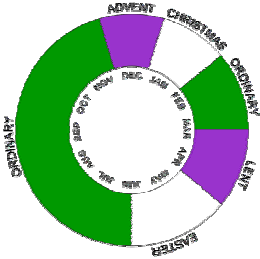


SPECIAL
EXPANDED
ISSUE

“The Canticle”



PARISH SURVEY SPECIAL EDITION — Fall 2005



Liturgical
Year
Calendar

We are in ...
“Ordinary Time”

“Christianity is not a philosophical speculation.

It is not a construction of our mind.

Christianity is not our work.

It is a Revelation.

It is a message that has been consigned to us, and we have no right to reconstruct it as we like or choose.”

—Pope Benedict XVI

“The Christian faith has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.” — G.K. Chesterton

“Parish Viewpoint Reflected in Parish Pastoral Council Survey Statistics”

SAINT FRANCIS PARISH
PASTORAL COUNCIL REPORT
“Summary of Parish Surveys”

Earlier this year the Parish Pastoral Council conducted a survey of parishioners regarding the status of parish life.

It was our intention that the survey would provide the council with valuable information regarding the status of parish life at Saint Francis so that we may be able to identify and address any short term or long term issues facing our parish family.

The council is pleased to announce that 220 people responded to the survey providing us with very useful information. In addition to the surveys, council members conducted personal interviews with more than 50 parishioners.

From the information we gathered in the process, the parish’s strengths were identified as:

1. The parish’s spirituality,
2. The celebration of Mass,
3. The parish office and staff,
4. The social activities offered at the parish, and
5. Confidence that the monetary offerings are being used well.

93% of parishioners who completed that survey stated that parish life meets the principles of the parish mission statement. 83% of the parishioners who completed the survey are frequently or almost always confident that the monetary offerings are being used well by the parish. 91% of the parishioners responding stated that the Mass schedule meets the needs of the parish as a whole

While overall the parish surveys yielded positive

feedback regarding the status of parish life, the Council has identified several areas for further review.

One such area includes increasing the involvement of the youth and young adults in the parish. We will also look at ways to increase evangelization to families who are enrolled in the CCD program, but who do not attend Mass regularly.

We will also explore ways to improve communication between the various parish ministries, as well as ways to encourage others in the parish to get involved within the various ministries and activities taking place at the parish.

The Pastoral Council is grateful to everyone who participated in the process and wants to remind all parishioners that the Council always welcomes feedback, suggestions and concerns from parishioners.

Please feel free to contact any member of Parish Pastoral Council by telephone, e-mail, postal mail or in person after Mass. We welcome your comments and suggestions. (Their names are listed in Father Blaney’s introductory remarks which head the survey results –Ed.)

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“Taking The Parish Pulse”

Rev. Robert M. Blaney

Pastor

Last fall, I asked the Parish Pastoral Council to initiate an assessment of the parish. They took on this project with tremendous zeal and love for the people of Saint Francis Parish. As a major component of this project, they conducted a parish wide survey last March. The results were very helpful in determining an accurate sense of how the parish is doing in light of its mission. You should know that the members of the council spent a couple of months just working on the questions and format for the survey. They wanted the questions to evoke the kind of response that would be helpful in assessing the parish. As you know, the survey was conducted over several weeks. Over 200 responses were collected. In addition, in the weeks following the survey, the council members each interviewed a number of parishioners to glean different insights into the life of the parish. Having collected and analyzed the information, the council members met to discuss an assessment, which they gave me in June. Their report and my responses follow in this newsletter. I want to thank them for the great effort they made in responding to my request for the assessment. In fulfilling my role as pastor, their support is a tremendous source of grace and help to me in my ministry here.

This council is made up of very talented, caring, loving, prayerful and insightful people. They represent the parish well. I am very proud of them and consider it a privilege to work with them so closely for the good of our faith community. My sincere thanks to these dedicated souls for their efforts on behalf of the parish...

Kevin Rauseo (Vice-chair)

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Brian O’Connor | Joe Day | Sharon Coram | Pauline Nutter | Debbie Hovanasian |
| Peggy Hill | Louise Daigle | Tim Smith | Collette Piche | Mary Jo Sudol |
| Joan Vinal | Kathy Long | Janice Ledbetter | Linda Bendzewicz | |

“St. Francis Parish is a caring, vibrant, involved family of believers... A family that thrives through shared experiences, common beliefs, and Christian service.”



