



Blessed Sacrament Parish & Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

THE ADVENT SEASON: *A Time to Grow in Prayer and Service*

Sunday, Nov. 30, marks the transition to the next liturgical year and the first day of the season of Advent. Just as we begin wrapping up the calendar year and putting an end to many of our personal and professional projects, the Church invites us into a time of intentional renewal and preparation.

“Advent is a time of preparing for the Lord,” Fr. Jim Buester says. “The spirit of Advent asks us to look again at how we are doing in prayer and service.”

There is beautiful symbolism in the fact that at the beginning of each liturgical year, we begin in waiting — waiting for our Lord to be born. On one hand, it hearkens back to the Old Testament as the Jews waited for the Messiah — on the other hand, it reminds us of how we continue to wait for Jesus’ return at the Second Coming.

Fr. Jim reminds us that Christmas is about Christ



being reborn in our hearts and minds, and for us to truly receive the fullness of grace that God wants to bestow on us at Christmas, we must prayerfully prepare ourselves.

To do this, Fr. Jim invites you to reflect on where your relationship stands with the Lord.

“Look again at how God has been good to you,” he says. “Reflect on what you may have taken for granted and dive

deeper into asking yourself how you can give back.”

Entering into the spiritual exercises of Advent to truly prepare our hearts for Christmas can be difficult. Often, this is a very busy time of year with school activities, professional deadlines, and family trips. Additionally, our secular world points to decorations and gifts as the reason for the season, rather than Christ.

Amid this busyness, Fr. Jim points us to the fact that even the secular commercialism of Christmas, which fills

continued on page 5

STEWARDSHIP



THE FOUR PILLARS

You've heard about the three Ts of stewardship, but what about the four Ps?

The three Ts — time, talent and treasure — describe the personal gifts we offer to the Church. The four Ps are the “four pillars” of parish stewardship described by the renowned pastor Msgr. Thomas McGread. They are the hallmark of a stewardship parish — hospitality, prayer, formation and service. Let's take a look at each of them to understand how we can improve in each area.

HOSPITALITY

CHRISTIAN KINDNESS

“When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The Gospel teaches that whenever we welcome the least of our brothers or sisters, we welcome Christ himself. That is why the first mark of a stewardship parish is hospitality. Being friendly is one of the first ways we can be Christ-like toward others.

Modern Catholic parishes are often so large and have so many Masses that many parishioners don't know one another. To create a sense of community, be sure to smile and greet others as you enter and exit the Church. Let's try harder than ever to be a welcoming community.

PRAYER

HEART-TO-HEART WITH GOD

“Do not become so involved in the work of the Lord that you forget the Lord of the work,” a seminary professor once taught. In other words, don't get so caught up with parish projects and outreach efforts that you forget to draw aside to spend time with God in prayer. Every great saint has taught that prayer is the most essential component in the life of the Christian. Through prayer, we nurture our most important relationship — the one that will last for all eternity.

A healthy prayer life should include communal prayer such as Mass, as well as personal prayer and family prayer. The two biggest obstacles to prayer are lack of time and lack of understanding of how to pray. We have to schedule time for prayer just as we would for an important appointment. And we have to learn how to pray from other people. Many saints have written spiritual books that describe different methods of prayer.

FORMATION

CONTINUOUS CONVERSION

Pope John Paul II always emphasized ongoing conversion. From childhood through adulthood, our whole life must be a process of drawing closer to God. He never stops calling us forward to learn more and to examine ourselves more deeply.

