

# SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

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When we think of stewardship, we often think of how we are called to share of our time, talent, or treasure with the community. However, on a larger scale, the Church itself is called to a life of stewardship that takes care of each of its members. Helping to make this possible, behind each particular church is a parish office that facilitates smooth operations, while also serving the many families that belong to it. Here at St. Michael's, one of the ways volunteers are able to share their time and talent is through helping out at the parish office, thereby helping the parish serve all its members.

"It's rewarding to volunteer," says Parish Administrative Assistant Carolyn Menke. "Volunteering gives a person a sense of fulfillment and belonging. The parish has almost 700 families, and it takes many hands to tend to all their needs."

Some of the tasks volunteers help with at the parish office include mass mailing



*Parish Administrative Assistant  
Carolyn Menke*

*continued on back cover*

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## Stewardship of Treasure *Giving to God First*

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**H**ave you ever wondered why no one really becomes uneasy when someone brings up the first two “Ts” of stewardship – giving of your time or talents – but when the third “T” comes up, many of us become uncomfortable?

That third “T” is treasure, and some people simply become so annoyed by the subject, they tune out the words from the pulpit.

Why is there seemingly such an adverse reaction?

Our finances are such a personal subject. Discussing money issues with others is not easy, and having someone tell us what to do with our finances is even worse. We earn the money, after all. So shouldn't we decide what to do with it?

Of course, the answer is “yes” – we decide every day how to spend our hard-earned dollars. Indeed, the monetary choices we make will either keep our finances in check, or put us into the red. The average American family has about \$7,000 in credit card debt – so finances certainly represent a challenge to our current society. Tight budgets, trying to “keep up with the Joneses” or poor financial management

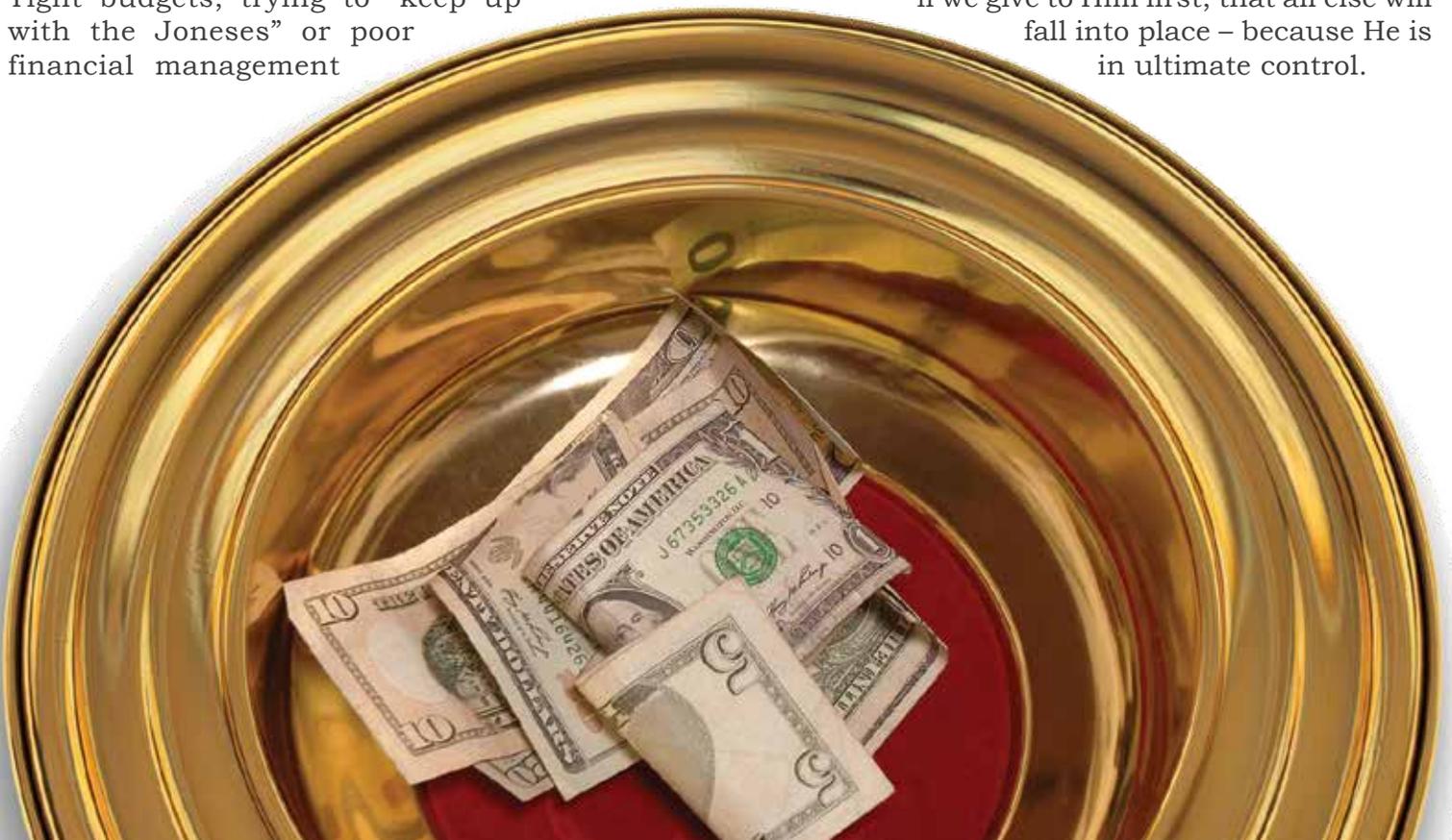
may be to blame for our tight resources. Does this mean we do not have anything left over for God?

