



QUARTERLY BLESSINGS

ST STEPHEN CATHOLIC CHURCH

SUMMER 2019

Living Courageously



Courageously Living the Gospel

Along with this Quarterly Blessings, we as a parish try to communicate with you in many different ways. We have so many beautiful and godly things that occurs on a weekly basis here in our faith community that we cannot wait for every three months to communicate with you.

Each week we send out an e-blast, “*The St. Stephen Weekender*” which highlights events happening within our parish community and looks to provide resources to help you along your faith journey. The school sends out a weekly “*tidbits*” which showcases all of the wonderful things happening within our school community. We also have a great website and Facebook page which help us stay more closely connected to you. Sometimes we use it just to share the silly joys of Christian life in photos.



Recently we started a new section on our webpage called “*Courageously Living the Gospel*”. It is a blog style page in which we hope to share inspiring stories of how our parishioners are living the Gospel in their everyday lives. Please take time and go to the link to read some amazing faith-filled stories, www.ststephencatholic.org and click on Courageously Living the Gospel. If you have an inspiring story to share or know someone who has courageously lived the Gospel and, with their permission, would like to share it with us, please contact our Communications Coordinator Lisa Lopez at communications@ststephencatholic.org and she will be happy to assist you in sharing that story. Each day, so many of you courageously live the Gospel in your daily lives. As brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us walk that journey with you through the sharing of your journey.

How do you courageously live the Gospel in your workplace, school, and/or family time? How do you courageously live the Gospel when your cross is heavy upon your shoulders? How do you courageously live the Gospel in the little acts of love and prayer each day?

Your story can be a paragraph or longer if needed.

In this addition we will share with you how many of your fellow parishioners are in fact, daily living the Gospel with courage.

Peace.

Fr. Dermot

Fr. Dermot Dunne, Pastor

Signs From The Holy Spirit

By Linda Perri

In August 2018, I was traveling to Chicago for an Elementary School Class Reunion. After all those years, I was so excited to see my classmates again from Our Lady of



Mount Catholic School as well as some high school friends. I hadn't been back in town for a while, so I was ready for some "girl time." Just before our plane was preparing for take-off, the man across the aisle from me pulled out his rosary. I wasn't sure if this was a good sign or a sign he knew something I didn't. So, I thought to say some prayers, too, for a safe trip. With only an hour left before arriving at Chicago Midway Airport, the man took off his jacket and on his shirt sleeve it said, "Holy Spirit Conference." The detective in me deduced that a married man who prays the rosary and attends spiritual events either must be a Deacon in the Catholic Church or at least very spiritual person.

I thought about striking up a conversation with him but chickened out. Now with only 30 minutes to go before landing, I couldn't stop wondering but was

too nervous, so I asked the Holy Spirit for strength as I tapped him on the arm asking him the question. His reply was, "Yes, I am a Deacon in the Catholic Church" and he and his wife introduced themselves as Mike and Lisa Ryba. I inquired as to which parish he was assigned. He said the Bishop had not yet confirmed one, but he was hopeful he would get word soon.

Of course, I mentioned that my parish, St. Stephen Catholic Church in Valrico, Florida, could always use more deacons! He had a surprised look on his face while saying, "That's our parish, too!" I couldn't believe it these strangers sitting next to me on an airplane heading to Chicago were fellow parishioners – what are the odds? At that moment, I felt like we were friends from the neighborhood, especially since they, too, were from the Chicago area and now living in Valrico. We seemed to have so much in common that we probably could have talked for hours!

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Hope Eternal

By Christine Riker

On September 1, 2011, God decided to test my faith. That is the day I found out I was pregnant and began a journey that changed my life and my faith forever.

A team of doctors determined there was a pocket of fluid outside my uterus that was coming from a hole in my uterus at the scar of a prior C-section. After several opinions from various doctors, all agreed I should terminate the pregnancy. That decision prompted me to go to St. Stephen for spiritual help. I spoke with a priest who reminded me that God is loving and merciful. The priest prayed with me for strength and a miracle. I remember crying for days but also remember finding the courage to remain true to my belief that life is sacred. My husband and I both knew terminating the pregnancy was not an option regardless of what the doctors recommended.



Prayer and faith were giving me hope as well as the courage to be strong. As time went on, instead of hearing that I should terminate the pregnancy, I was hearing they could patch the uterus giving the baby time to grow. I entered the hospital to be monitored for what would be many months. We learned the baby was a girl and we named her Hope.



I entered the hospital to be monitored for what would be many months. We learned the baby was a girl and we named her Hope.

“As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother’s womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the maker of all things” (NIV, Ecclesiastes 11:5).

After an emergency surgery at 24 weeks, Hope was born. The months of swelling, bleeding, infections, blood clots, daily injections were forgotten the moment I was able to touch her. My other children and family members were able to meet Hope a few days after she was born. My faith had given me the courage needed to kiss my new little baby girl. I felt so blessed. Hope had arrived and my faith was stronger than ever. I spent days looking at her in the NICU, praying for her and touching her. I knew she was very ill but my faith gave me the strength to stay by her side. I knew God created this beautiful little girl and He would care for her. I put my trust in Him.



Christine is a SSCS (Saint Stephen Catholic School) parent of two boys, Allan in 7th grade and Christopher in 4th grade. She and her husband Matthew live in Riverview with their four children. Christine coaches the summer soccer camp for SSCS and is an avid soccer player herself.

On February 1, 2012, at 3:10 a.m. my precious Hope started a new journey. I held her close, told her how much she was loved, and said goodbye. I believe children are a gift from God and He is the sole giver and taker of life. My faith has given me the courage to accept His will. I may never understand why after 54 days in the hospital, God allowed me to live but not my baby girl. I do believe Hope is with her Creator in eternity.

This experience has made me stronger and has left me with a powerful message of HOPE, faith and love. Through it all, my faith gave me the courage to stand firm with my convictions and to stand strong with my faith, to live the Gospel courageously. †

Meals on Wheels

By Carol Greene

“I have been getting meals since 2011 - my husband was alive then. This has been a blessing for me as my family cannot help with my meals. I am very appreciative of the good food and fellowship and look forward to the driver's arrival. I also love the chocolate goodies the driver brings me!” This was the response from “Mary”, one of our



Meals on Wheels (MOW) clients when recently asked what this program means to her.

