fingers curled around mine for the first time.

A faucet of tears exploded from my eyes and I was praying this was not just a momentary change but a permanent one.

A trip to the pediatrician gave few clues as to why this could have occurred. He was astounded, too. It was suggested that the replacement thyroid I need to take daily crossed the placental barrier causing hyperthyroidism in my child, possibly explaining her spasticity. Not wanting me to expect too much, he advised there may still be problems and this could just be a temporary remission.

I knew better. My child was healed and God granted us a miracle.

This special baby is now a special woman. She's a military veteran and a career woman in addition to a wife with two children of her own. †

*Nancy Reynolds is a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

## Heart to Heart



### By Deacon Dan Gratkowski

In early August, we began to read back-to-school ads in the newspapers and see them on TV. Even the state of Florida joined in the marketing blitz by announcing free tax days for all school clothing and supplies. Yes, as summer quickly wound down, preparation for school took precedence in most households with school-age children.

Going back to school may be a very

happy time for many parents, and maybe for some students, too. But what about those that parents who want their children to enter or re-enter St. Stephen Catholic School but can't because their financial situation prevents them from returning? How can these parents find the funds they need to register their children and give them a Catholic education?

The answer for our parish has been the Heart to Heart program.

For the past eight years, we, as a parish, have been able to support people who could not afford a Catholic education. But these past few years have been very difficult, even for our parish, due to the increase in parishioners who are experiencing financial difficulties.

In August, when I gave my monthly scheduled homily, I talked about how much of a procrastinator I was and, I'm sorry to say, I still am. I often read the church bulletins that ask people to help our children by giving a gift to Heart to Heart, and I even went so far as to mention it to my wife, Anita, one Sunday after seeing one of the flyers.

Did I do anything about it? You guessed it. No, I didn't. But I still continued to think about it. Mostly, I thought of

the great Catholic education that my wife and I received when we were young. I thought of the 12 years of Catholic education my children were privileged to receive. Like all parents, I believe that our children are a gift from God -- not just my children, but all children.

In a short time, the children of today will be young adults, then they will eventually become the leaders of this country. This is why I believe so strongly in a Catholic education. I may be biased, but I believe in my heart that a Catholic education is second to none. This is why I believe it is so important for us to continue to fund Heart to Heart. As Father Bill says, "Please open your heart to a child who could not otherwise afford to attend our Catholic school, and give what you can to this very worthwhile program."

Well, I finally stopped procrastinating. Anita and I have opened our hearts to Heart to Heart. How about you? Can you open your hearts and sponsor a child?

Is this evangelization? Yes, it is. †

*Deacon Dan Gratkowski is a Deacon at St. Stephen Catholic Church and a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# Prayer Hands



By Tara Dibble

Ask any parent how a child learns and they'll most likely tell you that children learn by watching and doing. They watch those around them carefully, and as they grow more confident they attempt the tasks they spent considerable time watching or hearing.

Parents of multiple children frequently observe that their younger children hit developmental milestones faster than their older children. They often attribute the difference to the fact that the younger child has someone to carefully observe to "catch up" to the older sibling. I witnessed this myself when my now 3-year-old began walking at 11 months, while his 8-year-old sister did not start walking until she was 13 months old. His first steps were not to Mommy; they were to his sister's retreating back.

Along with developmental milestones, such as talking, crawling, walking, and climbing, children receive their foundation for faith by watching and imitating. If your young child watches you bow your head and fold your hands in prayer three times a day prior to eating your meal, it is only a matter of time before he, too, will

bow his head and put his hands together. Does this mean that he understands that prayer is taking place? Not likely, but it is a start.

Meals in our home start with bowed heads, prayer hands, and a prayer. We ask our children to stop and imitate us. Often, the 3-year-old does not, but recently, in watching my son play with some plastic dishes, I watched as he quietly bowed his head, put his hands together, and near perfectly recited the Blessing Before Meals. As he saw me staring, he quickly asked, "Mommy, where are your prayer hands?"

Building the foundation of faith, I have found, has been pretty easy. Young children love to please adults, and mimicking behavior is very natural for them as they learn about themselves, their environment, and the people around them. As children grow older, it is more challenging to build from the foundation of repeating and mimicking.

We are fortunate that our 8-year-old attends Catholic school and is in an environment where her faith formation is encouraged and supplements what is being learned at home. But this does not always mean she is eager to learn. A Catholic school environment or religious

education classes do not ensure a child is being formed in faith. These environments only supplement what is being taught at home.

As parents, it is important to realize that we are the primary catechists for our children. It is by watching us that their faith is formed. It begins with imitating and mimicking, but their appreciation for Mass only grows if they see you attending and appreciating it. Their attitude and comfort in Reconciliation is a reflection of your attitude and comfort in Reconciliation. Reverence for the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion is a reflection of your own reverence. Honoring the vows of your marriage and being open to the gifts of marriage provide your child with a true understanding of honor and openness. Children do not learn appreciation, attitude, comfort, reverence, honor, or openness in the classroom. They learn the whys and the hows.

Learning why and how we, as Catholics, do what we do is knowledge of faith. Showing appreciation, an appropriate attitude, comfort, and reverence is formation in faith. Classrooms can provide the knowledge, but only parents can provide the formation. †

*Tara Dibble is a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*



# God's Economy

By Bob Swatland

In the last year, we've witnessed the world shifting like sand beneath our feet. We've been asking ourselves "What's happened to us?" "Is it ever going back to the way it used to be?" and "What kind of adjustments do we need to make to prepare for the future?"

People all around the world are experiencing a new level of insecurity. The things they placed their hope and confidence in have disappointed them. There is now a sense of fear, restlessness and anxiety lingering just beneath the surface. Because of the dramatic changes, you now have an opportunity to adjust to a new reality.

The difference is discovering how to navigate the battle between Man's Economy and God's Economy. In Man's Economy, the basic premise is that your purposes, goals, significance, self-worth, ambition and life energy are wrapped up in having money. You want to make as much as you can, as quickly as you can, to retire as soon as you can and enjoy a life of leisure as long as you can.

You are told that if you have enough money, you can live free of fear and anxiety – comfortably insulated from what's going on around you. In Man's Economy, you place your hope in your net worth, assets, and ability to generate income. Money is the master of Man's Economy.

In God's Economy, you can be prepared for the future no matter what it may be. You now have the opportunity, by God's grace, to reset your thinking, to be transformed, not conformed to the world (Romans 12:2).

Learning to live in God's Economy begins by understanding that His economy is made up of the divine integration of His Lordship, your stewardship and your generosity. When those things come together, you are transformed out of Man's Economy by the renewal of your mind. You are transformed out of the cultural pressure and grip of this world. God is the master of His economy.

When God is Lord, He is the object of your life. The Bible says in Matthew



6:33 to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. Use your energy to seek His kingdom first. In God's Economy, He is Lord of all and you seek Him as the object of your life energy, your purpose, your goals, your ambitions and your significance.

The world will always be dynamic and unstable, but God is constant. His constant nature is expressed in Hebrews 13:5: "Keep your lives free from the love of money [in other words, keep your life free from buying into the lies of Man's Economy] and be content with what you have."

When you are content with what you have, you can rest in the promise found in the remainder of that verse: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." The Lord is telling you that, in Man's Economy, you are vulnerable; everything can leave you and forsake you, except for Him.

When you understand God's Lordship, your role and purpose as a steward becomes clear. You define success by whether or not you are faithful with what you have.

In Man's Economy, you define success by how much you have. The scorecard for success in Man's Economy is how much you can accumulate. God does not measure success by accumulation. In His

economy, if you are faithful with little, you will be entrusted with "true riches" (Luke 16:11).

Success in God's Economy is faithfulness as a steward or manager of whatever you have been given. All are welcome into that economy. There is no discrimination whether you have much or have little. When God is the first priority and the object of your life, you will be faithful to Him, steward whatever you have and learn to be generous on every occasion. You will start to believe and practice the principle that it is better to give than to receive.

In Man's Economy, it is better to receive, hoard and have a big line of credit. These are all the things the world says are required to have success and significance. In God's Economy, He says it is better to be a giver. God's Economy is circulation, not accumulation.

