

SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

IN THIS ISSUE

3

*Advent: Moving
Toward a Time of
Fulfilled Hope*

4

*The Christmas Spirit
– Spreading Christ's
Love to Those in Our
Community*

6

*Time: The
Foundation of
Stewardship*

7

*“Thank God for the
People Who Share
With Us Their Gifts”
Our St. Michael
Adult Choir and
Christmas*

Radiating Christ's Joy to Others

Abbot Marmion once wrote, “Joy is the echo of God’s life within us.” Having first come across these words in Cardinal Timothy Dolan’s book *Priests for the Third Millennium*, Justin Vrooman has experienced firsthand their truth. And for Justin, a crucial element of achieving this joy is living out his faith through stewardship.

“Being involved in the Church and ministry has given me a much greater amount of peace,” he says. “It is a way for me to give back to the Church that has already given me so much, and to use my time and talent’s for God’s glory.”

The oldest son of parishioners Lee and Kristina Vrooman, Justin has spent his entire sacramental life here at St. Michael’s. Taught at a young age the importance of “doing his part” for the Church, Justin first began altar serving in the fifth grade. Now a junior at St. Cecilia High School, he continues to serve regularly for Mass, enjoying the opportunity to assist with the heavenly banquet. Justin has also recently become involved with the newly-formed Ministry Singers, a musical group that plans to provide music at various events



The Vrooman family sending Justin off for his World Youth Day pilgrimage – (from left) Lee, Justin, Kristina, Megan, and Allison.

for both St. Cecilia’s and St. Michael’s parishes.

Though a busy high school student, Justin works hard to maintain an inner peace by carving out time for the Lord through prayer and activism. For him, this is just part of being in a relationship with Christ.

“If you only give that one hour a week for Mass on Sunday, then you are missing out on so many opportunities to give back to the Lord and to build that relationship with Him,” Justin says.

Over the years, Justin’s faith life has been further enriched by his

continued on page 2

Radiating Christ's Joy to Others

continued from front cover

membership in the Iron Brothers Ministry. A by-product of the diocesan Leadership Camp, this program works to strengthen Catholic young men in their faith journey by providing them with Christian brotherhood and formation. In Justin's case, Iron Brothers has fostered his love for the Catholic Church particularly by deepening his Scriptural understanding of it.

"Before joining, I had read the Bible some, but didn't really know it," Justin says. "Now, I know a lot of Bible verses by heart, allowing me to dialogue with people and to defend our faith Scripturally."

Justin was also blessed to attend World Youth Day with the Diocese of Lincoln this past July, and the experience made a profound impact on him. Visiting the birthplace of so many great contemporary saints and witnessing the thousands of youth from countries all around



A view of some of the crowd during one of the World Youth Day 2016 papal Masses. Justin Vrooman was in attendance, along with as many as 3 million other Catholics.

the world gave Justin a much deeper appreciation for the universality of our faith. Being a pilgrim also helped Justin understand more fully what truly matters in life.

"That experience has given me a lot more perspective on life in general," he says. "Having lived as a pilgrim during that trip, I've realized coming back that I don't really need all of this

'stuff.' During the trip, whenever anything didn't go quite the way we wanted, Fr. Roland would say, 'Jesus, thank you for loving me this way.' I've tried to remember that and to take that saying with me when things get difficult or don't go as planned."

Reinvigorated by his pilgrimage, Justin has felt a deeper need to actively live out his faith. He's started attending daily Mass whenever possible, and also attends a Eucharistic Holy Hour each Wednesday with the school from 9 to 10 p.m. In this way, Justin hopes to continue growing in joy and peace, allowing God's life within Him to radiate toward others.

"I now have the deep sense that I am doing God's will, and it just surrounds my life with joy and peace," Justin says. "Once you make time for stewardship, it just becomes part of who you are – what you do. And you receive so much more from it in the process."



