

Saint Francis Solanus



AUGUST 2016

“The Power of Example” *John and Michelle Obert*

Both the product of traditional Catholic education, you might say parishioners John and Michelle Obert were raised in stewardship. Surrounded by faith-filled religious, the Oberts were each given concrete examples of what it means to joyfully and faithfully serve the Lord.

“The nuns in Catholic grade school and their commitment to caring and sharing the Gospel were so great,” says John.

“It’s something that we definitely took for granted at the time — being surrounded by the nuns — whereas now there are so few in Catholic schools,” says Michelle. “They just always seemed to be so committed and wise. They taught the academics and knew how to discipline, but they were also there to encourage and love us.”

Another important aspect of the Oberts’ religious upbringing was the examples of their own parents, each of whom exemplified active discipleship throughout their children’s upbringing. So when John and Michelle began raising their own seven children, they were committed to ensuring that same religious education—becoming the examples they had witnessed in others.

“As cradle Catholics, we sometimes take things in the faith for granted,” says John. “I think the more that we can work to become that example, sharing our beliefs with the younger generations, the more we can spread God’s truth; not in a pompous or judgmental way, but in a humble and loving way.”



Proud grandparents Michelle and John with one of their two grandchildren.

“We always emphasized that it was important for our kids to become involved,” says Michelle. “We’ve tried to set that example for them, showing them that faith is more than just going to Church on Sunday. We’re hopeful that the more active we are, the more they will be during their adult life.”

Over the years, the Oberts have modeled that activism in a variety of ways. Putting all of their children through Catholic schools, they have invested large amounts of time and treasure to ensure the best possible faith formation for their kids. And when their children were all living at home John and Michelle made a point of attending Sunday

Mass as a family, no matter how arduous of a task it seemed. In this way they emphasized that faith was a family affair — not simply an individual choice.

“There was no better feeling than us all going to church together,” says Michelle. “It was just very comforting to know that we were all there together.”

“It think it helped us put things into perspective,” adds John, “putting things in a proper balance. Through stewardship we were able to keep our eyes focused on what truly matters.”

As their children grew older, John and Michelle enjoyed becoming even more involved in parish life, with Michelle lecturing, John ushering, and both serving as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Distributing

continued on back cover

Stewardship's "Supreme Teacher"

Following Christ's Example

Former President and Five-Star General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "You don't lead by hitting people over the head – that's assault, not leadership." President Eisenhower's words are both blunt and humorous, but he makes a great point. Almost any successful endeavor in life requires the benefit of strong leadership. And a truly effective leader does not lead by simply telling others what to do, but by providing a strong example of how to carry oneself on a daily basis.

This is no different for us in our lives as Catholic Christians. As individuals who face a myriad of difficult choices every day, we require a leader who, through word *and* example, can show us the path to living according to God's will. For us, Jesus is the supreme teacher of every aspect of Christian life, and His life as documented in the Gospels is a model that we should strive to imitate in living as good Christians. And as we have learned, stewardship – the sharing of the gifts that God has given to us – is a big part of Christian life, and one for which Jesus left many examples of successful living.