Take action. Join us on this journey of discovering and living in God's Economy today. Surrender your finances to Him, manage what He has entrusted to you according to His financial principles and discover the blessings of God's Economy. †

*Bob Swatland is the area director for Crown Financial Ministries, an interdenominational Christian organization that teaches biblical financial principles.*

# School Rededication



A Decade of Inspiration  
St. Stephen Catholic School  
Established 2001

By D'Ann White

St. Stephen Catholic School will celebrate a decade of inspiring young minds with a series of events throughout the year. The festivities to mark the school's 10-year anniversary kicked off Oct. 9,

with the annual Angels Among Us dinner and auction with the theme "Faces of Faith." Over the 10 years the gala has been held, it's raised more than \$500,000 for St. Stephen Catholic School and the St. Stephen religious education program. Anniversary commemorative artwork by art teacher Julianne Gonzalez was unveiled at the gala, and there was a special 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary silent auction basket.

The festivities will continue in January during Catholic Schools Week, when the school will take a look back at its history and accomplishments. There will be a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary T-shirt for the occasion and special activities for the students.

As part of the celebration, the school will recognize eighth-grade students who started at the school as EC3 students. Special days will be named in honor of staff members Ken Hillyard, Maria Hoffman, Vice Principal Jennisica Sifferman and Julie Pollock, who have been with the school since it opened.

In the spring, there will be a special rededication ceremony to mark the anniversary, featuring an all-school Mass and reception. The bishop, along with former students and their families, will be invited to attend. Father Bill Swengros will bless each classroom of the school

and students will provide items to be buried in a time capsule.

St. Stephen Catholic School opened in August 2001 under the leadership of the Rev. Patrick Irwin and Principal Mary Liddy. Therese Jackson became assistant principal in 2002 and principal in 2006.

The anniversary committee is made up of founding families, parishioners, school board members and students. †

D'Ann White is a senior contributing writer for *Quarterly Blessings*.



## Come to the River of Life

By Kathy Taylor

*It just seemed to happen one day  
I found myself starting to stray  
Distractions came in  
And I can see when  
I started to lose my way*

*I remember the church where I  
prayed  
Mass and confessions I made*

*I said I believed  
While reciting the Creed  
But the memory has started to  
fade*

*Seeing the worship of others  
Made me come to discover  
The richness we share  
In Communion and prayer  
Cannot be found in another*

*I once thought all faiths were the  
same  
Praying in Jesus Christ's name  
But something was missing  
My heart was insisting*

*That these words beg me to  
discover:*

*Come to the River of Life  
Leave your fears and worries and  
strife  
Your soul will be healed  
God's love be revealed  
Grace will flow through your life*

*Come feel the love of a Friend  
Whose faithfulness never will end  
God's blessing and care  
Will always be there  
Whenever you come to Him*

# Mission of Mercy

By Marki Taucedo

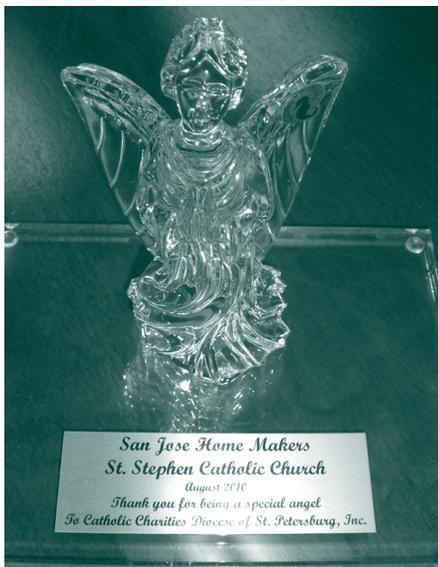
“Next, St. Stephen’s San Jose Homemakers are here to receive the Angel Award. People, they are a wonder!”

That is how Frank Murphy, president of Catholic Charities, introduced our ministry at the organization’s management board meeting.

Seven of us traveled to St. Petersburg to receive the prestigious Angel Award from Catholic Charities. It was such an honor to be chosen, and we are all so blessed to be a part of such an amazing ministry here at St. Stephen. With Fr. Bill’s encouragement and the incredible generosity of our St. Stephen community, our ministry has taken off like wildfire!

Many of you know the story of how two dedicated mothers, Pam and Heidi, had a vision to help the poorest of the poor in our community - the migrant families. Just 15 minutes from our door, young mothers and children slept on the floor without blankets or even heat this past cold winter.

The migrant workers’ plight is a difficult one. Most families are only here for four to six months during the picking season, and when they leave can only take what they can pack in a small bag. As you can imagine, this is especially difficult for the children.



Catholic Charities has provided several small apartments to assist these families, but we lacked the funds to furnish them. Through generous donations we provide beds, linens, towels, pots and pans and even decorate with a picture or two if we can!

We also always include a prayer card in Spanish with Our Lady of Guadalupe or Jesus on the front to remind them and us why we do all this. We pray with them and for them. Seeing the beautiful faces of those dear children when they receive a bed with perhaps their first ever matching sheet set is a wonderfully rewarding experience.

Recently, we were asked by Sheila Lopez, operations manager of Catholic Charities, if we were open to helping some Haitian patients they were moving here after the earthquake. They had the apartments. Could we help furnish them? You bet we could! The old convent we used in Dover for storage was packed to the gills with donations, and most of the migrant families had left that month to pick elsewhere.

Several of us had the privilege to set up 20 apartments. We had the very dedicated help of several homeless men that volunteered from Pinellas Hope. I remember one instance when everyone was stopping for lunch, Ann and I weren’t hungry and were finishing up an apartment. One of

the men set down his chicken and rushed over to help us. “My mama always taught me to be chivalrous,” he said. That really warmed our hearts!

We will always be dedicated to the migrant and poor families in our area. We have, however, been blessed with the opportunity to assist others in our diocese to realize their vision of helping the poorest of the poor. The homeless in Catholic Charities Pinellas Hope are not just getting a handout but a “hand up.” They are learning new skills, have job opportunities and recently can earn the blessing of renting their own apartment on the premises. Volunteers now have their own warehouse in Pinellas County, modeled after what we do in Dover for the migrant families.

What a blessing to evangelize and encourage others to be the hands and feet of Christ in their own communities! I guess we are a “wonder”- a wonder of God’s mercy and grace.

We’re always looking for donations, trucks and muscle, so if you’d like to join us, call (813) 842-1872 or email [sanjosehomemakers@yahoo.com](mailto:sanjosehomemakers@yahoo.com). †

*Marki Taucedo is a member of the San Jose Homemakers ministry at St. Stephen.*

# Apostles of Charity



By D'Ann White

**H**ours before the first client arrives seeking assistance from the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry at St. Stephen Catholic Church, volunteers are busy at work making sure all is ready for the parade of needy residents.

The day begins early for volunteers who arrive Friday mornings at St. Stephen to begin preparations for the weekly distribution of boxes of food for those who have fallen on hard times.

It's a routine that's repeated 49 weeks a year without fail by the steadfast volunteers led by Camille Riggins and Graciela Langan.

"We're here every Friday with the exception of Good Friday, the day after Thanksgiving and the Friday before Christmas," said Riggins. "The need never goes away."

Graciela and Camille are usually the first to arrive at the church at around 6:45 a.m., followed by the volunteers who pick up bread from Publix. Bread from Panera is dropped off the evening before.

The pantry has two storage spaces outside of the church to store paper sup-

plies, toiletries, boxes, diapers and clothing collected during the week. Those items are unpacked first, and the clothing is placed on the portico for the clients.

"We are very short of space at the church. We have to set up the kitchen for the day with items that are located in several places and closets in the church," said Camille. "By this time, it is almost 8 a.m., and we all proceed in for Mass."

After Mass, volunteers begin arranging clothing on the portico.

"The portico has boxes and bags of donated clothes and other items to be sorted and placed

on the tables to be made ready for the clients to come and select for their use," said volunteer Jean Emmett. "Clothes are checked for tears, stains and cleanliness. Our motto is, 'If we wouldn't wear it, throw it away.' Our work starts about 8:30 a.m. and ends about 1 p.m. At 10:30, clients are admitted to the portico to make their selections and then wait until 11 a.m. to be interviewed and receive their monthly food."

"It's so nice to hear the thank-yous from the clients," she said. "One lady last Friday was so grateful. Her husband was out of work, and she was able to get needed school clothes for her son."

Sometimes there is a lull in the activity. That's when Jean gets out her rosary-making supplies. She makes rosaries that she gives out to the clients. After the clients have finished making their selections, the left-over clothes must be repacked and stored for the next Friday.

Meanwhile, inside the church, another group of volunteers has been tirelessly packaging bread and bagging rice and beans.

"We buy the big 10-pound bags of rice and beans and then bag them in 2-pound

bags," said Camille. "It keeps the cost down. All of our plastic bags are donated to us along with produce bags from different grocery stores."

