Winters in Minnesota can seem to last forever, and February — although a short month — sometimes seems the longest. This is where our parish social and fundraiser, Winterfest, saves the day!

“It is a time for community,” says Winterfest Coordinator Steve Long. “It’s a time to get together in the middle of winter, and there’s always room for more.”

The Finance Committee oversees Winterfest, with Steve as the event coordinator, a position he has held for several years.

Saturday, Feb. 15 and Sunday, Feb. 16 will be full of activities that will help fund youth programs and our parish operations. However, most importantly, this event gives an opportunity to gather as a community to visit with old friends and make new ones.

“The money we make from this is secondary,” Steve says. “Community building and connection, that is first and foremost.”

Saturday’s dinner, after 5 p.m. Mass, and Sunday’s Chili and Soup Contest, after 10:30 a.m. Mass, both offer a great chance to bring the family and socialize.

“Attendees can go around, for a small fee, and sample chili and soup to vote for their favorite,” Steve says.

Following the Saturday dinner are cribbage and 500 tournaments at 7:30 p.m. There’s also a bake sale following the weekend Masses.

You are invited to join the fun during Winterfest weekend on Feb. 15 and Feb. 16. If you would like to register to cook for the Chili and Soup Contest, please see the sign-up sheet at Mass.
Jesus makes a promise in the Gospel of John, “I have come so that you might have life, and have it to the full-est.” Jesus promises to give us a full and abundant life. But often, we fall short of this promise. With that in mind, we would like to invite all of you to our upcoming “Holiness Revolution Parish Mission,” set for March 15-17.

For this year’s mission, we are happy to welcome international speaker and bestselling Catholic author Dan DeMatte. Dan also starred in A&E’s reality TV show, God or the Girl, as well as defended the teachings of the Catholic faith on Larry King Live, The View, and NBC’s Today. Dan is also the host of a new radio show called Encounter. He proclaims the Gospel with passion, energy and overflowing joy. He will challenge you to be the best person God created you to be.

The mission will start each night at 7:00 p.m., and cover a specific theme:

- **Sunday, March 15 — Be Healed**
- **Monday, March 16 — Be Empowered**
- **Tuesday, March 17 — Be Transformed**

What is the goal of this mission? To help fill you with life. To help awaken you to what’s really important in life and help you discover how to live each day with more passion and purpose.

This parish mission is really for everyone!

Whether you are advanced in your faith and hungry to be taken deeper, or if you are a person with a lot of questions about God and religion — this mission is for you.

Whether you are male or female, single or married, young or old, middle school or high school — this mission is for you.

Whether you’ve been to a parish mission before, or never stepped foot at a retreat — this mission is for you.

In particular, we want to do something really special with this year’s parish mission. We want to challenge all of you to invite a few people to attend the mission with you. You might invite your middle school or high school teenagers to attend with you. Or invite a co-worker who is hungry for more, even if they aren’t Catholic. Perhaps you may invite someone in the parish or the school who you know doesn’t come to Mass each week and could really use an invitation back to the Church.

Whoever it is, please just extend a heartfelt invitation!
The most important day in February won’t come till the end of the month. Alert parishioners may already have realized I’m referring to Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, which falls on Feb. 26 this year. That means we have most of the month to plan for Lent!

I know what you’re thinking right about now: “Father seems particularly happy about getting ready for Lent!” Of course, when we approach Lent in the right way, it will help us get spiritually fit to celebrate Easter. Just as an Olympic athlete goes through a long period of serious training to win a medal, so we prepare during Lent for our great Easter celebration. And “giving up” something during Lent is not supposed to leave a vacuum — we’re invited to put something more valuable in its place.

We’re all familiar with the three traditional Lenten disciplines of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These can serve as our framework for how we approach the season of Lent. One might decide, for example, to give up a half hour of television each evening. That doesn’t mean you sit and stare at a blank wall for the half hour. Instead, fill it with prayerful reading of the Bible or a devotional book, or praying the Rosary.

Some people decide to forego desserts during Lent (fasting). But just losing weight is not the purpose of Lent! The goal is greater discipline in our spiritual lives. However, a family can put aside the money saved by skipping desserts and contribute it to a Church-related charity (almsgiving), so that our self-denial can benefit others.

These are just possible examples. There are many ways of combining prayer, fasting, and almsgiving into our daily lives during the Lenten season. The object is to develop a spiritual routine that challenges us but still fits into our lives with our individual responsibilities and schedules.

By the way, most of us will stumble at some point during our Lenten journey. Our first instinct will be to throw up our hands and give up. What we should do is just pick up where we left off and continue to do our best as we proceed on the Lenten journey.

Of course, most of February is Ordinary Time. But that gives us time to figure out what we should do in the areas of prayer, fasting and almsgiving so we can keep our best Lent ever and arrive at Easter spiritually fit.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Peter Richards,
Pastor
When Jennifer Haller departs St. Michael Catholic School in March after serving nearly 16 years as Principal, she will be working in a new role that will build upon the successes she and the StMCS staff have accomplished together, along with the steadfast support of our parish.