Stewardship, at its roots, teaches that we are not supposed to give God our “leftovers.” We should instead strive to return to God a portion of our “first fruits” – giving to God first and then using the rest for our other needs. God gave us our talents that help us earn a living, after all. He should come first.

This idea can be worrisome for many. If our finances are already strained, how will we ever find enough to give back to God? Or, if we do try to give God our “first fruits,” will there be enough left over to cover our required expenses?

Taking the correct financial steps toward good stewardship simply boils down to trust – believing that God, who takes care of all of His creation, will take care of us. Trust that in giving to God first, we are both acknowledging that our multitude of blessings come from Him, and that we are thankful He chose to give them to us. And finally, trust that

if we give to Him first, that all else will fall into place – because He is in ultimate control.



## A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

# *The Word of God: How Do We Hear It? And How Do We Respond to It?*

Dear Parishioners,

A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time – but before long, we will begin Lent. This is one of those rare years when Ash Wednesday is in March – so, Lent does not, of course, begin in February this year.

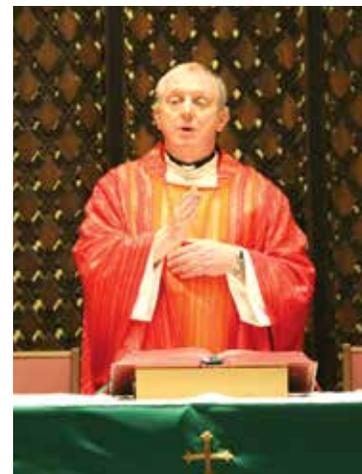
The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part – the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider that these readings are about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets of how we approach the Word of God.

For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks

us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God’s Word.



However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act requires time, practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us – that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Houlihan,  
Pastor



## Finding God in the Stillness *Perpetual*

Sometimes, it seems that the world is getting more “noisy” by the year. Some days, you can’t go five minutes without a cell phone buzzing, an email inbox dinging, or your favorite podcast or news source announcing they’ve got new information for you. It can be hard to find time for silence – time to be still.

“People are so busy and have so much noise in their lives – I think finding quiet, to be able to hear the Lord and talk to Him is very difficult today,” says our Pastor, Fr. Michael Houlihan. “Adoration gives them an opportunity to do that.”

