

Blessings

ST STEPHEN CATHOLIC CHURCH MAGAZINE

SPRING 2020

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD



Blessings

Blessing to you and your family,

We greet you with Easter joy, even though you'll receive this addition at the beginning of Lent. As a Christian people the Risen Lord is always our hope and our future. As people afflicted with our own sins and harmed by the sins of others, we know that many times we have more in common with the suffering Christ, than with the Risen Christ.

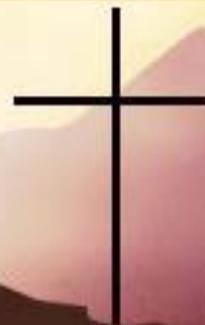
I hope as you read this magazine, you will be helped to see the beauty of the Risen Lord in your lives. God, the Loving Father sent His Son Jesus Christ, so that we would know that the journey of faith is always filled with God moments. We just have to open our eyes of faith to recognize Him.

During Lent, please open your souls to Christ. He awaits you with loving and powerful healing. Pray often, be charitable, and refrain from something that is not essential to you and your loved ones. 



Father Dermot Dunne, Pastor

*Lenten prayers for you,
and Easter joy upon you,
Fr. Dermot*



THE EASTER CANDLE

Living in Florida, we are prone to hurricanes and powerful storms that tend to spring up suddenly over the waters that surround us and then move onto shore disrupting our plans and creature comforts. I'm sure at some point we've all experienced a storm that knocks the power off, and when this happens, many of us have reverted back to the use of good old-fashioned candles in order to have light. Candles don't provide light as efficiently as modern electric lights tend to do, but they provide just enough light to see what surrounds us and to chase some of the darkness away. In this sense, they mirror the sacred - they provide enough light to dispel the darkness so that we feel safe and know where to walk or what to focus on, but at the same time, their light casts shadows reminding us that until we reach heaven and see the beatific vision, God will seem mysterious to us.

On the holiest night of the year, the Easter Vigil, a candle is featured prominently during the liturgy. This candle is known as the Paschal Candle. At the very beginning of the Easter Vigil liturgy, this candle is lit from the Easter fire (which begins outside the church) and then processed into a darkened church. That single flicker of light reminds us that Christ is the light who has come into the world to dispel the powers of darkness. After the candle makes its way into the church, light grows throughout the church as Her members come into contact



with the Light of Christ and light their own individual candles.

The Paschal Candle is bigger than any of the other candles that you will notice around the altar or anywhere in the church. This is because the candle is referred to as a *"pillar of fire"* during the Exultet proclamation which is proclaimed once the candle is placed next to the Ambo during the liturgy after its procession has concluded. There is a lot of symbolism that is inscribed on the candle itself. For example, five grains of incense are inserted into the candle representing Christ's five wounds. The first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the Alpha and Omega, are displayed on the candle to remind us that Christ is the beginning and end of all things.

You will see this candle present in the sanctuary for every Mass from the Easter Vigil until Pentecost. Outside of the Easter Season, you will also see the Paschal Candle displayed by the Baptismal Font, lit and used during baptisms, and lit and displayed by the casket during a funeral liturgy as a reminder that the person who died first began their journey to God with their baptism. The lit candle reminds us of how our lives eventually come full circle, so to speak.

Our church is FULL of deep symbolism and ancient rituals that express meaning for our lives. I hope this article enlightened you (pun intended) to the rich symbolism that is expressed in the Paschal Candle. 

**MAY CHRIST ENLIGHTEN YOUR MIND
AND HEART THIS EASTER SEASON,**

FATHER TIM



Easter Sunday Alleluia

Deacon Mike Sweeney



“When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place. Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed” John 20:6-8.

In John’s Gospel, at first, we see panic on that Easter morning. What had happened to the body of our Lord? Who had taken it? And where did they take it? Why would they want to inflict even more pain on the disciples? Wasn’t their grief enough? But there was something strange about the tomb. The burial cloths were still there. Why? And why was one of the cloths folded up?

John began processing the scene in his mind, trying to figure out why someone would rush in and steal Jesus’ body, and then waste time by removing the burial cloths and folding them. And then John figured it out. His body wasn’t stolen. It wasn’t missing. HE HAD RISEN!

Imagine the moment that John figured it out.

From a questioning faith, to one that realized that everything Jesus had taught them was completely true.

In an instant, he realized that the Son of God had just obliterated death. The sadness of knowing that when life ended there was nothing else, was annihilated, because Jesus was alive, and the gates of heaven were opened to His believers!

In Lent, we no longer sing the word “Alleluia.” During those 40 days, we take a good look at ourselves, and we acknowledge the fact that we are all sinners. The music style changes. Gone are the foot-tapping triumphant songs, as we replace them with more somber tones. We join our Jewish ancestors as they journey through the desert toward the Promised Land. It’s a journey of struggle and sacrifice.

At the end of Lent, we are with Jesus as He hangs upon the cross. Three days later, we again exclaim “ALLELUIA!” because the Promised Land opened to us is no longer a plot of land in the Middle East, but HEAVEN! Praise God, we are able to journey to that Promised Land by living in the Church!

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Labor of Love

Linda Perri

Every family has unique traditions that they pass down from generation to generation. My friends, Tom and Sharon Dickey, told me the story of their family tradition that I would like to share with you.

For many years, Sharon would crochet an afghan for each of their children (5) and continued to make them for their grandchildren, as well.

About five years ago, Tom and Sharon went to Ohio to visit their oldest son, Douglas, and their grandson, Jack. Sharon thought to bring with her the already started afghan so she could work on it in her spare time. Unfortunately, while she was there, she fell and broke her hip. Sharon was hoping to give this gift to Jack for his high school graduation. She made it in his school colors of green and gold, but had to put it away until she was feeling better.

As time went on, Sharon forgot about her unfinished project, so it just sat in her craft bag with no one to work on it. In May 2019, Sharon took ill, again, and passed away that June.



When Tom and his children were going through her personal belongings to share with the family, he came across this craft bag and saw the unfinished piece. He was wondering how he could get someone to complete this labor of love to fulfill Sharon's wish and present it to their grandson; even though he is now in college.