Another client, “Sue”, who has been receiving meals for over five years, said, *“I have no complaints, the food is delicious. Plus it helps with my independence, enables me to still live alone. It is a wonderful program. In all the years I have known about Meals on Wheels, I have not heard one negative comment.”*

And, there is more. Mr. K said, *“The meals mean a great deal to me. I appreciate the delicious meals and the people who prepare them. I am in my 90's and meeting the volunteers brightens my day. I live with my daughter who works extremely long hours. This is a blessing to her as well as it relieves the worry of me and enables me to have a hot meal at noon.”*

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A Week in Jamaica

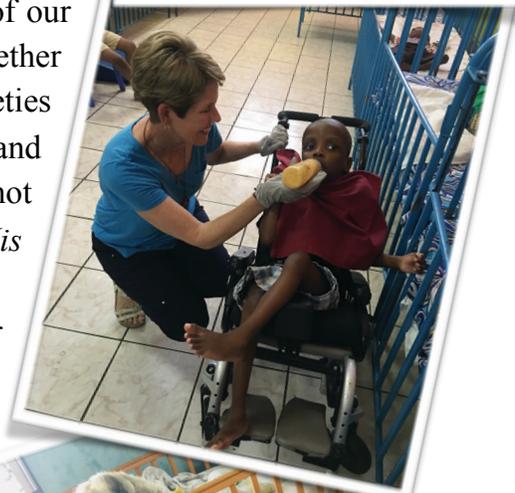
By Don and Susie Decort

“A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul.” St. Therese of Lisieux

When I first heard about the possibility of going on a mission trip to Jamaica to serve the poorest of the poor, I immediately longed to be a part of the team and share it with my husband Don, now fully retired. Over the years we had both heard the voice of God calling us to serve in various capacities at home and abroad, but this seemed unlike any other mission trip that I had ever been on. It would be a real journey of faith and definitely out of our comfort zone, but the opportunity to finally serve together seemed real and attainable. We put our fears and anxieties aside and signed up. We both questioned our worthiness and abilities, but have learned over the years that God does not judge our adequacy; he simply calls us where we are. *“His grace is enough.”*

As we write this, it has only been three weeks since our return, and we already long to go back. *The Missionaries of the Poor* was formed in 1981 by Father Ho Lung, a Jesuit, to serve the homeless and hurting men, women, and children of the world who suffer from unimaginable mental and physical disabilities, most of whom have been rejected and forgotten by families unable to care for them.

During our time with the brothers and sisters, our team had the opportunity to live and pray with them throughout the day and evening, joining them in the various centers where they carry out their apostolate of washing, feeding, unconditionally loving, and praying with the residents. There are no words to adequately describe this experience. Living the simple monastic and prayerful servant-life with the brothers was both profound and life-changing. Theirs is a challenging and difficult life, but each of them serves with great joy and unconditional love. They are truly the eyes, the hands, and the feet of Christ Jesus on Earth, broken and crucified, their love poured out for others.



Entering into the monastic life with them in prayer many times a day and caring for the physical needs of the residents along with the brothers was a profound privilege. We had worried about how we would react and deal with the suffering and severe disabilities we would see but it was an honor to walk beside them.



We saw and experienced Jesus in each of those dear residents as we washed and shaved their faces, rubbed lotion on their broken bodies, and fed them. Kneeling at the feet of an elderly catatonic woman, rubbing lotion all over her legs and feet, looking into her eyes, was like looking into the face of Jesus. Our mere presence, our touch and our smiling faces brought the residents to life and incredible joy to us much as Lazarus was brought to life by the mercy and love of Jesus. *“His grace is enough.”*



We were blessed to share our first Mass with Father Ho Lung. In his homily, he smiled and said that *“we were such a mystery to him.”* He wondered why we had chosen to spend a week with the brothers instead of spending our time vacationing at the Sandals Resort in Ochos Rios. This gave us much to pray about and reflect upon in our journals throughout our stay and upon our return home. It became readily apparent to Don and me that our *“yes”* to the call to serve fulfilled the overwhelming need and desire in each of us to *“dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives”* (Psalm 27:4). It was truly what heaven must be like. †



Don & Susie Decort have been parishioners of St. Stephen since 1992. They have four children and thirteen grandchildren, their greatest joys.

Make a Difference. Be the Difference

By Marki Taucedo

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13) is fittingly the biblical force behind an amazing ministry, The Home Makers of Hope. They have been *“Courageously Living the Gospel”* under their founder, Pam Stamey, since 2008. It was

here at our very own St. Stephen Catholic Church, volunteering for our annual Underwear Sunday (which collects undergarments for children in need) where Pam first heard the call to not only make a difference but, to be the difference. She was asked to find three twin



beds for a family of five who had nothing. Could families be sleeping on the floor just 15 minutes away? They were! She and her friend Heidi Smith not only helped furnish that home but were determined in less than three weeks, to get as many families off the floor as possible. As they say, the rest is history.

Since that first family, Home Makers of Hope have provided beds and furnishings to over two-thousand families in need of assistance. In 2018 they furnished a record 255 homes. They have served migrant workers, veterans, homeless moving into permanent housing, or anyone in need as referred by Healthy Start, Metropolitan Ministries, St. Vincent de Paul, The Homeless Coalition, Kay’s Ministry, Catholic Charities, Kinship Care, Devereux Kids, Family Enrichment Center, Guardian Ad Litem, Veterans Assistance Center, Early Childhood Council, Hillsborough County Social Workers and more.

The Home Makers do more than provide needed furniture and household items. Volunteers, with labor and love, turn a dwelling into a beautiful home. Along with basics and needed repairs, they add decorative finishing touches. It is truly a home makeover. The ministry relies completely on donations and the help of our wonderful volunteers from St. Stephen, Christ the King, St. Paul, Nativity, St. Lawrence, and now Our Lady of the Rosary Catholic Churches, as well as the United Way, University of Tampa, Tampa Catholic, and Jesuit High School.

This year the Tampa Bay Lightning honored Pam as their 35th Lightning 2011 by Jeff Vinik as the signature philanthropic program of the Lightning Foundation. We are so proud of you Pam and the Home Makers of Hope as you continue to make a difference and commit to praying for you as you courageously live the Gospel!

If you wish to find more information about Home Makers, volunteer, or donate please visit www.homemakersofhope.com. †



Marki Taucedo has been married 39 years to our cover designer Rick. She enjoys traveling, her volunteer work and playing with her six grandchildren.

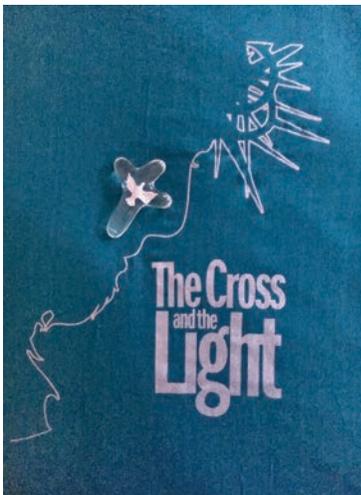


Intervention of the Holy Spirit

By Jan Boucher

I think back over my life and reflect on all the incredible things that the good Lord has done for me. I know I would not be where I am today if it were not for His redeeming love, many graces, protection, and wisdom.

My faith was put to the test when my world came to a screeching halt in the summer of 2016. Excruciating pain took over my body. I was unable to walk. Doctors couldn't pinpoint the problem. That December my orthopaedic surgeon revealed to me that my left



hip had collapsed into my pelvis. I would immediately need hip replacement surgery. Three days before Christmas, my left hip was removed. I had a severe staph infection as well as acute avascular necrosis (ANA). I spent nine uncertain months in a wheelchair.

By God's grace and mercy and his generous compassionate help I overcame my difficult challenges.

My prognosis for a new hip was not hopeful. My surgeon could not promise me a successful hip replacement because of the severity of my diagnosis. I was now facing the biggest test of my faith. During my convalescence, I had the full support of my dear husband, daughters, family, and friends.

