

St. Patrick Parish IN FOCUS



www.stpaturbana.org

March 2015

The Joy of the Gospel, the Joy of Lent

Does it seem odd to be reflecting on Pope Francis's book, *The Joy of the Gospel*, during Lent? If you think of Lent as a season of gloom and somber discipline, then yes, it may be a little odd. But that's not the only way to look at Lent. The joys of Lent may be more subtle than the joys of other seasons, but they are real and deep nonetheless.

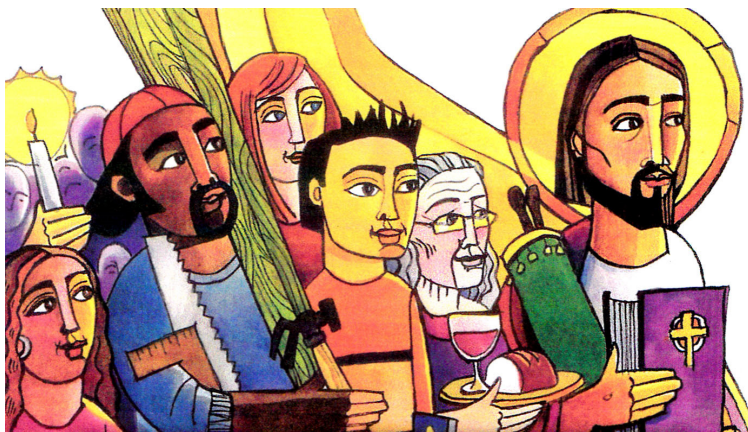
There's the joy of serving, for example. If your almsgiving in Lent includes a gift of your time and talent to help others, that can be a deeply satisfying thing. It's good to acknowledge the gifts the God has given us and to use them to make someone else's life easier.

There's the joy of becoming more yourself, your best self. Perhaps your fasting in this season takes the form of putting aside things that consume a lot of your time and attention, but doesn't draw you closer to other people or to God. You might be spending less time with celebrity gossip, computer games, media, or gadgets. If you use the time to be with people you love, to read something worthwhile, or to pray, this can be a thing of great happiness.

There's the joy of reconciliation. If you've been beating yourself up for mistakes that you've made, things that you've done wrong, bring them to God in reconciliation. God will forgive you and help you to move on. What could be more joyful than that?

Most of all, there's the joy of being drawn closer to God. Whatever you do to keep the season of Lent, be sure that God is with you—in your family, your friends, and your Sabbath Renewal group, to give you fresh perspective. God is there to bless your efforts, to help you stick with your commitments, and to use them for your good and for the good of others.

Everything God does for us is for our good. Everything God does is intended to make us happy. During Lent and Easter, on holidays and any-old-days, in this life and for all eternity, God wants us to be happy. God knows the joys that touch our deepest needs, the joys that will last. So of course Lent is a season of joy!



Discerning our future

We live in very exciting times – a unique moment when the thoughts of a new pope and the prospects of a new parish direction coincide! What an opportunity to reflect on who we are, where we've been, where we're going!

As a document issued at the beginning of a new papacy, *The Joy of the Gospel* is bold.

Pope Francis begins with his assessment of the Church as he sees it – not a pretty picture as he describes the conflicts among Catholics (clericalism vs. laity, rich vs. poor, established vs. the marginalized).

Yet coupled with this critique, Pope Francis provides a hopeful vision of service. He invites us to see evangelization as service, not a burden, essential to everything we are and do as Catholics. As we serve the poor and one another, the clergy (and parish staff) in our midst should serve us. Parish life, especially the Eucharist, should in itself be joyful, where we welcome the stranger, sing and pray our hearts out, and gather our strength as we live our lives. Parish life and Eucharist should invite us to the joy of service, encouraging us to make the time and muster the courage to move outside our comfort zone to mentor a student, serve at a soup kitchen, heal a hurt, attend the dying.

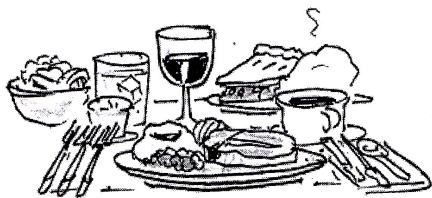
My Sabbath Renewal group of

See **Future** on next page



“Thank you for all that you do!”