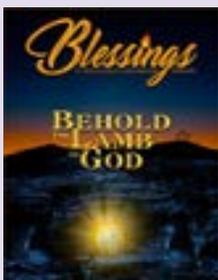
Tom read in the St. Stephen ministry brochure and found that they had a group of women known as *Blessed Stitches*. He contacted them, told them his story and they

were very receptive to the idea. They planned to pick up the crocheting supplies and unfinished afghan and told Tom they would call him when it was completed. Tom felt blessed to have found this ministry and was so touched knowing that his wife's efforts would come to fruition. He would be able to present Jack with this family treasure.

I know Jack will be happy to have such a wonderful memory of his grandmother and he will always think of her knowing it came from the heart; not only hers, but also from the hearts of the women of *Blessed Stitches* at St. Stephen. Thank you for all you do by sharing your time and talent with others in our community. 🌻



Linda Perri has been a parishioner for over 20 years. As new member of Blessings Magazine she says, "Being able to write stories for this ministry warms my heart!"



About the cover:

John the Baptist's proclamation, "**Behold the Lamb of God**" (Jn 1:29) is the foretelling of Jesus' role in salvation history as the sacrificial lamb of God. However, Jesus becomes the triumphant and resurrected Lamb of God on Easter morning. Lent and Easter is a continuum of faith from darkness to light, and our journey with Christ from death to everlasting life. - Rick Tauceda

God's Marvelous Gift of Peace

Anonymous



May peace from our Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit be with you also and remain in you forever.

That peace of God is a marvelous gift! His peace recollects us to serenity and health, allows us to breathe in the Word of God, and refocuses us on what is truly, eternally important. Sometimes this peace of mind and spirit has been hard for me to find in a world full of distractions and agitations.

I vacillated about whether or not to attend the Welcome weekend. I told myself that it's just another demand on my time, that I could encounter the Lord anywhere, and that other people needed the retreat more than I did. I am so grateful that the grace of God overcame my objections! Our community prayed intensely for me and the others whom God called to come. (Thank you!)

What I encountered far exceeded my expectations. The whole weekend was a tremendously rich and deep experience of the love of God and the love of our church community. In this environment, I opened and allowed myself to receive the love God offered. The Word of God and other gems of spiritual wisdom were sprinkled upon us as generously as a deluge.

In the talks and discussions, I heard other women experiencing the same basic challenges that I face and found encouragement in their vulnerability and faith. I felt welcomed, wanted, and served.

My faith in community was strengthened.

My experience of the sacraments was revitalized. And God took the time to reach out and tenderly touch me.

In response, I made a deep, frank appraisal of how I stood before the Lord. I did find myself unexpectedly lacking, but even more, I found the overwhelming mercy of God carry me into forgiveness and acceptance. I stepped outside of my comforts and rediscovered the peace and joy that I had shoved from my heart, the peace and joy of abiding in the truth of God's love.

I loved the weekend, every bit. I'm so grateful for this experience and intend to pay it forward. The peace is worth it!

Behind the scenes, another dozen members of the Core Team and their committees prayed. Then, on Oct. 5th-6th and 12th-13th, by the power of the Holy Spirit, teams of men and women at St. Stephen experienced Welcome. If you ask them, they will tell you Welcome changed their lives. 

Sisters In Christ

Joyce Wood

Originally from Massachusetts, my husband and I moved to Riverview, Florida, in January 2004. Although born and raised in a Catholic home, I was attending a Southern Baptist church introduced to me by a previous neighbor in Massachusetts. I had not been an active member of the Catholic faith since approximately 1970.



My childhood was one where Mother and Dad did not attend church but always made certain all eleven children received our First Communion, Confirmation, went to confession on Saturday afternoon and church Sunday mornings. My grandmother on my mother's side lived with us. Many a morning she could be seen sitting in her rocking chair praying the rosary.

Approximately a year and half ago, while taking a walk along a nature trail in our neighborhood, I met Zoraida, one of my neighbors. Zoraida was not the everyday neighbor, just waving "hello," but rather she shared wonderful experiences of her travels to the Holy Land, a place I had always dreamt of visiting but never had the opportunity.

She is a warm, caring person with a heart full of compassion, a family woman who loves her children and grandchildren dearly.

We had many a walk and would always pray for the needs of others before returning home. Then Zoraida invited me to attend church with her at St. Stephen. When sharing that I was a little nervous, she presented me with a gift: Catholic Book of Prayers. This little book immediately reminded me of the prayers I learned as a child and still helps me follow the Mass today.

If I was going to receive Holy Communion, confession was necessary. When confessing that it had been over fifty years since my last confession, the priest remarked, "Oh, my!" That Sunday, after receiving the Eucharist (with new meaning for me), Zoraida and I celebrated my "Welcome Home to the Catholic Faith" with a nice dinner. After dinner, Zoraida gave me my very first Catholic Bible. I now had the tools I needed for a new beginning in my faith journey!

Thanks to Zoraida and her patient, Christian witness. She will always be my wonderful Sister in Christ. Praise God!

Joyce Wood joined St. Stephen Church in April 2019 and has become a member of St. Vincent de Paul. She has six grown children, seven grandchildren, and two great grandchildren.



The Love of Jesus

Janet Swilley

Some of us, in fact, most of us may feel unworthy of Christ's love because He paid such a high price. Even so, we are to share His love us and let others know how much He loves them.

Imagine how Mary of Magdala must have felt standing there at the tomb of Jesus. (John Chapter 20) She must have felt doubt and fear just as we all do at times. But Jesus called her by name. It was Jesus who rescued her from her fears and it is Jesus who is calling you by name.

He will rescue you just like He did Mary on that first Easter Sunday.

In the Book of John Chapter 10, Jesus says the shepherd will call his sheep by name. His promise is true. He is the Good Shepherd and He knows you by name. Listen and you will know His voice. His sheep know His voice. You will hear it in His Word and in your spirit through the Holy Spirit.

May you know Jesus on a deeper level and experience the joy and peace of His love.



