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Saint Paul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Bringing Christ to Those Who Most Need Him Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to Shut-Ins

For nearly three decades, St. Paul parishioner Carolyn Mueller has brought the Eucharistic presence of Christ to Catholic patients at West Florida Hospital. In her time serving with this ministry, Carolyn has visited hundreds of people in various stages of health, and with different levels of commitment to their faith. But through it all, she remains amazed at the level of dignity and joy with which the people she visits gratefully accept the Eucharist.

"It's a real blessing to be with those people," she says. "I've met a lot of people and often thought, 'When I die, I hope that I can be as gracious as some of them are.'"

Carolyn and the other Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to Shut-Ins at St. Paul are specially trained ministers who bring the Eucharist to those who are restricted to their homes, live in assisted living facilities, or are convalescing in hospitals. The ministers generally visit their respective locations once a week, and each Extraordinary Minister focuses on a different facility or area of town.

Ray Heindl visits Northpointe/Westpointe Retirement Community on Sundays and Wednesdays, and he also visits some individuals who are restricted to their homes. He began participating in this ministry a few years back when his wife was sick and needed Communion brought to her, and he has been helping others in the community in a similar manner ever since.

"There's just a fulfillment of helping other people, because some people need it," Ray explains "Maybe it's going to happen to me sometime, where I'm going to have to have somebody come by and help me."

Ray says that one of the brightest parts of this ministry is seeing the notable change that the individuals he visits experience when they receive Christ in the Eucharist.



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Protecting Religious Liberties for All Americans

Much has been made in recent months about the struggle between the Catholic Church in the United States and political leaders in Washington, D.C., over provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that would require employers to subsidize insurance plans that include services that may violate their religious convictions. And depending on what newspaper you pick up, what television channel your remote lands on, or what radio station you tune into, chances are you're hearing a variety of conflicting messages and commentaries regarding the debate. But, upon casting all of the political rhetoric aside and focusing on the facts, one conclusion becomes clear: The provisions in question provide threats to the religious liberty and conscience rights of all insurers in the United States.

The controversy primarily stems from a rule that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) first issued in August of 2011, and reaffirmed on Jan. 20, 2012. The rule, a part of the health care act, states that virtually all private health care plans must cover sterilization, abortifacients, and contraception. The rule does provide for an exemption for "religious employers," but the terms of the exemption are so narrow that they fail to cover the vast majority of faith-based organizations – including Catholic hospitals, universities, and charities – that help millions every year.

On Feb. 10, the HHS made this rule final "without change"; delayed enforcement for a year against religious non-profits that were still not exempted (charities, hospitals, and academic institutions); and promised to develop more regulations to "accommodate" them by the end of that additional year. But the impact of these additional rules will not be felt until after November's election, eliminating an important incentive for HHS to provide the best protection for religious liberty. Further complicating the issue is the fact that non-religious employers with religious convictions against covering these types of services will not qualify for the already limited "accommodations."

Accordingly, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has vigorously spoken out against these provisions since their inception last August. In a March 14 statement on religious freedom, the USCCB condemned the HHS rule as "an unwarranted government definition of religion, a mandate against our teachings, and a violation of personal civil rights." The bishops went on to say that, "this is not a matter of opposition to universal health care, which has been a concern of the Bishops' Conference since 1919,"



and that "we will continue to pursue legislation to restore the same level of religious freedom we have enjoyed until just recently. And we will continue to explore our options for relief from the courts, under the U.S. Constitution and other federal laws that protect religious freedom."

What does all of this mean for us as Catholics, living our lives as disciples of Christ to the best of our abilities on a daily basis? First, it means we must continue to focus on cultivating healthy prayer lives. Dedicate some of your prayer time each day to our bishops, our political leaders, and all people of faith throughout our country in their efforts to restore religious freedom and conscience protections.

Additionally, we can support legislation that would correct the mandate's threats to religious liberty and conscience rights. The Respect for Rights of Conscience Act has been introduced in Congress (H.R. 1179, S. 1467) to ensure that those who participate in the market for health insurance "retain the right to provide, purchase, or enroll in health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions."

For the latest developments on the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, or to find out more about writing your local representative, please visit www.usccb.org/conscience.

What Does the Ascension Mean to You?

Dear Parishioners,

One of these Sundays, I'd love to have someone take a survey of our parishioners as they arrive at Mass and record their responses for my own information. The survey I'm thinking of would have one question: What is the importance of the Ascension of the Lord?

Some might reply that it completes Jesus' earthly ministry. Others probably would mention that Jesus returned to heaven so He could send the Holy Spirit to guide and empower the Church. Still others could state that He ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us. All these answers, and several additional ones, would be correct.

But if they answered honestly, I'm afraid many Catholics would confess they never give the Ascension much thought, even though they state they believe it every Sunday ("he ascended into heaven"), and they have no idea of its meaning. But it is one of the major feasts in May.