"The SVDP food pantry is blessed to have two main sources of food donations: parishioners who drop off food after Mass and the students of St. Stephen Catholic School. But even with these generous donations, we find that we often have to go grocery shopping to fill our pantry with a variety of healthy food items," said volunteer Kathie Huff. "We have a number of benefactors who regularly give monetary donations and many parishioners who donate using the Poor Box. It is with these monies that we are able to go grocery shopping."

Feeding America Tampa Bay, located on 50th Street in Tampa, is a large warehouse that provides food to charities for about 18 cents a pound.

"They usually have a variety of canned and dried goods which Graciela Langan orders in advance," said Kathie. "At times meat is available and we have purchased 200 to 600 pounds at this incredible price. That amount keeps our freezers filled for quite a while."

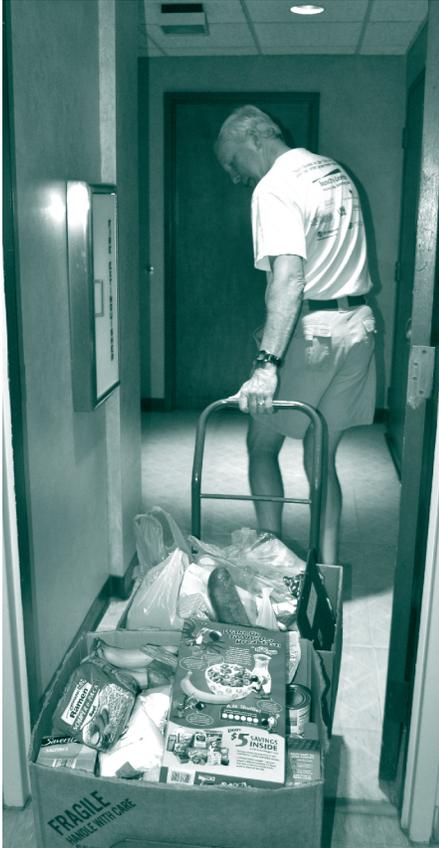
To round out their selection of food, they often have to order from Restaurant Depot, Save-A-Lot or Aldi's. Volunteer Lee Ann Lynch knows which stores have the best prices on certain items and is able to fax the SVDP order in so that it is ready for pick up. Other times, volunteers just go to the stores and buy cases of items when they run low.

"All of this shopping is done by a great group of women and men who donate their time, their vehicles and their muscle to help feed those in need," said Kathie. "We feel truly blessed to be following in the footsteps of Jesus, St. Vincent de Paul and Blessed Frederic Ozanam."

At 10:45 a.m. each Friday, all the volunteers, about 30 in all, gather in the kitchen for prayer before opening the pantry doors at 11 a.m.

All clients are interviewed before they receive their food from the pantry.

"We use Room 3 to conduct our interviews," said Camille. "All of our clients



have an application on file that we pull when we get their ID, and we conduct an interview with them and ask basic questions about what's happening in the household and if there are any changes happening in their home and with their families. We write our remarks on the sheet and then send it to the kitchen where it is processed according to how many people there are in the family. Clients are allowed to come once a month to our pantry."

Sometimes interviewing clients can be emotionally trying, said volunteer Sylvia Guerra.

"As I spend more time volunteering, I have come to the conclusion that it's not for everyone," she said. "I thank God it's for me. I feel such gratification in helping those less fortunate. There are times you come across someone who stays in your thoughts and prayers. So it was a couple of weeks ago when a lady came to us for assistance. I was not interviewing her. However, Nelly, one of our volunteers, called me over to speak with this individual. It turns out her husband passed away suddenly and the poor woman was beside herself."



The woman confided to Sylvia that she'd attempted suicide.

"Nelly asked me to tell her about my husband's death less than a year ago," said Sylvia. "It was difficult reliving that painful time but I knew this is what God wanted me to do. I spoke to her for awhile, telling her my story and how my deep faith in God has helped me through this very sad time in my life. By the time Nelly and I finished talking with this lady, she said how much better she felt and that her hope was that one day she would be able to volunteer alongside us. As time goes by, I realize nothing happens by chance. God pointed me in the direction of St. Vincent de Paul Society, and for this I will always be grateful."

While volunteers interview clients, there are typically 10 to 12 volunteers in the kitchen filling boxes for the clients. Two scales are set up and all food that is donated and distributed is weighed.

"We need to keep these records for our annual report to the St. Vincent de Paul Council," explained Camille.

Other volunteers collect toiletries that clients request. Once the box is filled, it's placed on a cart and wheeled outside.

"We have several men volunteers who carry the box of food out to their cars," said Camille.

Greg Huff is one of those men.

"I do this more because of what it gives me back, the rewards of helping other people," he said.

Jim Whiteman agreed.

"It's a great feeling to be able to help those in need, to do something nice for someone else and give back to the community," Jim said.

Kathie said there are certain items the food pantry is always in short supply.

"We can always use diapers and laundry detergent," she said. "We also need canned goods, especially soups, tomato products and tuna."

While the focus of the pantry is the distribution of food to needy residents, Camille emphasized that the St. Vincent de Paul Society's mission isn't only to feed the stomach. It also strives to feed the soul.

"To evangelize is to follow Christ our Evangelizer and Servant of the Poor," she said. "St. Vincent de Paul is referred to as the Father of the Poor and the Apostle of Charity. As Vincentians, our lives are consumed in serving the poor. What we do every Friday is our inspiration."

St. Vincent de Paul is always in need of brown paper bags. They can be dropped off in the kitchen any time. Look for announcements in the bulletin concerning St. Vincent de Paul's holiday food basket collections and Angel Tree. †

*D'Ann White is a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*



# Look Within

By Deacon Tom Schott

September 11. A date that has emblazoned itself into the consciousness of all Americans since that fateful day nine years ago. It is ineradicable for this generation, just as December 7, Pearl Harbor day, was for the generations of that time. I read that the usual commemorative events will happen. Somber reading of the names of all the victims, prayer services, quiet reflection.

In addition to these traditional remembrances, this year's event featured something else: counter-demonstrations by two groups. One is anti-construction and one is pro-construction of an Islamic community center two blocks away from the site. In the background was the continually reverberating, and not yet dead, story of Reverend Terry Jones, pastor of a miniscule congregation in Gainesville (the ironically named Dove World Outreach Center). Jones, who threatened to publicly burn copies of the Qur'an on this day, caused worldwide outrage, changed his mind and proceeded to stay in the news far beyond each person's allotted 15 minutes of fame.

"Islam," he said, "is of the devil."

The demonstrations were something new this year, as was the palpable anti-Muslim atmosphere in the country. People can speculate as to why this might have been, especially since the first eight commemorations of the tragic attack on the Twin Towers passed by with quiet, sad dignity.

Whatever the explanations, one thing is clear: People of good will must take a dim view of these departures from the usual practice this year. If you're a Christian, you're even more bound by the tenets of your own faith to condemn acts that are decidedly anti-Christian.

I have never been one to make WWJD—what would Jesus do?—a benchmark question in the practice of my faith. It always seemed a facile way of avoiding the complexities of moral choices, mainly because the question is often posed in situations that the flesh-and-blood Jesus who lived and died in Palestine over 2,000 years ago would never have confronted and which bear no correspondence whatever to His world and experience.



But in this case, asking what Jesus would do is helpful. Because the issue involved here is one Jesus confronted directly during His own life, and we have His behavior to serve as a guide for our own.

The issue, of course, is prejudice, the blanket and unreasoning hatred, suspicion and condemnation of a group of people simply because they *are* that group of people. We humans have devised a marvelous smorgasbord of reasons to be prejudiced against others: nationality, race, profession, income or educational level, and last, but hardly least, religion. Unreasoning condemnation, because this kind of hatred is not based on knowledge of the other at all. It is based on *fear* of the other, simply because he is different. And for this reason prejudice almost always

demonizes its object, makes people not only unattractive, but hateful and evil.

It's always a good idea when confronting attitudes like this to do a gut check like the several prescribed by Jesus. Prejudice cannot stand scrutiny under any of them: "Whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:22), "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31) and "A good person out of the store of goodness in his heart produces good ... for from the

fullness of the heart the mouth speaks" (Lk 7:45), not to mention "love your enemies" (Lk 6:27).