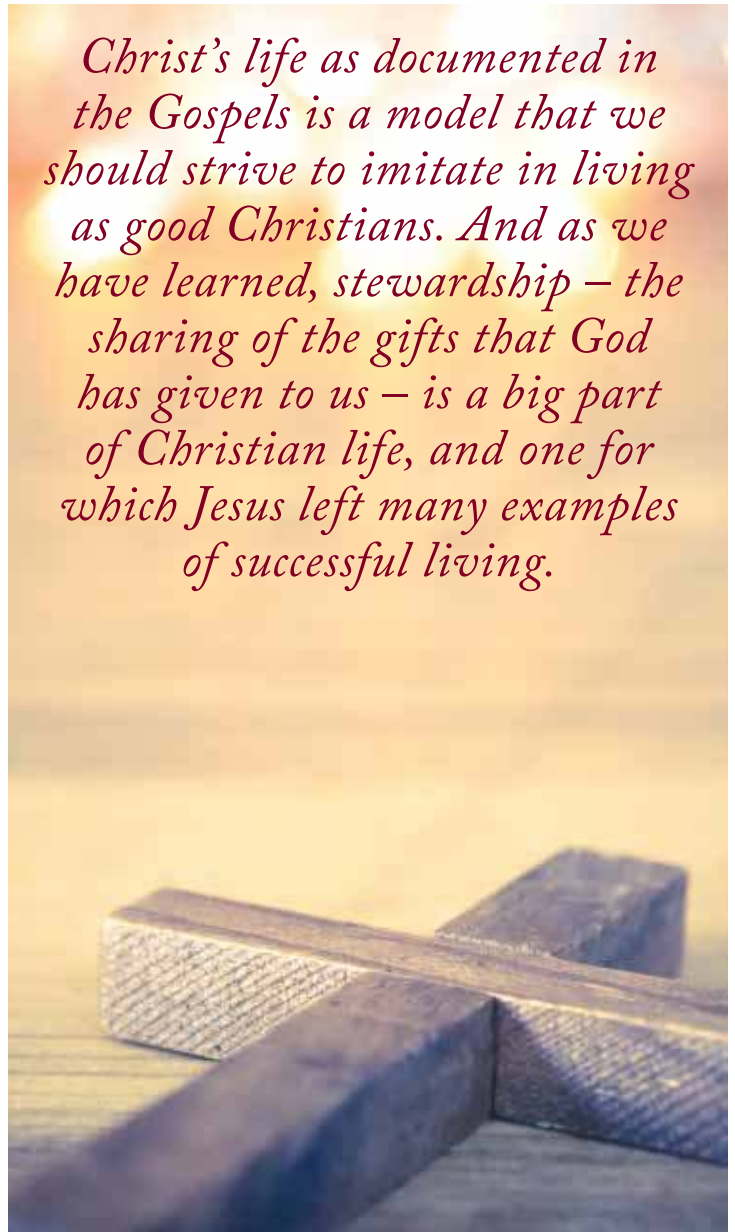
Jesus' nature of selfless service, documented many times throughout the New Testament and culminating with His death for our sins, is an underlying aspect of living the stewardship way of life. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops points out in its pastoral document *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, "In Jesus' teaching and life self-emptying is fundamental. Now, it might seem that self-emptying has little to do with stewardship, but in Jesus' case that is not so. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather, in setting aside self, he is filled with the Father's will, and he is fulfilled in just this way" (19).

Jesus points out to Peter in Mark's Gospel that this "self-emptying" requires sacrifice, but ultimately leads to "eternal life in the age to come" (Mk 10:30). But the Christian steward's ultimate reward is not his or her only benefit from living the stewardship way of life. By sharing of our time, talent and treasure, and living in imitation of Christ, we can relate more closely to Him in sharing, in a small way, in His sacrifice. "To be a Christian disciple is a rewarding way of life, a way of companionship with Jesus, and the

practice of stewardship as a part of it is itself a source of deep joy. Those who live this way are happy people who have found the meaning and purpose of living" (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 21).

The next time you are frustrated or unsure of how to best respond to God's gifts in stewardship, take a moment to open up the Bible. Jesus may not "hit us over the head" in His leadership, but He does provide numerous examples through His actions and teachings of how to live as one of His disciples.

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A Letter From Our Pastor

Stewardship: A Positive Way to Live

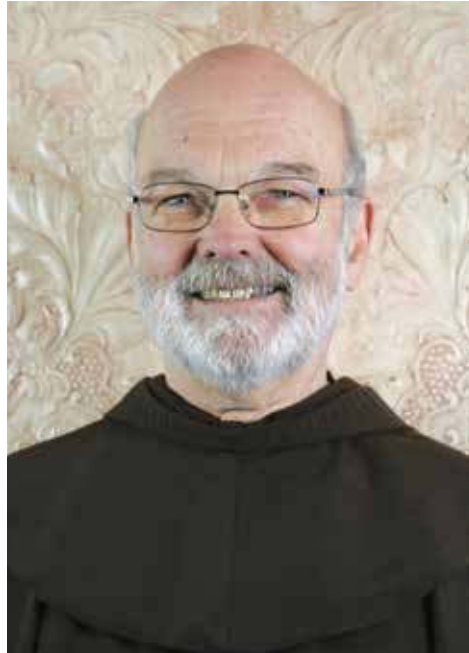
Dear Parishioners,

There is something about the month of August that is glorious. Summer is still in full force – the lazy, hazy days are upon us, some, myself included, still have vacations on the horizon. And, yet, we can also see the end of this wonderful season drawing closer – our vacations may already be over, and we may be sadly anticipating the end of this relaxing time, with back-to-school and a return to the busyness of life just around the corner.