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Jennifer Bohnart



Each year, the 7th grade students of SSCS prepare to present the Living Stations of the Cross to their school and parish community. During this preparation, the students immerse themselves in understanding this Lenten devotion and the ultimate sacrifice Jesus made for each one of us - the gift of our salvation.

As they work together to memorize their parts and their sequences, they start each class session with a prayer to remind themselves of this sacred undertaking.

In addition to preparing the living stations, the students write their own Station of the Cross Meditation in a Power Point and reflect on how the Paschal Mystery is evident in their everyday lives.

Here are a few examples of the students' reflections of the Paschal Mystery:

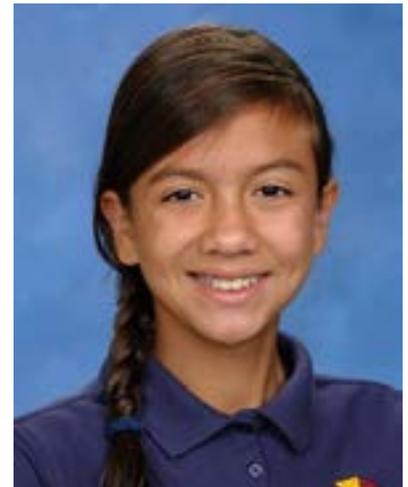
The Paschal Mystery is the process of dying and rising. The Paschal Mystery is evident in my life with my family. One example is my sister's surgery. She was a different person pre-surgery. She couldn't do a lot of the things she wanted to and was sad a lot. The surgery was the death of that person and the rising of the bright ball of sunshine she is now. For Lent, I am thanking God for a lot of things I take for granted every day. Whenever I get up in the morning, I'll say a little prayer and thank God for being able to get out of bed or have a bed. I think it's effective because it's making me think how I am so blessed that I can walk and have a house and see lives from other people's points of view. - Brayden M.





The Paschal Mystery is the process of dying and rising, death and new life. An example of this in my life is loss of a loved one. We know all life comes to an end, it happens. As Christians, we believe we all meet again in Heaven and will all rise together. Also, every time a child is born, new life is brought into the world. For this season of Lent, to reflect, I've been trying to pray more at night. I'm trying to do this so I can just ask God for something or if I've had a long day, I will just talk to God about all my problems and look for him to comfort me. This activity is pretty effective because I am getting closer to God, I am reflecting and it's helping me to be more thankful for when Jesus died on the cross. - Adriana L.

During Lent, I have realized that the Paschal Mystery is more than the rising and death of Jesus. It is similar to the positives and the negatives of our daily lives and interactions. An example of a negative would be as if you stub your toe and take your pain and anger out on your friend and a positive of your daily life and interactions is when your friend gives you forgiveness after you apologize. After being inspired by learning more about the Paschal Mystery, I have been trying to put in at least a quarter into my rice bowl as well as trying to pray every day at least once a day. I have been giving a lot of thought on my actions as well as my words. This activity has helped me realize that I am living the Paschal Mystery without even knowing it through my daily interactions and life. What I do now in my life is the Paschal Mystery playing in my life. - Natalia R.



The Paschal Mystery is a process of dying, resurrection, death and new life. The Paschal Mystery relates to our life because we fulfill it through the sacraments we make and what sacrifices we do. We experience this process as we go through the liturgical seasons. - Rose L.



Jennifer Bohnart is currently the St. Stephen Catholic School Social Studies teacher for grades 5 through 8 and 6th grade religion teacher. She lives in Fish Hawk with her husband Josh and their daughter, Ireland and son Patrick.

BLESSING OF THE EASTER BASKETS

Marty Diebold



This custom began at St Stephen over 25 years ago when Father Patrick Irwin was Pastor. A Polish parishioner from up north provided Father Pat with the information explaining the blessing and how deeply important it was to his Polish parishioners.

Based on my Polish heritage, I kept a copy so I can share with you the tradition of Easter Baskets Blessing.

Each Holy Saturday, millions of people around the world journey to their parish churches in a sacred pilgrimage known as “Swienconka,” or the Blessing of the Easter Baskets. This tradition began in Poland, spread throughout eastern Europe, and is now practiced in Catholic communities around the world.

The purpose of the Swienconka is to be sure that the first food consumed on Easter Sunday morning reminds of Christ’s resurrection. It is also important to note that several elements of the Swienconka meal suggest a connection with the Passover meal of the Exodus. Just as the people of Israel were released from slavery through the holy meal, so we are released from sin through the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

The following items comprise the main menu for the Easter morning celebration:

The Egg:

Long a symbol of life and rebirth, the egg is the first food to be eaten on Easter Sunday. It is hardboiled and cut into pieces equal to the number of family members and guests present. In addition, one piece is reserved for the presence of Christ, the risen Christ, the unseen guest in every home. The sharing of one egg with each other symbolizes our sharing of Christ with each other, since He is symbolically present in the egg, released from its shell, as He is released from the tomb.

Paschal Lamb:

The lamb is made of butter or dough. It is the center of the symbolic foods. The lamb reminds us that Christ, our Passover has been sacrificed.





Salt:

The most fundamental of all the spices and preservatives, reminds us that we are the salt of the earth.



Kielbasa, Ham, Pork:

All these types of pork were expressly forbidden under the former dietary code of the covenant inscribed in the Old Testament. Since our Lord comes to fulfill and exceed the law, the old needs to give way to the new. Therefore, these once forbidden foods are now most acceptable in the human diet by divine permission (Mark 7:19)

Vinegar:

Reminds us of the gall (sour wine) which was given to our Lord during His passion.



Horseradish:

The bitter herbs of the Passover, symbolizes the bitterness of the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Wine:

Symbolizes the blood which Jesus shed for us on Good Friday.



Bread or "Babka":

A round of bread, sometimes topped with a cross, reminds us of the Eucharist. It also declares to us as Christ did to the disciples, *"I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world"* (John 6:51).