Our mission is to faithfully fulfill the teachings of Jesus Christ. Centered in celebration of the Sunday Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, we encourage prayer, religious vocations, parish involvement, civic awareness and nurturing the God-given talents and gifts of all. We are committed to creating an atmosphere which will enhance spiritual development. Our challenge is to unify and strengthen the bonds of our parish family and reach out and welcome others into our faith community. As disciples of Christ, we will strive to minister to one another so we might provide dignity and improve the quality of life for all those we serve.

—From our Parish Mission Statement



“The Canticle”

<i>Publisher</i>	<i>Editor-in-Chief</i>	<i>Associate Editor</i>
Rev. Robert M. Blaney	Michael Cockrell	Michelle Cockrell

Contributing Writers:

Kathy Long, Collette Piche, Linda Bendzewicz, Sharon Coram, Kevin Rauseo. Brian O’Connor, Joan Vinal, Jessica Smith

Published quarterly with additional supplements during Christmas and Easter

Father Blaney Responds...

Question 1: Mission Statement

Ninety-three percent (93%) of parishioners responding to the survey felt that the community life of the parish almost always depicts what is in the Mission Statement. Respondents' reflections were favorable.

Question 2: Sunday Eucharist

Eighty-one percent (81%) of parishioners responded that they feel that the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is frequently and/or is almost always vibrant, reverent and participative. The survey revealed the importance of the music ministries and the importance of including children in the Sunday Eucharist.

Question 3: Homilies

Fifty-four percent (54%) of the parishioners responded that the Homilies almost always and/or frequently help them in their daily life, while forty-one percent (41%) of respondents feel that the Homilies sometimes help them in their daily life. Additionally, some respondents reflected that the manner in which a Homily is delivered has an influence on the degree to which they feel a helpful effect.

Question 4a: Sunday Worship

Eighty-eight percent (88%) of the parishioners responding felt that the parish addresses Sunday Worship well and/ or very well. When reflecting on the how well the parish addresses Sunday Worship, some of the respondents cited the importance of music and singing.

Question 4b: Reconciliation

Sixty-two percent (62%) of all respondents feel that the parish addresses Reconciliation well and/or very well. Twenty-one percent (21%) of the respondents feel that the parish addresses Reconciliation moderately well. Respondents' reflections included the need for more education and encouragement in regard to receiving the Sacrament.

Question 4c: Spiritual Development

Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the survey's respondents feel that the parish addresses Spiritual Development well and/or very well. Twenty-two percent (22%) responded that the parish addresses Spiritual Development moderately well. Respondents' reflections cited the need for re-instituting a Spiritual Development Committee as a way to involve more of the laity and to develop more adult education programs.

Question 4d: Religious Education Program

Fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents feel that the parish addresses the Religious Education Program well and/or very well. Thirty-four percent (34%) of the respondents had No Opinion. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the people responding to the survey were over age fifty (50) and, therefore, may have very little or no exposure to the Religious Education Program.

"I am pleased that our efforts to fulfill the promises stated in our Mission Statement are in keeping with the expectations of the Parish Community. We will continue to focus on events and opportunities which strengthen our spiritual life in the Church."

"The Sunday Mass is the most important activity in the life of our parish. As such, it is my first priority as pastor. I try to provide for vibrant, meaningful and engaging liturgies. Music is such an important part of our prayer. We are blessed with generous and talented people who lead us in song. I want to support them in every way so that all of us will pray and praise better. I am always looking for better ways to engage our children in the Christian practice of worship."

"I put great effort into preparing homilies for Sunday Masses. Preaching is central to my ministry as priest and is critical in the formation of a parish. I have listened to excellent homilies, and I have listened to lousy homilies. I know the affect each can have. Personally, I take advantage of books, articles and workshops on preaching. Critical and constructive feedback from parishioners is helpful to me."

"I would ask that you look back at my response to Question #2..." It was Saint Augustine who is thought to have said, 'He who sings, prays twice!' Our choir under the able direction of David Keefe harmonizes beautifully with the words of St. Augustine in voice and philosophy."

"Only a small number of our parishioners avail themselves of this sacrament. In terms of our salvation, nothing in the parish concerns me more than this. I have written and preached on countless occasions on the absolute necessity of Reconciliation and will keep doing so. Perhaps our greatest challenge as a faith community will be making an attempt to get over whatever hinders us from this sacrament."