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Saint Sidebar

By Megan Glogowski

In life, we sometimes are faced with the difficult decision of doing what everyone else is doing or being brave, doing what is right, and following God's plan for us. One saint we can look to for inspiration is St. Damien of Molokai whose determination to serve God by caring for the sick in Hawaii motivated him to go against society's warnings and standards.

St. Damien was born Jozef De Veuster in the countryside of Belgium on the 30th of January 1840. As the youngest of seven children, Jozef had three older siblings who had taken religious vows to look up to and admire. Jozef went to a local school, but by the age of 13 he worked full-time on his family's farm. Once he was old enough, Jozef followed the role model of his siblings and entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary where he took the name Damien.



St. Damien's brother had orders to travel to Hawaii, but he was too ill to make the journey. Damien offered to go in his brother's place but was denied until he finished his education. After continuously praying to St. Francis Xavier to be sent on a mission, his prayers were finally answered a year later. He received orders to go to Hawaii where St. Damien completed ordination in the summer of 1864. St. Damien worked on the main island for nine years as a priest serving the people of Hawaii.

In 1865, Hawaii's King Kamehameha V passed legislation to ostracize and separate those Hawaiians suffering from leprosy from the general population on the main island. An Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy forced anyone affected by the disease into a remote colony. At the time, people believed the disease was highly contagious and feared those suffering from it, resulting in their exile, neglect and aversion. The population of the remote Molokai Kalaupapa peninsula, the designated colony for those suffering from leprosy, pleaded for a priest. The local authorities hesitated, as they feared for the safety and health of the chosen missionary. In 1873, St. Damien, accompanied by three other priests, were the first volunteers allowed to serve the desperate community. They did so with full knowledge of the health concerns. St. Damien was the only religious person to stay with the community from the original envoy.

At the church of St. Philomena, St. Damien carried out his priestly duties as well as caring intently for the sick. He personally wrapped open wounds, washed the bodies of the affected, and buried those that passed away. Before the arrival of St. Damien, the community was highly neglected and thought of as lawless and in desperate need of stability. St. Damien's presence, duties, and love for the people allowed the community to flourish.

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Guest of the Quarter - Drew Woodke

By Brandon Avery

Around 15 years ago Drew Woodke was a young teenager. He was primarily attending Nativity Catholic Church, but was starting to engage more with his friends at the old Bell Shoals campus of St. Stephen youth group.

“I came to St. Stephen in the tenth grade to get involved in the youth group,” Woodke explained. *“I was born and raised at Nativity Catholic Church, and Nativity is where I received all my Sacraments, but when I was entering high school, they were in between Youth Ministers. I knew a few friends who were members at St. Stephen and they invited me to come check out the youth program.”*

Drew continued at St. Stephen for the rest of high school and into college, stepping in wherever he was needed. As he continued his involvement and spiritual growth, he got



one of his early tastes of leading ministry.

“I stayed involved with St. Stephen for the rest of high school and into college. When I was twenty I was asked to take over the high school youth ministry as they began their search for a new candidate.”

Drew remained in the youth ministry role for eight months until heading off to the Franciscan University of Steubenville to study theology. He continued returning to St. Stephen during his breaks from school, and it was during this time that he heard the calling to the priesthood.

“My call to the priesthood had a series of ins and outs. All throughout

my life I had moments where I considered the priesthood, but never gave it any serious considerations until I was in Steubenville,” Woodke remembered.

“I had the sense that God was calling me to priesthood while there, but wasn’t willing to commit. It was while I was on a retreat that I was praying with another guy and he told me in prayer that he felt God wanted me to know that I should not be afraid to reach out and trust God. That he was calling me to do something more with my life, and that even though it might be scary, He would always be with me.”

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Meals on Wheels

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Every Thursday morning, our volunteers gather in the Family Life Center. Our cooks bring in trays of food they have prepared at home. Each meal includes a protein, starch, vegetable, salad, bread, and dessert. The food is distributed into styrofoam “to go” boxes, and then packed up for the drivers to deliver. We provide meals 52 weeks of the year, with the exception of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, should it fall on a Thursday.

The St. Stephen MOW delivery area is bounded by the Alafia River to the south, Route 301 to the west, Lumsden Road to the north, and the north/south line of Dover Road



to the east. We serve between 45-55 meals every week.

For over 20 years, the St. Stephen Meals on Wheels ministry has been part of a cooperative of 19 churches in Brandon. Known as Greater Brandon Meals on Wheels, we help to provide nourishing mid-day meals from Monday through Friday to those in the Brandon/Valrico community who are unable to serve themselves. Our core of volunteers is made up of mostly retired people or those who have a flexible work schedule and are available for our mid-day activity. We have carved out this time each week to honor our commitment to doing good deeds by serving needy members of our community. Through these good deeds we are also serving our Lord. During the summer months and often times during school holiday breaks, our volunteers will bring a child or grandchild to help deliver meals. This experience is never wasted on these young people, as they find the joy in helping the less fortunate through their good deeds and thus, strengthening their faith.

“Indeed someone might say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works” James 2:18.

Our clients' needs may be temporary or permanent; they may be physically or emotionally ill, handicapped in some way, young or old. In many cases, we provide the only personal contact our meal recipients have for days at a time. Our clients often live alone and don't have family close by. Our good deeds often go far beyond providing a meal. Our drivers will take the time to visit with these clients, inquire about their health, their families, and their lives. Bonds are formed. It appears that we often become our clients' link to the community – a window to the world outside.

We have drivers who serve their clients in very personal ways. We try to give the person who delivers meals the same route each week so they often develop a special relationship with these recipients. One of our drivers delivered each week to client who was wheelchair bound. He took extra special care of her - calling her before he arrived so she would be ready, taking the meal into the house, opening up the box for her, and getting condiments from the refrigerator, if she needed them. He would cut up the meat or any other portion of the meal so she would have bite-sized pieces. When Tom “retired” from delivering meals due to his own medical problems, he wrote out these special instructions for the person who would soon be taking meals to this recipient.

One couple, who has been involved with the MOW ministry for many years, commented, *“My wife and I have been delivering meals for over 14 years and have experienced many emotional moments. As you deliver to these clients week after week, one develops a sort of bond with them. Sometimes it is a friendly bond, sometimes a helping bond, sometimes just a compassionate bond. But with each of our clients, we see the need to help them. Some are bedridden and can't even come to the door. Others have serious illnesses or just are not able to provide a meal for themselves. Over time, some clients get better and that is a good thing. Others move away and we miss them. And sadly, some pass away and that is the hardest to deal with. But what we do is important and so we continue on, doing what we can to provide a healthy meal, solace and maybe just someone they can talk to. This is what we do.”*

Meals on Wheels is truly a mission of many hearts and many hands that contribute to the success of this ongoing program for the benefit of those in need in our community. It fills our hearts with joy when we reach out to the hungry, the sick, and the homebound. As we fill their bodies with food, we hope we also fill their souls with faith and hope. Likewise, in service to them, we fill our souls with faith and love. †

Carol Greene has lived in Brandon since 1972 and has been a parishioner of St Stephen since its beginning, worshipping at the storefront on Bell Shoals. She and her husband, Roger have three children and six grandchildren. A member of the St Stephen MOW ministry since 2008, Carol finds this a most rewarding and worthwhile way to help the less fortunate in our community.

