

St. Patrick Parish IN FOCUS



www.stpatuurbana.org

February 2015

Sabbath Renewal is underway!

Undaunted by the severe winter weather that canceled the Sabbath Renewal kickoff on January 8, the Sabbath Renewal small groups have begun their study of *The Joy of the Gospel* and report that the sessions are going well.

Leaders of the small groups in Urbana, Champaign, Savoy, and St. Joe are expressing a belief that the Holy Spirit is certainly at work in all of them. The Sabbath Renewal Team is gratified that leaders are enthusiastically welcoming their members, who are settling in, sharing ideas, and becoming comfortable with one another.

Chuck Milewski, group leader, remarked that “there was obvious enthusiasm for reaching out to others at their points of need. Our group showed a desire to ‘be ready’ and be active.” And group leader Judy Fierke said, “Each person in my wonderful group is teaching us all. Everyone has found different words of wisdom from Pope Francis to enlighten us all.”

There are about 240 participants in 30 small groups, and hopefully many more parishioners participating in their homes using the bulletin inserts in English, French, and Vietnamese. Do plan to come to the all-parish Sabbath Renewal closing celebration on Thursday, March 19, at 7 p.m. in the parish hall for a time of music, entertainment, inspiration, prayer—and delicious treats!



A gift of love

One cold, early February morning, not long ago and not very far from here, a little boy woke up to find that it had been snowing all night. He lived with his mother in a house out in the country, the roads were blocked, and second grade was canceled.

So he and his mother settled down for a quiet day at home together. His mother set up her ironing board and started working through a mountain of laundry, and the boy went to his little desk to make something.

“Mom! Have we got any paper?”

“Of course; it’s right there in your desk.”

“No, I mean some red paper.”

His mother got him some red paper that was left over from the chains they had made for the Christmas tree. A little while later, she came into his room with a pile of shirts and found the boy staring at his desk.

“Tell me again how you make a heart?”

She told him to fold the paper in half, then she drew a line on it and said, “Just cut here.” She went back to her ironing and a little while later...

“Mom! Have we got any lace?”

“Well, snowflakes are like lace. Make some more snowflakes like the ones we put on the windows.”

A little while later, “Mom! How do you spell valentine?”

See **Gift** on next page

From parishioner Joe Siegel, Augustinian Novice

Joe Siegel entered the Church through the RCIA process at St. Patrick's. This was his parish home from 2009 until he entered religious formation with the Augustinians in 2012. Joe renews his connection with St. Patrick's on an occasional brief visit, and recently agreed to share some reflections with us on his life as an Augustinian novice.



In the sermon from which this quote is taken, St. Augustine asks an enduring question: What does it mean to remain in Jesus's word? My own encounter with Jesus during the novitiate provided an answer to the question, but more importantly, the long stretches of quiet

meditation, with the accompanying unpacking of my childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences, convinced me of the necessity of remaining in him. Did I bring into recollection times of great joy? Of course, but there were also times of despair and brokenness that had cut deeply, creating wounds that were not only mine, but caused by me. This is the sort of thing that, halfway through the year, in the depths of winter, begins to occupy one's mind.

My religious community prays together a few times a day. We close each session with words of praise for Jesus: "Through the cross, you brought joy to the world." We all have wounds. Are they our crucifixion? Through them, is it possible to bring joy to our world? With the help of the Spirit, some of my scars have become a source of strength and are foundational to my ministry, but the reality, probably for all of us, is that some still bleed. And, of course, these things help our

prayer take flight; they become a foundation for our hope, a hope that in some cases, despite our earnest desires, struggles in the face of impossibility.

The call for us to lift up our heads and see the redemption near at hand is a daily challenge, hence the necessity of remaining in Jesus Christ. Augustine finishes his sermon about Christ the interior Teacher by reminding us that "he will make us free; that is, he will deliver us, not from barbarians but from spiritual terrors; not from the body's weakness, but from the soul's tribulations. He is the only one who can deliver us. We should none of us call ourselves free or we shall remain slaves. Our lives will not, however, remain in slavery, because our debts are being forgiven every day."

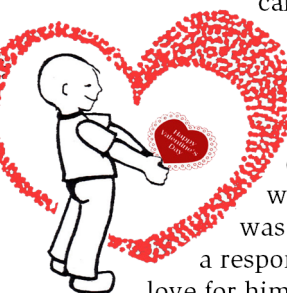
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"V - A - L..."

"Wait! Not so fast!"

At last he came running out to his mother with a present, a paper heart edged with lace, and wobbly writing that said, "I love you Mom. Be my valentine." Do you think she was pleased? She had given him the materials and the know-how. She had given him life and constant

care. And, honestly, the valentine wasn't a surprise. But of course she was pleased. It was a gift of love, a response to her love for him.



So it is with God whenever we do something that is loving, or generous, or creative. In a way, we can't really give God anything, because God gave us everything that we have. God gave us the materials, the talents, life, time, and love, and nothing that we do can ever surprise God. But of course God is pleased whenever we respond to him in love.

February seems to be the most difficult month in the experience of a religious novitiate. Some might say that, at least here in the Midwest, it has something to do with short, overcast days or being inside too much due to cold temperatures, but at least for me, it was in February 2014, halfway through what religious call "the canonical year," that I realized I wouldn't be escaping from myself: not this time...no way. The days were simply too empty, needing to be filled with anything, anything at all, even an unpacking of the psychological suitcases I had carried with me to Racine, Wisconsin.

The document that governs Augustinian formation to religious life describes the novitiate as a privileged experience during which one should personally discover, as St. Augustine would say, "Christ, interior Teacher and saving Word."

[Pope] Francis has given us hope and shown us the way, but it is up to us to pick up the ball and run with it. There is no room in the Church for passive observers; we are all called to be the body of Christ active in our world today. That means participating in or supporting parish programs for liturgical music, hospitality, continuing education, Scripture discussion, youth ministry, and social justice, to mention just a few.

—Thomas Reese, S.J.

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St. Patrick's Parish In Focus is published on the last weekend of the month in Urbana, Ill. During the parish's Sabbath Renewal, a two-page issue will be printed in the parish bulletin at the end of January and February. *In Focus* will return in its traditional format at the end of March with the April issue.

Articles, information, and photos for this issue were provided by Judy Fierke, Elizabeth Hendricks, Mary Lou Menches, Cathy Salika, Patsy Schmitt, and Joe Siegel. This issue was edited by Mary Lou Menches, page layout by Jim Urban.