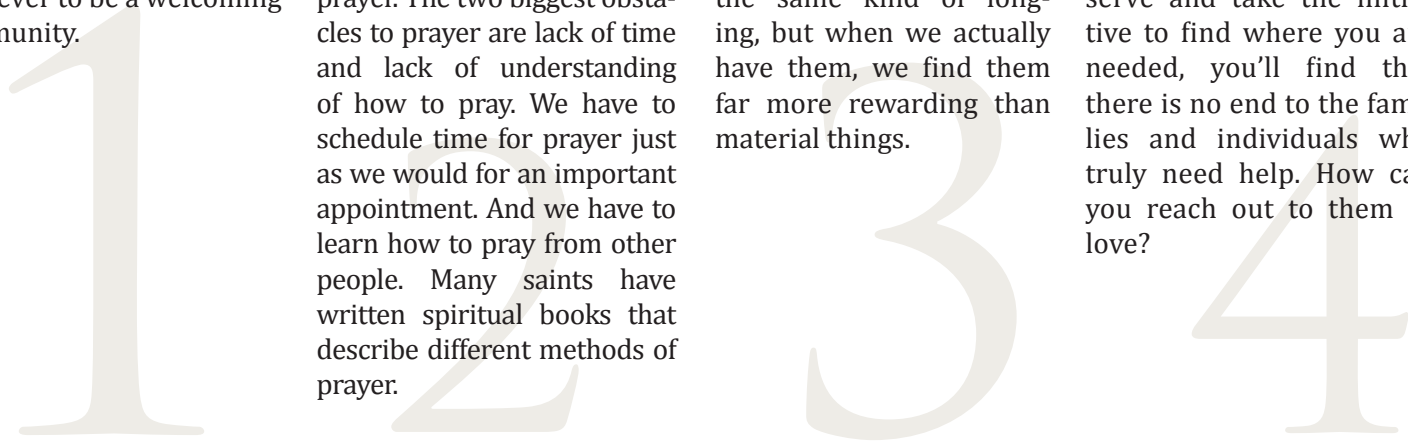
Very often our society values material things more than interior virtues. But as personal experience shows, when we finally acquire the car or house or “toy” that we wanted so badly, it doesn't really satisfy. On the other hand, we don't tend to desire spiritual virtues with the same kind of longing, but when we actually have them, we find them far more rewarding than material things.

SERVICE

LOVE IN ACTION

“Amen I say to you, whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). This Scripture was one of Mother Teresa's favorites. Each time she picked up a poor and hungry child, she knew she was ministering to Christ. While we may not view ourselves as saints, we too are called to such heroic service right within our own community. As Mother Teresa said, “To be a saint is not the privilege of a few, but the duty of everyone.”

We have many service opportunities right here within our own parish. If you have the willingness to serve and take the initiative to find where you are needed, you'll find that there is no end to the families and individuals who truly need help. How can you reach out to them in love?





A LETTER FROM OUR PARISHES' ADMINISTRATOR

GIVING THANKS TO GOD FOR THE GIFT OF TIME

Dear Parishioners,

The next several weeks are certainly a busy time for us as Catholics, good stewards, good citizens, and faithful members of the Church and our parish. There are celebrations and commemorations both inside and outside the Church that are momentous in terms of faith, citizenship, and living as people of thanksgiving and gratitude.

We celebrate Veterans Day to honor and thank all those men and women who served in the United States Armed Forces in one capacity or another. Indicative of the importance of this day, every year at 11 a.m. Eastern, a wreath-laying ceremony is held at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery.

We all understand that Americans celebrate a day of Thanksgiving on Nov. 27. What more can we say about this? It is a day that was faith-based from its very beginnings, and it is an indication of how much we have to thank God for in terms of the gifts we have received — our lives, our families, our Church, our Lord and Savior — everything we are and everything we have.

No sooner are Thanksgiving Day celebrations concluded than we turn the calendar page to the next month, and we begin that glorious season called Advent on Sunday, Nov. 30. This prepares us for and leads to



Christmas. Indeed, this is both a busy and extraordinary time of year! There is, of course, much more on which we could focus and about which we could think, meditate, and pray, but that is more than enough for us to consider and absorb.

From a stewardship perspective, I would like you to not only participate and focus on all the particular things that are about to happen, but also on one of our special gifts — the gift of time. The gift of time, which we all receive from God in equal amounts, is precious because it is a non-renewable resource. Although some of our time is committed because of family respon-

sibilities, work responsibilities or simply personal needs, we have an element of free will with how we spend a certain amount of it. We need to spend some of that time in prayer, in thanksgiving, in worship, and in works of mercy and ministry. Our time is perhaps more precious than any material gifts we receive from the Lord. How are we doing with that gift?