"Retreats, individual spiritual direction, literature, spiritual conferences, Evening Prayer, devotions, ample opportunities for Eucharist, classes on prayer and other areas of Christian formation are just some of the ways in which the parish is trying to help each parishioner to grow in faith."

"Generations of Faith seems to have met with success after the first year. It is obvious to me, though, that our parish needs to continue with individual classroom session, at least for the near future. This will always be an area of challenge for our parish, and it should be. We are very fortunate to have an excellent religious education director and assistant and very generous catechists. In addition, we have a core that helps to prepare the Generation of Faith sessions. There have been more opportunities for adult education which will continue."

Question 4e: Youth Program

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the survey respondents feel that the parish addresses Youth Programs either *moderately well* (12%), *well* (17%), or *very well* (24%). Forty-two percent (42%) of the respondents had *No Opinion*. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the people responding to the survey were over age fifty (50) and, therefore, may have very little or no exposure to the Youth Programs.

Question 4f: Pastoral Care

Fifty-six percent (56%) of the people responding feel that the parish addresses Pastoral Care either *well* or *very well*. Respondents' reflections were favorable. Thirty-two percent (32%) of the respondents had *No Opinion*, with many people responding that they do not have a need for Pastoral Care or they did not have a knowledge of what entails Pastoral Care.

Question 4g: Social Activities

Eighty percent (80%) of the respondents feel that the parish addresses Social Activities *well* and/or *very well*. Some respondents shared their thoughts regarding the need to encourage greater parishioner participation.

Question 4h: Evangelization

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses evangelization *very well* or *well*. Thirty-six percent (36%) had *No Opinion*. The survey revealed a need for the parish to reach out to those who do not attend Mass regularly, as well as reaching out to those who are looking for a new parish.

Question 4i: Parish Office

Eighty percent (80%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the parish office *well* and/or *very well*. Six percent (6%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the parish office moderately well. Eleven percent (11%) had *No Opinion*.

Question 4j: Facilities/Grounds

Ninety-two percent (92%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the facilities/building/ grounds *well* and/or *very well*. The survey revealed a need for more parking spaces.

Question 4k: Vocations to Religious

Fifty-one percent (51%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the Vocations to Religious *moderately well* or *very well*. Forty-four percent (44%) had no opinion. The survey revealed a need to bring Vocation awareness to the teens within the parish. *The Peer Leader program did very well our first year, engaging 19 high school students (11th and 12th grade) for monthly gatherings of prayer. There does not appear to be a need for social gatherings of youth, as every attempt draws few, if any young people. The Confirmation program for 9th and 10th grade is going quite well. Our team has given great effort in reworking the program during the past 2 years."*

"The Peer Leader program did very well our first year, engaging 19 high school students (11th and 12th grade) for monthly gatherings of prayer. There does not appear to be a need for social gatherings of youth, as every attempt draws few, if any young people. The Confirmation program for 9th and 10th grade is going quite well. Our team has given great effort in reworking the program during the past 2 years."

"I have been making greater efforts to visit the sick and home-bound. Many times, I never hear of a person's hospitalization until after they are home. I have noticed a significant increase in the number of persons requesting the Sacrament of the Sick. St. Francis partners with local parishes for pastoral care at Lowell General and Saint Memorial Hospital. Also, we have worked to improve our pastoral care for young parents and engaged couples, creating new programs of outreach and education."

"With whatever else we can say about St. Francis Parish, it is fun. There are many opportunities for social gatherings and fellowship which are essential for the overall mission of the parish. I am so impressed with the talents our parishioners possess in putting together events which are inviting, relaxing and refreshing. This is a real strength for the community."

"My hope for this year is to begin a program to follow up with young parents who recently have had a baby baptized. Many of them do not come to Church, yet, but the fact of asking for Baptism, show themselves to be persons of faith."

"The parish staff is one of the greatest assets of the parish. This is a dedicated and faith filled group of men and women who are very committed to the life of the parish and the mission of the Church. I am very proud to serve with them and grateful, knowing full well that I could not minister to the parish without them."

"God has given us a magnificent setting for our Church and parish offices (not to mention the rectory!) The building is now 10 years old. It has been maintained quite well. Some money has been set aside for scheduled projects anticipated in the next 10 years. Plans are underway for the expansion of the parking lot. Some parishioners generously give of their time and talent to keep the property looking attractive with flowers and plants."