We are at that point in the year when things are coming to an end and things are beginning all at once. However, isn't that the way it always is? The Russian playwright and short-story writer Anton Chekhov once said, "People don't notice whether it is winter or summer when they are happy." There is certainly truth to that statement. You might say it is a stewardship statement.

I am sure you are wondering how to make the connection between Chekhov's quote and stewardship, but the connection is found quite simply in the word "happy." I once heard someone say in a presentation about stewardship that people who live stewardship as a way of life are almost always happy. There is a reason for that.

Stewardship is a positive way to live. It means feeling grateful and centering your thoughts on gratitude. In other words, your focus is on the good things in life, not the bad. That does not mean you have perfect health or that all is ideal in your family, that you always sleep



well at night, or that you enjoy everything that happens to you or around you.

However, it does mean that when the good happens, you thank God. You recognize that good and are filled with feelings of joy and gratitude. You and I know people like that, don't we? We know people who always seem filled with joy, regardless of what may be happening to them or around them personally. To me, these kinds of people are stewardship people – the kind of people we all need to strive to be.

No doubt, you have heard that living a life of stewardship means living with an "attitude of gratitude." That is not easy, for you or for me. Let

us vow to try to be like that nonetheless. As we watch our summer season dwindle away and the busier time of year begins again, let us concentrate on how God has blessed us. If we do that, I truly believe that we can be those people Chekhov described. If we are happy, it will not matter what time of year it is.

I am grateful for you, your support, your prayers, and – most of all – your presence in my life. Thank you and God bless you.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, OFM". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Don Blaeser, O.F.M.
Pastor

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RCIA Sponsors: Helping



Renee Edwards, Jeremy Roberts, Drew Erwin, Julie Gunn



Fr. More confirming Drew Erwin



Drew Erwin, Julie Gunn (sponsor) and son, Aubrey Erwin

Sponsors who volunteer for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults – RCIA – process at our parish have beautiful stories to share about how it has touched their lives, and the lives of those they sponsor. Many of them find that by helping others come home to the Catholic Church, their spiritual mother on earth, they are blessed in return in amazing ways.

“I choose to sponsor candidates because I love Catholic doctrine,” Monica Hinkamper says. “To me, mentoring basically means leading by example. Each time I have gone through RCIA alongside one or two candidates, I have learned at least two or three new things about myself, as well about Catholicism. That is why sponsoring is so interesting to me. Likewise, I am humbled by each candidate and their eagerness to learn throughout the entire RCIA process. It is a great experience! I have been a Catholic since I was born, and sponsoring is a wonderful way to stay updated about the changes that have taken place in the Catholic Church, as well.”

Similar to Monica, Julie Gunn is another sponsor with a touching account to share.

“I enjoyed sponsoring my future spouse, Drew Erwin,” Julie says. “Drew and I met in December 2013 and were engaged the following year. During our courtship, Drew realized how important Catholicism was to me. He was a lifelong Protestant, yet, he felt something was missing in his faith. He attended Mass with me weekly and began to show an interest in converting. After attending Cursillo in the fall of 2014, he felt called to begin the initiation process. My prayers were answered when I realized I would be able to share my Catholic faith with my future

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husband. Drew was confirmed in September 2015.”

Sponsors are assigned to RCIA members to accompany them on their faith journey. Most members choose their own sponsor. However, if they are in need of a sponsor, the parish will assign them one. Sponsors usually attend RCIA sessions along with the person they are sponsoring, and help incorporate them into parish life. Importantly, sponsors offer encouragement to RCIA members to integrate the teaching of the Church into their lives and answer questions about doing so. Sponsors are present as the *catechumens* (non-baptized Christians coming into full communion with the Catholic Church) or *candidates* (baptized persons coming into full communion) receive the various rites and sacraments of initiation. RCIA offers a year-round catechumenate. Candidates can enter into full communion with the Church at any time throughout the year, while catechumens join only at Easter.