Making Mole Hills Out of Mountains

By Anonymous

Mountain Top Experience – it is an interesting phrase that Christians tend to throw around. It almost seems like our pilgrimage through this life is all about overcoming that one big obstacle. I thought a lot about this idea when being asked to write an article about when I felt incredibly close to God:

- I was randomly called to participate in a Christian summer mission camp
- I had a vision that profoundly impacted me
- I was reignited in my faith

However, I want to focus on the valleys and the mole hills; the hard times, and the trivial triumphs. Years ago, I had wandered into a spiritual desert. I had visited church a handful of times – primarily to fulfill family obligations and keep up appearances – and was perfectly happy living life frivolously and at times recklessly. Prior to being randomly called to



participate in a Christian summer mission camp, people probably would have varying descriptions of me: funny, conceited, caring, crazy, leader. Christian probably wouldn't have made it to the top 25. In short, it was in this period that a friend called – coincidentally as I was looking for a job and a new adventure – and asked if I would be interested in doing this Christian camp. Self-admittedly, I was not particularly qualified for leading impressionable pre-teens and teenagers to Christ. Still, I decided some money was better than no money; there was a trailblazing element that intrigued me. Contrary to my lifestyle, I liked Jesus, so I decided to go for it.

After that amazing summer, I actually would say that being a “*Catholic Christian*” would continue to be in the top 10 descriptors for me. I let Christ really lead my life, and while I was far from perfect, I was spiritually driven. Yet, nothing remains perfect forever. As these things go, when you are coming down from the “*mountain*” you can quickly go from coasting to falling. Job losses, shattered relationships, deaths of loved ones started to take their toll. Beside the big, dark things there were also many of the same fun, socially-acceptable vices that remained available. In short, there was the reality of life. I will save you the drama. There is no amazing ending to my story and the typical climax of the story is somewhere between my opening bullets. I live like most people. Work, friends, family and an occasional vacation take most of my time. The only real difference is that when I was at my highest spiritual point, God helped me to not just focus on the momentary achievement, but to survey the whole mountain range. I acknowledged the valleys, crags, and caves that I had already traversed and embraced the journey to come. In that moment of clarity, I made God one small promise: I won't try to journey alone anymore.

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A Deacon's Journey

By Deacon Mike Ryba

My wife, Lisa and I began our Diaconate formation journey in earnest in early 2011 but, the calling to serve started back in 1988, shortly after our marriage. We were at Mass at St. Edna in Arlington Heights, IL when I turned to Lisa and said, “*I am going to be a*



Deacon.” She gave me an affirming smile, but little did we know, my Diaconate calling would be placed on hold that day, for I was only 25 years-old at the time, and you needed to be at least 35 years old to begin the process. As the Lord always does, he had a different plan for us. He wanted us to raise our family and make that the focus of our ministry. We

are happy to report that all of our three children are happily married, and we have six beautiful grandchildren.

Turn the clock ahead to 2010. Lisa and I had begun discussions again about the Diaconate formation process, but it was just that, a discussion. I did not feel that same calling that I had back in 1988. As we sat in Mass one weekend and we listened to our Deacon preach, I was impacted by what he was sharing with us and I turned to my wife and I said, “*It's time.*” She knew exactly what I was talking about and so I began discussions with our Pastor and Deacon to better understand how to present myself as a candidate for the program. Obviously, I had been discerning for quite some time about this ministry of service, but I needed to discern a bit more to make sure that He was truly calling me to be His “*good and faithful servant.*”

After a series of tests and interviews for which my wife and I were both participants, we were accepted into the Diaconate Formation Program, Class of 2016, for the Diocese of Joliet in Illinois. For the next four and half years, we would undertake the most incredible journey that we had ever been on. The people we encountered, the ministries we served, the education we received prepared both of us to become better disciples for each other and for our communities; but it wasn't without trials and tribulations.

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Tune In to Your Faith

By James Perri

Since we just celebrated the birthday of the Internet a few months back, it's only fitting that we talk about how the Internet and social media are involved in our faith. The Internet just turned 30 years old, which is older than most of the people who are developing it today, and most likely older than many that use it. Given that the Internet is something most people use daily and our faith is something we should all practice every day, it stands to reason that there are many ways the two overlap. When most people think of the Internet they think of Google and simply browsing for information. However, there are many applications from simple bible apps to connect more with God to Christian dating apps to connect with other people who share the same religious values. There are also various TV programs or internet-broadcasts that we can tune in to that could enhance our connection with our faith.

I'm sure that at one point or another you've all been in church and seen someone on their phone from a distance, the bright screen illuminating their face from 20 yards away. At first glance it would be easy to simply dismiss them as just being rude, but this day and age there are so many religious apps that can be a supplement to our faith. There are many Bible applications out there like "YouVersion" that not only contain the Bible but that allow you to choose which version you want to read (for example the language in the King James Version might not be efficient when reading long passages at a time so you could elect for the English Standard Version to make the read a bit easier). You have an option to highlight and save any verse you want for quick reference or future reflection.

With regards to dating other people who share the same faith, it appears it is becoming increasingly difficult to find many Catholics in the real world among young people, but apps like *Christian Mingle* are a good resource. When it comes to finding someone who you might want to spend your life with, sharing in the same religion should be the number one priority and with Christian dating apps it makes it easy to talk about your faith from the very beginning.

We are all human and occasionally get sick or injured and cannot make it to Mass. Rather than go to Mass with the flu and risk getting others sick we can simply turn to Mass on TV. The EWTN network offers live streams of the Mass so that even those who are homebound can attend and practice alongside their brothers and sisters in Christ.



James Perri, a parishioner of St. Stephen, recently graduated from USF. He loves all electronics (gaming), family, friends, and animals. James considers himself as half math geek (degree in statistics) and half pun(ny) guy!

Sometimes after going to Mass every week, spending time in prayer every day, and even devoting extra time to volunteering in the parish, we still feel like something is missing. It could be that we want to go to daily Mass, but we aren't able to attend. With the Internet, we go to Mass, we spend time in prayer throughout the week and maybe even devote extra time to volunteering within the parish, but we still feel as though something is missing. With the Internet, we can simply search “*catholic.tv.org*” and stream the Mass live at 9:30 am EST. I know that while most people are at work in the morning, we can view the daily Mass at our convenience because they are archived. This is another great option for those looking for spiritual enrichment in their lives.

We live in a world where technology has made it easier than ever to stay “*linked*” to our faith on our journey through life. Any time you feel that you’re ready, simply tune in and listen to what God wants for you.