See recipe for Babka on page 15



The blessing of the baskets is more than a Pious custom, but a ritual which combines elements of the Passover meal with the celebration of our Christian faith. The faithful carry home their blessed foods and await the happy moments of Easter morn, when they will literally break fast with those ritualistically blessed fo



Marty Diebold joined St. Stephen Parish in 1990. She was awarded the St. Jude Medal by Bishop Parks last December. Marty is a member of the Liturgy Committee, coordinates the Eucharistic Ministers and is a member of Divine Mercy.



A Different Ki



The St. Stephen Catholic School (SSCS) Middle School Students recently experienced the meaning of sacrifice in a slightly different way. Rather than giving up something as is traditional during Lent, their sacrifices were to give of their time and to do an act of kindness. On November 18 the Houses in middle school chose a service project based on the saint each House honors:



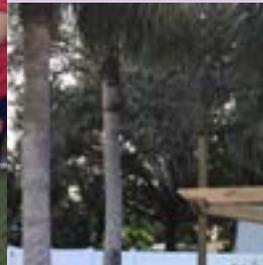
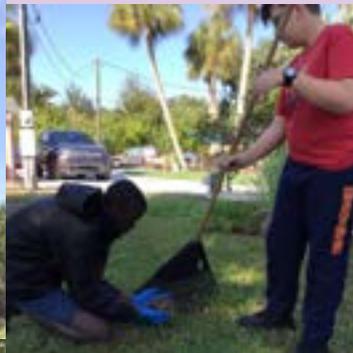
- The St. Therese of Lisieux House visited The Bridges Retirement Community.
- The St. Michael the Archangel House visited My Warrior's Place.
- The St. Jude Thaddaeus House visited Metropolitan Ministries.
- The St. Francis of Assisi House visited Alafia River State Park.



Briana B. from the fifth grade St. Therese House wrote about her experience: *"As Saint Therese said, 'Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.' Throughout our field trip to The Bridges, I spent time reading books to the elderly who have memory loss. This was a service of giving because I was giving my time to read to someone who might not be able to read. Reading to Mrs. Mary was definitely a blessing and totally worth it."*



Rose L. from the eighth grade St. Michael House wrote this about her experience: *"Our House visited My Warrior's Place (a retreat center for veterans) for our St. Michael service trip. We gave our time by completing lawn work to clean up the property. It taught us that every detail can make a difference. Kelly Kowall shared the story of her son Corey, a soldier who died at the age of twenty during his army service. We were grateful for the opportunity to share our time and efforts, giving back in a small way to the veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country."*



nd of Sacrifice



Aubrey C. from the seventh grade St. Jude House wrote about her experience this way: *“During Lent, both giving something up and donating your time are great sacrifices to make. Giving your time is just as meaningful as giving up something. At Metropolitan Ministries my group and I put in time and effort to help people get basic needs, such as clothes, shoes, and food. During Lent, it is important to remember that your sacrifices are for God, not for yourself. To me helping God’s people is a great way to give your time to God and others.”*

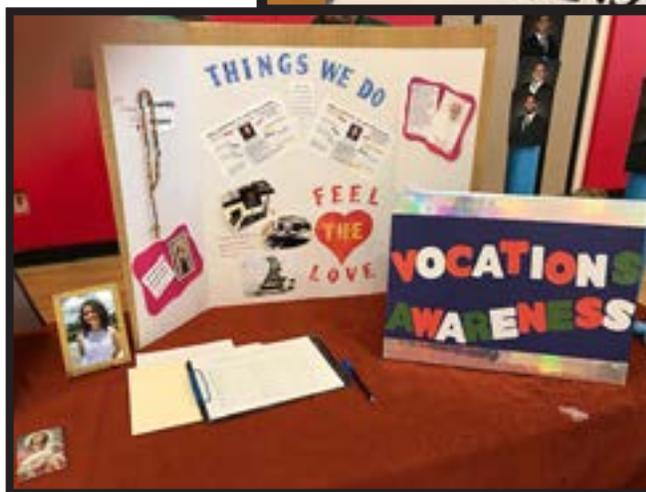


David Plumer, middle school teacher and leader of the St. Francis House reports on the service experience of his House: *“On the 19th of November the wonderful students of the House of St. Francis made a conservation service trip to Alafia River State Park. We learned about the importance of controlling invasive plant species such as the Caesar Weed, which even in the case of a controlled burn can outcompete local plant life and quickly usurp the diversity of an ecosystem. St. Francis House is committed to being good stewards of God’s creation and fully understanding our impact and responsibility for the world around us.”*



No Priests, No Sacraments

Liz Hauer



Consider a Catholic Church with no seminarians. No seminarians, means no priests. No priest, means no Eucharist, no reconciliation, no sacrament of the sick. For me, that is mind boggling. Yet, there are places here in both the continental US and Alaska where people don't get Mass but every two weeks, and sometimes it is up to two months before a priest can offer Mass and reconciliation. I can't even imagine not being able to celebrate Mass each week. We are so blessed here!

I don't think anyone would say that we have enough priests. We are graced to have two priests at our parish who, I think, are definitely overworked and underpaid for what they do. We need to pray for them. But we need more priests - good, holy, loving, shepherds. We have to pray for that. We need to ask God to open hearts to listen to His invite.

There are those that say it is not a priest shortage, but a response problem. God is still inviting, but the response to Him is "no". And we need to pray for a change of heart in those whom He is calling to discernment.

Each second Sunday of the month, the parish is invited to gather in the chapel at 4:30 with us to offer a rosary for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

And that is what the vocations awareness team at St. Stephen does. We pray, we invite others to pray, and if we meet someone who we think might make a good priest or religious or deacon or nun, we ask them if they are in discernment. Generally, the answer is no, so we suggest that perhaps they might want to think about it. This is everybody's responsibility, not just the priests or the vocations awareness team.

Recipe for Making the Babka pictured on Page 11

Babka Wielkanocna: Easy Polish Easter Babka

Total Time: 75 mins

Prep: 15 mins

Cook: 60 mins

1 rise: 90 mins



Yield:

10-inch cake (12 servings)

Babka is a sweet Polish yeast bread, similar to Italian panettone, that can be made with rum-soaked raisins and iced, or left plain.

It's an Easter favorite that often takes pride of place in a swięcone basket that is taken to church to be blessed on Easter Saturday. In fact, every Eastern European country has its own traditional Easter bread.