“You’re there all by yourself, no phone, no doorbells, no TV – you’re all by yourself and you can be more concentrated on God,” says Mary Rose, who coordinates the schedule for Perpetual Adoration. “I think it just gives you more peace, having that time alone [with God].”

Scripture tells us that God does not often come to us in a big, booming voice, but rather in the quiet of our hearts (1 Kings 19:11-13). Unfortunately, for many, there is not enough space or silence to be able to hear the still, small voice of God.

Perpetual Adoration is an opportunity to come sit in the Real Presence of the Lord, in silence, to share your heart with Him and open your heart to hear His voice. The church is unlocked from 6 a.m. until 5 p.m., with Jesus, truly present, in the tabernacle. Adoration is also accessible during the night, with a keyless entry, located on the east side of the church. Parishioners are invited to sign up for and commit to a weekly “Holy Hour,” to pray with the Blessed Sacrament, in hopes that someone



*Perpetual Adoration is an opportunity to spend time in prayer, in the True Presence of Jesus, in the tabernacle.*

will be keeping vigil with our Lord, at all times.

“It does give you a peace of mind,” says Paula Johnson, who goes to adoration each Thursday evening, from 7-8 p.m., the same Holy Hour that her parents kept for years, before their passing. “I can go and maybe be upset or angry, but when I go and sit down in the peace and quiet and talk about it, I feel much better.

“Once you do it and get in the habit, you start looking forward to it, spending time with God,” she continues. “There are no distractions, nobody around, you’re just by yourself and you have time to stop and think and pray and meditate.”

“When I go, there is no one else there, so it’s just a feeling of solitude, a one-on-one conversation with God – it’s really peaceful,” says Doug Sterup, who

has been going to adoration for the past 15 years. “It’s one of the few places you can go and totally disconnect from the day-to-day stuff.”

For someone who may be unfamiliar with how to pray during a Holy Hour, Fr. Houlihan recounts the story of St. John Vianney and his conversation with a farmer – “What do you do when you go in to pray?” asked St. John Vianney. The farmer said, “I look at Him and He looks at me.”

Some may bring a Bible and pray with Scripture, pray the Rosary or other prayers, or do spiritual reading. There are also other materials available to borrow during your time of prayer.

Those who regularly attend adoration have noticed the impact it has in their lives, in helping

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them grow in their faith and relationship with God.

“It’s like any relationship – you’ve got to invest yourself in it,” Fr. Houlihan says. “God is always willing to do that with you and He wants you to take that opportunity to be with Him, He wants to draw you closer to Himself. I think if people are spending time with the Lord and taking time to listen to Him, it helps them to put things into perspective of what’s important.”

“It’s really changed my whole relationship with God,” Doug adds. “It gives me an anchor. It keeps me grounded and on track. I talk to Him all the time now, and that wasn’t happening before. It’s really allowed me to realize that I’m not alone. I ask for help and talk to God about it.”

Paula encourages other parishioners to sign up for a weekly Holy Hour in adoration, or even to just stop by and pray when they are able.

“Just give it a try,” she says. “I think once you do it, you’ll think, ‘Maybe I need this.’ It does help and if you can’t stay a whole hour, just do it as long as you can. It’s hard to find the time, but if you just take the time, you won’t regret it.”

“That hour goes by so fast!” Mary adds.

As Fr. Houlihan encourages, if you want to deepen your prayer life, then sign up for an hour.

“You will grow in your relationship with the Lord just by spending that time with Him,” he says. “He is there for you, waiting for you, all the time.”

“Just try it,” Doug adds. “What do you have to lose? It could definitely change your relationship with God.”



*In a busy world, spending time in silence can be an important way to grow closer to God.*

*For more information on Perpetual Adoration, to sign up for a weekly Holy Hour, or to get the code for the keyless entry at night, please call Mary Rose at 402-469-0780 or Fr. Houlihan at 402-463-1023.*

## Valentine's Day *The Feast of a Christian Martyr*

Candy, flowers, romantic dinners, and excuses for wooing are the common traditions we associate with the once-pagan holiday known as Valentine's Day.