A gathering of the Diocese of Lincoln 2016 World Youth Day pilgrims.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

*Advent:
Moving Toward a Time of Fulfilled Hope*

Dear Parishioners,

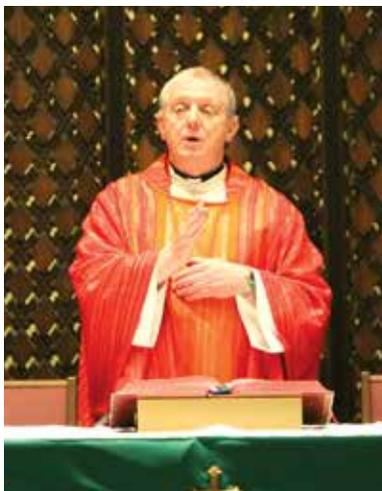
There is never a time during the year when we cannot pause and reflect on who and what we are and how we conduct our lives, both as a parish and as people of God. But this time of year in particular lends itself to just that.

Advent is often called “a season of hope.” However, it is more than that. We have choices and decisions to make at this time. This is the time when we must acknowledge the need for us to change attitudes and to welcome the light of Christ’s presence. In this way, we can contribute to bringing hope to a world that is starved for hope.

Of course, we approach this time of year with a spirit of confident expectation, but now is the time for us to be awake to Christ, Whose presence is revealed as forgiveness, Whose peace reconciles our differences, and Whose hope should strengthen and lift up our hearts.

We have pointed out that each and every day is an opportunity for a new beginning. Our new Church liturgical year began on the First Sunday of Advent. We understand that Advent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas – but I would remind you that it is much more than that for us Catholics and Christians.

It is a time for us to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming, as well. Much of what we do, our Scripture readings, our prayers, our traditions are built on that reality. One of the traditions in our Church



and in many of our homes is an Advent wreath. That custom is filled with meaning. The wreath tends to be circular in shape with four candles – three purple and one rose. The color purple is very evident at this time of year, just as it is during Lent. Purple represents prayer, penance, sacrifice, and good works.

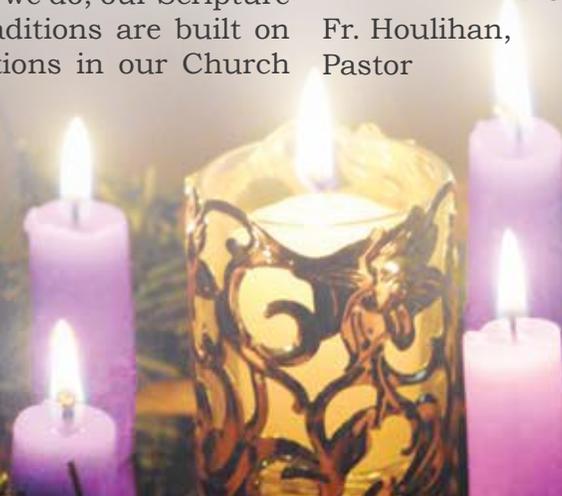
On the Third Sunday of Advent, though, we light the rose candle. That is Gaudete Sunday, a day of rejoicing. Throughout Advent, the candles are lit in progression each week. This builds on the idea of

expectation and hope that we may see as Christ’s first coming into the world, but we must also keep in mind that, at the same time, we are anticipating His Second Coming. We cannot ask ourselves often enough, “Are we ready?” Jesus and St. Paul and others remind us often that we do not and cannot know the time and the place.

The point is that the time is now for us. Yes, this is a time of hope, but we are heading toward a time of fulfilled hope. God bless you and yours at this special time of year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Houlihan,
Pastor



The Christmas Spirit – Spreading Chr

Though it is easy to get swept up in the frantic hustle and bustle of this time of year, Christmas is meant to be a time for us to refocus our spiritual lives and prepare for the birth of Christ. As we reflect on how Christ came to us as a little child, we also remember that He comes to us in each person we meet in our community. During Christmas, we come before our Incarnate Lord in worship and thanksgiving. This thanksgiving for His countless gifts then enables us to give back in selfless love to those within our community, spreading Christ's love through small gifts and acts of service.

"The Good Angel Tree project makes you really humble," says Co-Chair Cathy Mertens. "It makes you think less of yourself. There are a lot of people who are really struggling and in need. This project is a small thing we can do, and if we can put a smile on a child's face for Christmas or help a family sit down and enjoy a real Christmas meal – that's a huge blessing."

