



02.2012

Saint Paul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Growing in Faith and Mutual Support Women's Study Groups

Parishioner Tristan DeSorbo grew up in the Baptist faith tradition. She says that participating in a Sunday morning Bible study was ingrained in her, and a part of her Protestant spiritual journey that she really enjoyed. So when she converted to Catholicism and became a parishioner at St. Paul Parish, Tristan had a desire to find a similar venue for group discussion of Sacred Scripture from a Catholic perspective.

That desire led Tristan to become involved with the Thursday evening Women's Study Group at St. Paul. Now, eight years later, she serves as the coordinator of the Thursday evening group, and says that being involved in this ministry has become a fundamental part of her faith life.

"It is so wonderful to sit in a room with other ladies who share the same beliefs as you, and can empathize with what you're going through," she says. "Many of the ladies are a little older than me, and they just have so much wisdom to share from what they have experienced in their lives. That, I think, is most meaningful: it shows community, and that you are not alone."

"In our lives, we often re-read the same Scriptures over and again, but I find I always get something new from it, and it's those other perspectives that always really help. It's very uplifting and invigorating."

St. Paul's Women's Study Groups encourage women to grow spiritually through an understanding of God's Word, while giving support to one another through love, sharing, and prayer. In addition to the evening study group, which meets on the second Thursday of each month at the homes of the group's members, there is a morning study group that gathers in the Giri Room each Thursday at 9:15 a.m.

One of the unique aspects of the Women's Study Groups at St. Paul is the women themselves choose the study material, and the group itself drives the lessons and discussions, rather than an outside speaker or presenter. In the evening group, the women take turns reading from the week's lesson out loud, and anyone from the group is free to offer insights, lessons, or personal reflections at will throughout the course of the session. The morning group has more of a seminar format, followed by group discussion and prayer.

"We have two 'semesters' per year, and for each semester we choose a religion-based topic book or DVD series to study," says Patti Myers, who coordinates the morning study group. "We do this by majority vote, and each one of us chooses a week to study and lecture about the particular chapter or topic. We just learn from the author, from the topic, and we really learn a lot from each other's experiences. Once a woman gets involved with our group,



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Stewardship

Good for the Giver



Stewardship in Nature

The Sea of Galilee stays fresh and healthy because it “gives away” all its water through the Jordan River. When all that water finally drains into the Dead Sea, it just stays there, becoming stagnant and lifeless.

Human beings are the same way. Giving of ourselves is one of the main ways we stay spiritually healthy.

If you don't give it away, you can't keep it. But if you give it away, it will increase.

How's that for a riddle? The best answer, if you haven't already guessed it, is love. But the beauty of this paradox is that there can be a number of different answers. Another one might be artistic talent. Ask any artist, and they'll tell you that their skill for drawing or painting decreases after a few weeks or months of inactivity. But the more they paint, the more their talent grows.

If you hoard it, you'll lose it; if you share it, it stays healthy. We even see this concept illustrated in nature. For example, the Sea of Galilee teems with fish and other wildlife. However, all the water in this beautiful reservoir is constantly being drained through the Jordan River, which stretches about 60 miles, providing the only fresh water for all of Israel. It finally drains into the Dead Sea – which, unlike Galilee, has no outlet. Consequently, it is stagnant and totally lifeless, continually evaporating into thin air.

The point, in a nutshell, is that the good steward takes care of his or her gifts by giving them away. By doing so, you don't have less left over; rather, you have more!

There is a story that when Blessed Mother Teresa was visiting one of the hundreds of convents she had founded, the Superior of that convent told her, “Mother, we don't have enough

time to do our work with the poor; there's just not enough hours in the day.” Blessed Mother Teresa responded, “Then you need to pray more.” When they added another full hour of prayer each day, they somehow found that they had enough time to do even more for the poor in that city.

