



02.2015

Saint Paul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Steering Team

Working to Make St. Paul the Best Parish It Can Be

A parish's mission has many facets — in addition to the liturgies and sacraments, parishes also provide faith formation and education opportunities, as well as building a community among parishioners.

In order for this mission to be carried out, good leadership is necessary. At St. Paul, our Steering Team was formed in 2009 to take on that role.

“The original mission of the team was to define parish goals, develop tactics to accomplish those goals, and periodically measure goal performance, reporting results back to the parish,” says Donnie Plombon, Director of Leadership Development. “Since that time, the role and membership of the Steering Team has expanded to include a strategic role in building a healthier organization, including creating and communicating organizational clarity and alignment.”

The Steering Team is made up of 11 members — in addition to Donnie, the group includes parish priests Fr. Doug and Fr. Kevin, Diocesan Representative John Kennedy, Pastoral Associate Jim Havens, School Principal Lara Schuler, Pastoral Council Chair Diane Wilkinson, and parishioners Ed Toth, Becky Siegel, Paul Jansen, and Denise Rosenbloum. Monthly meetings take place on the third Wednesday of each month.

“The team is well represented by parishioners as nine of 11 current team members are St. Paul parishioners,” Donnie says. “Individuals are

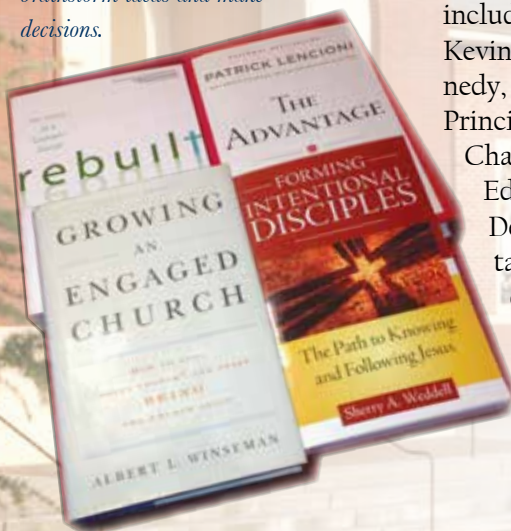
hand-picked to be a member of the Steering Team. As of right now, there are no term limits. If a member resigns from the team, a new parishioner may be selected and asked to participate. The Pastoral Council Chair is a member of the Steering Team to ensure information flow, both ways as necessary, and cooperation when needed between the two entities.”

By using the Faith Engaged process, which was developed by the diocese, our Steering Team has been able to create and execute a goal-based plan to make sure St. Paul's parish mission and goals are accomplished.

“The current parish ‘thematic goal’ is ‘to become the most hospitable and welcoming parish possible’ — this is absolutely essential to reaching all of our parish goals and was an easy selection as our current thematic goal,” Donnie says. “The St. Paul mission is to ‘Love God, Serve Others, Make Disciples.’ To make disciples, we need to keep getting people to attend parish events, programs, retreats, missions, concerts, be a part of small group communities, and attend Mass on a regular basis and become a part of our parish family. Nobody wants to come to a place where they do not feel welcome.”

This main goal, as well as several other current parish goals — which include increasing parishioner engagement and participation — will be evaluated and measured for effectiveness in September of this year. The Steering Team is also in the process of

These four books have helped to motivate and guide the Steering Team as they set goals, brainstorm ideas and make decisions.



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*Let us pray for the
Synod of Bishops
on the Family in the
words Pope Francis
provided on the
Feast of the Holy
Family
(Dec. 29, 2013):*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love,
to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families, too,
may be places of communion
and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic Churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again
experience violence, rejection and
division:
may all who have been hurt or
scandalized
find ready comfort and healing*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,
may the approaching Synod of
Bishops
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and
inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer.*

“A New Human Ecology” **Embracing the Vocation of the Family**

Think of the witness of a vibrant family. Within the family, we first encounter joys, trials and tensions — and we learn to navigate them. Within the family, we learn to know ourselves and to relate with others. A joyful, faithful family is at the center of evangelization in a society eroding the values of marriage and family life.