“We expect the sponsors to be a guide and a friend to those they sponsor, and to walk through the process with them,” says Carol Seifert, Director of Religious Education, who coordinates the sponsors.

According to Julie, being a sponsor was also a unique and enlightening way to grow closer to Christ and learn more about the faith of her youth.

“RCIA refreshed the teachings of my childhood as a Catholic,” Julie says. “St. Francis is fortunate to have such a knowledgeable and dedicated staff to minister to the prospective initiates. For me, being a sponsor was both a renewal and a sharing of my Catholic faith. Growing in one’s faith is an ongoing process. I have found RCIA to be a very fulfilling and rewarding ministry.”



Drew Erwin, sponsor Julie Gunn, son Aubrey and parents



Fr. More confirming Drew Erwin

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*If you would like more information
about how to “come home to Rome”
and begin the enlightening RCIA
process, please contact Carol Seifert
at 217-316-0905.*

The Assumption of Mary: A Time to Celebrate!

Can a pile of bones really be that exciting?

Every year, tens of thousands of pilgrims visit St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, eager to glimpse the spot in which the alleged bones of St. Peter, our first pope, remain to this day.

The relics of saints have been venerated throughout the ages in every corner of the world – yet, the bones of the very first Christian, the Mystical Rose, are nowhere to be found.

When it comes to the day, manner or year of the Blessed Virgin Mary's death, nothing is certain. No account is given in Scripture. The Church turns instead to Tradition for an answer.

Since the birth of the Church, no Marian relics have ever been venerated – nor can they ever be – because her body was *assumed*, or taken up, into heaven. There exist, therefore, no remains of the Blessed Virgin's body on this earth. She lives, right now, body and soul, in heavenly glory.

Although the particular dogma of the Assumption cannot be found in the writings of Scripture, if we look at many other writings by the early Christians, it is clear that the Church has always held this dogma to be true. Even more, though there is no statement of fact in the Bible itself that Mary was assumed body and soul, the truths that we do know about Mary from Scripture simply serve to back up the reality that she was assumed into heaven. She gave herself wholly to the Lord and followed His will for her life, perfectly, to the end.

The Assumption of Mary reveals that the prom-



ises of the Lord – including the resurrection of the body – were fulfilled in Mary. She shared most intimately in the life, death and resurrection of her Son, and was free from original sin and its effects – including corruption of the body at death.

Therefore, it was no surprise when, in 1950, Pope Pius XII declared infallibly the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a dogma of the Catholic faith with these words: “The Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory” (*Munificentissimus Deus*, 44).

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is observed on the liturgical calendar as a solemnity – of higher importance than a feast. On Aug. 15, this wonderful celebration is

accompanied by great hope in the resurrection of the body and everlasting union with God in heaven.

In the words of Pope Benedict XVI during his homily Mass on the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary in 2006: “Mary is ‘blessed’ because – totally, in body and soul and forever – she became the Lord’s dwelling place. If this is true, Mary does not merely invite our admiration and veneration, but she guides us, shows us the way of life, shows us how we can become blessed, how to find the path of happiness.”

Alongside Catholics throughout the country, be sure to celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption on Aug. 15. Though it is not a Holy Day of Obligation this year, it is a great liturgical solemnity. Mark your calendars.

Eucharistic Ministers of Holy Communion

Serving at the Table of God

The statistics are startling. More than 7 million people in the world do not have adequate nutrition. You don't have to leave the TV on for long before you're encouraged to sponsor a starving child in a third-world country or even here in the United States. People are starving all over the world.

And as important as it is to help those in need of food around the world, there's another kind of hunger that is often ignored — loneliness.

Feeling worthless or unloved. Anger, bitterness, hurt. These things are also signs of hunger, but needs like these can't be satisfied by any food. These are examples of spiritual hunger, and they can only be satisfied by spiritual food.

Steve and Geri McMillen, along with other parishioners who serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion recognize that hunger, and choose to serve the parish by helping to bring nourishment to those in need of the perfect spiritual food — the Eucharist.