Mrs. Haller has accepted the invitation to work for the Catholic Schools Center of Excellence, or CSCOE, as the independent nonprofit organization’s first Director of Excellence. She will be engaging in CSCOE’s support of our archdiocesan strategic vision for Catholic schools through its two-part mission — to enhance excellence while increasing enrollment in our 79 Catholic elementary and middle schools.

“April 1 is my first day in my new position with CSCOE,” Mrs. Haller says. “My husband, Mark, and I will remain in the community and will continue to be members of our parish. And thankfully, St. Michael Catholic School is one of the 79 schools that I’ll be blessed to serve.”

CSCOE is comprised of lay people who love Catholic schools and want to see them thrive. In her new position, Mrs. Haller will be helping Catholic school principals and their teams bolster academic programming through innovation and best practices to help meet each school’s individual goals. While championing the heart of our schools, Catholic identity and service, Mrs. Haller looks forward to building a stronger network among our schools for sharing everyone’s best ideas in faith and knowledge. She will have great flexibility and creative freedom in her role as Director of Excellence.

“It will be a highly collaborative position in which I can bring great people and ideas together,” she says. “CSCOE is entrepreneurial and driven and has a bottom-up approach. They listen to principals and teachers, and they fund ideas that will have the greatest impact.”

The first several weeks in the new position will be filled with school visits, as Mrs. Haller sets out to see each of the 79 schools to understand the culture and needs. There will be meetings with principals, teachers, task force groups, community partners and more.

“We have a whole lot of expertise in our schools and CSCOE wants to harness the best thinking of all,” she says. “They understand that when you’ve seen one Catholic school, you’ve seen one Catholic school — no two are exactly alike. Therefore, they fund solutions that increase the excellence in the system while respecting the unique charism of each school.”

During her tenure at St. Michael Catholic School, Mrs. Haller brought together faculty, staff and parish members to raise our school to a new level of excellence.

“In my time at St. Michael, we have grown from a K-6 school of 240 students to nearly 400 in K-8,” she says.
“Accommodating this growth within the same blueprint has required a whole lot of creativity and frugal innovation along with the generosity of many. As such, a few facility stand-outs in my memory are the summers of 2008, 2011, and 2014.”

In 2008, several areas of the school were remodeled to accommodate the growing enrollment.

“We moved more than a dozen teachers into different rooms on the hottest day of the summer, tore down walls and built new ones,” she says. “Much of the electrical [work] was updated, tile was repurposed, new carpet installed and fresh paint added, thanks to many people who came together to donate time and materials. The coordination of work was so extensive that I even received a pink hard hat and tool belt from our Home & School Association!”

In 2011, the church and school purchased an office building on First Street that became home to our St. Michael Catholic Preschool. Similar to the 2008 remodel, a number of persons came together to demolish existing space and build out classrooms to meet the needs of preschool students.

“We now have 60 preschoolers across three classes, bringing our total school enrollment to nearly 460, preschool to eighth grade!” Mrs. Haller says. “Waiting lists are the norm at St. Michael Catholic Preschool and families are trending K-8 enrollment. There are very few open seats scattered across all grades, and when people tour they capture our spirit and want to become a part of this family.”

The years 2014 and 2017 were also significant to Mrs. Haller. The convent built in 1958, which had served more recently as the parish offices, was updated in 2014 and connected to the 1939 wing of the school with a new hallway, stairwell and lift. This connection allowed for expansion of our main office, administration and student services, and is now known as the Administrative Wing.

In 2017, Mrs. Haller was inspired through prayer to seek volunteer help from school parents and parishioners to transform a storage closet in the Admin Wing into a small chapel. With the chapel just down the hall from her office, the voices of small children in prayer never fail to bring Mrs. Haller great joy.

“Another favorite StMCS memory has been celebrating my birthday, which typically falls during the first week of school,” Mrs. Haller says. “Student-made cards, being sung our traditional blessing song, and receiving hugs and high-fives too numerous to count will be greatly missed! My all-time favorite birthday was when the students and staff serenaded me outside my office window from the front lawn of the school!”

The recent celebration of Catholic Schools Week also brought fond memories and nostalgia as Mrs. Haller was able to reflect on her time at our school, knowing that this was her last Catholic Schools Week as a school Principal.

With Mrs. Haller’s departure, a search committee is being organized to find a new principal and an interim management plan is in the works for April and May. Mrs. Haller will consult on a few key topics until the close of the year and she’ll be seen at important student events.

“We already have an outstanding administrative team in place, with a Dean of Students, Support Specialist, Director of (After) School Programs and a Preschool Coordinator,” she says. “With the backing of Fr. Richards, this is a solid team that will keep us very stable and future-focused.”

Mrs. Haller takes her leave with the knowledge that there is a firm foundation of faith within the parish and school, and a strong tradition of academic excellence.

“I have been serving a community that is so devoted and so engaged in living out our mission,” Mrs. Haller says. “Living for Christ and Learning for Life is the key to our success. The people at St. Michael, the staff and students alike, share a love for the Church and a love for learning that I have honestly not seen anywhere else. This is the overwhelming highlight — the joy of working with people who come together in faith and service to Christ.”