Through the efforts of Catholic Social Services and the parishes of St. Michael's, St. Cecilia's, and St. Ann's, the



The gifts donated to the Good Angel Tree project allow families in need in our community to bring home gifts for their children, enjoy a family meal, and experience Christ's love in action through others.

Good Angel Tree project allows families in need this Christmas season to receive gifts for their children and a food basket to share. Catholic Social Services gathers the names of families who might need a special blessing this Christmas season and divides up the number of children in those families amongst the three parishes. Each parish then sets up a Good

Angel Tree, where parishioners can take tags and purchase an age-appropriate gift for a boy or a girl.

"It's a good way to give back to people more in need than us," says Co-Chair Mandy Evans. "Christmas is all about giving. It's all about love, and this is a way to show your love to the community by giving to those in need."

"The Good Angel Tree project makes you really humble. It makes you think less of yourself. There are a lot of people who are really struggling and in need. This project is a small thing we can do, and if we can put a smile on a child's face for Christmas or help a family sit down and enjoy a real Christmas meal – that's a huge blessing." – Cathy Mertens

ist's Love to Those in Our Community



Each year, the fifth-graders at St. Michael's Catholic School help with the Good Angel Tree project by moving the gifts and helping to sort them.



The Good Angel Tree project reminds us that Christmas is truly about receiving Christ's love and sharing that love with others. Many parishioners show Christ's love to those in need by donating gifts or prayer for the annual Good Angel Tree project.

After the gifts are purchased and brought to the parish, they are all sorted by gender and age group, and then set up in the St. Michael's gymnasium as a Toy Shoppe along with all the other donations from other parishes. This year's Toy Shoppe is on Dec. 10, when the parents contacted by Catholic Social Services are able to come to the gymnasium, pick out gifts for their children, wrap them or pick out wrapping paper to bring home, and receive a holiday food basket.

"God has given us all these gifts!" Cathy says. "We're so blessed with what He gives us, and when you're able to help someone who needs it, it makes you think of how blessed you are."

In addition to donating gifts, the Good Angel Tree also has spiritual bouquets available for parishioners to take. For those who would like to share of their time through prayer, these tags allow parishioners to make a card and pray for another parishioner

who may be sick, homebound or in the nursing home.

By either donating gifts or prayers, all our parishioners are invited to participate in this event that truly builds up the whole community by enabling us to think about others and to share our blessings with those in need. As we make our final preparations for Christmas, may we include our parish community in our "family" and continue to see Christ in each person we meet.

If you would like to learn more or have questions, please contact Cathy Mertens at 402-461-4207 or Mandy Evans at 402-469-3155.

TIME: *The Foundation of Stewardship*

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has told us that stewardship is part of discipleship and is a way of responding to God's call in every aspect of our lives. We refer to the three facets of stewardship as "Time, Talent and Treasure," and when we consider the importance of these three Ts of stewardship, the "time" component comes first by design.

When we talk about stewardship of time, we are referring to prayer time. Prayer is of the utmost importance in a disciple's life, and it serves as the fertile ground from which the gifts of talent and treasure blossom. Only by spending time in prayer each day and receiving the sacraments are we able to consistently and generously donate our talent and treasure to the Church.

When looking for examples of how to live our lives as disciples of Christ and as stewards of God's gifts, we can always turn to the great saints of our Church to guide us. And when it comes to the Stewardship of Time, the life of St. Damien is just one example of how prayer, or "Time," is the foundation for our lives of stewardship.

Shortly after being ordained a priest, St. Damien volunteered to serve a colony of lepers isolated on the island of Molokai, Hawaii. From May 1873 until his death in 1889 (at the age of 49) St. Damien worked to restore within the lepers a sense of personal worth and dignity.

Although for some time St. Damien took the necessary precautions to ensure that he did not contract leprosy, he knew that physical touch was necessary to communicate his love and concern to those afflicted with the disease. He embraced the lepers, dined with them, cared for them, and anointed them in the sacraments. With great humility and sacrifice, St. Damien offered his own life in order to save the lives of others.