And our brother and Lord always practiced what He preached (I wonder what change could be wrought in the world if *only half* of those who preached practiced *only half* of what they preached?). The gospels are replete with examples of Jesus stepping outside the prejudicial boundaries and barriers constructed by His society. He constantly consorted with the wrong kind of people, the lowlifes, the whores

and sinners. His religion said these people should be shunned. He forgave people guilty of grievous breeches of what was regarded as God's law: the woman taken in adultery, the thief on His right. He gave aid and comfort to the enemy. When a Roman centurion's child was deathly ill, Jesus cured him. He treated Samaritans, whom "good" Jews despised, with respect, and even made them heroes in His parables.

Note the nature of these unworthies whom Jesus embraced. All were either religious or political enemies, and in the case of the Samaritans, both. Note that our Lord and brother Jesus was not the slightest bit interested in the political implications of stepping outside the boundaries of acceptable prejudices in His society. There's little evidence that Jesus

ever considered the political implications of what He did. That was not His frame of reference. It was the furthest thing from the way He related to the world. He didn't think in terms of who wielded power and who didn't. He simply accepted people and loved them as they were because they were fellow children of God. That's what Jesus saw when He looked out upon the world. Everything and everybody were a reflection of His Father.

Admittedly this is a pretty tall order for us. We haven't figured out how to integrate what we are, God's children, with what we think and what we do, especially how we relate to others. Our frame of reference is always about power - who has it and how to get more for ourselves. This is why prejudice works so well in human societies. Ultimately, it's an instrument for one group of people to exert power over another. And there's really nothing

human beings like better than power.

So what would Jesus do about Muslims? How would He deal with the situations that roiled up this September 11? You already know. The real question for us is what will we do? †

*Deacon Tom Schott is a former Deacon at St. Stephen and now resides in Oklahoma. He is a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

## Living on God's Time

**By Mary Ann Smith**

**S**ix months ago, I wrote an article for Quarterly Blessings about God's miracle in my life. After being diagnosed with lung cancer about 15 months earlier, I received a miraculous report from my doctors: The cancer was gone.

During those 15 months, I had been on a journey from physical, emotional and spiritual pain to peace. Through help and prayers from my family, friends and the wonderful people at St. Stephen, I was ready to die. I came back to the Church. I read scripture. I reconciled with God. I made all my funeral arrangements and I found peace.

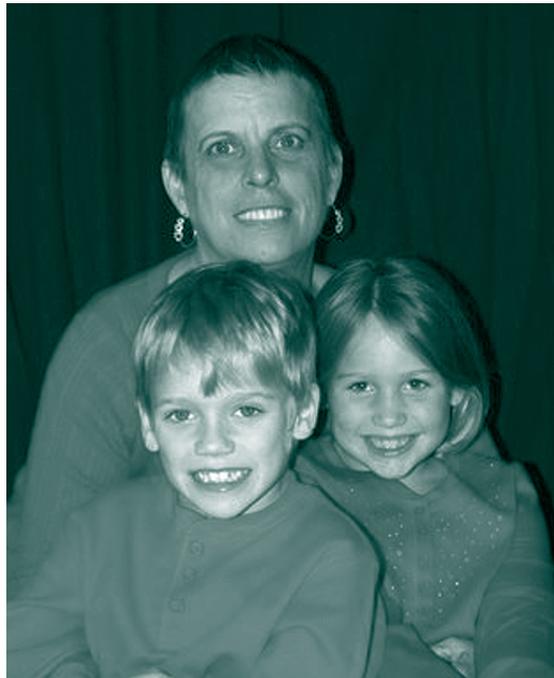
When the doctors told me I was going to live, I was perplexed because I had to figure out what I was going to do with my life. The first thing I did was throw a party. Then I went back to work. I was able to complete my journey with my Christ Renews His Parish team and gave my witness at the spring women's renewal weekend.

But once again, God showed me that He is in control and He had plans for my life. I began suffering from dizziness, blurred vision and erratic blood pressure. Thinking that I might be having a stroke, my brother and sister-in-law rushed me to the hospital. After a series of tests, it was determined that the cancer that we thought was gone had moved to my brain. The prognosis:

six months (give or take).

I'm not dying. I am living. Each day is a blessing from God and I realize that even with this tumor in my head God has a purpose for my life. Each day He gives me, I give back to Him.

It has been an amazing six months since I received my second death notice.



I've been able to put my life in order so my family can be at peace when I'm gone. I was able to witness my grandchildren receive their 1<sup>st</sup> Holy Communion – something I was committed to make happen. I took my first trip to Walt Disney World, which included riding as the grand marshal in the parade. I went

on a cruise. I've watched the butterflies. I have visits from my friends and I've seen angels. I've been given the opportunity to say "goodbye" and "I love you" to my family and friends. And I've been able to start a new ministry at St. Stephen called Hope Is Contagious. It is dedicated to providing support and help to cancer patients and their families to help facilitate the way to peace, God and happiness through the power of prayer.

This ministry is my gift to cancer patients and their caregivers. I want you to have the hope and peace that I experienced in my life. Not everyone who receives a diagnosis of cancer is terminal. We want to give you hope. Not everyone who is terminal is ready to die. We want to give you peace. The patient and the family live in fear. We want to give you strength.

If you would like to be involved in this ministry, you can contact Ed and Tina Sleyzak at [hopeiscontagious@ststephencatholic.org](mailto:hopeiscontagious@ststephencatholic.org). Look for more information to follow in the bulletin.

Remember: We are all dying, but we aren't all living. It's never too early and it's never too late to live your life according to God's purpose. I pray that every person will grow closer to God and accept each day as a gift. †

*Mary Ann Smith is the originator of the Hope Is Contagious ministry and a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# Musical Evangelism



By Tammy Modica

This summer we had the amazing privilege of presenting a full-length Broadway musical to the parish community. “Little Women: the Musical” was proposed as a way to benefit the Heart-to-Heart scholarship and build a dynamic new approach to evangelization. The response was overwhelming as God truly blessed us over the course of our entire production. St. Stephen’s brand new theater troupe is becoming a new ministry that will continue to grow and bring people together in a fun, engaging and ecumenical way.

Most people may not think that a theatrical production could be considered a faith-building experience, but they’d be wrong. Faith is, at its core, an act of trust. The cast and crew constantly had their faith tested during this production. Where are we going to get the rest of the

cast? What about the stage crew? Who would make the costumes? Where would we get the lumber for our set? How would we possibly raise any money to donate? Will anyone actually come to see this show?

God chuckled softly to Himself and then He answered us. We did have

a little help from St. Anthony, St. Genesius, St. Vitus, St. Jude and St. Augustine, who thankfully were in constant intercession on our behalf.

For instance, we started with three actors, when we needed 10. God, and an extremely tenacious young lady, helped gather more people together until we had a complete cast. Some came from the St. Stephen community; others were friends from neighboring parishes. Catholic, Protestant or agnostic, it didn’t matter because we were gathering together at the table of community.

Evangelism is simply spreading of the gospel. That doesn’t mean that you have to constantly spout Bible verses at someone. It means living the gospel message day in and day out by bringing people together to talk about faith experiences, working together to benefit someone else, raising awareness of the needs of others and, sometimes, to just be there

for a friend in need.

The San Jose Homemakers, a fantastic ministry that helps furnish and find apartments for migrant families and those in desperate need, came to our aid. In order to fill out our stage with appropriate furniture pieces, we contacted a multitude of people, some who now continue to donate furniture to the mission specifically.

By coincidence, one of our own production members was temporarily homeless, and immediately several people offered their own homes for him to stay in. Whatever we needed, whatever we asked for, we received and then some.

A motley group of 10 actors and a handful of stage crew became a family over the course of two months. In short, we formed a community. We struggled, we shed tears, we laughed our heads off, and we loved every minute of it.

We hope that as we continue to build this community and theater troupe that more will want to join us. Keep your eyes open for our next production and be a part of a new type of community.

They say that you can’t choose your family.

Well, apparently you can. †

*Tammy Modica is a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# Spiritual Commitment

By Lisa Huetteman

This morning there was a knock on the door. When the Little White Puff started barking her “*I’m-not-sure-if-they-are-friend-or-foe*” bark, I put aside my cup of coffee and went to see who it was. Looking back at me through our front door window were two women each dressed in their Sunday best with a pocketbook over their shoulders and carrying a Bible.

You’ve probably been in my place before. It certainly wasn’t the first time a couple of Jehovah’s Witnesses had shown up at my door. The first time I encountered them I responded by yelling through the window that I wasn’t interested.

The second time I was a little braver. I cracked open the door, stuck my head out and said, “I am Catholic and very happy with my Church.” And then I closed the door and locked it behind me.