“*Of all the winding paths through life be sure to follow the one leading to God.*” †

Poetry Cafe

By Katherine Lambert and her students

On Valentine’s Day middle school students celebrated the end of their poetry units of study by participating in a “*Poetry Cafe*”. Students in 8th grade were challenged to write a Shakespearean sonnet, while 6th and 7th graders composed a mini-anthology, including free verse poems, haikus and more. The students did an excellent job of sharing what most artists aspire to: tapping into elements of

the “*human condition*”, the key moments, emotions and experiences at the very essence of our humanity.

Katherine Lambert, SSCS (Saint Stephen Catholic School) Middle School Teacher and her students are excited to share some of their poems.



My Uncle’s Death

by Mia, 7th grade

The sky is gray and dark
 The clouds watch over me as I step outside
 I cry and cry praying to God
 Asking him if my uncle will be returned to earth
 I miss him like how a kid misses their favorite toy
 The way my parents told me was sad
 I had so much emotion going through me
 I was mad, sad, and confused
 I just wanted my uncle back. †

Poetry Cafe

The Little Star

by Kathryn, 7th grade

Look the little star.
So tiny and alone.
Sitting there so brightly.

Where are his friends?
They are miles away.
They shine far away from him.

Bigger and bigger the star gets.
Everyday he grows and grows.
No one sees him.

One day a planet formed.
It had no light
The small star knew how that felt so he keeps
growing.

implode?
No he grew so big he gave light to everyone.
Now he shines everywhere.

Look the big star.
So big and bright.
Now he shines for the world to see. †



Love is in the Air

by Austin, 6th Grade

Love is in the air, and it flows with great care.
It can appear here and there, but it shows up everywhere.
When you look at the ocean and look at the sky, love will surround you, and when you
find the right person, love has found you.
Love is like a fountain that never stops flowing.
Love is in the air, and never stops going.
If you have ever had a teddy bear love is like that, it's cuddly, cute, caring, and kind.
Love is in the air, and it flows with great care.
You may think your still searching, but love has already found you.
It may appear in different ways so just look around you.
Even if love does not come today, just be patient it's on its way.
Love is in the air, and it flows with great care. †

Poetry Cafe

THE BEAUTIFUL GAME

By Dante, 7th Grade

The beauty of game day

Stepping on the field

It is my field, my domain

The morning dew beneath my cleats

I walk on the pitch, feeling the energy
of what is to come

FOCUS

I stand in position

Along with others

This is our brawl, our moment

The whistle blows

Fans cheer, it's on †

The Feeling a Piano Makes

by Maria, 8th grade

The black and the white keys that I adore
Make relaxing and beautiful sounds

It is like nothing you have heard before

The sound it creates invades all around.

It is the best instrument that exists

With it you can interact which is key

When you look at it you can not resist

From playing it no one could disagree.

Each key generates a different tone

Which makes many different melodies

The keyboard never lets you feel alone

Playing it always brings good memories.

Its sound gives you a wonderful feeling

That you will never get tired of hearing. †

I am Juliette

by Juliette, 6th grade

I am Juliette

I wonder about heaven

I hear about the Bible

I see good in everyone

I want to be closer to God

I am Juliette

I pretend that I am a kid with candy

I feel happy about being Catholic

I touch my forehead to make the sign of the cross

I worry about my sins

I try to be good all the time

I am Juliette

I cry sometimes

I understand my faith

I say I am Catholic

I dream of a place like heaven

I hope one day I will go to heaven †



At the end of the drive from the church to the school, right before the turn into the school parking area, a beautiful surprise awaits! An environmental mural transforms the dumpster doors into a spiritual message. Our thanks to Bryan Martinez from the Winthrop Town Art Factory who, at the request of Julianne Gonzalez, contributed his time and talent to give us this beautiful gift.

Do something more... than nothing

By Kristin Taylor

On my 21st Birthday, I was given a gift... my first child. This gift wasn't wrapped in golden paper and bows; she was wrapped in a hospital blanket hiding her open spine, displaced hips, and clubfeet. Anyone who has been through this storm knows it takes the gift of unwavering faith to see the light through the darkness.

In 1979 I was the youngest employee of the hospital in which Mariah was born. I was keenly aware following her traumatic birth that all eyes were on me. Would my faith wash away with the thousands of tears I was crying or would the light grow even brighter? Thankfully I was surrounded by my faith family who had the wisdom to remind me that God has a special plan for EVERY life and that this gift, if accepted with faith, would transform not only my life but all those in the wake of my passing. Mariah's courageous battle through 15 major operations softened even the hardest of hearts. My father would often say to me “*the distance between Heaven and Hell is 12 inches... the heart and the mind. So rely on the heart.*” Now, when I feel the Lord's leading I never walk, I run because I've come to recognize that inner voice is the Holy Spirit.

In 1995 following a pilgrimage to Haiti, Jamaica and Samoa my life's direction became very clear. As I sang for the prisoners in Haiti and Jamaica, visited the orphanages and leprosy clinics and slums and then visited the sick and disabled in Samoa, I knew I was being asked to do ‘*Something more than Nothing*’. Knowing what mothers of special-needs children face, I could not simply walk away and do nothing. So I devoted my God-given voice and physical strength to help the needy in these countries. Our ministry named T.H.O.R.N (thankfully helping others real needs) was born. In a few years literally hundreds of disabled had wheelchairs for the first time (another story for a later time).

Thanksgiving of 1997 was the first time my family, with all twelve children in tow, set out to feed the homeless. Within five minutes of finding our first group my children were offering to come back with clothing, first aid, and more food. Their hearts were so sincerely caring and loving that it



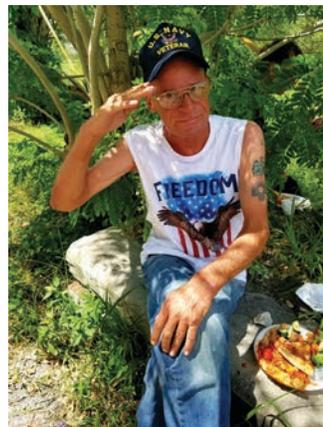


brought me to tears. I knew I had to go back and give Radar shoes and Jimbo a jacket. A light had gone on that was not going to be easily extinguished. I knew God lit the torch and I was being asked to carry it. The rest is simply miraculous.

In 20 plus years we have never run out of food. The volunteers bring food, clothing, first aid and most importantly love and faith. The Jimbos and Radars



Kristin Taylor-Staszak is a wife, mother of 12 children and 16 grandchildren, Founder of THORN Ministries Catholic Lay Apostolate, Samoa and THORN Ministries Inc., U.S. She is an inspirational singer/songwriter/conference speaker and parishioner of St. Stephen Catholic Church.



may change names and faces but they all have one thing in common, and that is their need to see that a loving God still exists in this world and that He loves them. Choosing to live your faith brings life to all those around you. As a child, I would tape wounded ants back together. Now, I use food and clothes instead of tape. When you live your faith with a smile, and sincerely love with your whole heart you will unwrap

your gift a little more each day. God will reveal to you His plan for your life. I challenge you to listen to that voice in your heart telling you to do something more than nothing. Be that three-year-old that believes love can heal because it can... and it will. All God needs is your YES. †

About the Cover

Courageous: to be not deterred by danger or pain; to be brave-hearted.

