



The Annunciation Parish Faith Challenge was originally posted as a daily Facebook event January 2-31, 2015. You can use the Faith Challenge in many ways – as a month long “busy person’s retreat” to help ground your daily life in your faith, as a “refresher” if your faith life is feeling stale or has been neglected, or maybe as something you do with a friend or as a family to guide your support of one another on your faith journey. You can, of course, just choose a section of the Faith Challenge – prayer, education, or service – to focus on. Links throughout will take you to videos, podcasts, and webpages to help you meet each challenge.

If you have questions or comments, please contact the parish office, 812/476-3061. Thank you so much for participating in our 30-Day Faith Challenge. Peace be with you.

PRAYER

The first third of our Faith Challenge will focus on prayer, offering ten daily challenges aimed at deepening your relationship with God.

Day 1: Assess Your Prayer Life

Your first prayer challenge is to take an honest look at your prayer life. Take a few moments to answer [these questions](#). This information is for your use only. The next several challenges will be offered to help you move from where you are to where you would like to be. You might take a few minutes to write down your thoughts following this assessment.

Day 2: What is prayer?

Prayer is conversation with God. The Bible teaches us that prayer is a vital part of our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:17), that it is to the Father (Matthew 6:6), through the Son (Ephesians 2:18), and by the Spirit (Romans 8:26). Prayer is relational, it is the building of a relationship between you and God. Through conversation with God, we seek to know Him, to grow in communion with Him, and so to know the peace and joy of being in the loving relationship with God that He intends for us. That we have the means to do this, is a great gift from God.

Today, set aside some additional time to talk with God, letting go of formality and expectation – make this a conversation between friends. Again, you might take just a little time to write about your experience.

Day 3: Why do we pray?

If prayer is building a relationship with God through conversation with Him, what are the goals of prayer? You can use the acronym ACTS to think about these goals: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. Many of us skip straight to supplication, asking God for things. However, if we think about successful relationships, they are not solely built upon one party asking for the other party to fulfill their needs.

ACTS is not a formula for prayer, but it can help us think about our prayer life. The challenge today is to spend some time in conversation with God, maybe applying the ACTS model to this prayer time. You might write down something about this experience.

Day 4: Types of Prayer

Prayer can be communal or individual. Communal prayer may include call and response, is often formal, and is directed toward a common end. Individual prayer can be silent or vocal, can be done anywhere and anytime, and can be formal or “free form.” Examples of communal prayer are a group rosary, a prayer group, family prayer before meals, or a prayer at the beginning of a meeting. Examples of individual prayer are formal prayers such as the Hail Mary or Our Father, meditation, or a “free form” conversation with God. Mass is a communal prayer.

Your challenge today to consider your participation in the Mass as prayer, a prayer we offer together as the Church to God. This [short video](#) from Fr. James Martin, may help. You might write about your experience.

Day 5: Common Catholic Prayers

The Catholic prayer tradition is rich. Many of us know several prayers by heart, and we may say them often. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that the Our Father is “the most perfect of prayers” and that it is called the Lord’s Prayer “because it comes to us from the Lord Jesus, the master and model of our prayer.”

Your challenge today is to spend some time praying the [Our Father](#). This [video classic](#) (about 20 minutes) from Bishop Fulton Sheen is his reflection on this prayer. You could write your own reflection on the Our Father.

Day 6: Praying at Meals

One prayer familiar to many Catholics is this prayer offered before a meal: *Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.* You might be less familiar with the traditional prayer offered after a meal: *We give Thee thanks for all Thy benefits, O Almighty God, who livest and reignest world without end. Amen. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.*

Your challenge is to offer these prayers of thanksgiving before and after each meal today. If you are not accustomed to praying at meal time, how does this feel? If you are eating with others or in a public setting, how does this affect your prayer experience? You might write something about this.

Day 7: Steps to a better prayer life

There is not one “right” way to pray. However, there are some general tips that we can all use to improve our prayer life and deepen our relationship with God.

1. Set aside a regular (maybe even daily) time for prayer. Just as we prioritize other things in our lives, we prioritize prayer.
2. Establish a quiet place for prayer. This can be at home, at church, even in your car or at your desk, as long as you are able to concentrate on your conversation with God.
3. Get comfortable. Minimize distractions so that you can present yourself fully to God.
4. Focus, opening your heart to the Lord, sharing and listening, and allowing yourself to be vulnerable before God – and to be transformed.

Your challenge is to commit to one thing today that will improve your prayer life. If you need help to keep this commitment, pray for it! Writing this commitment down could help you honor it.