The third time I was a little more polite. I listened to their sales pitch, took their materials, thanked them for their time, told them I was firm and committed in my faith, and wished them well.

But was I really committed in my faith? Not exactly. I would never do what

they were doing.

Two by two they go out, knocking on doors, interrupting someone’s breakfast, smiling, reaching out and getting doors slammed in their faces. And they go on. You have to admire someone who is strong enough in their faith to make cold calls.

It was interesting for me to watch and listen to these women. Like a trained salesperson who knows how to overcome every objection, the talkative one would go on. Always looking for a way to find the hole, the weak spot where she could move in to see if she could hook me.

So we continued our conversation. They would offer me an opportunity to learn more and I would share with them how I had everything they were offering and more – so much more.

Then I asked them, “Who do you believe that Jesus Christ is?” They responded, “We believe that He is our Lord and Savior, the Son of God.” They told me that there is a misperception about Jehovah’s Witness and their belief in Christ. We agreed on this point.

We also agreed that Christ was a model for how to live our lives. We agreed that the Bible is our guide. Then I shared how we not only have the Bible, but as Catholics, we have our Traditions. I talked about why and where scripture supports them and how wonderful our sacraments are. Most importantly, I told them how all of this helps me go out every day and attempt to love my neighbor as Christ taught. And I went on and on.

What was different about this encounter than the countless knocks on the door I’d experienced before? I was. When I answered the door this morning, I was different. Today, I witnessed to them.

This transformation in me didn’t happen overnight. It has happened over years of seeking a personal relationship with Christ and finding answers in

the Catholic Church, its teachings and its Traditions.

But it is much more than just an intellectual understanding of why the Church teaches what it does, it has been a process of putting into practice those things that have helped me grow and confirm my faith.

I am now firm in my faith – so much so, that I want to share it with others, even two Jehovah’s Witness women who came to my door.

We don’t have to go out two by two knocking on doors to spread the Good News. People cross our paths every day in need of mercy, healing, strength and hope. We find them sitting at the desk next to us at work. They are another parent at our child’s school. They are a clerk in the grocery store we shop at every week. And they are even that nameless face we see at church every Sunday. There are people everywhere who are in need of God’s grace but don’t know where or how to find it.

It doesn’t take a degree in religious studies or the ability to quote chapter and verse of the Bible to share God’s gift with others. All it takes is an open heart and a true desire to have a positive impact on every person we meet. As Francis of Assisi said, we should share the Good News of Christ always and, if necessary, use words.

What happened to my two friends?

Realizing that she didn’t have a prospect, the talkative one decided it was time to move on. Before they left, I wished them well and asked God to bless them. I also asked if there was anything special that they wanted me to pray for. We agreed that we would pray for each other.

Then the talkative one said that they had friends in the neighborhood and that maybe they would stop by again to say “Hi.” I said, “That would be nice.”

I look forward to it. Maybe next time, I’ll invite them to join me for Mass at St. Stephen. †

*Lisa Huetteman is a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*



# These Men They Call Knights



By Julio Alvarez, PGK

**W**ho are these men seen serving throughout St. Stephen Catholic Church and our community who wear the emblem of the Knights of Columbus? In short, they are a group of Catholic men bound together to realize a legacy inspired by a young parish priest at St. Mary's Parish in New Haven, Connecticut in 1882.

The vision was as simple as it was ground-breaking - to grow the faith and help build the Church through a fraternal organization of Catholic men who would band together to: aid on another in times of sickness, hardship or death, especially



caring for the widows and children of our deceased brothers; strengthen ourselves and each other in our Catholic faith; strengthen our families and family life; to be strong pillars of support for our bishops, priests and religious; and to be of service to our Church and community by coming to the aid of those most in need in our society.

Driven by that same spirit which filled the founders 128 years ago, in June of 2006, a similar small group of men came together at St. Stephen Parish and were chartered as the 14,084th council in the order, honoring the first martyr of the Church, as St. Stephen Council 14084 of the Knights of Columbus. The good works performed by the Knights are founded upon four core principles... Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism. These principles underpin the multiple works that are accomplished through our Key Service Programs representing Church, community, Pro-Life, Council, Family and Youth Activities.

## Charity

Charity is the first principle of the order. As such, Knights of Columbus throughout the world are committed to easing the plight of those less fortunate. These past two years alone, St. Stephen Council raised and donated over \$47,257 to Church, community and youth programs and 38,032 volunteer hours to charitable causes. Money raised has been through the efforts of Knights and their families through working con-

cessions at Raymond James Stadium, Casino Nights, Tootsie Roll Drives, Keep Christ in Christmas program sales and multiple other fundraisers both throughout the community and as part of events held within the council. These programs directly support special needs programs and Hillsborough County Special Olympics, helping life and pro-life programs such as LifeCare of Brandon, tuition support and boarding for children in an impoverished Catholic community in India, assistance to food and shelter programs, and assistance to members, parishioners and those in our surrounding community where possible, to include local scholarship programs for Catholic education and religious education support.

## Unity

Unity, the second principle of the Knights, is exemplified in our collective commitment to join together as steadfast men of faith who are unafraid to demonstrate our love for our holy Church and our place in society. We focus our unified strength to speak out for religiously grounded moral values, issues and for those who believe themselves defenseless in a society and culture that today seems intent upon drowning out the voices of good. Most evident in our community the Knights have stood firm in pro-life events such as dedications to several memorials to the unborn, erecting crosses to bring to the forefront the cause of the unborn, prayer vigils at abor-

tion clinics and support of the 40 Days for Life prayer campaign throughout our region, as well as promulgating materials on issues of civic relevance to our Catholic community. Additionally, our council has been a stalwart supporter of our law enforcement, firefighters and first responders who we honor with an annual community-wide Blue Mass each September to pray for them and their families' selfless contributions to our safety.

### Fraternity

Fraternity is the third principle of the Knights of Columbus, and is manifested in the sincere way that our members band together to pray and encourage each other to become better Catholic men of faith, husbands, fathers and role models within our parish and community. Moreover, nothing is more important to Knights in exemplifying the principle of fraternity than maintaining the family atmosphere within our council, which manifests itself in the caring for each other and our families, especially in these difficult financial times, but most importantly, in the event of sickness or death of any of our members. In our council, Knights have come together, thankfully only on very few occasions, to pray for brothers who were called into our Lord's arms, to honor their service and as a show of unity and fraternity dedicate ourselves to ensuring that, as members of our Knights of Columbus family, the widows and families of our deceased brothers are looked after. Each year, on August 12th, we celebrate the birth of our founder, Father Michael J. McGivney, who in March

2008 was given the title "Venerable Servant of God" by Pope Benedict XVI. We give thanks for the opportunity he created for us to serve our God, and offer prayers for his continued cause for canonization. Additionally, every November Knights throughout the world join in memorial services dedicated to the memory of our deceased brothers and demonstrate our commitment to their families. Our spirit of fraternity is real and sincere and is always evident in the camaraderie shared between members and their families throughout our St. Stephen community.

### Patriotism

Patriotism, the fourth principle of our order, is one of the defining principles of the Knights of Columbus to demonstrate that as Catholics we are proud and loyal citizens of our great nation. We proudly show our love for our country and advocate the strength of the ballot box to advance the moral causes for which we stand. Further, we aim to bring to the forefront of our parish the gratitude and the prayers we owe our serving military, veterans and deceased service members through programs at Veterans Day and Memorial Day weekend Masses. This year we organized and mailed 'care' packages to deployed service members in Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, our St. Stephen Council members and families actively participate as an integral part of our Fourth Degree Assembly to conduct periodic visits to the residents of the Haley Cove Nursing Home at the VA Hospital, including putting on a major Christmas party and a summer picnic. This year we are organizing to send



'special' Thanksgiving and Christmas gifts to remotely assigned and deployed service members of our parish.

The 261 Catholic men of our parish who have become members of the Knights of Columbus St. Stephen council are part of what has become one of the most active and well respected councils in the State of Florida. These "Men They Call Knights" belong to a vibrant fraternal family who are unafraid to publicly profess their love for God, their faith, their families and each other and hold true to a commitment to serve as God's hands in our parish and community. To those who would be Knights the simple question is not whether or not any one man can make a difference...the question is whether or not you are that man. †

*Julio Alvarez is a Past Grand Knight of the St. Stephen Council of Knights of Columbus.*



# The Divine Physician

By Maria Malac

**H**ave you noticed how we live in a world which has traded the Divine Physician for powerlessness and synthetic solutions? Without appearing to completely debase modern medicine, my intent here is to merely ignite the thought process of overturning this culture of sickness.