"Vocations to the priesthood and religious life is a very serious issue facing the Church today. The few entering seminaries and religious life does not speak well of the number of ministers who will be available in the future. On the parish level, I think there are a number of potential candidates for the seminary. I have spoken directly with them. There is little encouragement for them, however. Also, I have invited young religious women to the parish, particularly to work with the confirmation students to expose them such a vocation."

Question 5:**Where do you get information about what goes on in the parish?**

Bulletin: 175 responses

Website: 52 responses

Newsletter: 92 responses

Mass Announcements: 124 responses

Newspaper: 26 responses

Word of Mouth: 87 responses

"No matter how hard we try, there does not seem to be a very affective method means of communication about what is happening in the parish. I am grateful for those who provide for this newsletter as it makes possible the opportunity to get news to every registered household."

Question 6: Mass Schedule

Ninety-one percent (91%) of the parishioners responded that the Mass schedule meets the needs of the parish as a whole. The survey revealed that the Mass schedule reflects the needs of the parishioners as well as the clergy.

"I recognize that the present schedule is not to everyone's liking, I think it responds well to the present needs of our parish community. We are fortunate to be in a location where there are many other parishes in close proximity offering alternative times for Eucharist."

Question 7: Monetary Offering

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the parishioners responded they are confident that their monetary offering is being used well. Eight percent (8%) had No Opinion. The survey results recommend that the fundraising proceeds be announced. The results also recommend that the parish be given details of where the second collection is being sent.

"In the last few years, I have learned that monies entrusted to me for the welfare of the parish represent the souls who worship here. I try to handle the money with the level of respect I give parishioners themselves. I am aided by an excellent finance council as well as the many resources offered by the Archdiocesan chancery. As a community, there is an immediate need to look at the revenue of the parish. We have a trim budget as it is. With more education, hopefully, each of us can begin to think differently as to how we support the parish."

Question 8: Various Ministries

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the parishioners responded that the parish offers sufficient opportunities to join the various parish ministries. The survey results recommend that the parish hold a Ministry Fair for new parishioners as well as publish a listing of people to contact for each ministry.

"Aside from asking people for financial contribution, we ask for some of their time. People here are very generous with their time and are quick to volunteer when there is a need. The challenge before us is how to invite other into the work of the parish. Many parishioners are waiting to be asked for their help."

Question 9a: The Elderly

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the needs of the elderly *frequently and/or almost always*. Thirty-two percent (32%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need for the parish to make known to the parishioners the support the parish has to offer for the elderly.

"With always room for improvement, our parish does well in reaching out to the elderly. We have many parishioners who visit and bring Holy Communion to those unable to come to Church. Our parish visits Fairhaven Nursing Home each week. Our handicap accessible Church building help in enabling people to enter with ease. We have improved the sound system and have included individual aides for those hard-of-hearing."

Question 9b: The Youth

Sixty-two percent (62%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the needs of the youth *frequently and/or almost always*. Twenty-five percent (25%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results recommend that the parish establish a Youth Ministry. The parishioners would like to see continued youth involvement in the parish.

"See my previous response to 'Question 4e' above."

Question 9c: New Parishioners

Sixty-one percent (61%) of the parishioners responded that the parish addresses the needs of new parishioners *frequently and/or almost always*. Twenty-seven percent (27%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results recommend that the parish establish a New Parishioner Ministry.

"More than 200 new families have joined in our parish since July 2004. Our office staff does an excellent job in helping them to feel welcome in registering and identifying any immediate pastoral needs."

Question 9d: Homebound

Forty-two percent (42%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated the parish *addresses the needs* of the homebound, while fifty-two percent (52%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need for parishioners to be aware of the services provided to the homebound in order to become involved with this ministry and to increase the likelihood that those in need of the services will be made aware of them.

"See my previous response to 'Question 9a' above."

Question 9e: The Poor in the Community

Fifty-two percent (52%) of all parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of the poor in the community, while thirty-eight percent (38%) of the parishioners had *No Opinion*. The survey revealed a need for the parish community to look for better ways to publicize the services provided.

"From my perspective, this is an area that needs great attention. Often people do not think of Dracut as having people who are poor and thus we easily overlook those who are. This year we will begin a St. Vincent de Paul Society."

