

Saint Mary

ON THE HILL

CATHOLIC CHURCH



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News and Notes from Fr. Jerry

Showing Our Gratitude for Others

Dear Parishioners,

This first week in February marks "Catholic Schools Week." Catholic Schools Week is an annual national celebration of the important role that Catholic elementary and secondary schools across the country play in providing an education that emphasizes not only academics, but also spiritual, moral, and social values.

This year's theme is "Dividends for Life," reflecting the long lasting benefits of a Catholic school education. Catholic schools provide good things for students and families – high expectations and daily experience of faith. The theme also reminds us that the dividends of a Catholic school education – students prepared in faith, knowledge, morals and discipline – last a lifetime. There is no better way to invest in a child's future, or the future of our world. Many families could not make this investment on their own resources alone, so I am deeply grateful for the generosity of so many people in our faith community who support Cath-

olic education through your stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

During Catholic Schools Week, we celebrate our students, faculty, staff, and our parish. And this year I want to offer a special thanks to the members of the

School Commission, which was formed last year. Its members are wasting no time in moving towards defining standards of excellence for our parish school. They are a very focused, mission-oriented group of leaders who are presently working with the Superintendent of Catholic

School Commission Members

*Eric McArdle
Dr. Rhee Fincher
Pat Fair
Kelly Fair
Catherine Tribby
Dr. Tony Ramage
John Strelec
Steve Hagler
Ruth Ann Vericella
Lisa Murray*

Schools, Sr. Rose Mary Collins, SSJ, and our School Principal, Mr. Keith Darr, to put into place a structure of evaluation to make sure that the school's curriculum and staffing keep up with the children's needs. I am grateful for their service to the parish.

In mid-February we will celebrate Valentine's Day. Like most things in our world today, this is a day that has become somewhat detached from its religious roots. Nevertheless, it is still

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A Great Adventure

St. Mary's Adult Faith Formation

The Adult Faith Formation program at St. Mary's is on a journey.

Participants have discovered the secrets within the Book of Revelation, gained an appreciation for Biblical language and the context of different scriptural references, and now the group is exploring the Gospel of Matthew.

Approximately 35 adult parishioners take part in the weekly series, which has allowed them to grow closer to their fellow parishioners, develop a better understanding of the Word of God and how it relates to everyday life, and fall deeper in love with the Lord.

"Everyone's faith journey is different, but everyone considers it important to be knowledgeable about his or her faith," says Deacon Ken Maleck, director of Adult Faith Formation.

The Adult Faith Formation program is a perfect way for adult Catholics to become more knowledgeable in the fundamentals of Catholicism. Although each participant's reason for attending the sessions is different, all walk away from the experience strengthened in faith.

"Many people have forgotten what they learned about Catholicism as a young person, and consider it important to learn more," says Deacon Ken. "Some admit they were poorly catechized in their young age and have developed a desire to become better informed at this point in their lives."

Others consider the program to be valuable because it helps them answer questions other Christians and non-Catholics might ask about the Faith.

Adult Faith Formation sessions take place each Sunday throughout the school year and are held at

9 a.m. in the St. Mary's School computer lab. There, participants watch a DVD series by Scripture Scholar Jeff Cavins; currently, the group is viewing *Adventures in Matthew*. After the DVD presentation, Deacon Ken or parishioner Tony Warezak, who occasionally helps

with the program, offers the group supplementary information about the weekly lesson and opens the floor for questions and comments.

This simple yet straightforward format has proved beneficial for the program, and participants have felt free to grow in faith together by rediscovering scripture. Jeff Cavin's entertaining style also adds appeal to the program.