It is God's desire that we live free of disease. And while the medical system has made great strides, it's simply keeping illness and pain at bay with never-ending treatments. Meanwhile, the cost of healthcare is crippling our bank accounts and enslaving our emotional well-being.

Let me help you explore healthy choices that you can live with and help you discover or rediscover our Divine Healer. You have more control over it than you think.

I am a mother who has made it a personal mission to honor my stewardship of holistic wellness by fostering a community of healing and discovery while inspiring others to wellness and purpose. What qualifies my efforts is simple: 100 percent faith, zero percent fear, walking the talk and talking the walk (teaching others).

While I have been living holistically for more than 10 years, it wasn't until I read Christopher West's book "Theology of the Body for Beginners" that the door opened to a whole new level of awareness of how sacred our bodies are. This book fosters a renewed respect for the body and what miraculous lengths God went through to reveal Himself to humanity starting with Jesus.

Our bodies were created for wellness, not sickness! In the basic course of nature, our bodies have the potential for sickness, however, we have an innate mechanism for self-healing. When you cut yourself, have you ever had to verbally tell your wound to heal? It would be silly to think that God would put us here on earth without equipping us with the tools and remedies to keep our bodies well. With faith, trust, knowledge

and practical application, we all have the ability to harness the healing power that resides in us.

Here are some, but certainly not all, of the causes that contribute to our toxicity, which untreated or unresolved will lead to illness: sin, negativity in thought and action, poor diet, inferior personal care products and cleaners, pollution, and drugs.

When making lifestyle changes, overzealous efforts usually end up changing very little. It starts with a prayerful desire to align ourselves to God's purpose for our lives, which means keeping our bodies charged with wellness for the fulfillment of that purpose.

"It is for us to tune in with God's wisdom and His will, to educate ourselves in how to restore our wellness and maintain our health by the use of His natural creation." (David Stewart, "Healing Oils of the Bible,") When you commit to living in union with the Lord, He opens up a line of communication that is undeniable. "If one prays with an open mind, free of the influence of modern medical propaganda and pharmaceutical advertising, one will be led by God to consider His 'original medicine.'" (Stewart)

It's a matter of surrendering old ways while putting trust in new beginnings. Ideally, we should replace toxic products that are commonly used with ones that do no harm. Replace one of these items every two weeks or so until a significant change has been made. In this manner, you will ease into a positive change with lasting results.

Next, learn about how to incorporate essential oils into a daily routine. "Daily application of essential oils in Biblical times was extensive. There are over 600 references to essential oils in the Bible." (Stewart) The highly esteemed gifts of frankincense and myrrh were brought to the Baby Jesus. In Proverbs



21:20, we read, "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise." Essential oils are nature's living remedy. "Essential oils are composed of tiny molecules that can penetrate every cell, administering healing therapy to the most fundamental levels of our bodies." (Stewart) They're alive, bio-available, have no side effects and safely pass through the blood-brain barrier. Only God could pack such healing power in the essence of plants.

One of the clearest examples I can share to illustrate this truth is in the use of antibiotics. We all know that antibiotics kill both the bad as well as the good bacteria in our bodies. When essential oils are introduced into the body they only kill the bad bacteria while keeping the good bacteria intact. Essential oils contain divine intelligence; synthetic drugs are spiritually dead and devoid of such intelligence to know how only to do the right thing.

"God's medicines support our innate healing abilities. ... What they simply do is restore the body to its natural state of balance and health." (Stewart)

On the whole, it has become commonplace to put more faith in science than God.

Is all this information meant to scare?

Certainly not! But knowledge is power, and education is the first line of defense. I have made a conscious decision to challenge mainstream medicine with amazing results. To the consternation of friends and family, I have confronted many health issues with 100 percent faith in God's healing abilities and the discernment to know when to seek medical advice. I have a system I use which enables me to proceed without fear. With an intense devotion to the Holy Trinity, I give all common (and not so common) health concerns three days to resolve. If, in that time, I cannot remedy a situation with essential oils and other natural remedies, I vow to take it to a medical professional. Triumphant, I've not gone

beyond my three day cut-off date.

This practice is by no means reckless abandon. Many hours have been dedicated to education and prayer in an effort to whole-body wellness, peace of mind and freedom. Do we have insurance? Absolutely! We realize accidents do happen. However, the fear of sickness does not exist in our household.

How comforting would it be for you to know how to use peppermint oil to ease the discomfort and pain of these ailments: digestive issues, the itch of a mosquito bite, headaches, achy joints, reduced mental focus. Did you know there are reports and research that detail how orange essential oil combats cancer? How encouraging is that?

The Divine Physician is available to us all today, as always. May the veil of fear and false hope be lifted, and may your faith be awakened or restored in God's great plan for us here on earth. Feel free to contact me to conduct a workshop or for a free article on why essential oils heal and drugs don't.

In the meantime, pick up the book "Healing Oils of the Bible," by David Stewart, to start opening the doors toward a renewed awareness of God's healing in the modern age. †

*Maria Malec is a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

Footnotes 1-8 "Healing Oils of the Bible," David Stewart, 2002.

## Share the Good News!

By Lisa Huetteman

For the past four years, more than 100 parishioners, family and friends have walked the Project Cure walk to help bring an end to breast cancer. Many more have participated by volunteering or by donating to the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute, the beneficiary of our fundraising activities. This year, the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Project Cure 3-Day Walk to end breast cancer will be held October 29-31 at the Hillsborough County park on Natures Way in Bloomingdale East.

Why does St. Stephen sponsor a breast cancer walk? Doesn't Susan G. Komen already host a three-day walk for breast cancer the same weekend?

"Project Cure exists precisely because we wanted to provide an alternative to the Susan G. Komen three-day walk," said Mary Owens, one of the event's co-founders. "Most people donate to Komen because of the wonderful job they have done bringing awareness to the issue of breast cancer. However, the Susan G. Komen Foundation also provides grant funding to Planned Parenthood, an organization that promotes promiscuous behavior to our teens and provides abortions on demand across the country."

Five years ago, after losing a friend to breast cancer, a group of St. Stephen moms formed a team to walk the Komen three-day walk.

"Unknowingly, we signed up to support Komen for the good work they do and were unaware that we were also making a contribution to turn on the lights in an abortion facility," said Amy Meany, a four-time 60-mile walker. "We found out about Komen when a prospective sponsor told us she wouldn't make a pledge because some of the money could end up supporting

Planned Parenthood."

That prospective sponsor was Jeanne Lewis, the co-chair of St. Stephen's Respect Life ministry. "It is so important that we get the word out about the Komen-Planned Parenthood connection," Jeanne said. "I'm proud to support Project Cure every year because we need to have an opportunity to make positive strides toward a cure for breast cancer without compromising our values. Project Cure provides that opportunity."

Parishioners can get involved in several ways:

- The first and most important way to get involved is to pray. Pray for the success of Project Cure, for the victims of cancer and their families, and for the doctors and researchers who are working to find a cure.
- Those interested in walking or volunteering for the three-day walk and 4-mile family fun walk are encouraged to visit [www.projectcure.ststephencatholic.org](http://www.projectcure.ststephencatholic.org) for more information and registration.
- Make a donation to Project Cure. Over the past four years, Project Cure has raised more than \$75,000 for the Don and Erika Wallace Comprehensive Breast Cancer Center in Tampa.
- Spread the word. If you are asked to support the Susan G. Komen walk, let the person know that you cannot donate to that organization because it funds Planned Parenthood. Let them know there is an alternative to the Komen three-day walk and make a donation to Project Cure instead.

This year, on Oct. 31, we'll be walking our 300<sup>th</sup> mile for Project Cure. We'd love to have you join us for just one mile.

*Lisa Huetteman is a senior contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

# Jesus, Do You Love Me?



By Cynthia Wood

**A** little boy no more than 4 years old came to Jesus and asked him, “Jesus, do you love me?” Jesus answered with a smile, “Yes I love you and MORE”.

With that the little boy got a bit excited and held out his hands six inches apart in front of him and asked, “Jesus, do you love me this much?”

Jesus quickly responded imitating the boy’s hand gesture saying, “Yes, I love you this much and more.”

With that the boy immediately widened his arms another six inches and asked, “Do you love me this much?”

Jesus again answered, “Yes and more!”

At this the little boy paused and a smile came across his face, as he asked for a final time, “Jesus...” he began in a quiet coy voice, then excitedly continued “do you love me...” and with his arms stretched out as far as he could, he shouted, “THIS MUCH?”