Day 8: Lectio Divina, Praying with Scripture

Lectio Divina is a slow, contemplative praying of Scripture. Here is a [video](#) from the Benedictine monks of Conception Abbey in Missouri that describes Lectio Divina. Your challenge is to try this practice, using the Gospel reading for today, or another Gospel passage. You might spend some time writing about your experience with Lectio Divina.

Day 9: Adoration

Holy hours are the Roman Catholic devotional tradition of spending an hour in Eucharistic Adoration in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Annunciation Parish offers you the opportunity to commit to spending an hour with Jesus each first Friday from 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. at Christ the King Church and each third Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. at Holy Spirit Church. If you are not able to commit to a regular hour of Adoration, you can always be there when you can during these times.

Adoration is being in the presence of Jesus, silently adoring Him. This [video](#) is a beautiful description of Adoration. Your challenge today is simply to watch and reflect upon this video. What would allow you to commit to adding Adoration to your prayer life? Write down your reflection.

Day 10: Finding your own prayer rhythm

Now to incorporate what you have gained these past several days into your life. Where are there spaces – or where could there be spaces with a little adjustment – for you to make prayer a part of the rhythm and flow of your day, your week, your month? What is getting in your way and how might you address these obstacles?

Your final prayer challenge is to find your own prayer rhythm. Maybe you could try daily prayer and see how that feels after several weeks, knowing that it is deepening your relationship with God that is the goal, not checking prayer off of your task list. Maybe you could add in a regular group prayer commitment or praying as a family. Maybe you have learned about a prayer practice that you want to spend more time with. Maybe, for you, being fully present at Mass each week is the prayer commitment you need to make. Today is the day to commit to being more faithful to knowing and being known by God. Writing down your ideas could be helpful.

EDUCATION

The next ten days of our Faith Challenge will focus on education, offering ten daily challenges aimed at learning more about your faith.

Day 11: Where do we learn our faith?

Many of us began education in the Catholic faith as children, growing up in Catholic homes and attending Catholic schools. Some did not learn about the faith until they were adults through programs such as RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults). Annunciation Parish Catholic School, parish adult faith formation programming, and our RCIA program are ways that [our parish offers education](#).

But how do we determine what other sources of information are useful in adding to our faith education? There are many – and it seems ever-increasing – sources of information available to us. Here are some foundational sources you can depend on:

- [The Bible – Does the translation matter?](#)
- [The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)
- [The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)
- [The Vatican](#)

Your first education challenge is to assess your sources of information. Where do you turn when you have a question about your faith? Do you know where your Bible is? Have you ever heard a statement about Catholicism that didn't strike you as accurate or that caused you to recognize a gap in your understanding of your faith? Did you take the time to find the truth or fill the gap? You could write about your experience learning about your faith.

Day 12: What do we believe?

Each weekend at Mass, we profess our faith by reciting the Nicene Creed. Your challenge today is to [read](#) the Creed, reflecting on each statement. You may have recited this hundreds of times. Today, what do you hear? Does one word or phrase stand out? You might write a short reflection about this experience.

Bonus: What is [the difference](#) between the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed?

Day 13: The Mystery of God

The beginning of the Nicene Creed expresses [our belief in God](#). How do you know God as the Creator of all things? How does that influence your life? Practically, – really – how does your belief in God impact your understanding of the world, the way you think and act, the way you relate to others? Our belief in God gives us hope of eternal life. Knowing God as Creator also changes our lives now, because God cares for us and invites us to ask for his help and accept his guidance through Jesus Christ. These truths about God should give us hope, free us from anxiety.

Your challenge is to demonstrate your belief in God – to yourself, to someone else, publicly or privately. You could write about this challenge.

Day 14: The Mystery of Christ

Accepting Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word of God calls us to an intimate relationship with Him. This acceptance is more than an intellectual assent, it is a heart-felt experience of Jesus as God, present for us in the Eucharist. Your challenge today is to watch this [video from Fr. Robert Barron](#) and think – and maybe write – about how you answer the question, “Who is Jesus?”

Day 15: The Mystery of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Loving Presence of God, revealing God and making Christ known to us. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the [Trinity](#). Knowing the Holy Spirit as a person, as opposed to an impersonal force or positive feeling, is particularly challenging for many of us.

Your challenge is to review the [Catechism](#) on the Holy Spirit and the story of [Pentecost](#) in the Bible. Do you think to call upon the Holy Spirit to fill and inspire you? Where do you use the [gifts of the Holy Spirit](#) in your life? You might write down your answers.