With enthusiasm and charity, Pope Francis exhorts the faithful to not only reflect on the vocation of the family, but also to consider how the Church can support and renew the family.

This past fall, the Synod of Bishops addressed the contemporary reality of the family. As we know, the diagnosis is bleak — sociocultural realities discourage the young from marrying and affect the increasing number of divorces, and a disrespect for life belittles motherhood and perpetuates the exploitation of children.

Yet we keep our gaze on Christ and on revelation to understand the original mission of the family! Indeed, Jesus is born in a family. Jesus reaffirms the enduring union of man and woman (Matthew 19:8) and yet extends genuine mercy to the Samaritan woman who lives outside this union (John 4:1-30).

Recent Church documents continue teachings on marriage and the family that have been consistent for centuries. In *Gaudium et Spes*, marriage is defined as a community of “life and love,” which includes a mutual gift of self (48). In *Humanae Vitae*, Blessed Pope Paul VI specially addresses the intimate union of conjugal love and the generation of life. Pope Francis explores the connection of family and faith in *Lumen Fidei*, declaring that faith “makes us aware of a magnificent calling, the vocation of love” (53).

In their assembly, our pontiff and the world’s bishops posed a dynamic Church-wide query — how can the Church support the family and its mission as seen in Christ and revelation?

From the beginning, pastoral care for families should start with the whole community guiding engaged couples in their preparation for marriage. This support necessarily continues during those “vital and sensitive” first years of marriage. All churches must aspire to be welcoming and resourceful communities, supporting families as they face the challenges of raising and educating children in today’s culture.

Pope Francis and the bishops also emphasize that while continuing to proclaim the “Gospel of the Family” and foster marriage, there is a pressing necessity for a courageous and constructive pastoral response to “a great many who no longer live in this reality.”

In imitation of the charity and mercy of Christ, pastoral care extends also to civilly married couples, couples living together and wounded families. The Synod particularly encourages reflection on how to care for wounded families — people who are separated, divorced and not remarried, divorced and remarried or single parents.

Following the assembly, Pope Francis addressed an international, inter-religious gathering and spoke of endeavoring to care for our fragile social environment like we endeavor to care for our natural environment. As society continues to threaten the institution of the family, the pontiff calls us to “foster a new human ecology and advance it!”

The Synod of Bishops will reconvene this fall to continue their dialectic on the mission of the family in the church and the contemporary world. In the interim, the questions raised by their prior assembly will be developed and clarified through reflection in local churches and their lay movements and organizations.

May we support our pontiff and our bishops during this time through ongoing charitable dialogue and prayer!

A Letter From Our Pastor

Growing in Our Faith During Lent

Dear Parishioners,

February 18 marks the beginning of Lent with a unique holy day — Ash Wednesday. While not a Holy Day of Obligation, we are offered a special opportunity on Ash Wednesday to take a step back from the daily grind to focus on an important element of our Christian lives.

As the ashes are placed on our foreheads in the sign of the Cross, we are told, “Remember you are dust and to dust you will return” or “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel.” This is a significant reality to keep in mind as we begin our journey through Lent. All of us are sinners and each is in need of seeking the Lord’s help and forgiveness. Our very breath is a gift from Him — without God’s mercy and grace, we can do nothing.

The way of Lent should be the life of the steward, one in which we acknowledge that all we have is from God and that our lives are meant to be lived as a gift of gratitude for all He is and does for us.

Many of us associate our Easter preparation as a time for self-denial and sacrifice. While those elements are important, they will do us little good if we do not remember that the whole point of those actions is to improve our relationship with God and each other. Sometimes we get caught up in the complexity of Lent and lose sight of our calling as stewards to actively pursue depth in our relationship with the Lord



while we live out our faith.