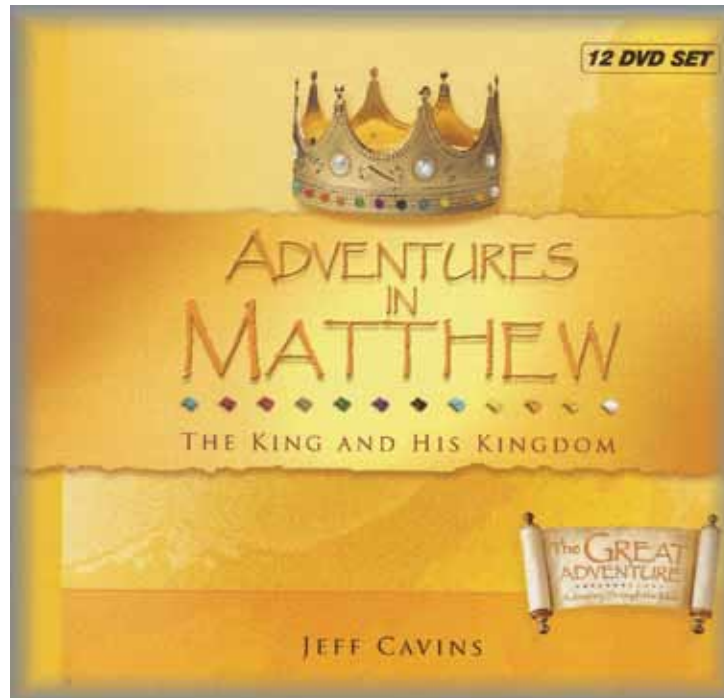
"The Cavins series has proved to be very popular with the attendees," Deacon Ken says. "His

style is engaging enough to where both the novice as well as the experienced Bible student can appreciate his material. He has a knack for presenting the basics as well as delving into the theology."

Adults, are you interested in deepening your understanding of scripture, growing in faith with your fellow parishioners, and making new and lasting friendships? If so, St. Mary's Adult Faith Formation program is just what you're looking for.

Truly, each of us travels our own unique journey of faith, but we are all heading in the same direction – toward Jesus Christ. Consider walking the "straight and narrow" with your fellow parishioners and benefitting from the support they offer.

For more information about the Adult Faith Formation program, contact the parish office at 706-733-6627.



Making Every Sunday “Super” Putting God First

This month, thousands of visitors will flock to Miami and fill Dolphin Stadium for Super Bowl XLIV, the championship game of the National Football League. Millions of football fans across the world who have followed their respective teams week-in and week-out will gather together on Sunday, Feb. 7, to kick back, enjoy fellowship, and celebrate the culmination of the 2009-10 NFL season. Last year, an estimated 152 million American viewers watched all or some of the telecast of Super Bowl XLIII between the Pittsburgh Steelers and Arizona Cardinals, making it the most viewed television broadcast in U.S. history.

On Feb. 7, more than 18,000 Catholic parishes in the United States will also be celebrating Masses. But if recent statistics are any indication, the percentage of the U.S. Catholic population attending Mass that day will stand in stark contrast to the percentage of the U.S. television audience watching the Super Bowl.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life’s U.S. Religious Landscape Survey published in 2008, Catholics account for roughly 23.9 percent of the adult population in the United States. But of the 70 million-plus registered Catholics in the U.S., only 36 percent attend Mass once a week or more, according to Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the

Apostolate. Only 12 percent of U.S. Catholics participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year, and a mere 17 percent of Catholic men say they have ever even slightly considered becoming a priest or religious brother.

God gives us leisure time to clear our heads and recover from what can often be a hectic daily life. But it is important that we glorify God in all that we do, and time away from work or school provides a great opportunity to celebrate the sacraments regularly. As Catholics, we are obligated to attend Mass on a weekly basis barring illness or extenuating circumstances, but this is just the first step. Spending time in prayer, Eucharistic Adoration, and confession provides us with the graces, healing, and the wisdom to live as disciples of Christ on a daily basis. And sharing of our talents and treasure through ministry participation, social outreach, and charitable giving helps enable us to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ, and ensure that we are placing God at the top of our list of priorities.

The season of Lent, which begins this year on Feb. 17, is a time for us to renew our commitments to discipleship in anticipation of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. This month, set some time aside to discern ways that you can put God first, on Super Bowl Sunday and every Sunday throughout the year.

Congratulations to You!

Congratulations to you! This year our parish received Commitment Cards from 916 families – including many children – making our participation rate 36 percent. This is a very favorable participation rate! Many thanks to all who participated.

Here’s some of the good news about the commitments you made:

- St. Mary’s parishioners are prayerful! Parish families made 914 commitments to spend time with God in prayer.
- We have a very active parish with many dedicated members. Adults, children, and teens made 1,416 new commitments to ministries. (That’s on top of the 2,425 re-commitments to ministries.)
- Many relatively inactive families took steps to become more involved in our parish. One hundred

three families who were not previously active in any ministry signed up for a total of 369 ministries.