Peace,

Fr. Jim Buerster
Parish Administrator



A LOOK AT THE BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY *Offering Compassion and Essential Support*

Few think about grief until it's upon them. That's why we have a Bereavement Ministry here at Blessed Sacrament and Queen of Peace. Led by Sharon Needham, the Bereavement Ministry stands as an outreach of compassion.

"After I lost my husband, I saw the value of having this ministry," Sharon says. "We envision it as an outreach based in our parish family, providing support to those experiencing loss. Loss comes in different forms as we age."

In turn, the ministry's outreach comes in different forms as well. One is the Card Ministry.

"We send cards to parishioners who are shut-ins or in assisted living or nursing homes," Sharon says. "Our goal is to keep them connected to the parish family. So often, they feel a loss of friends or neighbors or their independence."

The monthly cards are sent based on a list.

"It's very fluid, unfortunately," Sharon says. "Oftentimes, when I go to a facility to drop off cards, I will not have heard about the passing of someone who's on our list, but they seem to be very well received. We hear from the people who visit them who see the cards."

When someone needs to plan the funeral, Sharon attends the meeting.

"We provide assistance with funeral planning," she says. "In our parishes, the bereaved meet with our minister of music to plan the service. I know a lot of these people personally, having been a parishioner for 40 years. Our goal is to make it warm and comforting. It's also an opportunity to get contact information for the next of kin or sometimes more."

Sharon's presence helps the ministry know how to best support the family. One way is with a funeral luncheon. When families choose a funeral luncheon, Sharon directs them to Julie Grubb, who coordinates that ministry.

"It opens discussion," Sharon says. "They have so much on their plate. We provide info for grief share programs. We have a wonderful hospice branch in



"After I lost my husband, I saw the value of having this ministry. We envision it as an outreach based in our parish family, providing support to those experiencing loss. Loss comes in different forms as we age." — Sharon Needham

Belleville. They provide amazing programs. You don't know about that stuff till you need it."

That's why the ministry exists — to serve those overwhelmed with the stress and decisions when a loved one passes. Grief is not an event, but a process.

"We've found a set of books from Stephen Ministries," Sharon says. "They walk with the bereaved through a year of different stages of grieving. One book will go out at three weeks, one at three months, six months, and 11 months. The content is tailored to where most people are at that time in their grief journey. I'm blessed to have a wonderful woman, Marilyn Majka, who writes beautiful notes inside those books. She's a real gift."

The books are sent to the next of kin, and sometimes to multiple family members.

"One family, God bless them, had 10 children that went to Queen of Peace," Sharon says. "They all wanted a set of those books. Of course, we sent them. I mean, it was the least we could do."

Lastly, they celebrate a Mass of Remembrance

continued on page 5



BEHAVEMENT MINISTRY

al Support on the Journey of Grief

around All Souls' Day for those who've passed in the last year. It takes place on a Saturday at 9 a.m., outside of regular Mass times.

"We personally invite through our listing the next of kin to come to the Mass," Sharon says. "They put the name of their loved one in our book of the dead. We have a display of candles with the names of those who have passed. They take those home as a remembrance."

Afterward, attendees can share in fellowship with

coffee and refreshments, as well as talk with others who are also on the journey of grief. See the bulletin for details about the Mass of Remembrance happening this month. Sharon is grateful for all those involved in the Mass of Remembrance.

"They make it possible," she says. "The parish secretary does a tremendous job. She keeps the parish database of burials and services. There are a lot of moving parts. We're lucky to have people who pick up those pieces."

To serve with the Bereavement Ministry, or if you require their services, contact Sharon Needham at 618-974-4064 or needhamsharon2@gmail.com. If you've recently lost a loved one and need to plan a funeral, contact the parish office at 618-397-2287.