Lent is an important time for us to refocus and to recognize the magnitude of Christ’s victory over the grave. It is by overcoming sin and death on Easter Sunday that we are set free from the bondage that sin puts us in and rejoice that, “By his wounds, we are healed” (Is 53:5).

As we journey through Lent this year, let us pause to praise God for the gift of life that He has given us. Let us thank Him for the opportunities He presents to us each day to grow, to accept the challenges thrown our way and to choose Him. When we live out

our lives in humble service to God and to one another, dying to the desires of the flesh, we think of ourselves less and give Him the glory that He so greatly deserves. May we join in the prayer of St. John the Baptist, “He must increase, I must decrease” (Jn 3:30).

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Doug Halsema
Pastor

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School Students Preparing for Easter



From a special meal to an Easter egg hunt and reconciliation services, the students at St. Paul school will prepare for Easter in a variety of ways.

Christmas might seem to get all of the fanfare — but in our faith, Easter is truly the most important day of the year. This year, the students of St. Paul Catholic School, from kindergartners to eighth grade, will prepare for Easter by embracing all that Lent can mean and learning about ancient traditions.

“Our students will prepare for Easter with traditional Lenten practices that are appropriate for their age level, such as abstinence from meat on Fridays,” explains Principal Lara Schuler. “Grades two through eight will participate in a whole-school Reconciliation service, and all students will be guided through reflections meant to improve their knowledge and application of practices that help them to prepare their hearts and minds for the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

While the students prepare their hearts to celebrate Jesus’s resurrection, each grade level will participate in different activities. For instance, the pre-K and kindergarten students will take part in an Easter egg hunt during Holy Week, while the first through fifth grades will participate in a retreat on the afternoon of Holy Thursday.

One of the more interesting traditions at St. Paul this time

of year is the Upper Room Seder Meal. As led by middle school Religion teacher Dan Hanley, the Upper Room Seder invites students to experience a Passover meal just like the one Jesus celebrated with the apostles in the Upper Room.

As the overview of the program states, “Our elder brothers and sisters in our faith are the Jewish people. Our public worship of God, the liturgy, often follows Jewish liturgy. Today, as we prepare for Holy Thursday, we remember Jesus asking His disciples to make preparations for the Passover in the Upper Room. We gather now together, in that Upper Room, and observe and reflect on the actions of Jesus and His disciples. We will follow a sequence of events that contains the various foods assembled, the Holy Thursday story, and related songs.”

Mr. Hanley explains that middle school parents will help their children set the Seder tables with tablecloths, plates, cups, and food. Each item provided during the meal has a different meaning, such as horseradish, a bitter herb meant to remind the faithful of the bitter life the Jews endured as slaves in Egypt. Parents and students will follow along on paper provided to explain each element of the meal.

“We did not use any meat but we did have a large roasted bone,” Mr. Hanley says of last year’s Seder meal.

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With Reflection and a Special Meal

“Each table had two students from each middle school grade and at least one adult. Gather Comprehensive and YouTube provided excellent resources for appropriate music. The Student Council read the Scripture readings. At the end of the Upper Room meal, the students enjoyed some sweet cookies.”

Parents and parishioners who wish to get involved in any of the Easter preparations are asked to contact the school office at 850-436-6435. Those parents and parishioners interested in volunteering are required to take the Shield the Vulnerable online courses ahead of time. Please call the school office for more information.



Last year's second-grade class at St. Paul welcomed the Easter season with a special treat.

Steering Team *continued from front cover*

answering six critical questions in order to make sure organizational health, clarity and alignment is up to par:

- ❖ Why do we exist?
- ❖ How do we behave?
- ❖ What do we do?
- ❖ How will we succeed?
- ❖ What is most important, right now?
- ❖ Who must do what?

Once the team's work is complete, the answers will be distributed to parish staff, leaders, ministry providers, and others to be put into practice. By understanding the answers to these questions, everyone at St. Paul will be better equipped to deal with everyday issues and decisions.