- The five ministries that had the most new sign ups were: Vacation Bible School volunteer (76), Golden Harvest Food Bank (70), Gift Bearers (69), Habitat for Humanity (62), and Casseroles to Go (61).
- Your generosity continues to make possible all of the good work accomplished in our parish. The total annual amount pledged was \$3,233,025, which is a good first step toward reaching our budget of \$4,117,094.

Thanks to all of you who have made commitments of time, talent, and treasure. We hope that all our efforts will bring the presence of Christ into our lives and into the world, helping those who are in most need of God’s love.

Interfaith Hospitality Network

Nearly 10 years ago, Dr. Gary Billingsley – a member of Trinity Methodist Church – felt God calling him to reach out to the homeless. He and his daughter, Sarah, prayed together about ways in which they could help those in need. It wasn't long before Dr. Billingsley and other volunteers founded the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Augusta. Today, Sarah is director of the program.

Interfaith Hospitality Network is an all-encompassing outreach program for homeless families. The network not only provides temporary housing and meals for its guests, but also plenty of networking opportunities to help them find jobs, make connections with relief agencies, secure permanent housing, receive medical services, and much more.

So, where does St. Mary's come in? Our parish is grateful to be one of the nearly 30 Augusta-area churches who contribute to this tremendous effort of love. Three times a year, for one week at a time, our parish opens its doors to three Interfaith Hospitality guest families. These families are given temporary lodging in the Annunciation House, which is located on the corner of Arsenal and Central Ave.

Parishioners contribute to this initiative by providing the families with meals, towels, toiletries and companionship during their stay. Each time St. Mary's hosts Interfaith Hospitality, close to 60 parishioners contribute approximately 400 volunteer hours toward the cause.

"We have a great team of volunteers and we all work together," says parishioner Diane Cone, Coordinator of St. Mary's and Most Holy Trinity's Interfaith Hospitality efforts. "We have had such a generous outpouring of donations and volunteer services from our parishioners."

Diane serves alongside other St. Mary's parishioners, including Co-Coordinator Lori Serji, Overnight Coordinator Heather Killips, Set-Up Coordinators Karl and Sonia Quinn, and Meal Coordinator Marge Meneghello.

Interfaith Hospitality volunteers have the chance to personally impact those in need in a positive way.

Parishioners can share Christ with guests through acts of service, generosity and compassion. The reverse is also true: many of the guests reciprocate the love they are shown and bless the ministers who spend time with them.

"There was once a young boy who loved to pray and quote scripture," says Diane. "During an art activity, he wrote all kinds of scripture verses on our windows with erasable markers, all by heart, and we were so amazed and encouraged."

"Interfaith Hospitality has benefited me and my family in many ways," says Lori Serji. "It has brought us all closer. My children help when we volunteer, which teaches them to be disciples of Jesus. They learn not to judge others, and that people come from all walks of life."

More volunteers are needed to contribute to this important ministry. Are you searching for a way to help the homeless? Consider volunteering for Interfaith Hospitality. St. Mary's hosted three families last month, and will do the same the weeks of April 25-May 2 and Aug. 15-22. Be sure to visit the sign-up sheet in the narthex and indicate your desire to help out. An Interfaith Hospitality volunteer will contact you with instructions and training information.

For more details about Interfaith Hospitality Network of Augusta, contact Diane at 706-733-6312 or Lori at 706-922-5962.



*(back row; left to right) Karl Quinn, Lori Serji, Marge Meneghello and Diane Cone
(front row; left to right) John, Sonia and Katie Quinn*

Sharing the Faith Within Families

Family Night Workshops

No one receives a how-to lesson on the proper ways in which to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas. Instead, we watch our parents and, seeing the joy that holiday traditions bring them, we try our best to imitate them.

Catholicism works in much the same way. The parents' example, more than anything else, is by far the strongest influence on a child's faith. No matter how much "Catechism" our children are taught or how many good friends they make, if children never see their parents living out a lively, joyful faith, then they will not want to do the same.

Many parents at St. Mary's are passing on the faith to their children through the Family Night Workshops held throughout the year.