Jesus answered “Yes, I love you this much.” And with His arms stretched out as far as they could, they nailed Him to the cross.

*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.*  
—John 15:13

When I heard that story during a homily many years ago, I was touched in a profound way. We Catholics are so blessed to have the crucifix, the image of Christ on the cross. It gives us a tangible, physical reality to help us grasp the invisible - the mystery of our faith. When I reflect on the crucifix, I am awed that our Lord would love us so much to have endured such pain, humiliation, and death for our sake. Sometimes as I sit before Mass, looking up at the crucifix with His arms stretched out as far as they could, I am that little child and I can hear Him say, “I love you this much”. And as I close my eyes, I feel the warmth of His hug and His embrace that gives me the strength, the faith, and the determination to want nothing more than to help others see, know, and feel that incredible love of Christ.

It saddens me to know some people reading this right now may not know how much they are loved by God or that it is possible to feel His embrace. That is where evangelization comes in.

We are all called to know, love, and serve God in this world so that we can be happy with Him forever in the next. (By the way that is the answer to the Baltimore Catechism Question #150 Why God made us?) Evangelization is sharing with others our knowledge and love of God and the opportunities to serve the Lord so that they too can experience that glimpse of heaven on earth and share in that glorious life everlasting.

Evangelization comes in so many forms. Sometimes, it is the written word like the Quarterly Blessing. Today we have so many other media as well like the radio, internet, CDs, mp3 downloads, and

more. At St. Stephen we are fortunate to have the Lighthouse Catholic Media CDs available to us. What a blessing to hear the voices of holy people like Mother Teresa and Bishop Fulton Sheen on the way to work; to gain in wisdom and knowledge about our Catholic Faith from great theologians like Dr. Scott Hahn and Jeff Cavins, to be motivated by Matt Kelly, Father Corapi or Father Larry Richards, and so much more. If you want to be touched and enriched by these CDs as I have been, please email me at [cwood@ststephencatholic.org](mailto:cwood@ststephencatholic.org) or check out the CDs we have in the kitchen hallway at church.

Sometimes evangelization needs to be face to face and at St. Stephen we are committed to providing many opportunities to grow and to share your faith face to face like bible studies, apologetics, Catechism of the Catholic Church studies and more. We even have a Toastmasters Club where you will not only learn about your faith but how to confidently share it with others. Please check the bulletin weekly for times and locations. If you

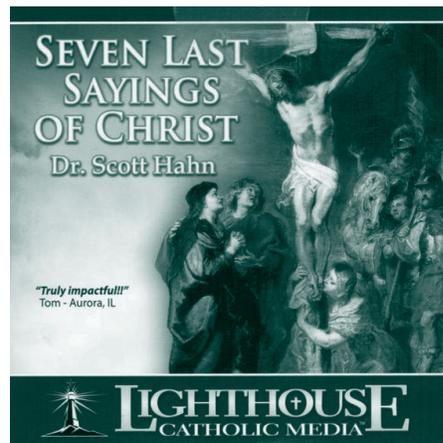
have any questions on the above or ways that you can participate and become a member of our Adult Ed Evangelization team, please contact me at [cwood@ststephencatholic.org](mailto:cwood@ststephencatholic.org) or call 813-728-2056.

May God bless you and may your hearts and minds always be opened

to the truth and may you come to know how much you are loved as a child of God. †

*“Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” -Mathew 18:3*

*Cynthia Wood is the adult faith formation religious education coordinator for St. Stephen.*



# Shaped Through a Kind Heart

By Elaine Owens

Everyone has that person in their life that shapes them and makes them who they are today. That person in my life is Nancy Shirina. A leader, a sponsor, a coach and a friend, Mrs. Shirina helped make me the person I am today. She has been very exemplary through her actions. She always strives to do what is right and to help others in anyway she can. Mrs. Shirina taught me to do everything for God whether it's volunteering, helping out a friend or playing sports.

Over the past years, sports have always been a big part in my life. For four years Mrs. Shirina has been Coach Shirinato me. As a coach she taught me to play sports for God. I have learned that I can use my talents and athletic ability for His greater glory. When I was mad or upset, Coach Shirina taught me how to use that to my advantage through sports. Instead of letting that aggression out on someone, I can use it to improve my game. I always use this as an outlet. One of the biggest things I have learned is sportsmanship. This has shaped me into the student athlete that I am proud to be.

Mrs. Shirina got me into volunteering at a very young age. She got me started at school and at church. I love volunteering,

because it gives me a chance to help others and make a difference in the community. When I was younger my mom use to tell me that we were going to volunteer at church and I always asked in reply, "Is Mrs. Shirina gonna be there?" I always got the same response "Yes!" Hearing that Mrs. Shirina would be there would make me smile, because she always knew how to make volunteering fun and enjoyable.

Whenever I need help or guidance I turn to Mrs. Shirina. She is like my spiritual leader. She leads me on the right path when I fall astray. Mrs. Shirina has always been someone I could trust no matter what the circumstances. She has always had my back and I will always have hers.

In eighth grade when I was told I would need a sponsor for Confirmation, I knew exactly who that was going to be. Ever since I was a very young age, Mrs. Shirina has been a big part of my spiritual journey. I wanted that to continue through out eighth grade and the rest of my life. Through her, I have learned that my faith journey doesn't end at Confirmation, it's just the beginning. My faith continues with me through the rest of my life. It goes with me everywhere I go.

I don't see Mrs. Shirina as much anymore which at times can be hard because



I care so much about her. She has played such a big part in my life and in my faith. I never really know when I'll see her again, but one thing I'm sure of is that if I ever need her she is just a phone call away.

Mrs. Shirina has shaped me into a person who cares about others, her faith, and her community. I am so very thankful for this, because this is the person I want to be and Mrs. Shirina helped create that. I have one thing to say to Mrs. Shirina, "Thank you so much and I love you with all my heart!" †

*Elaine Owens is a high school student at Bloomington High School and a graduate of St. Stephen Catholic School.*

## Catechist Spotlight

By Tara Dibble

Formally trained as a teacher, Linda Calhoun took a short break to raise her children. The itch to teach was still there, however, and Linda relieved it by teaching religious education while her children were in the elementary program. As the children moved on to middle school, Linda found herself stepping back to give them a little freedom. At the same time, it offered her an opportunity to enter a

traditional classroom again.

Fortunately for St. Stephen, Linda found her niche teaching religious education. In her third year as a catechist, Linda was excited as the school year drew near. There's just something about that back-to-school buzz and that little taste of teaching that draws Linda back each year. When asked why she continues to volunteer, Linda quietly explains: "I think it's my gift. I've always been drawn to it."

And the religious education staff

wholeheartedly agrees. Linda is a popular catechist, and we're excited she's agreed to return this year. Please help us thank Linda for her generous donation of time and talent. †

*Tara Dibble is a coordinator with religious education at St. Stephen.*

# Faith and Scandal

By Jonathan Stephanz

I would like to address something that has been on my mind, and I am sure a lot of your minds as well. Priest scandals have once again plagued our Church in the context of the media. It is nearly impossible to go through seminary at a time when the Church faces so much opposition without looking at the enemy head on. I have taken a great deal of time in my prayer and reflection on this matter over the last few months.

While this great tragedy in our Church is bad in and of itself, we have the internet and other media helping to tear open this all-too-fresh wound. Media can be good, but the way in which we use media can be the turn that leads us to a dead end.

Too often, we, as Catholics, are out of touch with our faith and our faith's catechesis. We think that if it is being said on the television or the internet from a news network then it must be true. When people begin to place more trust in the media than on the central beliefs of our faith, problems arise, and this good entity that we have becomes an instrument of deterioration. To paraphrase what a priest said in a recent homily, the media has been the source we have turned to in order to understand our faith.

What a sad truth this is. We no longer turn to Holy Mother Church or those that have been placed in leadership for a better comprehension of issues that involve the Church or other basic questions about our faith.

There is nothing that can be said to calm the outbursts of hatred. In recent weeks, Pope Benedict XVI has tried to address these issues, and he has met with utter rejection. As I spoke with another seminarian, I said that we can sum up the pontificate of Benedict with one word: apology.

From the start of his pontificate in 2005 after the death of John Paul the Great, Benedict has sought the forgiveness of all those affected by sexual abuse from clergy and other members of the holy institution. One thing that has been overlooked in the recent outbreaks of hate-filled remarks directed at the Holy Father has been the amount of time that Benedict has spent meeting with victims of this horrible crime during his visits to foreign countries. In his visit to America, Benedict met with many victims one on one to apologize and seek forgiveness.