Traditional babka is made with a staggering number of egg yolks and requires two or more yeast risings. This recipe is lighter on the cholesterol load, requires no kneading, and only takes one rise.

Ingredients For the Cake:

2 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast

1/4 cup warm water (no hotter than 110 F)

6 ounces salted butter (cold)

3/4 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup scalded milk

1 teaspoon vanilla

3 large eggs (room-temperature, beaten)

4 1/4 cups flour (all-purpose)

Optional: 2 tablespoons lemon zest

1/2 to 1 cup raisins (light or dark)

Optional: confectioners' sugar

For the Optional Icing:

2/3 cup confectioners' sugar

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 tablespoon boiling water

Steps to Make It:

Note: while there are multiple steps to this recipe, this Polish babka is broken down into workable categories to help you better plan for preparation and cooking.

Make the Cake:

Gather the ingredients.

In a small bowl, dissolve the yeast in warm water and set aside. If the mixture doesn't look bubbly after 15 minutes, it could mean your yeast is old. Start again with fresh yeast before proceeding to the next step.

Place butter, sugar, and salt in a large bowl or stand mixer, and pour the scalded milk over it. Using the paddle attachment, mix until the butter has melted and the milk has cooled to 110 F or below. Mix in the vanilla and eggs. Add yeast and mix until well combined.

Add the flour, lemon zest (if using), and raisins and mix thoroughly. The dough will be of a thick cake batter consistency.

Heat oven to 350 F. Lightly coat a 10-inch babka pan, kugelhopf pan, Turk's head pan (turban pan), Bundt pan, or tube pan with cooking spray.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan and cover lightly with greased plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk or until dough reaches the top of the pan but no higher.

Bake about 40 to 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean, or until an instant-read thermometer registers 190 F.

Cool completely on a wire rack and dust with confectioners' sugar before serving or, immediately after cooling, with the optional icing.

Make the Optional Icing:

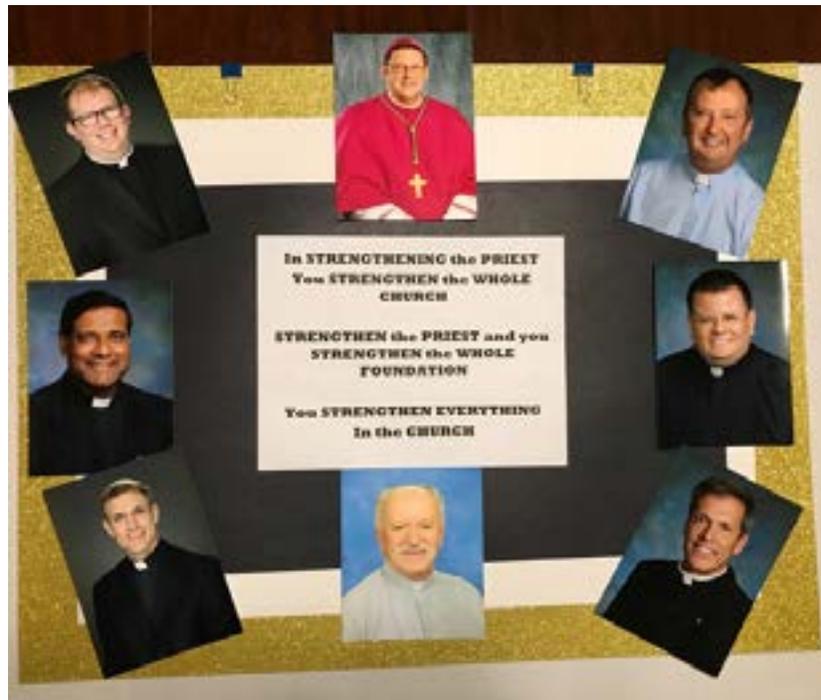
Gather the ingredients.

In a small bowl, whisk together 2/3 cup confectioners' sugar, lemon juice, and boiling water until smooth.

Drizzle over cooled cake. 

The Holy Hour

Lori Russell



One morning after daily Mass, a woman visiting St. Stephen approached me and asked if we had a Seven Sister Apostolate. She asked if I was interested in getting an Apostolate established at St. Stephen.

The Mission Statement reads, "*The Seven Sisters Apostolate is a call to strengthen the Church by ensuring that a Holy Hour is prayed each day of the week for the sole intention of a specific priest or bishop; a 'holy wasting' or lavishing of prayer for his deeper conformity to Christ.*" Groups of seven women pray for a particular priest. Within the group, each woman selects a different day of the week and offers a Holy Hour for that priest alone and commits to doing this for a year. This way each priest has a seamless week of Holy Hours being prayed for him continuously for a whole year. The goal is to have every priest supported with prayer.

The Holy Spirit has been moving members of St. Stephen Parish with five groups praying: one each for Father Dermot and Father Tim and three for Bishop Parks (Bishops get three groups praying for them).

Significant progress has been made in establishing the Apostolate in neighboring parishes. It is our hope that all priests in the Diocese of St. Petersburg will have an Apostolate praying for them.

To spread the word, we hosted a table at the Catholic Women's Conference in September and have spoken at the November Columbiettes' meeting. It is a wonderful blessing to our priests and the women praying and the parish benefits as well.

As members of the Body of Christ, we should offer our prayers for young men to respond to the call to the priesthood. Once a priest, they need our prayers just as much. The Seven Sisters Apostolate is praying for priests and bishops at more than 250 parishes, chanceries, seminaries, hospitals, and other locations around the world!

Please visit the Seven Sisters Apostolate website for more information (sevensistersapostolate.org). If you would like to be part of this Apostolate at St. Stephen please email, Vocations@StStephenCatholic.org or seek out one of the organizers, known as Anchoresses: Lori Russell, Liz Hauer or Lisa Ryba. 

Lori Russell and her husband Ted have served the community of St. Stephen for the past 21 years through their involvement in numerous ministries and in whatever way the Lord has asked.

Did You Know?