"As people are walking down the aisle, we have no idea what's going on in their life during that time," says Steve, "But they all have a need for that connection with Jesus in the Eucharist."

Steve and Geri — who have been serving as EMHCs for the past 20 years, and also train those who want to become EMHCs — have found that this ministry has strengthened their faith and their devotion to the Eucharist.

"Once you get involved (as an EMHC), it deepens your faith," says Steve, "It makes you more aware of what's going on (at Mass). Some of us become blasé, when you go to church and it's the same routine, but when you go through the (EMHC) training, and realize what you're actually doing... You really become aware, when you're standing up there... I have in my hand, the true Body of Christ."

Geri often finds herself struck by how humbling it is to serve the Lord and His Church in this way.

"There are many times when I have stood there distributing the Eucharist, and I get a big lump in my throat," she says, "There's always someone (receiving the Eucharist) who touches me so intensely."

Although Geri was raised Catholic and Steve entered the Church as an adult, after being brought up Lutheran, both are struck by the great gift of receiving Christ in the Eucharist.

"I've always been so aware of (the Eucharist), knowing I want to have Jesus enter into my heart, to be able to



Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) assist the priest in distributing the Precious Body and Blood of Christ at Mass.

talk to Him, knowing that He's right with me," says Geri.

"We know (mega churches) are bringing people to Christ, but they're missing out on one thing — and that's Jesus is present in the Eucharist, and they're missing out on the Eucharist," says Steve.

Steve is also struck by the unity of the Catholic Church, embodied as the faithful come to receive Holy Communion.

"When you're handing out the Body of Christ, people hold out their hands... you look down, you're placing it in their hand, you see the young hand, you see the old hand, the callused hand, the crippled hand, the dirty greasy fingers of the guy who's been working on cars all week... and realize, we're all one community, we're all one Church," he says.

Steve and Geri encourage other parishioners to grow closer to God by serving in this way.

"One of the things that I would say to someone is pray about it, and take that first step," says Steve.

They remind that the requirements for this ministry aren't complicated.

"You have to love the Lord with all your heart and want so much to share that love and grace with everyone at Church, or wherever you are," says Geri, "You just have such a joy and you want to share it."

To become involved in serving the parish as an EMHC, please contact the parish office at: 217-222-2898.

St. Francis Solanus

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John and Michelle Obert *continued from front cover*

Jesus' Body and Blood to the congregation has been a particularly humbling experience for the Oberts, helping them to better comprehend the "full significance" of the Eucharist.

"It is so reinforcing when you hear that 'Amen' from everyone — to know that we all share that belief in Jesus' Body and Blood," says John.

John and Michelle have also become that living witness through their involvement in Evenings with the Engaged, a ministry devoted to preparing engaged couples for the sacrament of matrimony. Meeting with couples periodically in their own home, John and Michelle have been able to share some of their own wisdom and knowledge gained from thirty-one years of marriage. In the process, they have found their own marriage revitalized as they have come to more fully appreciate the richness of the sacrament.

"We find ourselves kind of taken back as we reflect upon our own experience preparing for marriage and

how special the sacrament truly is," says John.

Today, John and Michelle have been able to witness some of the fruits of their example as their adult children continue to remain active in the Church. With the recent birth of their second grandchild, the Oberts hope to see the cycle continue as their children begin raising their own children in the faith.

They have also been both amazed and grateful for the effect stewardship has had on them personally, transforming their relationship with Christ and filling them with a sense of purpose and accomplishment.

"Whatever you put into something that is how much you are going to get out it," says John. "But getting involved, it just reinforces your relationship and commitment to God."

"And it does truly make you feel good to give back," adds Michelle, "to know that you are making a little bit of a difference through that gift of time or service."

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 a.m.

Weekday Mass: M, T, W, Th, F, 6:30 a.m. | M, T, W, Th, F, S, 8:00 a.m. | W, 8:35 a.m. during school year

Confessions: Saturdays 8:30 a.m., 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Holy Days of Obligation: Vigil 5:30 p.m.; Holy Day: 6:30 a.m.; 8:35 a.m. on school days; 8:00 a.m. during summer; 5:30 p.m.