Dangling cupids, candy "message" hearts, and faux long-stemmed roses clutter every card store, waiting for that last-minute purchase.

The question is – how did this over-commercialized holiday really begin?

There are a few stories surrounding the history of Feb. 14 and St. Valentine himself, all dating back to the Roman Empire. The 14th day of February was a day set aside to honor the goddess Juno, queen of the Roman gods and goddesses. The following day, Feb. 15, began the feast of Lupercalia – a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

As part of the festival traditions, there was a name drawing among the young people. The names of young Roman women were written on slips of paper and placed into a jar. Each young man would draw a young woman's name from the jar, and the two would be partners for the duration of the festival. Sometimes the pairing lasted an entire year, and often, the couple would fall in love and later marry.

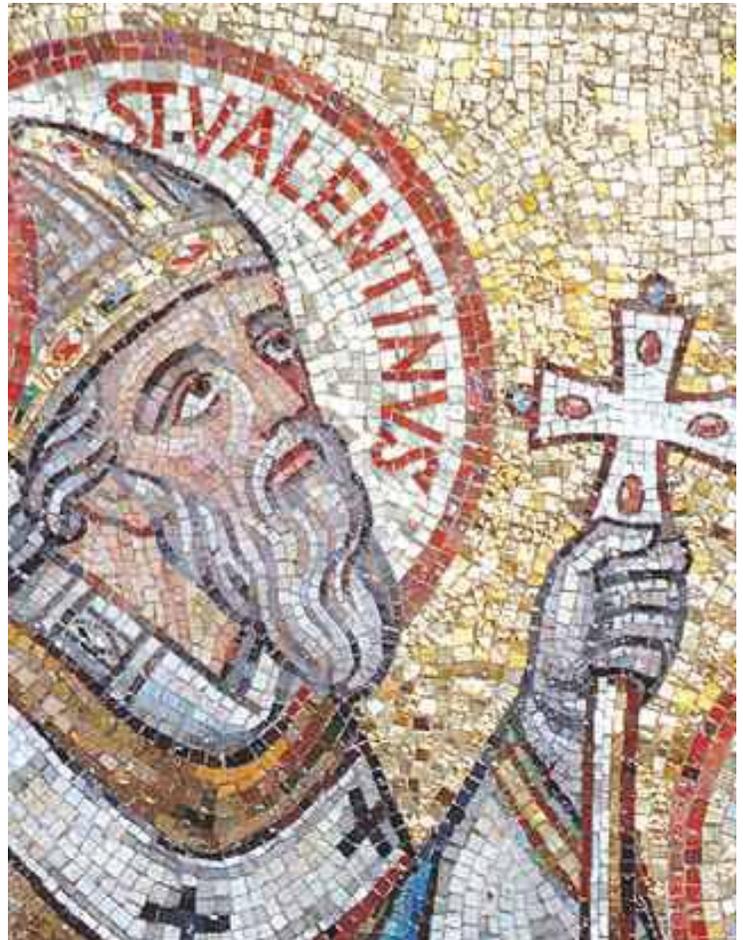
At the time, Emperor Claudius II was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns, and he was having a difficult time recruiting soldiers to join his military leagues. Claudius believed that soldiers were reluctant to join because they did not want to leave their loves or families.

With this in mind, Claudius decreed all marriages and engagements cancelled in Rome. During this time, St. Valentine was a priest in Rome, and he and St. Marius secretly married young couples. For this, St. Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who sentenced him to be beaten and then executed by beheading. He suffered this martyrdom on Feb. 14, around the year 270 AD.

Before his death, it is said that St. Valentine left a note for the jailer's daughter, who had become

his friend, and signed it "From Your Valentine." Although the truth behind the St. Valentine's legend is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and, most importantly, romantic figure. It is no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

Over time, Feb. 14 became a time for lovers to exchange sweet messages, making St. Valentine the patron saint of lovers. The date was often commemorated with the sending of poems and simple gifts. During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that Feb. 14 was the beginning of the avian mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of February – Valentine's Day – should be a day for romance.