The difficulty with this idea – that by giving we receive – is that it's still a struggle to give. At the very moment of giving, it looks for all the world like we'll have less left over. This is especially true when it comes to money. Mathematically, after you write a check to a charity or to the parish, you end up with less money to spend on other things. And yet, the immaterial value of our sacrifice is immeasurable. This is why Jesus speaks so frequently in the Gospels about the spiritual benefits of giving to others. We do have more after we give, but it is simply more of something else – and something better.

When we emphasize stewardship at St. Paul, it isn't primarily to increase “volunteerism” or to swell our budget. Rather, our first aim is always the “good of the giver.” It's not because the parish has needs, but because we have a need to give. In the end, the model steward is Jesus, who indeed gave all, even His very life, so that we may have everything.

A Letter From Our Pastor

Preparing for Lent as Good Stewards

Dear Parishioners,

Sometimes I get questions along the lines of “Do I have to go to Mass every Sunday?” or “Do we really still have to abstain from meat on every Friday during Lent?” or even “Are we required to tithe our income to the Church?” You may have been asked those questions by other Catholics. Perhaps you’ve even asked similar questions yourself.

By the way, the simple answers to those questions are “Yes;” “Yes;” and “No.” However, the tithe (10 percent) is the biblical guideline for giving. In some places in past times it was required, and even today many Catholics find following that practice to be a great spiritual blessing.

But my major concern when I hear such questions goes beyond the correct answer to the specific inquiry. The more important matter to my mind is, why do people want to do as little as possible in their Christian lives?

Certainly we need the laws of the Church to teach us what our duties are to God, to other Christians in the Body of Christ, and to ourselves. But as we grow in our understanding of the Faith and develop a more mature spiritual life, we should go beyond, “How little can I do and still avoid hell?” or to put it another way, “How little can I do and still get to heaven?” We have to ask ourselves, “Is that where I want to go?”

We know from the Our Father, the prayer Jesus himself taught us, one characteristic of heaven. In that prayer we pray, “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” God’s will is always done perfectly in heaven. If we don’t want to do God’s will, He won’t force us to go there – and you’ll realize you have chosen the alternative.

My point is, let’s do away with minimum Christianity! Instead of asking, “How little can I do and stay out of hell?” let’s begin asking, “How much can I do for God, who created me, who redeemed me, who pours blessings out every day? How much do I love God, who loves me enough to die for me?” The psalmist asked, “How can I repay the LORD for all the good done for me?” (Ps 116:12). Let’s make that question our own and make it our goal to live maximum Christianity!

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which comes on Feb. 22. As you plan your Lenten rule of life, why not be as generous toward God as you can be? I’m not suggesting that you shed all your other obligations and spend all day every day in the Church. What I am suggesting is that you respond to God’s blessings, with gratitude, as fully as possible rather than as grudgingly as possible.

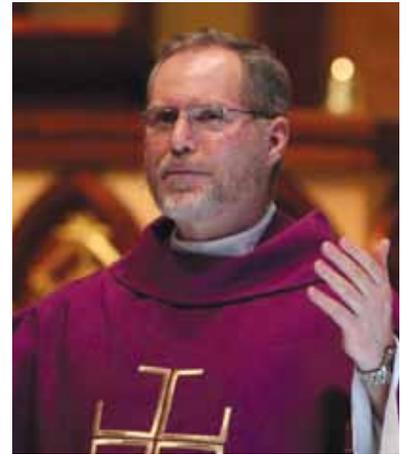
After all, Lent is the season when we especially strive to combat sin in our lives. And as the American bishops reminded us in their pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, “Sin causes people to turn in on themselves; to become grasping and exploitative toward possessions and other people; to grow accustomed to conducting relationships not by the standards of generous stewardship but by the calculus of self-interest: ‘What’s in it for me?’ Constantly, Christians must beg God for the grace of conversion: the grace to know who they are, to whom they belong, how they are to live – the grace to repent and change and grow, the grace to become good disciples and stewards.”

Let’s use this Lent to ask God to remove our attitude of “What’s in it for me?” and to replace it with the grace to become good disciples and stewards.