Ted Russell



Translated as “*fortieth*” in Latin observing Jesus’ fasting in the desert for forty days and forty nights (Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:2 and Mark 1:13), Lent is a solemn religious observance in the Church’s liturgical year that begins on Ash Wednesday through six Sundays and ends at the Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday.

The purpose of Lent is the preparation of the believer for Easter through prayer, penance, repentance of sins, almsgiving (charity) and the denial of ego. The last week of Lent is Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday and follows the New Testament account of Jesus’ crucifixion (commemorated on Good Friday). At the beginning of the next week the joyful celebration of Jesus’ resurrection is celebrated on Easter Sunday.

A number of changes are made both to the physical appearance of the church as well as in the Liturgy during the Lenten season. While it is common for the altar to be decorated with flowers during most of the year, this does not occur during Lent (with few exceptions) reflecting the focus on repentance over celebration.

The altar hangings are purple, a color of Jesus’ royal kingship and of his royal priesthood, as He

embraces suffering and finally death on the cross for His people. The Mass starts with the Penitential Order, which focuses on confessing our sins and in receiving forgiveness from the very beginning of our worship.

The Gloria (“*Glory to God in the highest...*”) is not sung or said during Sundays of Lent but continues in use on solemnities and feasts and on special celebrations of a more solemn kind. All Alleluias are removed during Lent, reflecting that Lent is about penitence over celebration. You may notice that the hymns sung during Lent are different in character with words that draw us to the holiness of God and our need for God’s forgiveness and grace.

All of these changes to the appearance of our worship space and in the Liturgy during Lent are designed to get our attention and help us to engage the Lenten experience in a more present way. Hopefully our Lenten journey will take each of us out of our comfort zone and truly reflect on our lives and relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. May this year’s Lent be full of God’s grace and blessing! 



Ted Russell is active in several ministries of St. Stephen: RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults), Men’s Club, Welcome, Knights of Columbus, Pastoral Council Representative for Faith Formation.

SAINT SIDEBAR

Saint Gertrude the Great

Megan Glogowski



Known as one of the great mystics of the 13th century, St. Gertrude the Great was born on January 6th, 1256 in what is now Germany. Although not much is known about her childhood or family, her religious journey began following her enrollment in a monastery school in Helfta, Saxony.

From the young age of five, the monastery is where her foundation of religious studies began. She lived and studied under the watchful care of Abbess Gertrude of Hackerborn and her younger sister, St. Mechtilde, who shaped St. Gertrude's education and spiritual life. She excelled as a student, where she studied a wide variety of subjects and flourished in languages such as Latin. Eventually, St. Gertrude the Great joined her mentors in the religious life as a nun in the Benedictine Order at Helfta. She lived an exemplary life as a Benedictine nun.

Beyond her studies, St. Gertrude the Great centralized the power of prayer in her life. Her devotion to prayer transformed into visions during her mid-twenties, which carried on throughout her natural life.

Her religious dedication only increased following this development as her relationship with Christ was renewed.

No longer did secular school subjects consume her interest, rather she exclusively focused on theological studies of the scriptures and teachings from the Fathers of the Church. St. Gertrude, with assistance from her mentors and fellow nuns at Helfta, went on to write numerous theology pieces, all of which were written in Latin. Unfortunately, many of St. Gertrude's writings have been lost or heavily damaged by time.

As seen throughout her life and written teachings, she showed great sympathy for souls suffering in purgatory. Although not documented in her surviving works, Christ promised St. Gertrude that He would release 1,000 souls from purgatory with every prayer invoked in her name.

In November of 1301 or 1302, St. Gertrude the Great died, later Pope Clement XII canonized her in 1677. The Church celebrates her feast day on November 16th. With every prayer invoked in her name, we remember St. Gertrude's life and the power of prayer. 

Jesus Washes The Disciples' Feet

Denise Moyer



One year ago, on Holy Thursday night, I found myself preparing for Mass. At this special Mass one of our own precious clergy would be washing my feet as Jesus did for His disciples. Oh, it is so humbling and makes so real Jesus' love for each one of us.

To reflect and cherish each moment of the sacrifice that our dear Lord and Savior Jesus gave to us; from the Garden of Gethsemane, when no one could even stay awake with our Lord for only one hour, to the blessed and saving resurrection of Easter Sunday my heart is filled with overwhelming gratitude of His love for each one of us.

At the Last Supper, on the night before Jesus knew that He was going to die, He was about to be betrayed by Judas, one of His own disciples. Soon, Jesus would be beaten, made fun of, and nailed to a cross. Even though Jesus knew all these things, His disciples did not understand that He was going to die and then rise again. It's interesting to see what Jesus did for His disciples on His very last night with them.

Jesus got up from the meal. He wrapped a towel around His waist. He poured water into a large bowl. Then, He began to wash His disciples' feet. He dried them with the towel that was wrapped around Him. In those days, foot washing was needed in every home.

How loving, kind, and respectful would it be to wash the feet of our loved ones who would join us at your dinner table? How very honorable, intimate and humbling would this be with those who we share a meal with? Words cannot express the feelings and healing interaction this gesture of love would be among those that we love. Actions speak louder than words.

May there be healing within our families; relationships and restoration this Blessed Easter. Please join me in the Garden of Repose as we reflect on another precious outpouring of God's love for each one of us! Please pray for health, justice, and relationships restored in our families. GOD's will be done! AMEN!

JESUS, We Trust In YOU Always! 



Denise and Thomas Moyer has been parishioners since 2004.

Easter Sunday Alleluia

The Apostles were chosen by Christ to begin His Church. Peter, the one who would deny Him, was given the authority to lead the Church. Paul, who earlier had persecuted Christians, gave up a life of power and security to preach the Gospel. John, the first to realize that the Resurrection was real, taught us especially well about the Holy Eucharist.

The Church that GOD created has been saving souls ever since. While the world has changed in numerous ways, the Church has stayed constant, trusting the plan that God set forth.

The cold, dark manger was replaced by a cold, dark tomb. But the darkness didn't remain for long. Imagine the explosion of light that happened in the tomb at that moment.

VICTORY! And His victory is ours! 