Day 16: Saints

Saints are men and women who have lived lives of “heroic sanctity” and who have undergone an extensive canonization process, which includes an investigation of their lives, their writings and any miracles attributable to [their intercession](#). Through the canonization process, the Church recognizes these men and women so that we can learn from their lives.

Your challenge today is to consider the life of [a saint of your choosing](#). Why did you choose this saint? Is there something you can take from this person’s life and use in your own? How might this saint intercede for you? Write your answers down if that is helpful to you.

Day 17: The Mystery of the Church

The [Catechism](#) teaches us that the Church is the people that God gathers. The Church is visible – it is the community of believers – and it is spiritual – it is the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church was established by Jesus Christ: He appointed Peter to be the visible head of the Church (Matthew 16: 18); gave Peter and the Apostles the power and authority to carry out His work (Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23); and gave them commands as to what that work should be (Luke 22:19; Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15).

Your challenge today is to read [1 Corinthians 12](#) and to pray for guidance in building up the Body of Christ. Are you a contributing member of the Body of Christ? Are you actively serving God and sharing Him with others? Are you contributing to peace and unity within the Church? Do you attend Mass regularly? You could write a brief reflection on your reading and responses to these questions.

Day 18: God teaches us how to live in Christ

Knowing and believing in Jesus, the first letter of Peter says, allows Christians to “attain the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” John tells the story of the disciples encountering the Risen Lord so that people might believe, and in believing “may have life in his name.” The

saving work of Jesus – the Paschal Mystery – offers us eternal life. It also offers us fullness of life today.

Pope Francis has written about the amazing joy that the Gospel brings, but he admits that many Christians often look like “sourpusses.” How is this possible for people who are really saved, who really have the fullness of life, and the hope of eternal life? We hesitate to take the risk of love – serving and forgiving as Jesus teaches us. Your challenge is to read [Luke’s description](#) of the early Christian community. People wanted to be a part of this community. Consider – and maybe write about – what life you invite others to.

Day 19: God invites us to be in communion with Him and one another

God invites us into relationship through prayer and worship. Your challenge is to invite someone to Mass. Do you know someone who has expressed an interest in how we come together to pray? Do you know someone who hasn't been to Mass in a while? Maybe there's someone in your life who has talked about wanting to get to meet new people or find a place to belong. Maybe someone has wondered how you are able to have hope in the midst of challenging times. Maybe someone has asked what compels you to go to church week after week.

Here is a [video](#) that can help you in conversations about Mass. You might write about your experience inviting someone to Mass.

Day 20: God calls us to love

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22: 36-40).

Love. [God loves us](#). And we are called to [return that love](#) – as completely as we possibly can. Your challenge today is to set aside some time to think, pray, and maybe write about the ways that you accept and return God’s love. How do you extend this love to your neighbor?

SERVICE

The next ten days of our Faith Challenge will focus on service. How can you put your faith into action?

Day 21: Your Spiritual Gifts

All that we have comes from God. We are each given talents and Spiritual Gifts to use for the benefit of ourselves and others, and to build up the Body of Christ. A talent is something you do very well, often because of training or experience you have gained. Using your talents brings fulfillment in your personal and work life. You might also want to share these talents in your parish or community.

Spiritual Gifts are a bit different. Each baptized Christian has at least one Spiritual Gift or Charism (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 798-801) meant to be used for God’s people. Certainly, you can have a talent which is also a Spiritual Gift. So, how do you know what your

[Spiritual Gifts](#) are? There are many – some very complex – processes for discerning your Spiritual Gifts. However, one place to start is with a few questions. Your challenge today is to think and pray about [these questions](#), listening for God’s guidance in starting to discern your Spiritual Gifts. You might also open yourself up to confirmation about your Spiritual Gifts – what do others say you do that has a positive impact? Writing down your answers to the questions will allow you to refer back to them as needed.

Day 22: Stewardship

We are to receive God’s gifts gratefully, manage them responsibly, and share them with our family, parish, and community. We often think of [stewardship](#) as primarily about material gifts, the financial resources we have and share. Giving generously of our money can absolutely help in building the Kingdom of God. Sharing our time and the Spiritual Gifts that are uniquely ours is also vital to this work.

Your challenge is to take a look at yourself as a steward. Consider your tithing, the time you spend with God, and the way you share your Spiritual Gifts. Are there adjustments or improvements you would like to make? You might write about where you are now as a steward and where you would like to be.