Have a blessed and holy Lent,



Fr. Doug Halsema
Pastor



The Value *An Inside Look*



Active service is important for all of us, no matter how old we are. For the youth of our parish, serving at the altar is a great way to become active stewards and learn the value of serving God and others at an early age.

“You have blessings, and it pulls you closer to God,” says altar server Joseph Heino. “The whole time at Mass, you’re basically seven feet away from the Tabernacle. You feel something when you’re serving at Mass; you feel a sense of holiness whenever you serve.”

Joseph is one of 66 altar servers in our parish. These boys and girls assist the priest and deacon throughout the celebration of the liturgy. The altar servers are involved with the readings, the processions, and the preparation of the Eucharist.

“I try to rotate the servers as far as responsibilities and the different roles of being an altar server,” says Altar Servers Ministry Leader Matt Ernde. “I’ve tried to enforce the idea that it doesn’t matter *what* you do when serving Mass; *all* the things you do are important.”

And though there are many tasks and duties the servers

carry out, there are many benefits to their service as well.

“It’s so much fun to do it during Mass,” Joseph says. “You feel a great sense of pride knowing that you’re helping out God and the priests.”

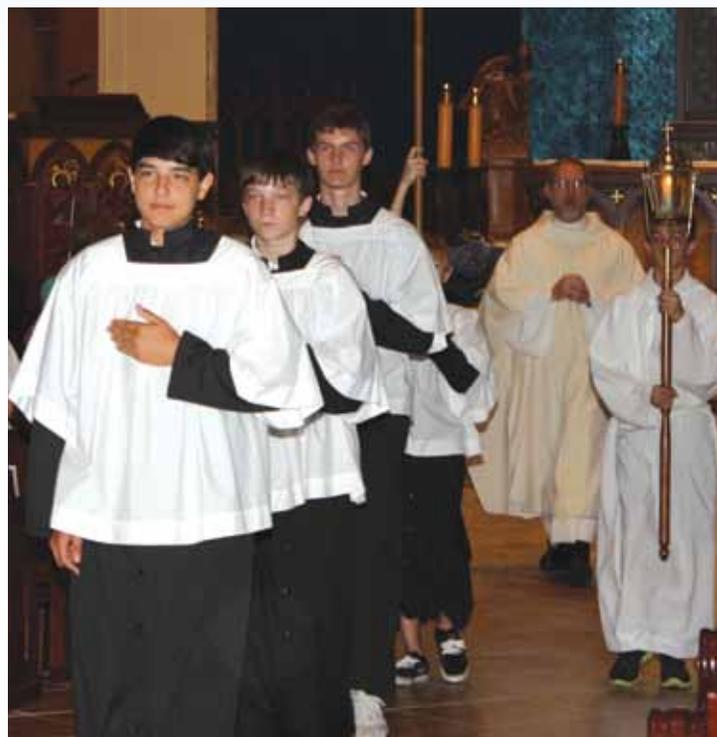
Not only is it enjoyable, but serving on the altar is also a great way for our young people to offer gifts of talent back to the Lord.

“Even though the kids are younger, they’re also leaders within our parish, and taking on the responsibility of an altar server is stepping into a leadership role,” Matt says. “I look at our younger people within our parish as the future of our parish, and I think they should take on those roles. It gives them an understanding of how important the Mass is, and as they get older, it gives them a love of the Mass and being involved in the community.”

Boys and girls in the fifth grade and older can become al-

“It’s really awesome, these younger kids who because they get an opportunity to do what some of the parts mean.” — Matt Ernde

of Service at Altar Servers



altar servers at St. Paul. Altar server training is generally offered once a year. Matt oversees the training process, and Fr. Doug or Fr. Michael are usually there to give guidance and answer questions the servers may have.

The youth also learn a great deal about the Mass during their time as altar servers.

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of the Mass actually
Ernde, Ministry Head*

“It’s really awesome for me to see some of these younger kids when they start serving, because they get an opportunity to understand what some of the parts of the Mass actually mean,” Matt says. “It’s enlightening to me to see their eyes light up when they realize that incense isn’t just

‘smoke.’ They’ve opened themselves up to it and it gives them a stronger grasp of what’s going on during the Mass.”