The evening gatherings begin at 6:45 p.m. with a half hour of family Adoration in the church. For many families, this can be a challenge. Adoration is a reverent, quiet form of prayer and children are, well, often the very opposite.

However, family Adoration is just that – a family event. The parents and families who routinely attend family Adoration understand that small children can only be quiet for so long.

"It's not silent adoration, and we don't expect everyone to be perfectly quiet," says Joan Purucker, one of the co-directors of CCD. "It's not a long

amount of time, and we're not expecting the children to be angels in the church. But, it is a small chance to expose them to Adoration and let them spend time with God."



And exposure is what the Family Night Workshops are all about: exposure to Eucharistic Adoration and exposure to the faith of their parents. When parents set aside time to pray and teach their children about the Faith, they silently communicate to their children the importance of maintaining a solid relationship with Christ.

Family Adoration is followed by refreshments and activities for all ages in the parish hall. Each family is provided with materials for that evening's craft, which is usually a creation that families can bring home with them as a visible reminder of the liturgical season.

"The goal is to bring families to experience Adoration and also to share their traditions for Advent and for Lent," Joan says.

During Advent, for example, each family made an Advent calendar prayer chain for the home: a simple reminder of the importance of waiting and anticipation.

Family Night Workshops bring the different families of the parish together, strengthening the bonds among and within the families.

"The families enjoy getting to work together, and it's always a nice family atmosphere," Joan says.

To find out more about Family Night Workshops, contact Joan at 706-733-9908.

Be sure to check the bulletin for more details on the upcoming Lent workshop! It's a small way to show your children what you think is truly important.

Many parents at St. Mary's are passing on the faith to their children through the Family Night Workshops held throughout the year.



Homecoming Miracles

by Katie Conner

For a long time, a very long time, I anticipated the moment – the moment when I would at last walk through the kitchen door with Gabriel in my arms to meet his daddy and brothers and sisters. For so long I dreamed of it, imagined it, and played over and over in my head how it would be.

And then it was finally here. And it was not at all as I had imagined.

In my daydreams, I left out the part about the three-hour flight from Bulgaria to Germany, on a day which began for us at 3 a.m. I also left out the four-hour layover there, waiting for a 10-hour flight into Atlanta. I didn't realize that upon arrival back in the United States there'd be a wait at Customs, an even longer wait through Immigration, and the longest wait of all at the rental car line to get a "midsize" to drive the last two hours to my kitchen door.

Through it all Gabriel held up remarkably well, especially given that he had been out of his small, three-room ward at the orphanage for less than a week. His new mother, however, had utterly lost her composure by the time we finally settled into that rental car (not the one we had reserved) and were heading for the dreamed-of homecoming. I called Steve and told him we were well beyond tired and not to expect much from us. Gabe was shell-shocked, I was sleep-deprived and we were both overwhelmed with the emotion of our first week together and the grueling travel and bureaucratic hoops we had just jumped through. I had missed my family – dearly – but all I could think about was my own bed and falling into it as soon as possible. I couldn't keep a coherent thought in my head as we drove closer and closer to home, except, "Hmm, this isn't at all how I thought it would be."

And it wasn't. It was so different from my imaginary homecoming. It was miraculous. After my heartwarming phone call, Steve had gathered the kids for a "meeting" to tell them that Mom and Gabe were very tired (he probably mentioned that Mom was very crabby) and that what we needed most when we got home was quiet. That is when the first miracle of this homecoming occurred. When we pulled in the driveway there was a beautiful "welcome home" sign on the back door (that part was in my imagination, too). And when we walked in, it was utterly, totally peaceful and quiet. Their new brother was

not even in the door and already they were bending to meet his needs. Quietly they tiptoed to us, one by one, to have a look at Gabriel. He clung to my neck and peeked around. My sweet mother-in-law had yummy homemade soup ready and Gabe had his first meal in his new home, his first time in a home. The children gathered around, still quiet, and looked at him. They gave him a quick tour of the playroom and then Steve helped me to get Gabe into his jammies and tuck him into the crib he had set up next to our bed. I don't know if it was exhaustion or grace, but he looked up at us looking down at him and went peacefully to sleep that night. It was the first of so many small miracles I have witnessed since bringing Gabriel home.