Pope Benedict has certainly not tried to cover anything up. In fact, these meetings have further exposed these issues to the public. He has heedlessly taken

will ever stop the hate-filled remarks of so many people. I honestly believe that the only thing that will truly mend the brokenness is prayer for the hearts of all people to become open to the healing power of God. I feel that most people who speak out against the Church have hearts that are hard and so distant from the Lord that they are no longer able to see love. Because of this, they are unable to find healing. As members of this sacred institution, we should pray for the victims and all of those people whose hearts have grown cold and distant. We pray that their hearts may be open to receive the love and healing needed to mend this situation.

Lastly, the issue of priestly celibacy should not be an issue at all. If you were to ask seminarians throughout the world, I would think that it would be a unanimous understanding that priests should be celibate. We know what celibacy is, and therefore we understand that marriage is an act of adultery toward a priest's spouse - the Church. For too long priests had been misinformed about what celibacy means. Celibacy does not mean that the priest is a glorified bachelor, as is the popular belief. Celibacy is the radical surrender of all that the priest has to his spouse, the Church. At his



the cross of the Church upon his shoulders and sought to bring reconciliation to those who have suffered. In looking at other major institutions where acts of sexual abuse occur, it is nearly impossible to find the heads of those institutions coming out and seeking reconciliation from the victims. But Pope Benedict has made this a major priority in his pontificate. Still, he is greeted by people who cry out with hatred.

I think that no amount of apologies or amount of money given to the victims

ordination, the man lays prostrate before the altar of God as a symbol of his complete surrender. Just as a married man is to lay down all that he has for the sake of his family, the priest gives his whole life to the faithful and to God.

Thanks to the teachings of John Paul II, we have a more profound understanding of celibacy. This had been missing in the formation of priests for a long time, but is beginning to come forth once again. John Paul II spends a good portion of his text "Theology of the Body" on the

importance and understanding of priestly celibacy. The men coming up through seminary today reap the benefits of these teachings and understand more clearly the role of celibacy in the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Obviously, these questions go much deeper, but hopefully these answers will spark enough interest that you will seek the answers from “reliable” sources - in other words, not your local news reports, but from the Church itself.

The greatest and most beautiful thing about our Church is her wide acceptance. If you are not happy with an answer you receive, you can always seek another

opinion. With an institution of this magnitude, we are blessed to be able to see every entity from various vantage points, which allows us to come to one single truth from all different directions. For too long Catholics have allowed others to answer the difficult questions for us. Now, it is time to stand up and learn more about our great faith so that we can answer them for ourselves.

My prayer is that we may all seek to have an awakening in our faith. I hope that, instead of sitting back and taking whatever is spoon-fed us by the media, we have the courage to ask whether or not that is the true teaching of Holy Mother

Church. We should know our faith and not agree with someone because they sound intelligent when they relay information. I pray that we become zealous in trying to unveil aspects of our age-old religion and that our hearts burn with the fire with an unquenchable flame for the truth and the love of God. As Christ tells us in Luke 12:49, “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” †

*Jonathan Stephanz is a seminarian at St. John Vianney College Seminary and a contributing writer for Quarterly Blessings.*

## When Non-Catholics Say

*“Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence” 1Peter 3:15*

**A**s Catholics, we are called to know our faith and to give others a reason for our hope.....(Heaven)...

Some of the greatest Christians around are non-Catholic Christians. Their faith in Jesus is truly amazing. Their love of scripture is something that all Catholics need to emulate. However, some of what they think about the Catholic Church is just plain wrong. This section hopes to answer some of these things with some Catholic “quick hits”, from the Bible.

### **When Non-Catholics Say....**

*“Catholics break the biblical command to not call anyone on earth father by referring to their priests as Father”.*

### **Then you say...**

One of the Ten Commandments given us by God was to “Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother.” It doesn’t say “Dad”; it says Father. Paul says that He is our father in Christ Jesus in 1 Corinthians 4:15. In James 2:21, James refers to Abraham as our father. In 1 John 2:14, John is writing to the fathers. Hyperbole is used in the Bible in several places, in

order to make a point. The point with “call no man on earth your father” (Matthew 23:9) is to let us all know that our Heavenly Father is the Father of us all (“Our” Father). Other examples of hyperbole would be “all have sinned” (Jesus, 1 day old infants, people born with brain damage have not sinned), and “all Israel will be saved” from Romans 11:26 (Israeli murderers, robbers, sorcerers, fornicators, etc., who do not repent will not be saved). Jesus says in Luke 14:26, “If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Does anyone really think that statement by Jesus is to be taken literally? And in America we have this holiday called “Father’s day”. Do you celebrate this day with Catholics?

### **When Non-Catholics Say....**

*“Catholics need to be “born again” in order to be saved.”*

### **Then you say...**

Finish the sentence. The sentence says that you must be born again of water and the spirit in order to be saved (John 3:5). This is a clear reference to Baptism (Matthew 3:16). We know from Matthew 3:16 that the Spirit comes to us at Baptism. The phrase can also be trans-

lated “born from above” in addition to “born again”. Tell them that you have been baptized and this is no longer an issue for you.

### **When Non-Catholics Say....**

*“Catholics need to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”*

### **Then you say...**

Catholics consume the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ at every Holy Communion (John 6:56). Like the Blessed Virgin Mary, we are living tabernacles of Christ immediately after receiving Holy Communion. You can’t get more personal than that.

### **When Non-Catholics Say....**

*“Why do you have Jesus hanging from a cross in every Catholic Church? Don’t you know that He is risen?”*

### **Then you say...**

Like St. Paul, the Catholic Church preaches Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). By looking at the crucified Jesus on the cross, it is a constant reminder to us all that Jesus said that we, His followers, must pick up our own cross and follow Him (Matthew 10:38). Meditating on the crucifixion of Jesus is healing for our soul (Isaiah 53:5).

**St. Stephen Catholic Church**  
 5049 Bell Shoals Rd.  
 Valrico, FL 33594

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**O**ur mission is met if each quarter, when reading the *Quarterly Blessings* one person who is not actively involved in the church gets inspired and excited about the great things going on at St. Stephen and gets involved by participating in any of the wonderful spiritual and fellowship activities.

The *Quarterly Blessings* also encourages all parishioners to make any contributions, suggestions and comments for this publication. And please submit any and all photos. we will be glad to return them to you. †

**Staff Contacts:**

**Fr. Bill Swengros** *Advisor*  
 813-689-4900

**Mary Owens** *Managing Editor*

**Scott Huetteman** *General Manager*

**Gretchen Robens** *Communications*

**Robert Cone** *Copy Editor*

**Senior Contributing Writers**

**Colleen Chappell**

**Lisa Huetteman**

**Ted Russell**

**Deacon Dan Gratkowski**

**Deacon Tom Schott**

**D'Ann White**

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**Calendar of Events**

*Visit the parish website for more information about these and other upcoming events*

[www.ststephencatholic.org](http://www.ststephencatholic.org)

|          |                                   |         |  |
|----------|-----------------------------------|---------|--|
| Oct. 31  | Project Cure Walk                 | Dec. 10 | Christmas Program  |
| Nov. 5   | Community for Women               | Dec. 11 | First Reconciliation Service   |
| Nov. 6   | Men's Club Golf Scramble          | Dec. 12 | Spanish Mass for Our Lady of Guadalupe   |
| Nov. 7   | Parish Picnic                     | Dec. 17 | Christmas Music Program  |
| Nov. 13  | Couples Game Night                | Dec. 20 | Parish Penance Service   |
| Nov. 14  | New Parishioner Welcome Reception | Dec. 24 | Christmas Pageant at 4pm and 6pm Masses, additional Masses at 8pm and Midnight |
| Nov. 24  | LifeLine Health Screening         | Dec. 25 | Merry Christmas! Masses at 8am, 9:30am and 11:30am                             |
| Nov. 25  | 10am Thanksgiving Mass            | Dec. 31 | New Year's Eve Adoration and Reception   |
| Dec. 1   | Mass of Innocents                 | Jan. 22 | Challenge- Mother/ Daughter Morning of Reflection                              |
| Dec. 3   | Advent Gathering                  | Jan. 29 | Adult Confirmation Retreat   |
| Dec. 3   | Community for Women               |         |  |
| Dec. 4   | First Reconciliation Service      |         |  |
| Dec. 4   | Couples Game Night                |         |  |
| Dec. 6-8 | Advent Mission                    |         |  |
| Dec. 10  | Men's Club Christmas Party        |         |  |