Serving at the altar is also a great opportunity for the children to begin thinking about vocations.

“I’ve heard a few times that vocations begin at the foot of

the altar,” Matt says. “If you are there kneeling at the altar in that close proximity to what’s going on, I think it does give you a stronger grasp of what your vocation will be.”

Matt has been involved in this ministry for over a year now, and he has gained a lot from his participation.

“I consider myself an altar server, because I serve along with them,” he says. “I was a convert. I never served growing up, and it was always something I was interested in as I watched my son do it when he was younger.”

The most significant aspect of his service, Matt says, is the impact it has had on his personal journey with Christ.

“It’s been a great way for me to be able to connect with my Faith a little better,” he says. “I don’t know if it’s the actual serving that’s been the high point, or if it’s been the fellowship with all the servers, but it’s definitely been a way for me to make a stronger connection with my faith.”

For more information about altar servers and how you can get involved, call Matt Ernde at 850-770-1050.

Lenten Practices: *Penance and Abstinence*

To many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our Faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say goodbye to meat on Fridays and hello to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hardwired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing Catholics are good at, it's abiding with the laws of tradition, and the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the Faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

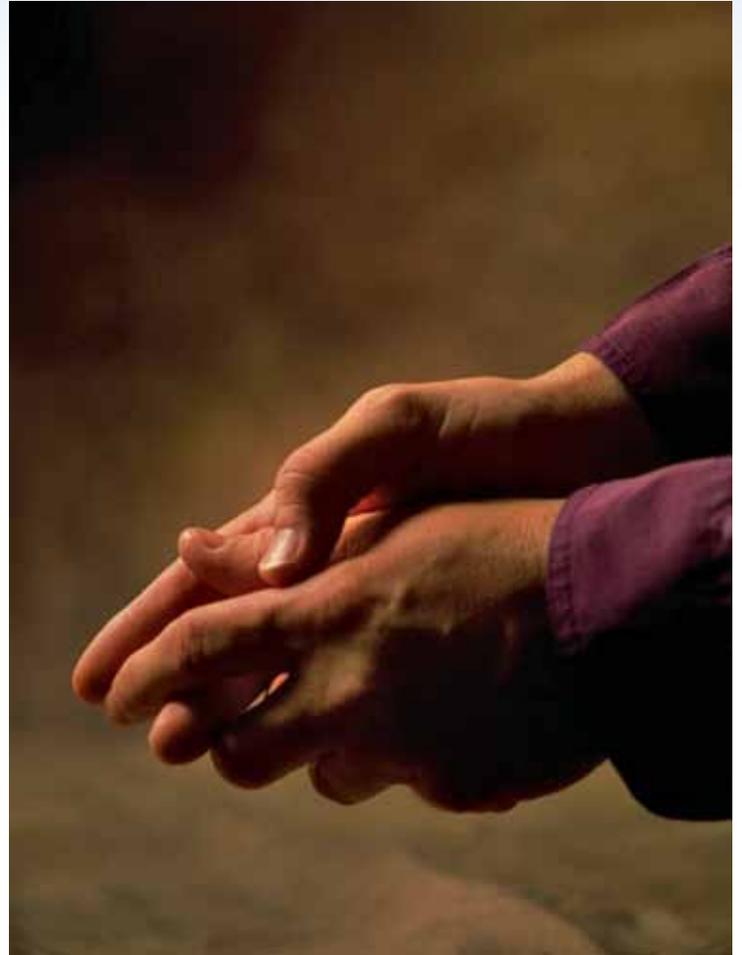
In November 1966, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the bishops' statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence:

1. All humans are sinners
2. Penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God
3. The Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance
4. Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.

The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ, not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord's experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday (which falls on Feb. 22 this year) and Good Friday (April 6). And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent. Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.



But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others – just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind – “by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own” (*On Penance and Abstinence*).

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time (prayer), talent (actions) and treasure (monetary offerings). The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.