As I write, we are still in the "transition phase" as this almost 4-year-old makes the many, many adjustments to life outside an orphanage. Everything is new to him – new country, new language, new foods and smells and clothes and climate. The very idea of "family" is new to him. He has never gotten to run outside ("outside" scared him at first), he has never been in a kitchen before, and sadly, we've discovered, he probably has not had a full tummy after a meal before. But he is learning very quickly that he is loved, and he loves us fiercely in return.

We've had our share of bumps in the road, and I expect more will come, but already I've learned to expect daily miracles like our quiet homecoming. And they do come. There is the miracle of my children welcoming this boy with a tenderness, patience and gentleness I always hoped was there and now is quite apparent. They have accepted him, just as he is, as their brother. They have become their parents' teachers in this new venture. There is the miracle of so many prayers prayed for us over the last year. It humbles us and makes our hearts overflow with gratitude. There are the miracles Gabriel displays each day: the first day he really played with his brothers and sisters, the first time he went running to his daddy when he came in the door from work, the first sentence he spoke ("Hi dog"); the little arms he reaches out to us with total trust and pure love. So day by day we live by grace, trusting in the Lord to guide all of us into our "new normal." And now I realize that the homecoming I anticipated for so long is not the end of long-held dream. It is just the beginning.

Showing Our Gratitude for Others

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a good thing to have a day dedicated to expressing your care for the special people in your life. Actually, the historic accounts of the beginning of Valentine's Day vary, and even hint at three different saints named Valentine, but all the stories point to a saint whose love for others was selfless. According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, one was a priest in Rome, another saint was a bishop in Terni, and the third saint by the name of Valentine died in Africa. And surprisingly all three were said to be martyred on Feb. 14. So, there is no better example than St. Valentine to give honor to a day dedicated to loving others. Therefore, Valentine's Day is a perfect day to selflessly spend time showing someone how much they mean to you.

This past Christmas, I received two different letters from parishioners, which detailed the reasons that they were grateful for my priestly ministry. I was both humbled and delighted by these letters, and I treasure them. They gave me an idea for a Valentine Project that is in keeping with our pastoral focus of gratitude. Would

you selflessly spend some time writing a testimonial letter about someone in our faith community who has played a role in your faith development? I'd like to print some of these letters in the April or May *Marianite*. Simply name the individual and share how much they mean to you. In this Year of the Priest, I would love to receive some letters about the priests of the parish. How have Fr. Mark, Fr. Charlie or Fr. Ed Frank been a blessing in your life? Drop your letters off at the parish office, or e-mail them to the "Valentine Project" care of smoth@knology.net. Happy Valentine's Day!

God bless you,



Fr. Jerry

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St. Mary on the Hill

Leave a Legacy Program

Pew Plaque

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Kathy Baltzell

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Zielinski

Stained Glass Windows Restoration

In memory of

Mr. and Mrs. Carl Purrington

St Mary on the Hill Church

Mrs. Anne Proctor

Dr. and Mrs. Steven Hackman

Peggy Lovelace

In memory of Dr. Thomas Saul

Doug and Elizabeth Engler

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In memory of Sr. Rose Margaret Schweers

Mr. and Mrs. Milton Burroughs

In memory of Marjorie Kilchenstein

*and in honor of Kevin, Philip, Lacy,
and Caroline*

Thomas and Anna Marie Spain

In honor of the Consolation Ministry

Jim and Elizabeth Fleming

In honor of the Church Choir

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Brady

In honor of Verna Landrum

Peter and Laurie Landrum

Baptisms

Blossom Ihuoma Anyanwu,

daughter of Blossom and Clement Anyanwu

Matthew Joseph Scherer,

son of Michelle and Richard Scherer

Benjamin Carter Casella,

son of Ben and Laura Casella

Gabriel Lee Conner,

son of Steve and Katie Conner

Rosemary Tate Williams,

daughter of Erin and Frank Williams

St. Mary on the Hill School

In honor of Mac and Neal Sellers

Mr. and Mrs. Jerry Matheis

St. Mary on the Hill School Endowment

In memory of Dr. Thomas Saul

Dr. and Mrs. Mark Tribby

In honor of Fr. Jerry Ragan and Fr. Mark Van Alstine

Lou Cheek