The cover shows two young sisters, Bella and Lily at the edge of a shoreline with imminent darkness approaching; a lantern, a rose, and a guardian angel watching over them. The light of faith pierces our darkness, a rose reminds us of the intercession of Mary, and we have the blessed assurance of celestial companions ever at our side. “

“I command you: Be strong and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go” Joshua 1:9.

The cover speaks of overcoming fear and realizing that there are angels around all of us; that we should live with courage and not fear.” — Rick Taucedo

The Power of Prayer

By Adriana McAnally

Our daughter Brianna learned very early in life that her journey in this world would be special.

At only six months old, a biopsy of her tiny liver was flown to London where this very rare condition could finally be diagnosed by the top specialist as Progressive Familial Intrahepatic Cholestasis (PFIC). Brianna had been born without the liver enzyme necessary to allow her body to process bile.

Brianna learned all about her condition early in life and has fought through it like a real champ. At only nine years old, she has experienced several birthdays in hospitals, doctor visits, innumerable needle sticks, blood transfusions, heart surgery, and finally a liver transplant. Throughout her courageous battle with PFIC, her unrelenting faith has never faltered. She loves God with all her heart and trusts Him with her life as no one I have ever known. Too young to be an altar server at St. Stephen, she had her grandparents take her to Mass at Resurrection Church, where she enrolled for altar server training and served Fr. Eugene with deep seriousness and responsibility in her role. Her prayerful life is an example to us, and her faith is evident to all who know her. This has given her the courage to live through some very difficult times.

In September of 2018, Brianna was finally listed on the national transplant list. From this point forward our family planned life day by day, not knowing when we would get “*the call.*” January 27, 2019, is a day we will remember forever. Though we were waiting for this call, it was the scariest moment of our lives and nothing could have prepared us for it.

All sorts of emotions ran through our minds. One of the hardest things to do was break the news to Brianna why we were packing our bags on a Sunday night for what could potentially be a two to three month stay away from home. Our family drove to Miami on a rainy Sunday night for what we knew was going to be the hardest 24 hours of our lives. I could not stop thinking about the donor’s family and the pain that they had to be going through having lost their 13-year-old son. At the same time, I knew we owed them the world for making the decision to donate his organs during such a tragic time and wondered how we could ever repay them. We prayed for them throughout our long and rainy drive south. We also prayed for the doctors who would be doing the long eight-hour surgery and asked God to give us the strength to allow us to trust them with her life. We prayed for the harvesting team and those doctors who were flying to pick up the liver from the deceased child during such terrible weather. While



driving through Ft. Myers, we received a call from the transplant team. The surgery had been postponed until the next day due to the severe weather, prohibiting safe travel for the organ. We truly believe this was God's working, who wanted everyone to stay safe, have us slow down, ensure the doctors had a safe flight in clearer weather, and make certain everyone was well-rested for the big day.

The next morning, we arrived at Holtz Children's Hospital in Miami bright and early for Brianna's big day. By then the prayer chains had already been set in motion and countless messages from people praying for our little girl started coming through from South America, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Africa, and all over the United States. This gave us such comfort and truly helped us stay calm and strong during this extremely nerve-racking time for all of us, but especially for Brianna. With confidence in the Lord, we were able to focus on making the appropriate decisions for our little girl.

When we arrived in the pre-op room, we asked for a priest to come and give Brianna the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. This dear priest rushed to the hospital, prayed with us and with her nurses, and once again our nerves were put at ease. At 2:30 p.m. they arrived at her room to take her to the operating room. We kissed her many, many times and let her know we would be by her side when she woke up. We left her in God's hands for the longest six hours we had ever experienced. We received updates every two hours. The surgeon came out to let us know surgery was successful and Brianna was able to receive the full liver from her donor with no complications. Praise the Lord, for He is good and His love endures forever! Truly, God watched over our Bri, her transplant team, and all of us through every step of the way.

Brianna was brought into the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit on a ventilator with many lines and monitors. It was extremely difficult for us to see her this way, but she managed to open her eyes and give our hands a tight squeeze to show how strong she was and that she was ready to fight through the recovery process. The next morning, she surprised us all and woke up requesting to be extubated. Her words of gratitude to everyone for their prayers included, "*I've got this!*"

She had only one minor complication with her medication. A week and a half later, she was given the green light to leave the hospital. This was her goal from the moment she was admitted, and our little warrior wasn't going to give up until she reached it.



Doctors are ecstatic and have no explanation to her extremely-quick recovery and the unusual minimal complications, other than all the prayers around the world asking for God's workings. The unbelievable number of people praying for our Brianna has yielded amazingly powerful results. God and Our Lady have watched over her and guided every step of her recovery. There is no other explanation for it!

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Love's Tide Yet Stronger Flow

By Deacon Ralph D'Elia

We've all heard the old cliché, distance makes the heart grow fonder. In fact, one of the earliest written expressions of this sentiment can be traced back to the ancient Roman poet Propertius, who eloquently penned, "*Always toward absent lovers love's tide stronger flows.*" While the expression has perhaps lost the beauty of Propertius' lyrical prose, the truth behind it remains as true as it was in the time of Ancient Rome. I've had the opportunity to verify this claim over the past four years of priestly formation as I've been separated from my home, from the Church in the Diocese of St. Petersburg, and from the people I have been called to serve one day soon as a priest. After each return to the Diocese, I find myself swept away by the strong influence of love's enveloping tide.

One of the blessings of being formed for the priesthood in Rome has been the opportunity to grow in appreciation for the Universal Church. I have been enriched by my broadened experience of the Church and universality of the faith so evident in the rich history and culture that make up the foundation upon which the Church in Rome has been built. Ultimately, however, without reference to a particular, the universal remains vague and ambiguous. Each Sunday we proclaim our belief in "*one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,*" but our experience of that Church is largely informed by an encounter with our local church, the Church in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. As a diocesan seminarian, this is all the more meaningful because it is this particular church that I have been called to serve as a priest. For this reason, being away from home can at times be challenging.

However, time after time, upon returning to the diocese for summer breaks, I find myself confronted with that old cliché. When I am reunited with the diocese and encounter once again the particular face of our local church, I am able to better appreciate the value of my time away. After four years outside of the Diocese, I always find great contentment and profound joy in simply being back, in engaging with parishioners, and in becoming reacquainted with the sights and sounds of this particular church that Christ has called me to love as He loves.



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Linda Perri is youngest of three sisters (the baby), devoted wife and mother who works hard, but loves life! Humbled by God's grace and thankful for every day.

Signs From The Holy Spirit

continued from page 3

As we began our final descent, I told them that I would pray for him on his assignment to St. Stephen. Lo and behold, four months later Fr. Dermott announced Mike Ryba's assignment as a new Deacon at St. Stephen. After Mike's first Mass, I welcomed him and Lisa as well as thanking God for answering my (and their) prayers. Mike and Lisa are a wonderful couple whose spiritual experiences will be a true inspiration for me in my faith journey and I'm sure in yours, as well.