Journey to the Altar

Marriage Ministry

The Sacrament of Marriage is a beautiful blessing, but it is also a serious commitment.

“In our Faith, we view marriage as a sacrament and a vow that we take before God and man,” says Director of Marriage Ministry Lana Ernste. “It’s important to prepare and to be open to everything God wants to give us — His grace, His support. We’re coming to Him and asking His blessing on this union. It’s important to do everything we can to prepare for entering into this union as responsible adults.”

Engaged couples that wish to be married in the Catholic Church must meet certain requirements regarding preparation. In our diocese, this means completing a marriage preparation course, presenting the required documentation and meeting with the priest.

“They offer the engaged couple counsel and guidance to help the them talk about areas of interest, to see where they agree and match up, and it helps them discuss things before marriage,” Lana says. “It also helps couples know that the Church views marriage as a sacrament. In their vows, they confer the sacrament upon each other.”

For couples wishing to celebrate their wedding at St. Paul, the parish asks that they begin making arrangements six months before the wedding date. Lana then serves as a liaison between the couple and the priest, offering the couple support throughout the preparation process.

A couple’s first meeting with Lana is informal and allows everyone to get to know each other. Then, closer to the wedding date, Lana and the couple meet again to plan the ceremony and rehearsal. Lana is present

at every rehearsal and every wedding, and she also helps our priests customize weddings for each couple.

“I don’t feel that there are any great challenges if our communication is good with our couples,” Lana says. “The main goal has been to keep excellent communication and follow the couples on their journey and offer them support. When that’s done well, the needs are met and I don’t see many challenges.”

It is important that the couples fully understand the true meaning of the Sacrament of Marriage, which is a primary goal for Lana and our clergy.

“It’s more that just a couple entering into marriage,” Lana says. “As a Catholic and as a Christian, you enter into a whole faith community. You’re part of that ‘Body of Christ,’ and preparation helps you understand that. God gave us that community so that we can help one another in faith and love and support and all those things that make our lives whole with Him. And that’s pretty exciting that we actually get to participate in that.”

Our community also does its part in welcoming and supporting the couples in their union.

“Jesus gave us the Church so that we could be a community together,” Lana says. “It’s a beautiful thing to see everybody praying for this couple before God. We are praying for them to be able to succeed in their vocation, so the community offers their support. I think it’s a great blessing in life that God gave us that union of marriage.”

For more information about Marriage Preparation or to begin planning a wedding of your own, call the parish office at 850-434-2551.



Above: Joseph and Lyndsey Eadler Siara, who went through Marriage Preparation at St. Paul’s, were married at the parish this past Aug. 27

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Women's Study Groups continued from cover

she usually doesn't really want to let go, because we intimately share our faith. And a big part of our group is that, at the end of every class, we do intercessory prayer."

The women study a wide variety of topics, ranging from studies of specific books of the Bible, to books about saints, and narratives of the lives of notable women in Catholicism. For example, this semester, the morning study group is discussing a book called *The Crucified Rabbi: Judaism and the Origins of Catholic Christianity*, by Taylor Marshall. As part of its study, the group invited Rabbi Eric Tokajer, a Rabbi in the Messianic Jewish movement, to talk about the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

For Tristan, Patti, and the other members of this ministry, the Women's Study Groups offer a wonderful opportunity to grow closer to Christ by growing

in knowledge and understanding of His Church, its tenets, its Scriptures, and the many individuals who have played a part in shaping its history.

"Most of us in the morning group are mothers of school-aged children who are still forming their own faith," Patti says. "We want to be able to grow with them, support them, and learn with them. And as an adult, if you seek information, it's because you really want it, and it's just so much more meaningful to you. So we're doing it for our children, to edify what they're learning, and we're also doing it for ourselves, as we are learning more the second time around."

All women of the diocese are invite to participate in either of St. Paul's Women's Study Groups, and childcare is available for the morning session. For more information, please contact Tristan DeSorbo at 850-474-9863 or tristan_raenne@hotmail.com, or Patti Myers at 850-291-6435 or myersmobile@gmail.com.

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.