From where did St. Damien draw his strength? What was the source of his inspiration? "Were it not for the constant presence of our divine Master in our humble chapel, I would not have found it possible to persevere in sharing the lot of the lepers in Molokai,"

St. Damien wrote. "The Eucharist is the bread that gives strength... It is at once the most eloquent proof of His love and the most powerful means of fostering His love in us. He gives Himself every day so that our hearts as burning coals may set afire the hearts of the faithful."

St. Damien found his strength in the Mass, the greatest prayer of the Church. Prayer was the impetus behind the generosity of this faithful servant of God, and is the fuel that ignites every heart to flame in love. Without prayer, without the grace that flows from the sacraments, we are incapable of leading lives of service and responding to God's call!

How much time do you dedicate to prayer each day? One hour? Fifteen minutes? None at all? Before you consider joining a parish ministry or volunteering your talents in service, and before you discern your gifts of treasure to the Church, be sure that prayer is your foundation. Identify a prayer schedule that is manageable. This may entail arising 20 minutes early each day to offer your work to the Lord, or attending daily Mass once a week. Every prayer commitment is unique and personal. Yet, no matter what, this time offering, this dedication to prayer, is the key to serving the Lord with faithfulness, generosity and joy.



“Thank God for the People Who Share With Us Their Gifts” *Our St. Michael Adult Choir and Christmas*

Music has been an integral part of Catholic liturgy from the beginnings of the Church. At Christmas in particular, most of us are familiar with the music, both secular and religious, which fill our memories and experiences. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Song and music fulfill their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are ‘more closely connected...with the liturgical action,’ according to three principal criteria: beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration. In this way they participate in the purpose of the liturgical words and actions: the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful” (1157).

According to the history of our parish, music and a choir have been part of our celebrations for more than 60 years – note that the parish is more than 70 years old. For almost half of that time – 27 years – Pam Koch has served as director of the Adult Choir. As has been the case for several years, she and the members of the choir – some of whom have been participating for almost 40 years – are preparing for singing



“Song and music fulfill their function as signs in a manner all the more significant when they are ‘more closely connected...with the liturgical action,’ according to three principal criteria: beauty expressive of prayer, the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and the solemn character of the celebration.”
– Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1157

at the Christmas Liturgy. Specifically, they will sing at the last Mass on Christmas Eve at 10 p.m.

The choir has been practicing and preparing for this liturgy on

Monday evenings at 7:30 p.m. This Christmas, the choir is preparing some special music.

“We will begin with a prelude at 9:30 p.m. prior to the Mass,”

continued on back cover

SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

715 Creighton Avenue
Hastings, NE 68901
(402) 463-1023
www.stmichaelsasthastings.com

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
ZIP CODE 58040
PERMIT NO. 3

Our St. Michael Adult Choir and Christmas

continued from page 7

Pam says. "This year, we are doing *Wonderful Counselor*. It is a moving and worshipful remembrance of the Christmas story based upon the words of the prophet Isaiah to the New Testament account of the birth of the Lord, and the rejoicing of the angels and shepherds. It begins with *Angels from the Realms of Glory* and includes *Wonderful Counselor*, *The Glory of the Lord*, *My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord*, *Break Forth*, *O Beauteous Heavenly Light*, and exciting versions of *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, *O Come All Ye Faithful*, *The First Noel*, and *Angels We have Heard on High*. Of course, most of the music we associate with Christmas will be included in the liturgy itself."

In our Music Ministry at St. Michael Catholic Church, God has given us the gift of music. It is our great joy and our duty to share this gift. Music enables us to more fully celebrate the great sacrifice of the Mass. Our music ministers are literally workers in the field. The people involved endeavor to elevate the written word by the sung verse. It is through music that we are able to celebrate more joyfully, and to build our faith community as we serve one another as good stewards.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Sunday:

Saturday Vigil 5:00 p.m.
Sunday 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m.
and 11:00 a.m.

Weekday:

Mon-Fri 7:30 a.m. & 8:10 a.m.
(School Mass)
Saturday 8:00 a.m.

There are currently about 30 members of the adult choir, but Pam Koch points out that there is always room for more. "Just join us on Monday evening at rehearsal, contact me at 402-469-7168 or email me at pam@consulthi.com," she says.