Question 9f: Widows and Widowers

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of widows and widowers, while fifty-four percent (54%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need for parishioners of all ages to be aware of the services provided to widows and widowers in order to become involved with this ministry and to increase the likelihood that those in need of the services will be made aware of them.

"There is a bereavement group that meets twice a month and a widow/widowers group that meets monthly. Often, we think of widows/widowers as being in their older years. However, there are several young widows in the parish who are often neglected pastorally because of their age."

Question 9g: Families In Crisis

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of families in crisis, while fifty-five percent (55%) had *No Opinion*. With such a large number of parishioners not having an opinion regarding the service the parish provided for families in crisis, the parish community should look for ways to better publicize the services provided.

"Thanks to the generosity of parishioners, we have money to help families in a crisis. Several have taken advantage of this fund. The challenge in this area is that most often I am not aware of situations with emergencies in the parish."

Question 9h: The Sick

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of the sick, while thirty-eight (38%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need for the parish community to look for better ways to publicize the services provided.

"Please refer to my responses to Questions 4f and 9d above..."

Question 9i: Engaged Couples

Forty-nine percent (49%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of engaged couples, while forty-eight (48%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need for parishioners to be aware of the services provided to engaged couples in order to become involved with this ministry.

"St. Francis is fortunate to have an excellent marriage preparation team. We offer the program each winter to parishioners or anyone who needs to a marriage prep. program. Aside from the program, I meet with the couple to help in the preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage. I would like to see us offer a program on Natural Family Planning."

Question 9j: Babies and Toddlers

Forty-five percent (45%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of babies and toddlers, while forty-seven percent (47%) had *No Opinion*. There have been several initiatives started over the last several years for babies and toddlers such as the SMART program. It is important for parishioners to be aware of these programs so that the details of these programs can be spread to those who may need them.

"The SMART program is doing quite well. Some folks have asked about a crying room. My concern with this is that children will grow up feeling excluded from Mass. I am of the opinion (and I realize I write this as one who does not have children) that once they are baptized they belong in the assembly at Mass."

Question 9k: The Bereaved

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish *addresses the needs* of the bereaved while thirty-seven percent (37%) had *No Opinion*. The survey results revealed a need to bring awareness to those in need.

"Please refer to my previous response to Question 9f.. In addition, we have a memorial Mass each November for all those who have died during the year."

Question 10: Spiritual Development

Eighty-three percent (83%) of the parishioners responding to the survey stated that the parish offers *sufficient opportunities* for spiritual development. The survey results revealed a need to increase the spiritual development of the parish as a whole.

"Please refer to my response to Question 4c above..."

Question 11: Does the Parish Meet Your Needs?

Ninety-three percent (93%) of the parishioners responding to the survey feel that the parish *meets their needs*.

"I have learned from personal situations as a parishioner and as a pastor that it is impossible to meet every need of every person. The most challenging part is identifying the need correctly. That being said, over all I am impressed with the generous and creative ways in which St. Francis Parish responds to various needs of parishioners and the Dracut community."

St. Francis Parish

Join the fun!! ...

"Generations of Faith"

Annual Parish Picnic

Sunday

September 25



Tickets
\$5 donation for Adults
\$3 for children 7 and up
children 6 and under FREE

Day begins with
Mass at 10 am

*No 11:30 am Mass today
followed by a
Barbeque Lunch
in the back yard!*



Learn the meaning of
"Church"
When you Visit
Saint Francis Park
in the Parish Hall

**Activities
for all ages...**

Crafts
Face Painting
Games

Musical Entertainment

*provided by "Dots"
with members from the 7 pm Choir*



"The Legacy of Life-'Long' Learning"

Kathy Long

**Director of Religious Education &
Pastoral Associate**



I have attended school either as a teacher or a student for most of my life and so I always consider September to be a time of new beginnings.

As I look forward to what this new school year will bring, I would like to take a moment to reflect on last year's religious ed program and share the successes and opportunities we discovered on our journey.

Let me start by thanking all of you who were so willing to jump into the pool and immerse yourself in a new program. The Generations of Faith program could not take place without your willing and open participation and without the very dedicated volunteers working so hard to make it happen.

Many of you have offered me great feedback on our programs including suggestions for improvement and for those suggestions I am most grateful.