“I was so hungry this weekend,” a woman wrote in a letter to our parish’s St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry last



November. “My neighbor delivered her homemade soup to me to get me through the weekend until I could visit you today. Thank you for all that you do! You are greatly appreciated.” Thanking the parish of St. Patrick for allocating space to the food pantry, she added, “God bless all of you! It is a very beautiful act of kindness that ALL of you make available to us. *You are in my prayers daily.*”

Four afternoons a week, the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in the St. Patrick’s parish center is open from 4:30 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. to serve those in our community who need food assistance. Most of the people served say an immediate and heartfelt “Thank you” or “God bless you!” to the volunteers as they receive their groceries. However, some are moved to express their appreciation in a letter.

“Friends, I want to thank you for all your hard work, concern, and kindness at the food pantry,” a food pantry client wrote. “I really appreciate all you do. The meat is always special to me and all the sides help to stretch our food allowance. I am able to get fresh fruit and vegetables when I come to your pantry. My grandson loves cereal and it is so expensive, so

when we get cereal it is a treat. We eat oatmeal most often and enjoy it, but the cold cereal is a great change. With love and gratitude in Jesus’ name.”

At the annual SVDP Food Pantry Friends Dinner in September, a guest used one of the coloring sheets provided to children to write this message: “Thank you for the wonderful food and fellowship. We thank God for his Blessings.”

“Thanks for all the much, much needed food contributions y’all have provided,” another letter begins. It goes on to say that the food has come “especially especially especially when I need it the most!” and concludes with “a huge super extra thank you!”

To borrow the words of the first letter writer, these thank-you letters are a “beautiful act of kindness... made available to us” to remind us of how blessed we are in our parish to be able to serve those of our neighbors who are in need through the SVDP Food Pantry.

Future from previous page

eleven includes about 300 years of collective parish history and a record of continuous and varied service. I’ve heard about a number of activities that “St. Pat’s used to do,” which ceased for unknown reasons; we might well ask why, for in light of *The Joy of the Gospel* they were good evangelization opportunities.

How appropriate that we adopt *The Joy of the Gospel* as a parish study as we anticipate a new facility. Just as our own human imperfections don’t excuse us from revealing God’s presence in our world, the lack of adequate facilities will no longer excuse our collective responsibility to be of service – to evangelize – in our civic community.

New possibilities abound as St. Mary’s and St. Pat’s become truly “sisters,” knowing and serving each other. We must redouble our efforts to serve the poor, educate the young, counsel the troubled – open ourselves to those whom the Pope himself embraces at every opportunity.

—Barbara Wysocki

Inquiring minds, inquiring hearts

Since September, a group of inquirers has been meeting weekly with the RCIA team, comprised of members of St. Patrick’s and St. Mary’s, to learn about the Catholic faith and to discern whether God is calling them to full communion with the Church.

The RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) is a process that leads inquirers through discussions about God, the Trinity, Jesus, Holy Scripture, the Mass, and the Sacraments. Participants spend time in prayer, seeking ever deeper faith and connection to our God.

This year our catechumens (unbaptized) and candidates (baptized) include college students, parents-to-be, grandparents, a



family, a retiree, and a stay-at-home dad, among others. One rearranged his work schedule to be with the group every Tuesday evening. Another is studying

Ignatian spirituality at Loyola University. Participants are joined by sponsors, parishioners who journey in faith with them and give time, prayer, and support to these seekers.

In early Lent, the group will participate in the Rite of Election, making final prayerful discernment about coming into the Church. Please pray for our catechumens and candidates during Lent and consider coming to welcome them into the Church during the Easter Vigil service at St. Mary’s.

St. Patrick Parish IN FOCUS

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 is to 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 Frances Drone-Silvers, Elizabeth Hendricks, Mary Lou Menches, Cathy Salika, and Barb Wysocki. This issue was edited by Mary Lou Menches, page layout by Jim Urban.