Deacon Mike and his wife, Deanna moved to the area in the summer of last year, because moving to Florida in the summer is only slightly better than moving to the surface of the sun. Since moving, he has learned that God will put you in situations to better yourself.

Need to be more patient? You'll learn to be more patient driving in Tampa traffic.

When not at Church or home, you can find Deacon Mike and Deanna at the beach or at Disney, which is the happiest place on earth until lunch time, or the crowds are too big, or it's nap time. Then, get the Deacon out of there and get him his nap. Deacon Mike and Deanna have loved connecting with dozens of people at St. Stephen, and they look forward to meeting even more over the coming months. Pray constantly Church!

No Priests; No Sacraments

At St. Stephen, we sponsor the "Adopt a Seminarian" campaign, usually in the Fall in conjunction with National Vocations Awareness Week. This past November, an insert was placed in 950 bulletins, each containing a photo of one of our diocesan semi-narians, or our two seminarians in religious orders, or our one woman who is in discernment with the Salesians. Eighty-five percent of the inserts for "Adopt a Seminarian" left the church. It is hoped that everyone who got an insert is praying for their person in discernment. They surely need it during this time.

In February, we sponsor the "Feel the Love" campaign. After each Mass on Sunday in February, parishioners have the opportunity to write a note to each, any, or all of the seminarians from St. Stephen. Then we mail them to the seminarians in time for February 14. Imagine the love a seminarian feels when they are far from home and they receive a message of support from fellow parishioners they don't even know.

We are looking for those interested in being a part of this ministry. Contact Liz Hauer or email her at vocations@Ststephencatholic.org. 

Liz Hauer is a child of God, hoping people will pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and religious life. I'm not terribly interesting but God sure is!

MOVIE REVIEWS

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood

Dave Glogowski

The recently released movie, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, is not a biographical sketch of the beloved Mr. Fred Rogers as I originally thought.

This critically acclaimed and wonderful movie was inspired by Tom Junod's 1998 article "*Can You Say ... Hero?*" published in *Esquire* magazine. It tells a story of forgiveness and redemption between the journalist

and his dying father as he is researching a simple biographic sketch of Mr. Rogers. Throughout the movie, we learn about the character and life of Mr. Fred Rogers. His mild manner, soft spoken tone, and ever present attention to others' concerns defined him and the tone of the movie.

Fred Rogers was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1963 and charged to continue to minister through his iconic children's television shows *Misterogers* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. These shows never overtly evangelized his faith, but rather demonstrated kindness, encouragement,



and love while tackling challenging topics ranging from death and divorce to sharing and giving thanks. These timeless expressions are still as relevant and needed today as they were fifty years ago. His ability to reach out to people of all ages, ethnicities, and cultures was highlighted in the movie when an entire subway car began singing his memorable song "*Won't You Be My Neighbor?*".

Prayer was an important aspect of Fred Rogers' life. Every day he offered prayers on behalf of the hundreds of people he met or heard about. The movie demonstrates this very well and is something we can all learn to incorporate into our lives.

Fred Rogers lived a simple yet profoundly impactful life. He never sought fame. On the contrary, he was a meek and humble man who achieved so much through mere kindness and compassion. He once said he wanted to be remembered for being a compassionate human being. I think there is no doubt this is how he is remembered. ☀️

*Dave Glogowski serves as a Eucharistic Minister at St. Stephen.
He enjoys genealogy, writing, and programming websites.*

Harriet

Kathy Brown

Most of us have heard of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, but nothing about her faith in God. Harriet was born as Araminta (Minty) Ross, daughter of slaves Harriet Green and Ben Ross, around 1825. When Minty escaped the plantation, her owner was relentless in trying to catch her, with a posse of several men and dogs.

Her strong faith helped her to know which way to go each time that she was on the verge of being captured, and she made it on foot to freedom in Philadelphia, a distance of 100 miles. Minty would have "*spells*" in which she would hear God speaking to her.



When she later went back to rescue others, they would try to talk her out of the route God told her to go, but Harriet believed God and not man, and followed His word. Going the wrong way could result in death, or at least capture and torture. It took a very strong faith to follow God's directions when they did not seem to make sense to mere man.

The movie was inspiring, especially when Christians all over the world are being persecuted, even in the US. I enjoyed the story, and I think seeing this movie can move us to be stronger in our faith whenever we are faced with challenges. The movie contained some light language, violence and nudity, but should be okay for most older children. ☀️

*Kathy Brown is a conservative activist and the owner of a pet care business.
She is a Spirited Toastmaster and a member of the Prison ministry.*

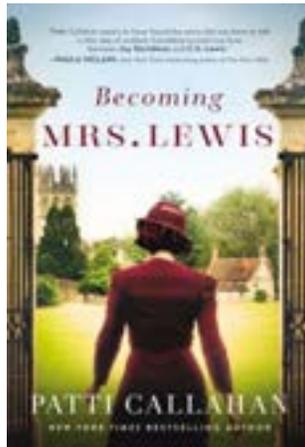
BOOK REVIEW

Becoming Mrs. Lewis by Patti Callahan

Caryl Nolan

Becoming Mrs. Lewis, a historical biographical fiction authored by Patti Callahan, is a story based on the real-life woman, Joy Davidman, who was seeking spiritual advice from C. S. Lewis—known as Jack—and found love. Joy, turned to communism in college in the late 1940's, married another fellow communist and author, and soon after had two boys. Her husband, once married, wanted a "typical" 1950's wife to do the housework and care for the kids. He stayed at home and wrote books. Along the way both Joy and her husband became Christians, but this leaves her with a lot of questions. After reading Narnia and another book by C.S. Lewis, she sends this don of Oxford a letter filled with questions about Christian spirituality. He answers her back. This starts a wonderful communication by mail that lasted for years.

In the meantime, Joy's marriage is crumbling as is her physical and mental health. She takes a few months to travel alone to London to stay with an author friend and recuperate.



She also finally meets this wise man, C.S. "Jack" Lewis. Joy travels home to America to find her husband wants to leave her. She takes her boys and travels back to England again, facing poverty and heartbreak, discovering friendship and a deeper faith, and against all odds, finding a love that even a threat of death could not destroy.