The Ascension is more than one of the key historical events that founded Christianity. It is also a call to us to turn our attention to heaven. St. Paul wrote, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1) and "...our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20).

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§666) expresses: "Jesus Christ, the head of the Church, precedes us into the Father's glorious kingdom so that we, the members of His Body, may live in the hope of one day being with Him for ever."

My point is that we should not limit our vision to earthly horizons. We're called to view our life here on earth in light of our ultimate home, with Christ in heaven.

There are those who claim that for Christians to pay any attention to heaven means that we neglect service to other people here on earth. But just the opposite is true.

We actually have more incentive to work for the well-being of our fellow humans because we know that people



live beyond the grave. The thought quoted by St. Paul, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Cor 15:32) is one espoused by those who think our existence ends at the grave, not by Christians.

We know that how we treat others, how we help or hurt them, has eternal consequences – for them and for us. We're called to offer our time, our talent, and our treasure to share the Good News of God's love shown in Jesus and to relieve their suffering. Because we believe that human life is not confined to our years on earth we're called to work for justice and to eradicate the causes of poverty and bitterness. We have a responsibility to tear down the barriers that keep people from seeking the Kingdom of God.

The Church insists that our faith in God and our desire for all people to come into His presence in heaven strengthens rather than weakens our commitment to improve earthly life. In fact, the *Liturgy of the Hours* that the clergy and religious pray includes a petition, "Make our work today benefit our brothers and sisters, that with them and for them we may build an earthly city, pleasing to you."

In light of the truth of our heavenly citizenship, we may need to shift our priorities. How are you using the time, the talent, and the treasure God has entrusted to you to prepare yourself and others to enter the presence of our ascended Lord?

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Doug Halsema
Pastor

Sky! Everything Is Possible with God! Vacation Bible School 2012

If they didn't know it already, children at St. Paul Parish will learn this summer that "everything is possible with God" (Mk 10:27). This verse from St. Mark's Gospel will serve as the central theme for Vacation Bible School 2012, which will take place June 11-15 at the parish campus.

The format for this year's program will be similar to programs used in the past. Volunteers will lead children in Pre-K through those entering the fifth grade through a series of daily stations. Stations for this year's program, *Sky! Everything Is Possible with God!*, include "Up and Away Sing and Play," "Wild Blue Bible Adventures," "Imagination Station," "Sky High Movie and Missions," "All Star Games," and "Skydive Diner." By rotating through each station, the children will learn a Bible story, make crafts, watch fun and engaging movies, play games, and eat snacks with their friends in a safe environment.

Vacation Bible School is designed to teach the children a number of core Bible points – truths about our Catholic Faith gleaned from Scripture. To help the children retain the Bible points they've learned, each activity is designed to reinforce the daily Bible message. So, if the daily Bible point is "No matter who you are... trust God!" then the games, crafts, snacks and more will all teach the children the importance of putting one's trust in the Lord.

Parishioner Ginny Stephens, who has helped coordinate Vacation Bible School for the past 10 years, encourages all parents with young children to consider sending them to Vacation Bible School this June.

"It's inexpensive entertainment for your children," she says. "What a great way to build your child's faith as he or she participates in games, arts and crafts, snack time and sings songs."

Registration for Vacation Bible School is ongoing and will continue through

June 11, the first day of the program. The cost per child is \$25, which covers all of the materials, snacks and t-shirts for the children.

While registration is limited to children in Pre-K and elementary school, teens can also participate as volunteers. In fact, many teens help out as a way to earn service hours for Confirmation. Ginny's own family members help out with the program each year, and this year her daughter and oldest son will be helping in various ways.

As a 10-year Vacation Bible School veteran, Ginny shows no signs of stopping. Perhaps what keeps her so committed are the positive signs of learning she sees in all of the children who attend.

"I don't remember Vacation Bible School being available when I was a child, so I became aware of it when my children were of the age to attend," she says. "Some years, we've had 150 children participate. It's a crazy week, but there's so much excitement and learning. As adults, we learn through the children who attend."

If you have children in Pre-K through fifth grade, consider giving them the gift of Vacation Bible School this summer. There is no other place to have as much fun and learn as much about God as Vacation Bible School. We hope to see you there!



**Sky! Everything Is
Possible with God!**

*June 11-15,
from 9 a.m. to noon each day*

Cost: \$25 per child attending

Mothers and Stewardship



*During the month of May,
let us all take some time to express
our appreciation to our mothers for
allowing us to come into this world,
for loving us, and for serving as an
example of what it means to be a
steward for life.*

We celebrate Mary during May, and during this month we also celebrate Mother's Day. It seems fitting that we honor our mothers during May since Mary is given to us by God as the example of true Christian motherhood.

