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Helping Parishioners Feel Welcome

THE

Stillwater

CATHOLIC

HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE

*PERFORMS KEY ROLE OF EVANGELIZATION
AS OUR FAITH COMMUNITY GROWS*

Most of us equate evangelization with foreign missions and outreach to the poor and less fortunate, or with verbal communication and actual preaching of the Gospel. But in reality, evangelization occurs in many different ways and sometimes hidden forms. Sometimes, says Hospitality Committee member Toni Smith, evangelization comes through a hot cup of coffee or a freshly baked donut. For in drawing people together, these simple pleasures help our parishioners experience the joy and love of Christ.

“It’s so much more than the donuts,” Toni says. “They’re just a tool we’re using for evangelization. We’re working to foster an environment where each person who walks through our doors can feel the love of Christ.”



(From left) Toni Smith and Cathy Albright

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MASS REVERENCE AND ETIQUETTE

For many of us, when we are invited to a wedding, one of our first considerations is “what am I going to wear?” We wouldn’t think of showing up at a formal event in our workout clothes. How many of us search for just the right outfit to wear to our annual office party or on a date? Compare that to how much thought we put into what we wear to Mass on Sunday.

How we dress for an occasion indicates the importance that we place upon that particular celebration. At Mass, we encounter God through the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Dressing appropriate-

ly for Mass is one way that we show respect both for God and for our faith family. And this respect is important at all Masses – no matter what time of day or night.

Think about what you are teaching your children when you all wear your “Sunday clothes” to Mass. You are reminding them that Mass is a special celebration. After all, we are going to Jesus’ house.

Some people may quickly point out that Mass shouldn’t be a fashion show – a place to show off your finery – and they are right! We also know that some parishioners come to Mass on

their way home from work, and they certainly should not feel embarrassed about arriving at Mass in their work clothes. And no one should ever stay away from Mass because of simplicity of clothing.

But one rule should apply in all instances – our attire at Mass should always be modest. Our clothing should never distract others from what we are gathered together to celebrate – the life, death and resurrection of our Lord.

The celebration of Mass is always a holy occasion and thus should be treated in the most holy manner – in body, mind and spirit.





PENTECOST AND STEWARDSHIP

TONGUES OF FIRE

SHOULD PUT HANDS TO WORK

Basketball sportscasters often describe a player who seemingly can't miss a basket as being "on fire." Sometimes, we say that a person is "fired up" when he or she shows passion about some topic or situation. And rambunctious toddlers often earn the title "fireball."

Though it's difficult to show any real etymological proof, it's easy to imagine that phrases like these take their origins from the Biblical account of Pentecost. According to the book of Acts, Pentecost — literally "50 days" — was the day when tongues of fire descended upon Mary and the apostles, rendering them so confident and excited about Jesus that they wanted to tell the whole world about Him. It was the day they got "fired up" about the Gospel. And what better than a flame to symbolize this new burst of energy!

Pentecost — which falls on May 20 this year — has become so important in the eyes of Christians that it is known as the birthday of the Church. The Holy Spirit — though active even in Old Testament times — suddenly blazed into action with an unprecedented sign of power. It was on that day, in the upper room, when the apostles' faint-hearted *assembly* — Greek *ecclesia* — was transformed into *Ecclesia*, the Church. Within hours, maybe minutes, the apostles discovered that their little band was responsible for the most ambitious marketing campaign the world has ever seen — "tell *everyone* about Jesus, ASAP."

How did they know this was the plan? If it wasn't made clear by the sudden dissipation of their fearfulness, it was immediately confirmed by the fact that the onlookers in the streets heard the apostles in their own languages. This remarkable detail, scholars believe, is a testament that the

Church is both *universal* and *missionary*. That is, the Church is for everyone, but it's up to current members to spread the message.

Consider for a moment if the apostles had not responded by spilling into the streets to tell passersby about Jesus. What if they had brushed off the gift of the Spirit like an errant firefly? Or, an equally frightening alternative, what if they ran about haphazardly telling everyone about Jesus, without rallying around Peter, "who stood up with the Eleven" and proclaimed "in a loud voice" one *single* Gospel message to the crowds?

These scenarios should give us pause. To receive a gift, but not use it — or to use it, but with little judgment — changes the whole world. It's that dramatic. We too should listen to St. Peter when he says, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pt. 4:10). If the Holy Spirit was able to light a fire under the apostles, it can happen to us, as well!



THE NEW PARISHIONER COMMITTEE

EXTENDING A WARM WELCOME TO

For parishioner Jessica Mitchell Trojan, providing a warm and hospitable welcome to our newest parishioners is an essential ministry.

“I want them to feel comfortable, I want them to know that they’re cared for, they’re wanted and that this is a home they can come to,” Jessica says. “I’m hopeful that these newcomers will want to come back because they feel like they belong.”