We began Generations of Faith to improve and strengthen the process of learning about our faith and to bring our parish closer together by providing opportunities for people in the parish to get better acquainted with each other so that we might support and help each other in our faith walk.

One of the most gratifying things to have had happen was that so many of you attended. We discovered that 75% of our children attended at least one faith festival last year.

At some of our Sunday morning faith festivals, we hosted more than 300 people. While it is exciting to have that many people gathered together for the purpose of sharing their faith and learning more about each other and God, many children and adults found the space too confining and noisy, leading us to quickly add an additional meeting time for subsequent events involving such enthusiastic parish response.

We also discovered that 200 people at each festival is the right number for audience participation and interaction, building community and meeting new people, and fits very well into our space in the Church Hall.

The participation of our Confirmation students was 100% and all of the teens enjoyed helping. The best attended Faith Festival for our junior high youth came during Advent when members of the junior high program performed a skit about the birth of Jesus.

It became clear that we needed to provide a dynamic place for the junior high students at the faith festivals.

Many methods of facilitating whole community learning exist and we tried several different approaches last year. Here at St. Francis we offer a blended model approach to religious education. We are learning new ways of coming together and learning about our faith while still participating in the positive things gained from classroom learning.

The curriculum planning team, the parents and the children feel, as I do, that we hit our stride at the fifth and final festival of the year which we celebrated about Eucharist.

The community participated in a game emceed by Darin Colarusso (our seminarian) and Ken Grisley. Afterward, we broke up into age-related groups for storytelling, teaching, and crafts for every age group from nursery school to adults.

We included the junior high with our Confirmation students so that younger teens could work together with older ones. Some of the Confirmation students also helped in the younger children's classes. This learning model proved to work best for us and so we will adopt it for four of our faith festivals in the new school year. The other model we tried comprised traveling around to different learning centers throughout the parish hall and weather permitting, outside on the church grounds beginning with our parish picnic on Saturday, September 25th

The third learning component of Generations of Faith is the home kit.

At each faith festival event we provided each family with a home kit full of different activities for different ages in keeping with the theme of the faith festival.

Included in each kit was a prayer card of family prayers to be said around the family table.

Each family used them in a different way and many people have thanked me for them.

Although I appreciate the favorable response to the home kits, I don't think the home kits have been as successful as I had originally hoped so we plan to change the packaging and streamline them to make them even better.

The home kits were designed to facilitate talking about our faith at home. They were meant to enhance the appreciation of church in each of our homes, and in the domestic church at

large, while bringing the members of our families closer to each other and to our God.

They were not meant for daily use nor are they to be seen as homework that must be done. We would like you to give us feedback so that we can develop better and more usable home kits for you.

Now we actually have more religious education time than ever before with less wear and tear on the families for car pooling.

This year we will have 18 classes for grades K-6 and 12 classes for grades 7&8.

We will be introducing a personal safety program for children in grades 1-4 and you can hear more about it at the parents meetings on either September 12th or September 15th from 7-8pm.

Class lists will be posted downstairs at that time. We are increasing the number of times each festival is offered from three to four so that we will meet after the 4 p.m. Mass on Saturday, after the 10 a.m. Mass on Sunday, Tuesday evening from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. and Thursday evening from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m.

Not much can be learned without your participation. If we encourage our children to go to school, pay attention in class and take them to libraries, bookstores, and scatter books around our homes, they will become avid readers. Religious education happens in the same manner.

We will build on the success of last year and continue with five festivals this coming school year.

While many area churches have begun using the "Generations of Faith" model exclusively for religious education I am very happy with our blended approach of classes and festivals. Our intention is to offer the best of each model in religious education. We are also limiting the number of people at each faith festival so that all will fit together in the Church Hall.

I welcome all feedback positive and negative as we are going to make this program the best it can be.

Thank you for joining us in the faith formation of our children.

Our catechetical year will begin on Sunday, September 25th with Mass and a huge parish Picnic.

(Continued on page 9)

Life - “Long” Learning

(Continued from page 8)

The church Hall will be decorated like a park where we will explore the theme of “Church and answer the question” “What is Church?” with games, crafts, and face painting for children of all ages. We will have music outside and a huge cookout which includes making your own sundaes. There will be time for lots of fun and laughter. So mark your calendars now!

There is an additional charge for food at this faith festival ONLY.