Day 23: Charity

When you think of Christian service, what comes to mind? Many of us first think of direct action in response to immediate needs, or charity. This would include helping out at a homeless shelter, contributing to a clothing drive, or donating to an emergency fund for parish families. There are also daily opportunities to respond in love to the immediate needs of our friends and family.

Your challenge is to watch this [brief video](#) and think about how you live a life of charity and mercy. Recommit to responding to God’s love by serving others. Writing this commitment down – being specific about what this will look like for you – can help you keep it.

Day 24: Your relationship with Jesus Christ

You cannot give what you do not have. It is crucial to remember that the foundation of our life is our relationship with Jesus Christ. “Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40). St. John Paul II captures the essence of Christian service – Our relationship with Christ spills over into how we live, actually becomes the driving force of our life, compelling us to share God’s love with others.

Your challenge today is to spend time on your relationship with Jesus. Who is Jesus for you? Where do you see him present in your life? You might write a brief reflection in response to these questions.

Day 25: Corporal Works of Mercy

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. **The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry,**

sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead” (2447).

The Corporal Works of Mercy are found in the Gospel of Matthew. Your challenge is to read this [section of Matthew](#) and to set a specific goal to perform a Corporal Work of Mercy. [Need ideas?](#) Write your goal down to help you honor it.

Day 26: St. Angela Merici

Today we celebrate the life of St. Angela Merici (1474 – 1540), an Italian religious educator who founded the Company of St. Ursula, which was dedicated to the service of the Church through the education of girls. This organization became the monastic Order of Ursulines, whose nuns have established places of prayer and learning throughout the world.

Your challenge today is to read [this account](#) of St. Angela Merici’s life. Take a look around you. Pay attention. What people do you notice who need help but who are not being helped? What are their true needs? How could you help them? You might write brief reflection on St. Angela Merici’s life and the needs of those around you.

Day 27: Spiritual Works of Mercy

The Spiritual Works of Mercy are less well known to most of us than the Corporal Works of Mercy. These charitable works address the spiritual needs of others, which can seem less tangible than bodily needs. And, our response to the spiritual needs of others can seem less obvious – and more challenging. Here is a [video presentation](#) (about 20 minutes long) on the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Your challenge is to watch this presentation and set a specific goal to perform a Spiritual Work of Mercy. Again, jotting down your goal might help you honor it.

Day 28: Justice

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops helps us understand the ways we respond to God’s love through service as [“Two Feet of Love in Action.”](#) Charity is one of these “feet.” The other is social justice. Social justice promotes social change in institutions or political structures in response to the long-term needs of people. Social justice addresses the underlying causes of suffering through legislative advocacy, changing policies and practices, or political action.

Many of us are more comfortable with charity than we are with justice – justice work is more public and asks us to look at our role in social structures. Your challenge today is to watch [this video](#) from preachingfriars.org, a collaborative effort of the Dominican Student Brothers of St. Dominic Priory in St. Louis, Missouri. In the video, several questions about social justice and the Church are addressed. Are there ways you could do justice work? You might write down a few ideas to follow up on.

Day 29: Where to start?

Most parishes offer many opportunities to engage in charitable works. At Annunciation Parish, there are several outreach ministries, including Knights of Columbus, Camillus Ministry, Legion of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul, Dignity of Life, and our Meal Ministry. We also offer opportunities to donate to the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, to our sister parish in Haiti, to the work of Habitat for Humanity, and to the poor at Christmas through the Angel Tree. There are other

opportunities in the Diocese of Evansville and the Evansville community, including [Catholic Charities](#).

Sometimes the hardest part of starting something new is taking the first step. If you need some help with that, please contact Missy in the Parish Office: 812/476-3061. Your challenge is to think and pray about that first step – or the next step – you need to take to offer yourself in service to those in need. You could write this step down and maybe some thoughts to help you take it.

Day 30: Discipleship

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines a disciple this way: “The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it” (1816).

Discipleship requires ongoing conversion, working on your relationship with Jesus consistently through prayer. It also requires dedication to study, to continuing to learn about your faith throughout your life. As a disciple, you are also called to community, to relationships centered in Jesus Christ that support your faith. And, you are called to service and evangelization, to be a missionary where you are, proclaiming the Gospel by loving your neighbor and inviting them to know Jesus Christ.

Your final challenge is to say “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to be His disciple. Wherever you are in your faith journey, that intention will transform you and all that surrounds you. You could finish the Faith Challenge by writing a reflection on yourself as disciple.