Jessica serves as the Co-Chair — along with Mona Pratt — of our recently formed New Parishioner Committee. Both women come from different backgrounds. Jessica spent a number of years moving quite frequently as a travel nurse and has only been a part of the Catholic community in Stillwater for the past year and a half. Mona, on the other hand, has been an active parishioner for the past 30 years, serving in various aspects of parish hospitality.

“It’s challenging when you want to get involved in a community — it can be challenging because you don’t know very many people,” Jessica says. “When you feel like you’re a stranger, it’s so important to have a church that you can go to, where you have a place, that you can go and feel welcomed, no matter where you

are in life, no matter where you are in the world.”

The New Parishioner Committee hopes to help newcomers feel welcome and find ways to become engaged in the life of the parish — through informative Welcome Packets, follow-up calls to answer questions, small-group gatherings to meet others and learn about opportunities in the parish, and more.

“We want them to feel welcome,” Mona says. “When you feel welcome, you have a tendency to be more engaged.

“Jesus said that we’re supposed to welcome everyone, it’s what we do,” she adds.

“We’re hopeful to give them a really warm welcome to our parish and our community — and not just to welcome them, but to keep them coming,” Jessica says.

Similar to the New Parishioner Committee, our newly formed Ambassador Ministry hopes to help people feel welcome and familiar with our new site. Joe Haney serves as the Coordinator of the Ambassador Ministry, which currently includes 30 people who have been trained to give tours of the church, drawing people’s attention to the incredible and sacred features of our new parish home.



(From left) Mona Pratt and Jessica Trojan

“We have given hundreds of people tours of the church — more non-Catholic than Catholic, which we think is great,” Joe says. “The ambassadors work hard to share the beauty of this church with the community.

“We’re really proud to give the tours because it opens our church to the community,” he adds. “We have given tours to cradle Catholics

TEE AND AMBASSADOR MINISTRY

TO ALL IN OUR NEW PARISH HOME



Joe Haney

“It’s challenging when you want to get involved in a community — it can be challenging because you don’t know very many people. When you feel like you’re a stranger, it’s so important to have a church that you can go to; where you have a place, that you can go and feel welcomed, no matter where you are in life, no matter where you are in the world.” — Jessica Mitchell Trojan

symbolism in the church.”

Although these two ministries may serve our parish in different ways, in both cases, the heart of their mission is the same — welcoming people to our church so that they can journey closer to God alongside our parish family.

“I have been a stranger many times, as a traveling nurse, and whenever I went to church, it was instant,” Jessica says. “They welcomed me, I felt comfortable, I was in the house of God. I want our church to be that way, I want people to come and feel welcome and want to come back [and grow] closer in their faith and with God.”

“All we want to do is share

the beauty of this church and this building, but if people pick up the Catholic traditions we have, they’re more likely to want to come,” Joe says. “We feel like we’re doing a lot of quiet evangelism through the beauty of this building. All you need to do is show them the beauty of the church — it’s enough to be inspirational to people.”

Jessica encourages fellow parishioners to consider becoming involved in serving our newcomers.

“It’s going to be really exciting bringing new people to our church and showing them what we have to offer,” she says. “I just encourage people to volunteer.”

and others and when they leave the tour, they are amazed at how much they’ve learned. There are so many hidden treasures in this church. It is worth the tour to understand the

Those who are interested in serving as part of our New Parishioner Committee are encouraged to contact the parish office at 405-372-6886. Parishioners are also invited and encouraged to take a tour of the church with one of our ambassadors. Tours take place daily at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., as well as after Sunday Masses. Tours begin at the parish welcome center, on the southeast corner of the property. Please call the office with questions.



STEWARDSHIP

LIVING IN LOVE

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him” (1 Jn 4:16). As Christ’s disciples, we are called to live lives of love. When asked which commandment is the most important, Jesus answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.” He immediately followed this command with, “Love your neighbor as yourself. No commandment is greater than these” (Mk 12:29-31).

The life of a Christian is, essentially, all about love! This doesn’t mean that Christ preached an abstract Gospel, or that we need to love simply because “it feels good.” The reality is quite the opposite. Indeed, Christ’s Gospel of love is one of dramatic action, and living in that love calls each of us to action.

What is this love, then, of which Christ speaks? How are we to live it out today?

Christ, the God who, as John tells us, “is love” Himself, came to Earth out of pure love for us. So that we might have everlasting life, Christ took the punishment for our sins. He, the Lord of all creation, was mocked, scourged and

ultimately murdered on the cross to atone for the sins that we, His creatures, have committed. Now, that’s love! And it is the love that we are called to imitate throughout our lives.

Notice the selfless nature of Jesus’ act. He gained nothing in return for what He did, and He calls us to love in the same manner. How do we do that here and now? Do we die on our own personal crosses? The answer, in a way, is “yes.” We don’t necessarily die on the wood of the literal cross as Christ did, but we must die to self for the sake of others. That is the love of Christ, and that is the love He calls us to every day. If we want to truly love God, we must love others. God Himself showed us the reality of this need when he commanded that we love our neighbor just as we love Him. And then Christ explained, “Whatever you do to the least of those, you do to me.” If we are called to love God, then we are called to love our neighbor, for Christ resides in each one of us. It must be a love like Christ has shown us – one of selflessness. We should want

for nothing more than the good of our neighbor.