“I have led with a spirit of possibility and hope,” she adds. “I leave with that same spirit but more so, a deep sense of gratitude. I’ve been formed by the St. Michael community and I am richly blessed.”
As professed disciples of Christ, we are also stewards of our personal and communal vocations. When we declare Christ as our King and Savior, we also promise to exist as His earthly body. The universal Church depends upon its individual earthly members for evangelization and support. As stewards of Catholicism, we must respond to this call with living faith and heartfelt stewardship. We must employ our lives in Christ’s service, allowing Him to vocationally use us to our fullest potential. God designed us with specific talents in mind — by closely communicating with Jesus, His Son, we can put our talents to proper use. As stated in John’s Gospel, when we give our lives to Christ, He promises to ignite them accordingly: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

True life demands sacrifices, which are crucial in urging us onward and upward toward Christ. When we embark upon a lifelong path of stewardship, giving our time, talent and treasure in the service of God and His Church, we are effectively allowing Jesus to guide us along life’s slippery slopes with the steady hand of a practiced master. Christ explains this concept in the ninth chapter of Luke’s Gospel: “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:23-24). Only after completely giving our lives over to Christ, will we experience the true majesty of life — the life each of us is destined to live.

As Catholics, we are urged to outwardly promote all stages of life, and to stand up in its defense. Considering the attention death has garnered within our society — whether we focus upon abortion, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment or euthanasia — an understanding and respect for life must be reinstated into our culture and lives. But we must first harbor a true, personal love for life within our very souls, and live our own lives to the fullest, through Christ, in the service and promotion of His Church. We must become stewards of faith, in order to truly live as Christ planned. And we must give our time, talents and treasure — all gifts God has given us through life — before we can really claim to be alive.

Let us promote the sanctity of life through personal conversion. Our deaths in Christ destine us to live in His glory, the ultimate expression of life. Let us become the disciples we claim to be, by adopting the essence of stewardship and melding it into our very souls.

**True life demands sacrifices, which are crucial in urging us onward and upward toward Christ. When we embark upon a lifelong path of stewardship, giving our time, talent and treasure in the service of God and His Church, we are effectively allowing Jesus to guide us along life’s slippery slopes with the steady hand of a practiced master.**
The Fifth Luminous Mystery is the Institution of the Holy Eucharist. So, during supper, fully aware that the Father had put everything into his power and that he had come from God and was returning to God, he rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around his waist... So when he had washed their feet (and) put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, “Do you realize what I have done for you? You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” Amen, amen, I say to you, no slave is greater than his master nor any messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it. – John 13:2-5, 12-17

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my Body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, from now on I shall not drink this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father.” – Matthew 26:26-29

The Fifth Luminous Mystery: The Institution of the Holy Eucharist

The Fifth Luminous Mystery is the Institution of the Eucharist, in which our Lord gives the disciples his Body and Blood to sustain us and commissions them to love and serve each other. In this image, as in St. John’s Gospel, Jesus kneels to wash the feet of St. Peter, giving His disciples a tangible example of how they are to serve others. Peter’s hand is raised in questioning protest — recall that before Christ revealed Himself in His public ministry, St. John the Baptist said, “[T]here is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie” (John 1:26-27). Touching the feet of another was a task for the lowliest of slaves, and John the Baptist claimed not to be worthy even of that duty in comparison to Jesus. How much more compelling is it, then, when God-made-flesh shows His love for His creation by serving them with such humility and tenderness! The focus here is on the washing of the feet because it is a tangible example of how every follower of Christ can serve. Not everyone is called to the priesthood, to serve at the altar and speak the words of consecration given to us by Christ — but we are all called to charity regardless of our vocation.

This profound act of love occurs just before Jesus eats the Passover with His disciple, and reveals an even deeper love in His coming sacrifice and gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist. The table near Jesus and His disciple is spread with white linens, like our altar, and set with bread and a cup of red wine — behind it is an arch like our baldacchino beneath which stands the tabernacle, the dwelling place of our Lord in the Holy Eucharist, a reminder that the same Christ who gave Himself for His people then is still with us here today.
There’s a $10 per ticket cash raffle. The prizes are $1,500, one $500 winner and a snow blower. Tickets are available at the parish office, at weekend Masses and during the Winterfest events.

A favorite event for Steve is Bingo and the meat raffle on Sunday afternoon. The whole family can join the fun!

“People seem to have so much fun playing Bingo,” Steve says. “I enjoy watching that.”

He also enjoys hearing the roar of people visiting during the Saturday and Sunday events.

Though this is the third largest fundraiser for the parish, this event is more about hospitality and community than a fundraiser.

“This is an opportunity, in the middle of winter, to get out as a community, come together and have a good time,” he says.

Steve is thankful to the teens in the youth program for helping with the “heavy lifting” like setting up, serving and cleaning up. He invites everyone to join the activities.

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