Welcome again, Mike and Lisa, to our St. Stephen family – it is good to have you here! †

The Power of Prayer

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We would like to extend our gratitude to all of St. Stephen Catholic School, St. Stephen Parish, and the Resurrection Catholic Church community for their continued support and abundance of prayers, which have allowed Brianna to recover so amazingly quickly and well. We ask everyone to continue with prayers for our princess warrior as her life goes onto this new post-transplant phase. †

Guest of the Quarter - Drew Woodke

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From that time forward Drew embraced his vocation. He went through his discernment and joined the seminary. In April, Woodke entered his sixth year of seminary and was ordained as a transitional deacon, and should be ordained into the priesthood in another year.



Today, one of the ways he still maintains ties to St. Stephen is through his friendships with Fr. Tim and Fr. Dermot.

“St. Stephen has been blessed with quality leadership over the past decade, and I am excited to see these two men leading the community. They are great priests and have dedicated their ministry to making sure that St. Stephen is in a better place tomorrow than it is today.”

However, he still remembers his past at St. Stephen fondly.

“It was at Franciscan that I became convicted to enter the seminary, but St. Stephen definitely fostered my vocation during very formative years of my life,” he said. “My time at St Stephen were blessed years.” †

A Deacon's Journey

continued from page 15

The first year of formation was very difficult for me. If it were not for my wife “talking me off the ledge” after many classes, I would not be a Deacon today. You see, I have always been hard on myself, with low self-esteem. I did not feel that I was worthy enough to be called to serve. I thought all the men in my class had more to offer than I did. How could I compete with them (as if it were a competition)? That all changed when I read these words in our Diocesan magazine: “God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called.” I know that He placed that phrase in front of me at a time when I needed it most and as they say, the rest is history.

I was ordained by Bishop Daniel Conlon on August 27, 2016 for the Diocese of Joliet and was assigned to Holy Spirit Catholic Community in Naperville, IL where we had been parishioners since 2004. This would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife and my children. We have courageously lived the Gospel and will continue to do so, helping others along on this incredible faith journey.

We are so blessed to be a part of such a faith-filled community as St. Stephen and we look forward to many years of serving the parish and our community. We can never thank you enough for welcoming us to the family that is St. Stephen. †



Saint Sidebar

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Despite leprosy not being highly contagious, St. Damien's continual extreme proximity eventually made him susceptible to the disease. Unfortunately, St. Damien's dedication to the people of the Molokai Kalaupapa colony resulted in him contracting the disease in 1885. He continued his work throughout his illness, putting others before his own health by finding strength in prayer and his faith. He spent sixteen years working for the community of lepers before passing away on April 15th, 1889. His life provided hope to the entire community when society deserted them.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed St. Damien's sainthood 14 years after his beatification by Pope John Paul II. St. Damien's feast day is celebrated on May 10th, which can be used as a reminder to be courageous and headstrong in our faith despite what others believe. †



Megan, a Florida State University graduate, has returned from working six months in London and is very thankful for the experience. She is excited for the next phase of her life here in the Tampa area.

Intervention of the Holy Spirit

continued from page 9

On May 19, 2017, my husband and I attended “*The Cross and The Light*” at St. Stephen Catholic Church. This Broadway-style interpretation of Christ’s Passion to the Pentecost had a profound impact on me. It was an exhilarating and powerful performance. As the Pentecost played out on stage, I suddenly had an overwhelming



Jan Boucher and her husband, Ken have been members of St. Stephen since 2004. They have four grandchildren and enjoy traveling in their RV. Jan is a St. Vincent dePaul (SVDP) volunteer and a member of the Columbiettes.

feeling that The Holy Spirit was burning in my being. The feeling radiated in my left hip and pelvis. I had uncontrollable tears running down my cheeks. My husband could see that I was experiencing a profound spiritual encounter and he held my hand.

The tears kept on coming. The power of The Holy Spirit compelled me to enter a prayer room after the performance. Inside sat a dozen or so Angels. I was wheeled in front of a cross where calmness overcame me as I prayed for serenity. My hip and leg were still burning. The Holy Spirit was working his miracle. I prayed for strength and felt compelled to share my experience. The Angels in the room, which included close friends, sat quietly as I told them about my encounter with The Holy Spirit. My tears dried as I spoke. The Angels around me started to weep. In that moment, I knew God would see me through my challenge. He would grant me a new hip so I could continue his good work.

God guided my surgeon’s hands through two difficult hip replacements. Both were successful. I am now able to walk, exercise, travel, and play with my four precious grandchildren. I’m not angry about what happened to me. My faith is stronger now because I know God was and is with me. He’s the reason for my miracle recovery. His work was made visible through my hardship. And now, on two feet, I will continue to spread his good word.

I am and will forever be grateful for all my “*Blessings*”. †

***“And whatever you do, in word or in deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through Him” Colossians 3:17.***

Book Review

THE MASS by Edward Sri, Review by Janet Swilley

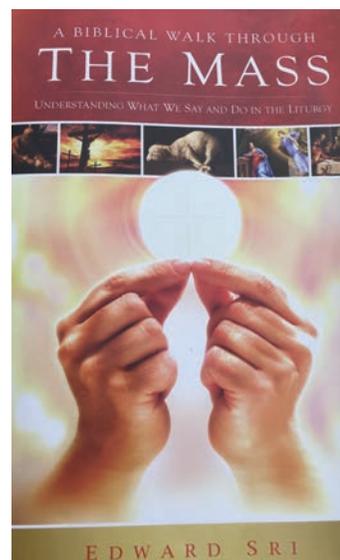
Understanding what we say and do in the Liturgy.

The Mass is the center of the Catholic Faith, but do we really know, or remember, what all of the words and gestures we repeat every Mass all mean? The book *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*, by Dr. Edward Sri, gives us a full tour of the Mass and explains the profound significance of the things we do and say and enlightens the reader to new meaning of the liturgical experience.

Dr. Sri brings you into being present at the Last Supper with Peter and the other apostles. If you were one of them, how would the words of Jesus have impacted you? We've heard them a hundred times and yet we might be tempted to take them for granted or consider them routine. That won't be the case after you read this eye-opening book.

You will understand that the past is not just being recalled, but it is truly being relived in the celebration of the Eucharist. The past is made present and real. Each new generation participates in this event spiritually and is united in Christ.

The Mass explains that at the Last Supper, Jesus refers to His blood as, "The blood of a new and eternal covenant". Instead of speaking of the Passover Lamb, Jesus talks about His own body and blood being offered up and poured out in sacrifice, and His actions anticipate His sacrifice on the cross. Understanding the connection of the Last Supper and the cross shed light on how The Eucharist we celebrate today commemorates the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. When Jesus says, "do this in memory of me" he is not telling the apostles to perform a simple ritual meal. He is commanding, instructing, them to celebrate the Last Supper as a liturgical memorial. *The Mass* speaks eloquently about how a liturgical memorial brings the past and the present together, making the event present for the current generation. It details how the Eucharist makes the events of the upper room and Calvary sacramentally present to us today so that its power is applied to our lives for the daily sins we commit, and so we can unite ourselves to Christ in His act of total self-giving love. †



“Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you know how to respond to each other” Colossians 4: 5-6.