Children 6 and under will be admitted free, for those aged 7-18 the fee is \$3.00 and for adults the price will be \$5.00 each for entertainment, learning and all you can eat after the ten o’clock Mass on Sunday, September 25th.

Tickets will be on sale after all the Masses in September and after all of the parent meetings. We look forward to seeing you there and helping to make the event a huge success!

Fall Scripture Study – “The Book of Ruth”

This Fall, the Scripture class will study The Book of Ruth from the Old Testament. It is a short yet profound story of God’s faithfulness during difficult times and the woman who finds new life, freedom, and the God within after experiencing tragic circumstances.

We will use the Book of Ruth to discuss and reflect on 12 moments in everyone’s spiritual journey.

Those moments are loss, change, transformation, aging, independence, respect, recognition, insight, empowerment, self definition, invisibility and fulfillment. Class will begin on Wednesday, September, 14th —November 2nd from 9:30 a.m.—11:00 a.m. or Wednesday evenings beginning September 21st. through November 9th. from 7:15-8:30 p.m.

All are welcome. Please call the office to sign up so we can order the correct number of books. There is a fee of \$20.00 to cover the cost of materials.

Bring your Bibles.

For more information, call Kathy in the Religious Ed. Office

“The Ministry of Consolation”

“Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” -Mt. 11:28

The purpose of the Ministry of Consolation is to bring the love of Christ to the bereaved as they deal with their sorrow and grief. Members in the Ministry of Consolation, under the coordination of Joan Vinal, assist family and friends at the time of death of a loved one. The funeral liturgy, including music and readings, are organized in conjunction with the bereaved family.

Another offering of the Ministry of Consolation is a Mercy Meal at the conclusion of the burial services. Under the direction of Carol

Harndon and Sally Byrnes, members of this ministry prepare and serve a luncheon meal for the bereaved family and friends.

Parish Nurse Louise Daigle moderates a Bereavement Support Group for those experiencing the loss of a loved one. This group meets on the first and third Monday evening of each month at 7p.m. in the Parish office. All are welcome any time in the grieving process as the group is ongoing. All information is kept confidential. For more information please call Louse Daigle at 978-454-797.

Saint Francis Parish Widow and Widower’s Social Support group provides a long-term socialization for members to begin the road of healing in a safe and friendly place.

Claire Vigeant (St Francis Church, Dracut. co-chair); and Jean Page (St Margaret Church, Lowell, co-chair) facilitate opportunities for members to be together to socialize with supportive friends.

The opportunity for this Ministry, as well as many other Ministries in the Parish, is available to all parishioners We are looking for members to volunteer their services within a Ministry of their choice and assist us in keeping Saint Francis a real family

Coordinator of Parish Ministries

Joan Vinal
(978) 452-6611

Centering Prayer Group — “Fixing Our Eyes on Jesus; Fixing Our Lives In The Process”

“This September marks the second anniversary of my commitment to the practice of Centering Prayer. About twelve years ago, I had explored the idea of learning about the method of Centering but for various reasons did not adopt this technique as a part of my prayer life.

Since then, I have been introduced to Father Tom Keating’s books and his most enlightening video presentations, in addition to participating in group discussion provided by the Centering Prayer group at St. Francis, and in that process, I have discovered, much to my amazement, that I have become a person who finds herself benefiting from the practice of contemplative prayer.

Previously, I had felt threatened by my inner silence or lack of it,

but over time and with the continuation of the practice, I have learned to surrender to the Lord and have come to understand that

God lives in the midst of my silence.

Centering Prayer has given me sensitivity to God’s Presence everywhere. I rest in and with God, focusing on Him alone. It is a remarkable journey that I look forward to each day.” —Teddie Paczkowski

The centering prayer group meets on Monday mornings from 9:30-11a.m. and Thursday evenings from 7-8:30 p.m.

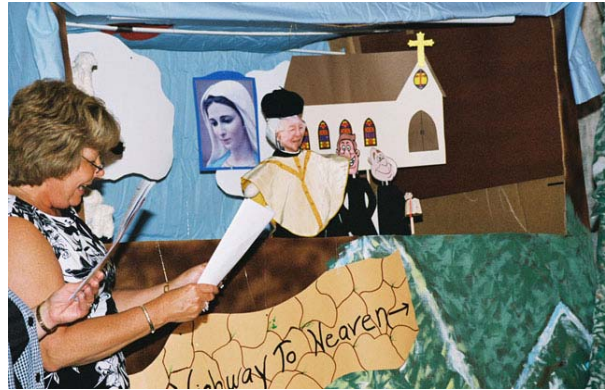
All are welcome to come for prayer, learning and faith sharing. For more info: Call Kathy Long in the Religious Education Office... (978) 452-6611.