Those who are called to be mothers have been blessed by God and called to fulfill a very important responsibility. Mothers are the vehicle through which God brings new life into this world. When we talk about Christian Stewardship we talk about sacrificially returning to God what we have been given. What can more clearly be a demonstration of complete sacrifice than the relationship between mother and child during the nine months of growth in the womb? During these nine months, the child's life depends on the actions of the mother as the first portion of her energy and nourishment goes directly to the growing baby.

Although this relationship may change to some extent after the child is born, a mother's sacrifice for her child is far from over after the birth. The role of the mother is critical in the child's development – both spiritually and physically – throughout life. Mothers provide the comfort, nurture and support necessary for their children to become productive citizens and responsible Christians.

The job of a mother is not an easy one. This is a fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew very well. She worried when her son appeared to be lost at the age of 12, only to find Him later in His Father's House. She was probably concerned as Jesus began His public ministry – not knowing what difficulties and rejections He would encounter along the way. And Mary must have experienced great anguish as she watched her Son's body being crucified.

May all mothers look to Mary as their model for motherhood and ask her intercession as they strive to fulfill their God-given role in their children's lives. During the month of May, let us all take some time to express our appreciation to our mothers for allowing us to come into this world, for loving us, and for serving as an example of what it means to be a steward for life.

Pentecost and Stewardship

Tongues of Fire Should Put Hands to Work

Basketball sports-casters often describe a player who seemingly can't miss a basket as being "on fire." Sometimes we say a person is "fired up" when she shows passion about some topic or situation. And rambunctious toddlers often earn the title "fireball."

Though it's difficult to show any real etymological proof, it's easy to imagine that phrases like these take their origins from the biblical account of Pentecost. According to the book of Acts, Pentecost (literally, "50 days") was the day when tongues of fire descended upon Mary and the apostles, rendering them so confident and excited about Jesus that they wanted to tell the whole world about him. It was the day they got "fired up" about the Gospel. And what better than flame to symbolize this new burst of energy!

Pentecost — which falls on May 27 this year — has become so important in the eyes of Christians that it is known as the birthday of the Church. The Holy Spirit — though active even in Old Testament times — suddenly blazed into action with an unprecedented sign of power. It was on that day, in the upper room, when the apostles' faint-hearted assembly (Greek *ecclesia*) was transformed into *Ecclesia*, the Church. Within hours, maybe minutes, the apostles discovered that their little band was responsible for the most ambitious mar-



keting campaign the world has ever seen: Tell everyone about Jesus, ASAP.

How did they know this was the plan? If it wasn't made clear by the sudden dissipation of their fearfulness, it was immediately confirmed by the fact that the onlookers in the streets heard the apostles in their own languages. This remarkable detail, scholars believe, is a testament that the Church is both universal and missionary. That is, the Church is for everyone, but it's up to current members to spread the message.

Consider for a moment if the apostles had not responded by spilling into the streets to tell passers-by about Jesus. What if they had brushed off the gift of

the Spirit like an errant firefly? Or, an equally frightening alternative, what if they ran about haphazardly telling everyone about Jesus, without rallying around Peter, "who stood up with the Eleven" and proclaimed "in a loud voice" one single Gospel message to the crowds?

These scenarios should give us pause. To receive a gift, but not use it — or to use it, but with little judgment — changes the whole world. It's that dramatic. We too should listen to St. Peter when he says, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt. 4:10). If the Holy Spirit was able to light a fire under the apostles, it can happen to us, too!

St. Paul Celebrates Easter!



(clockwise from top left) Lighting the Easter fire; processing into the church with the Light of Christ; sharing the Light of Christ; Fr. Doug baptizes the Elect

(bottom, from left) Receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation; a full church during the Easter Vigil Mass



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Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to Shut-Ins

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“Maybe they don’t act like it all the time, but I feel that Christ goes into their body and He kind of helps them out throughout the day,” he says. “Some of them don’t have any or much family to come and visit with them, so they can be pretty lonely people. But Christ takes care of that.”

Carolyn says she’s stayed involved with the ministry throughout the years because she believes that including all Catholics in our community in the celebration of the sacraments is an important outreach mission of the parish, and she enjoys helping to carry it out.

“Especially for those who are not able to get out and come to Mass, I think it’s very important for them to see that the Church hasn’t forgotten them just be-

cause they’re homebound, and that Jesus still loves them,” she says. “Sometimes, if they’re going back and forth between the nursing home and the hospital, it’s very easy for them to get depressed. I think there are some days that I go and I’m wondering, ‘Lord, why am I here? Nobody is interested.’ And then there are other days that you really know why you’re there, because it’s very important to bring Christ to these people.”

All parishioners are welcome and encouraged to become involved as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to Shut-Ins if they feel called to do so. If you know of someone who is in need of this ministry, or if you would like more information about volunteering, please contact Deacon Richard Lurton at 850-291-0481, or lurtonr@stpaulcatholic.net.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 7:00, 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., 1st Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., and by appointment
Eucharistic Adoration: Thursday 9:00 a.m. until Friday 7:30 a.m.