THE ADVENT SEASON *continued from front cover*

the advertising space in Advent, directs us to gift-giving.

"I don't want us to approach Advent as a time when we are to oppose the commercialism that we experience leading up to Christmas," Fr. Jim says. "Part of our spiritual preparation for Christmas should be developing a spirit of generosity."

At Christmas, God the Father gives us His dearly beloved Son. The Blessed Virgin Mary gives us our Savior in the form of a baby.

At Christmas, we receive the greatest gift mankind has ever been given, and as Christians, we are called to receive this gift with open and grateful hearts and imitate God's generosity by giving ourselves back to God — by offering our time, talent, and treasure to build the Kingdom of God here on earth — to benefit our family, parish, and greater community.

There are many ways for you to give back to the

community and to your parish during the season of Advent. There will be food drives organized by the St. Vincent de Paul Youth Group and Food Pantry. The giving tree will be back, and the eighth-grade class at Blessed Sacrament Catholic School will lead the drive to help children at the Don Bosco Center, a home for children who have been removed from their families for safety reasons.

Additionally, there will be many prayer services, including a penance service that will be offered at the parish. Similarly, an Advent Bible study will be open to all parishioners to learn more about Christ's birth from Scripture.

Many more opportunities to grow spiritually, serve, and give will be detailed in the bulletin. Please be attentive and take on the challenge to grow in gratitude and generosity during this Advent season.

All Souls Day: A Reflection of Catholic Stewardship and Remembrance



In the richness of the Catholic tradition, few days hold the same depth of significance as All Souls Day, observed on Nov. 2. This solemn occasion, rooted in both faith and compassion, offers Catholics a unique opportunity to intertwine their beliefs in stewardship and remembrance, creating a powerful link between the living and the departed.

All Souls Day is a day of profound reflection and prayer for the souls of the departed who are believed to be undergoing purification before entering the eternal embrace of heaven. This belief rests on the concept of purgatory — a state of cleansing and transformation where souls are purified of their remaining imperfections. As Catholics, this doctrine emphasizes the enduring connection between the living and the deceased. By offering prayers, Masses, and acts of devotion on this day, Catholics hope to assist the souls in purgatory on their journey towards heavenly glory.

Catholic stewardship is founded on the principles of giving our time, talent, and treasure back to God and the parish in gratitude for the gifts God has given us. It extends not only to the earth and its resources but also to the spiritual realm and the souls of those who have passed away. All Souls Day embodies the essence of stewardship by underscoring the responsibility Catholics have towards their fellow human beings, even beyond the threshold of death. Stewardship, in this context, signifies an active commitment to caring for the spiritual well-being of others. By praying for the souls of the departed, Catholics are fulfilling their stewardship duty by interceding on behalf of those who cannot pray for themselves. This act of compassion and selflessness exemplifies the core values of stewardship and resonates deeply with the Catholic teachings of love, charity, and empathy.

There are many ways to honor and pray for the deceased in our parish community and our own families. Attending Mass on All Souls Day is one of the most powerful ways to honor the deceased. Offerings of prayer, often in the form of the Requiem Mass, are customary on All Souls Day. These prayers are not only for the souls of specific individuals but also for all departed souls. The Catholic tradition of lighting candles serves as a symbol of hope and remembrance. Visiting the graves of loved ones, cleaning tombstones, and leaving flowers are poignant ways to connect with the departed. It serves as a reminder that life is fleeting and encourages the living to cherish their time and relationships. Performing acts of charity in memory of the deceased is another meaningful way to honor them. Donating to a cause they cared about or volunteering in their name reflects the Catholic spirit of selflessness and compassion. And families can come together to share stories, memories, and prayers for their departed loved ones. This fosters a sense of unity and ensures that the memories of those who have passed away remain alive in the hearts of the living.