As a part of the Steering Team, Donnie enjoys working together with others to ensure that St. Paul is serving both its parishioners and God as best as it can.

“I enjoy the camaraderie that comes from working with a group of people that truly want to make a positive difference in the lives of others, in this case through the continued growth and improvement of our parish community,” he says. “It is a group of faith-filled, hard-working, dedicated people sharing common goals of making disciples and growing the best possible parish community and organization. Our Steering Team is a cohesive group. We all trust one another, are willing to engage in constructive conflict, fully commit to group decisions, and hold one another accountable.

“Working with the Steering Team and seeing the level of commitment and loyalty to the parish and the Catholic faith displayed by its members has increased my level of commitment to achieving all of our parish goals,” he continues. “I also very much enjoy the personal relationships that I have built with the team members.”

In the six years since the team's conception, St. Paul has seen great strides forward in accomplishing its goals, and has truly grown as an active, welcoming parish.

“The positivity and enthusiasm of parishioners is extremely high — parishioner engagement levels have increased, and our parishioner engagement level now ranks in the top 25 percent of Catholic parishes nationwide!” Donnie says. “During this same period, parishioner spiritual commitment levels, inviting and financial giving have all showed the same steady upward trend. The parish has also grown in size based on positive gains in the number of registered families over the past six years.

“The positive increases in parishioner engagement have supported recent successful capital campaigns to fund the purchase, refurbishment and installation of a Baumgarten pipe organ in the church, originally built circa 1862, and to greatly enhance our parish infrastructure, school and parish center,” he continues. “The parish is well on its way to a major transformation!”

For more information about the Steering Team or its efforts, please contact the parish office at 850-434-2551.

St. Paul Lenten Schedule

ASH WEDNESDAY – Feb. 18

Mass times at 6:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 7 p.m.

Lenten Series on Relational Wisdom –

Tuesday, Feb. 17, 7-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 24, 7-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 3, 7-8:30 p.m., Tuesday, March 10, 7-8:30 p.m.

Parish Lenten Penance Service –

Wednesday, March 4, 6:30 p.m.

Religious Education Penance Service –

Wednesday, March 11, 6:40 p.m.

School Penance Service – Friday,

March 13, 9:30 a.m.

Stations of the Cross – Every Friday at

3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

School Stations of the Cross

1:45 p.m. on all dates – Feb. 23, March 3, March 11, March 19, April 1

Fish Fry – on the following Fridays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.: Feb. 20, March 6, March 13, March 27

St. Patrick's Fellowship Supper –

Wednesday, March 18, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Palm Sunday Brunch and Easter Egg

Hunt – Sunday, March 29, following 9 a.m. Mass

HOLY THURSDAY of the Lord's

Supper – April 2

Mass at 7 p.m., Eucharistic Adoration following until midnight

GOOD FRIDAY – April 3

Stations of the Cross, noon and 7 p.m.

Celebration of the Lord's Passion with Veneration of the Cross, 3 p.m.

HOLY SATURDAY – April 4

Blessing of Easter Baskets, 2 p.m.

Easter Vigil, 8:30 p.m.

Other Events During Lent:

Father/Daughter Dance – Saturday, Feb. 21, 7 p.m.

Parish Picnic – Sunday, March 1, noon to 4 p.m.

Men's ACTS Retreat – March 5-8

Middle School Dance – Saturday, March 7, 7 p.m.

Confirmation – Sunday, March 22, 2 p.m.

A Look Back on Recent Parish Events

Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas are certainly exciting and busy times for all Catholic parishes. Here at St. Paul Catholic Church, there were a number of special parish events to mark these seasons, such as the Thanksgiving Fellowship Supper, the Immaculée Ilibagiza Retreat, the Marian Grace Concert, and the Blue Christmas Mass.