Making Mole Hills Out of Mountains

continued from page 14

When I am feeling particularly strong in my faith, I am able to do more, get more involved, and embrace tougher spiritual challenges. I love those times. However, there are other times where I honestly just feel defeated. I am doing the wrong things or putting unimportant things before God and loved ones. During those stretches, I just try to say one prayer, overcome one sin, or at least show up at church for Mass. I just try to put myself into a position to let God navigate and get out of my own way. I refute the “*mountain top*” experience and choose to embrace the mole hills experience.



As I journey further from my mountain, it has become a mole hill. The names, experiences, and even that lovely vision have faded over the years. Still, that feeling of comfort and love remain. My promise remains and the journey continues. I have learned there is a certain dignity to just finishing the trek with honor and working to overcome your weaknesses instead of surrendering to them. So, if the metaphor holds true, there are going to be very few

mountain tops. However, there will be many mole hills: the friends, the smiles, the sunsets, and minor miracles that remind us that Christ is here and that even when lost, there is safety and rest with the Heavenly Guide. †



Ralph D'Elia is a transitional deacon for the Diocese of St. Petersburg. He is in his fourth year of theology studies at the Pontifical North American College in Rome. In May, Ralph will be a priest at St. Jude the Apostle Cathedral with Deacon Anthony Astrab and Deacon Joshua Hare.

Love's Tide Yet Stronger Flow

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This was certainly the case during my summer at St. Stephen. My time away, then, has not only allowed me to better appreciate and understand the universal dimension of the Church, but it has afforded me the opportunity to fall more deeply in love with the Church in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. And it is precisely this profound love that gives me the strength to courageously live the Gospel, to throw myself more readily into formation for the priesthood, and to seek Christ in everything that comes my way.

As I prepare for ordination to the priesthood in May, I am better able to understand my particular calling to serve our diocese as a priest in large part because of the distance I have experienced over these years in formation. And although I will return to Rome after ordination for another year of studies, I can embrace all the more my journey on these uncharted waters carried along by love's tide yet stronger flow. †

SHINE: Another source of light

By Jose Concheiro

Seniors, age 60 and over, comprise nearly 25% of Florida's population, adding vitality and enrichment to our communities. Without them, our state would not be the great place that it is today. However, as individuals approach age 65 or start the process of retirement, the reality of navigating Medicare looms large. Seniors must make an overwhelming array of vital healthcare choices, and often need guidance on Medicare issues, supplemental policies, prescription resources, personalized plan comparisons, and much more.

Many people find themselves uncertain about their Medicare options and the processes for enrollment. At the same time, some current Medicare beneficiaries are struggling to make ends meet. They are eligible for help but do not know it is available, or do not understand the process to access benefit programs. For these individuals, and many others eligible for Medicare, there is help available!

“Volunteers do not have necessarily have the time, they just have the heart.”

Elizabeth Andrew

I have volunteered with this wonderful program called SHINE (Serving Health Insurance Needs of Elders) for over six years now. Under the Florida Department of Elder Affairs and through the Senior Connection Center, SHINE provides free and unbiased Medicare counseling to assist elders and disabled individuals navigating the complex Medicare system. SHINE volunteers provide Medicare beneficiaries, their caregivers, and loved ones assistance with Medicare topics including claims, appeals, billing issues, combatting Medicare fraud, and programs that are available to help lower costs associated with Medicare. The assistance is completely free, unbiased, and can be done by phone, or an appointment can be made for a face-to-face counseling session. SHINE volunteers have a special opportunity to help those in need, while simultaneously gaining knowledge that can be applied personally, as many of the volunteers are Medicare beneficiaries themselves.

Through SHINE, volunteers gain the opportunity to learn new skills through professional training programs, meet new people during outreach and partnership, and acquire healthcare-related knowledge that can be applied to all Medicare recipients. I have found my experience as a SHINE Volunteer Counselor to be very satisfying. This unique volunteer opportunity has given me a real sense of purpose to help the elderly and individuals with disabilities in my community.

SHINE counselors are trained to provide unbiased advice and assistance with anything Medicare-related, so people have the information they need to make the best choice for their individual needs and preferences.

In 2017, our **SHINE** counselors documented **15,682** client contacts.

- **8,335** were low-income
- **4,005** were disable
- **4,753** were over the age of 75; **1,530** of those were 85+
- **1,143** needed assistance in a language other than English

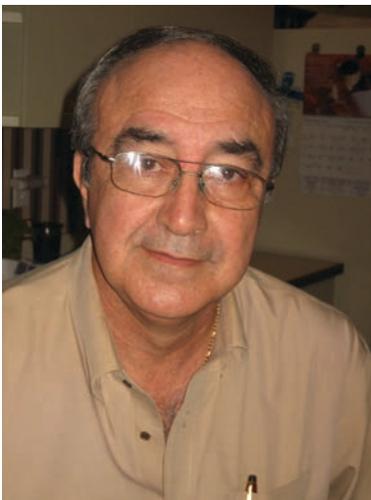
We helped **791** low-income individuals apply for Medicare Savings Programs, leading to a combined savings of more than **\$1.2** million. Of these low-income individuals we helped **416** apply for the Extra Help Programs which saved each about **\$4,000** annually on their prescription drug expenses.

During 2017, SHINE volunteers touched the lives of an additional **19,195** seniors and caregivers through free, educational seminars and outreach events.



Furthermore, SHINE is a part of the Senior Connection Center, the local Aging and Disability Resource Center that provides services for Hillsborough, Polk, Manatee, Highlands, and Hardee counties. The Senior Connection Center has other departments outside of SHINE, which can provide additional resources and assistance with things such as:

- Long Term Care
- Food
- Housing
- Transportation
- Home repairs
- In-home services for seniors
- Legal assistance
- Help with Medicaid
- ...and much more!



Jose Concheiro actively participates at St. Stephen as a Greeter, Usher, Sacristan and a member of the Pastoral Parish Council.

I invite you to access SHINE's free services by simply calling the Elder Helpline toll-free at 1-800-963-5337 (1-800-96ELDER) or by visiting the statewide SHINE website at www.FloridaSHINE.org. To learn more about volunteer opportunities with SHINE, please email me, Jose L. Concheiro, at jose.concheiro@agingflorida.com with the following reference the subject line: St. Stephen SHINE volunteer opportunity.

I hope you take this opportunity to provide a much-needed service and help those in need in our church and throughout our community. †

***On behalf of the everyone from Quarterly Blessings,
Have a safe, happy, and God-filled summer!***

St. Stephen Catholic Church

10118 Saint Stephen Circle
Riverview, FL 33569

Return Service Requested

QUARTERLY BLESSINGS

Our mission is met each quarter, when one person reading the Quarterly Blessings, who is not actively involved in the church, becomes inspired to participate in any one of the many wonderful spiritual and fellowship activities happening at St. Stephen.

Comments, suggestions and contributions for this publication are encouraged and always welcome. Please email us at

QB@ststephencatholic.org.

Any photos submitted to the *Quarterly Blessings*, will gladly be returned upon request.

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Guest of the Quarter

Learn more about Drew Woodke inside!