All Souls Day bridges the gap between the living and the departed, weaving together the threads of Catholic faith, stewardship, and remembrance. By dedicating time to prayer, reflection, and acts of compassion on this day, Catholics honor the souls in purgatory, demonstrating their commitment to the principles of stewardship and their unshakeable belief in the eternal connection that transcends death. In this way, All Souls Day serves as a powerful reminder that Catholic stewardship encompasses not only the tangible world but also the realm of the soul – a testament to the depth and richness of Catholic tradition.





OUR BROTHERS' KEEPERS AND THE DIOCESAN PRISON MINISTRY

Meeting Essential Needs, One-on-One



Many of us are familiar with different types of outreach programs — such as soup kitchens and clothing drives — and how they work. But the work that a prison ministry does may be unfamiliar. The Diocese of Belleville has an extensive Prison Ministry that reaches out both to those serving time in prison and those transitioning back into their regular lives. Lou Slapshak, a parishioner at Queen of Peace, serves at Our Brothers' Keepers of Southern Illinois.



"Most of the time, we live our lives in a very comfortable position — go to church, write a check to charity, work at a picnic — and feel like we've done our job," Lou says. "I wanted to move out of my comfort zone. When you cross the track, you see there are a lot of other needs out there that need you, one-on-one."



A lot falls under the Prison Ministry umbrella. On one side, we have 30 priests, deacons, and lay volunteers who go inside. It is highly regulated, so the opportunities are limited, but the gratitude received in turn for bringing the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation is immense.

On the outside, we have people like Lou, who serve those living in transitional homes. Lou helped to found Our Brothers' Keepers in 2018, a re-entry center that provides many resources to clients.

"Some of our clients are starting at the beginning," Lou says. "It's hard not to be overwhelmed at the beginning with everything they need to do."

Our Brothers' Keepers helps clients navigate as they gather important documents and identification, gain skills, and apply for jobs in the limited time they have in transitional housing. The clients have few belongings, no transportation, and many have been abandoned by their families. OBK offers some practical assistance, such as hygiene kits, clothing, and helping clients get bus passes. In addition, some clients need help with literacy or getting their GED.

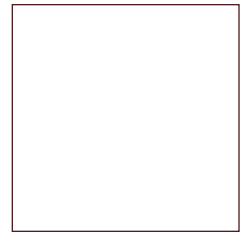
Some of the staff at OBK have gone down this path themselves.

"They know how important it is to make a change in their lives," Lou says. "They're some of our core people. Our volunteers are on fire to do whatever they can to further our cause. We've had a lot of growth. We

continued on back cover

"I'm always reminded of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and how He told us to do the same. I've been blessed — now how can I bless somebody else?" — Lou Slapshak

Blessed Sacrament Parish & Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish



8707 West Main Street,
Belleville, IL 62223
(618) 397-2287
bellevillecatholic.com



MASS TIMES:

Tuesday:

8:15 a.m. – Blessed Sacrament

Wednesday:

8:15 a.m. – Our Lady Queen of Peace

Thursday:

8:15 a.m. – Our Lady Queen of Peace

Friday:

8:15 a.m. – Blessed Sacrament

Saturday:

4:30 p.m. – Blessed Sacrament

Sunday:

10:00 a.m. – Our Lady Queen of Peace

OUR BROTHERS' KEEPERS AND THE DIOCESAN PRISON MINISTRY

continued from page 7

probably see over 300 clients per year. It takes a lot of time with each client — these things don't happen in seconds."

The Prison Ministry also needs people who are willing to serve as pen pals with those in prison and to write reflections on the Gospel readings. These alternative ways to volunteer can be incredibly rewarding for those whose gifts lie outside one-on-one work. Whatever your gifts, the Prison Ministry needs volunteers with a heart for the downtrodden.

"I'm always reminded of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and how He told us to do the same," Lou says. "I've been blessed — now how can I bless somebody else?"

To learn more about the Prison Ministry, visit www.diobelle.org/dps/prison-ministry/prison-ministry.

To learn more about volunteering at Our Brothers' Keepers, contact Kirsten Peterson at 618-271-7821 or kpeterson@obkministry.org.