Rick and Amy Schwartz

“We Truly Call This Home”

When parishioners Rick and Amy Schwartz first met, it was under stormy circumstances.

Both were working as auto adjusters for Progressive Insurance — Rick in Pensacola and Amy in Birmingham — when they were sent to Louisiana to help deal with the devastating aftermath of the damage caused by both Hurricane Gustav and Hurricane Ike. And despite the fact that they lived in different states, when they decided to marry they made the fundamental decision to let God, love, persistence, faith, and prayer be the foundation of their new life together — a decision that reflects a faith journey that had rocky beginnings for both of them.

Originally from southern Illinois, Rick’s parents divorced when he was still very young. Since his mother was not Catholic, his father — who came from a large Catholic family — was the one who made sure Rick and his sister attended Mass and religious education classes. But when his father passed away when Rick was just 8 years old, it was his father’s family who continued to be a huge Catholic influence.

“My grandparents on my father’s side of the family lived 100 miles away,” Rick says. “And for a few times a year when I visited them I was able to be part of a good, healthy environment in which things were less chaotic and definitely more fun. We went to church together, and they taught me about God, Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. They gave me the stability and faith foundation that I didn’t have at home. When I was 18 years old, I went to live with my grandparents, and that year I began attending RCIA so I could receive the sacraments of Holy Eucharist and Confirmation.”



Amy’s childhood growing up in Birmingham was a little different in that she was raised without any organized religion at all. She was first introduced to the faith when her brother converted to Catholicism when he got married. Although she didn’t realize it at the time, God was planting seeds of faith.

“My brother’s conversion definitely piqued my interest in the faith,” Amy says. “I watched my brother and his wife walk in their faith, and I watched how they raised their children. At one point, my brother even said to me that his conversion helped give him a map for life. So when I met Rick and we began to discuss marriage, we wanted faith to be a foundation of our life together. I began taking RCIA classes in 2010 and was baptized into the Catholic faith in 2011 during the Easter Vigil Mass here at St. Paul’s. We were married one year later in April 2012.”

Today, Rick and Amy have been married almost three years and they both still work for Progressive Insurance. They have one son, Ricky III, and as a family they try to live their faith daily. They often pray together, read Bible stories to their son, and have a holy water font by their front door and crucifixes around the house as a visible reminder of the faith they have fully embraced. And despite busy schedules, they have also found ways to share their time, talent and treasure with the parish — Rick has been involved with the parish suppers and is an officer in the Knights of Columbus, and they’ve hosted small group studies in their home and have volunteered to help with the parish picnic, RCIA and the Angel Tree. Ultimately, Rick and Amy see their involvement in the parish as an extension of their faith. In fact, the very act of giving back serves as a means for our faith to grow.

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Address Service Requested

Rick and Amy Schwartz continued from page 7

“My first lessons in faith were from RCIA,” Amy says. “The program helped me to understand that faith is not just vertical between me and God, but it is also horizontal between me and the world. The combination of both makes the perfect cross. Our relationship with God and our relationship with our neighbor — both are important.”

In the end, both Rick and Amy say through all of life’s storms, through the rocky periods and dark hours, God is always present and available — sometimes we just need to seek him out and decide to walk in faith.

“Allowing the Holy Spirit into our lives has been such a blessing in our relationship with God, which then inspires us to be more active in our parish and community,” Rick says. “We truly enjoy and love the people at St. Paul’s Parish, and we can now truly call this our parish home. As someone who has moved over 20 times in his life, having a stable family, home and church community is truly something I’ve always desired. At St. Paul, we overflow with the joy we have of calling this our home.”



Rick and Amy Schwartz with their son, Ricky III

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 9:00, 11:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m. | **Daily Mass:** Monday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.
Confessions: Saturdays, 9:00 a.m., 3:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.,
most Sundays during 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. Mass, 1st Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., and by appointment
Eucharistic Adoration: Thursday 9:00 a.m. until Friday 7:30 a.m.