## Faith-Sharing Groups to Experience Healing Stories This Lent

Everyone can use a little healing. Even when we feel great physically, our spiritual and emotional selves can often use the balm of God's love to make us feel well again. This Lent, parishioners at St. Michael's will have the opportunity to explore these healings with the Lenten Faith-Sharing Groups.

These small groups, who meet weekly throughout Lent in coffee shops, group member's homes, or even at the church, gather to study the Bible with the help of a text chosen by the St. Michael Evangelization Committee.

This year's text is *The Healing Stories of Jesus: Signs of the New Creation* by Louis Grams. The study is part of *The Word Among Us Keys to the Bible* series. It examines six Gospel stories in which Jesus heals people who are suffering from physical and spiritual afflictions, and takes a deeper look at what these healings mean for the Kingdom yet to come. The study is meant to help the reader see Jesus' healings in a new light and pray to experience that healing in his or her own life.

Committee members say these groups help enhance parishioners' experience of Lent by providing fellowship in an intimate and caring atmosphere.

"When people have issues or they need prayer or advice, trust has been built up and whatever has been said stays in the room," says committee member Mike Tebbe says of the bond that develops between these small groups. "We all need healing and we all have issues that need prayer and support. A lot of our prayers have been answered over the years."

Mike, his wife Loretta, and their friends, Tom and Karen Jurgensmeier, and Bruce and Cherrie Mooers, have helped facilitate the Lenten Faith-



Sharing Groups since 2000. Loretta says the 80 to 90 members who return to these groups year after year enjoy the changing format and the ability to adapt it to the group's needs.

"It's once a week and the leader decides what night people come," she says. "The majority meet in their homes. There was a group of ladies that met for coffee early before they went to work. You can get creative with it. We have prayer when we start. Then there's reading, there's faith sharing, it's all part of the evening. We tailor it to them."

Though some of these groups find they enjoy their time together so much that they continue to meet throughout the year, Karen says it can be a great way to prepare specifically for Lent.

"It's such a great experience," she says. "I haven't heard of anyone who has done this and not been happy with it, and every year they look forward to it. It's for your personal experience."

"Try it, you'll like it," Tom says. "If you miss a week, you can come back and pick up where you left off."

Parishioners interested in joining the Lenten Faith-Sharing Groups can contact the Tebbes at 402-463-7704 or [mt93034@windstream.net](mailto:mt93034@windstream.net), the Mooers at 402-462-9506, or the Jurgensmeiers at 402-462-2947. You can also call the parish office at 402-463-1023.

# SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC PARISH

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## *Parish Office Volunteers* (continued from front cover)

preparation, seasonal work, and placing inserts into the bulletins. These tasks help spread the Good News, share important information about events and opportunities, and create a sense of belonging to a community. Carolyn requests help in the parish office six to eight times a year. By helping with copying, stapling, and putting mailings together, volunteers help the parish office administer to all of its parishioners through the written word.

“Volunteering with parish office work gives a person a good insight into what is actually needed to have a parish office

run smoothly. It is a tremendous help to the parish when volunteers can assist in these duties,” Carolyn says.

While this ministry is often an unnoticed ministry, quietly coming together as needed, it provides an important service to the parish, allowing parishioners to receive information in a timely fashion and sharing the good news with each person who receives the mailing, especially during liturgical seasons such as Advent Christmas, Lent, and Easter.

“Through the many years of service to St. Michael’s Parish, St. Michael’s has become an extension to my own family,” Carolyn says. “It is truly a privilege, honor, and blessing to work for and with so many of God’s wonderful people.”

### 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.*

*Carolyn Menke keeps an ongoing list of volunteers that she calls as needed. If you would like to help in the parish office in this way, please contact Carolyn at 402-463-1023.*