There are many ways that we can show our love to others, particularly through prayer and service. Here at our parish, there are many ministries that offer us the opportunity to serve our neighbors. If we offer a little bit of time, we can help out in the parish office doing seemingly menial yet important tasks, such as stuffing inserts into the bulletins so that fellow parishioners are aware of news and events within the parish. Those of us with an aptitude for teaching may be called to serve others through RCIA or our Religious Education program. There is also always a need for more lectors and Eucharistic Ministers to aid the priest in bringing Christ to other parishioners at Mass.

These are but a few of the countless opportunities we have to serve our parish and local community. However we are called to do so, one thing is for certain: the love of Christ calls us to action. How will we show our love for God this year? Remember, “Whatever you do for the least of those, you do for me.”

GREETER MINISTRY HELPING PARISHIONERS FEEL WELCOME

Sometimes, all it takes to set the tone for the day is one simple interaction. Positive or negative, we have all experienced how the simple actions of those we encounter in public can affect us. One ministry wants to make sure the first interaction you experience at St. Francis is a happy and positive one.

The Greeter Ministry is a group of about 40 parishioners of all ages who take pride in welcoming other parishioners and guests alike to each Mass at St. Francis. Kevin Fowler, a greeter who helped start the ministry, says being at the door to say “hello” and pass out bulletins as the Mass ends has ignited the energy of the assembly and helped enhance communication between parishioners.

“The team of greeters gets much more out of it than we give,” Kevin says. “It’s been an opportunity to learn so much more about people, their families and their needs. We get to know their businesses, what their concerns are.”

Michelle Slovak, a greeter at the 8 a.m. Sunday Mass and ministry scheduler, says she draws upon



“It’s been an opportunity to learn so much more about people, their families and their needs,” says greeter Kevin Fowler.

her experience in the hospitality industry by making an effort to greet parishioners by name.

“When people come to church, you sometimes expect it to be quiet and you don’t make a lot of contact at first,” she says. “Now we try to learn people’s names and I feel very strongly about that. We want to know who people are and people respond to their name. When you’re able to remember

their name or call them by name, that’s a warm fuzzy on the inside. We want to step out of what people think and show them that we’re reaching out and letting them know we’re glad they’re there.”

As St. Francis merged with St. John, Kevin says the chance to use the Greeter Ministry as a conduit for sharing information about events, schedule changes, and other ministries, has also provided an additional line of communication.

“It was godsend when the days came upon us that we were to merge,” he says. “There was that one open avenue of communication so that the greeters became more of an important way to merge the two churches.”

Michelle says she hopes the ministry helps all parishioners get a sense of warmth that touches on something unspoken that can only come when we let the Holy Spirit work through us in the name of stewardship.

“I find myself saying, ‘Welcome to St. Francis, we’re glad you’re here’ and I’m thinking ‘I’m glad I’m here,’” she says.

This wonderful ministry of hospitality can always use additional smiling faces at all Masses. For more information on how you can get involved, please contact the parish office at 405-372-6886.

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HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE *continued from front cover*

To this end, the Hospitality Committee works together to host fellowship after each Sunday liturgy, serving specially ordered coffee, fresh pastries and fruit. And while it might be the food that initially attracts people, the ultimate goal is to bring our entire faith community closer together by providing regular opportunities for fellowship and sharing.

“We’ve got this brand-new church, combining two parishes, and we’re really trying to bring those two communities together,” Toni says. “We want St. Francis to truly become a home away from home for its parishioners and this is one way to help accomplish that.”

Committee members also organize an information table for both visitors and new parishioners, sharing with them the many different resources and ministries available through St. Francis Xavier Parish. This, Toni says, helps further plug people into parish life, making them feel more a part of the faith community.

“We want to make sure that new and old parishioners alike know all that we have here to offer at St.

Francis Xavier,” Toni says. “We want them to know that this isn’t just an old church that only has Mass and Confession. We have something for everybody here and we want to be sure they know that — to just really reach out to and evangelize our parish family.”

Having formerly been a parishioner at St. John’s, Toni feels that her participation in the Hospitality Committee has been pivotal in her own journey. It has made the transition much easier, helping her quickly feel at home in the new church and eager to become even more active within it.

“I’ve made so many friends here at St. Francis through this ministry,” Toni says. “I’ve felt a new kinship with these women, which has been such a blessing. It was really hard for me to leave St. John’s. That’s where I converted and where all my kids were baptized. But meeting these women and becoming part of this new church through the Hospitality Committee has made it so much easier than I thought it would be. I’m truly excited to be here and to be part of this great movement of evangelization.”

As our faith community continues to grow, parishioners are encouraged to get involved in the Hospitality Committee, helping to ensure that each person who walks through our church doors feels welcomed and loved. To join, please contact either Cathy Albright at 405-747-9824 or Toni Smith at 405-334-1165.