Though many of us are familiar with the Narnia stories and movies and Lewis' many Christian writings, few of us know

that a woman, whom he grew to love as a friend and finally near her death, as a husband, had so much influence upon his autobiography and religious writings which she edited.

Joy is a brilliant writer, an intensely independent mother, and an ardent woman of the 1950's when women were not to have a voice; yet Joy changes the life and writings of a respected author. *"Patti Callahan breathes life into this fascinating woman whose thirst for knowledge leads her to buck tradition at every turn."* Diane Chamberlin, author of the Dream Daughter. 

Caryl Nolan, 2018 Angel Award Winner, serves as an usher and a greeter.

Parish Life

FEBRUARY

- 17-19 Parish Mission, MC, TBD
- 26 **Ash Wednesday, first day of Lent**
Mass 8:30am, Noon, 4:30pm and 7pm, MC
- 28-April 3 Fridays during Lent
Stations of the Cross 7pm, MC
Fish Frys 4:30-7pm, FLC
- 29 Confirmation, MC, TBD

MARCH

- 8 Daylight Savings Time, change clocks; Spring ahead
- 21 Family Ministry Night 5:30pm, Open to families with children, FLC
- 28 & 29 Men's Welcome 2.0 Weekend

APRIL

- 2 Penance Service, 7pm, MC
- 4 **Palm Sunday Vigil Mass** 4:30pm, MC
- 5 **Palm Sunday**
Mass 7:30, 9:30 & 11:30am, MC
Life Teen 5:30pm, MC

- 7 Chrism Mass at the Cathedral of St.Jude, 11:30am, streamed - www.dosp.org
- 9 **Holy Thursday**
Prayer Service 8:30am, CHP
Mass of the Lord's Supper 7pm, MC
Altar of Repose 8pm - Midnight, FLC
- 10 **Good Friday**
Prayer Service 8:30am, CHP
Stations of the Cross 12pm, MC
Chaplet of Divine Mercy 2:30pm, MC
Veneration of the Cross 3pm & 7pm, MC
- 11 **Holy Saturday**
Prayer Service 8:30am, CHP
Blessing of Easter Baskets 11am, CHP
Easter Vigil 8pm, MC
- 12 **Easter Sunday**
Mass 7:30, 9:30 & 11:30am, MC & FLC (No Mass at 5:30pm)
- 17 Outreach Ministry Wine and Cheese Party for recently registered St. Stephen members, TBD

- 18 Family Ministry Night, TBD
- 25 & 26 Women's Welcome 2.0 Weekend

MAY

- 1 May Crowning after Morning Mass in Mary's Garden
- 2 & 9 First Communion Masses, TBD
- 3 May Crowning at all Masses, MC
- 10 Mother's Day, TBD
- 16 Family Ministry Night, TBD
- 21 8th Grade Graduation of St Stephen students, TBD
- 25 Memorial Day - Office Closed
- 29 Last day of school for St. Stephen students
- 31 **Pentecost Sunday**

MC - Main Church
CHP - Chapel
FLC - Family Life Center
TBD - To Be Determined

Editor's Note



Your BLESSINGS magazine is put together by your Quarterly Blessings Ministry team, made up of volunteer parishioners. (Quarterly Blessings is the former title of your magazine) It takes twelve weeks, from start to mailbox to create it, and believe me when I tell you that it is not a time burden on any one of us. While the magazine is huge undertaking, it's like how one eats an elephant: one bite at a time. And this is a very small elephant.

First bite: Our members meet just four times a year (an easy commitment) to brain-storm themes, ideas and stories for our next issue. We generally don't write the stories. We get the stories and photos from all of you, our parishioners. Check out the tagline at the end of each story.

Second bite: Each member is asked to contact 1-3 parishioners who might have a story which they are willing to share based on our brainstorming ideas. The authors can be anonymous, if they wish. The writer/parishioner usually has 2-3 weeks to write the 350-word story, and don't forget the photos! Not a writer? No worries! Many of our members would enjoy writing your story for you!

Third bite: Once the stories are received, we have members with a knack for editing (mostly spelling, punctuation and grammar). We don't edit content, that's left to the writer.

Fourth bite: After the story is edited, it then goes to the layout editor, who makes all the photos and stories fit into an engaging presentation. This is kind of big deal, as we want our readers to value, and hopefully bless others by sharing.

Fifth bite: When the layout is complete, the preliminary copy is sent out to all of our members for the last proofreading (a virtual sneak peek before the final goes to the printer).

Sixth bite: From the printer, it is sent to the mail house which makes sure it reaches your mailbox. Ta-Da!

Can you eat a very small elephant?

If you, too, would like a preview of the magazine before everyone else, contact us at www.QB@StStephenCatholic.org to join our ministry.

The results are always an abundance of BLESSINGS!  Heike House

Blessings

Our mission is met when one person reading the Blessings magazine, 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 will gladly be returned upon request.

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COME HOME FOR EASTER

Worship With Us!

Palm Sunday

Saturday, April 4

Vigil Mass 4:30pm, Church

Sunday, April 5

Mass 7:30, 9:30 & 11:30am, Church

Life Teen 5:30pm, Church

Tuesday, April 7

Chrism Mass at the

Cathedral of St. Jude, 11:30am,
streamed - www.dosp.org

Holy Week Triduum

Thursday, April 9

Prayer Service 8:30am, Chapel

Mass of the Lord's Supper

7pm, Church

Altar of Repose, 8pm - Midnight,

Family Life Center (FLC)

Good Friday, April 10

Prayer Service 8:30am, Chapel

Stations of the Cross 12pm, Church

Chaplet of Divine Mercy

2:30pm, Church

Veneration of the Cross

3pm & 7pm, Church

Holy Saturday, April 11

Prayer Service 8:30am, Chapel

Blessing of the Easter Baskets

11 am, Chapel

Easter Vigil 8pm, Church

Easter Sunday, April 12

Mass 7:30, 9:30 & 11:30am,

Church & FLC

St. Stephen Catholic Church

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Riverview, FL 33569

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