Congratulations Father "G"... And Thanks... For 60 Years of Selfless Service !!!

Scenes from Father Gagnon's 60 years of Priesthood Celebration - May 24, 2005...



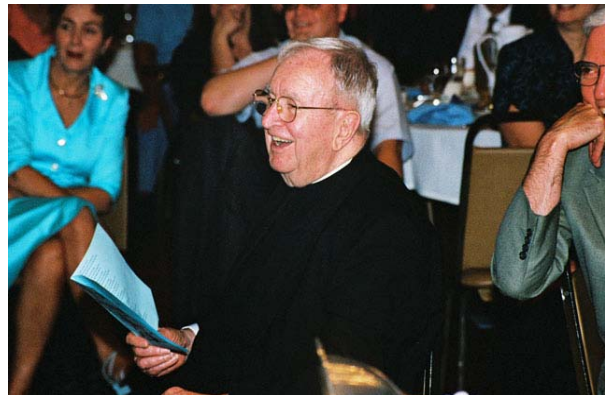
Father "G" celebrates his 60th year as a Priest by celebrating Mass.





Father "G" "treading the boards" in song and story! ...Our songs; His story!



The Saint Francis Parish Choir sings Father "G's" praises!



Father "G" celebrating his special day in another way... with friends, family, fun and frivolity.


SAINT FRANCIS PARISH SHOW


There is so much fun working as a family to produce a show of entertainment with an important purpose!

Members and friends of Saint Francis Parish have come together, once again, for the production of a 6th Parish Show.


Since May, forty adults and adolescent participants, along with 15 children, have been practicing diligently two nights a week and Saturday mornings to prepare a production that our audiences will enjoy.

The show, entitled, "The Best Little Theater in Town," showcases the beautiful voices and acting skills of our members. The first half is a musical play about a theater that is experiencing some financial woes. The second half is a medley of tunes spanning themes of patriotism, homeland, hope, freedom, the past, the soldier and peace.

The \$12.00 ticket price for this production, scheduled for September 17-18, 2005, will give you an evening of fun and music, as well as assist us with a donation to our cause of "Families in Crisis."

Let's fill up Dracut High School as you help us sell all the tickets for our two performances! All purchases will be greatly appreciated.

Director - Dr. Linda Trouville



“Forty Hours” Devotion



By

Kathy Long

Religious Education Director

Pope John Paul II declared the year ending this October 2005 to be the Year of the Eucharist. Archbishop Sean O’Malley has requested that each parish in the Archdiocese to hold a “Forty Hours” Devotion to the

Eucharist to encourage the people of God to grow in and acknowledge their belief in the “True Presence” of Christ in the Eucharist.

St Francis Parish will begin a “Forty Hours” Devotion on September 22nd.

The Forty Hours Devotion is an opportunity for the community to gather before the Blessed Sacrament and to pray before the Lord in solemn adoration.

It gives us time to deepen our appreciation of the importance of the mystery of the Eucharist in our lives. Traditionally it begins with the celebration of Mass.

At the end of the opening Mass, The Blessed Sacrament is exposed and over a period of a few days the faithful are given the opportunity to pray before the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

The Blessed Sacrament will be exposed around the clock both day and night. The celebration will end with the celebration of the Mass at 4 p.m. on Saturday, September 24.

People can come to church at any time day or night to pray before the Blessed Sacrament during this devotion. You can pray for fifteen minutes or for an hour or more. It is our hope that every parishioner will come to pray for some time before the Blessed Sacrament.

Every family and every child in our parish is strongly encouraged to partake of this opportunity to spend some quiet time with the Lord. Those wishing to spend a specific hour before the Blessed Sacrament are asked to call the office or sign up in the church foyer.

“The Church and the world have a great need of Eucharistic adoration. Jesus waits for us in this sacrament of love. Let us be generous with our time in going to meet Him in adoration and in contemplation that is full of faith and ready to make reparation for the great faults and crimes of the world. May our adoration never cease.” —Pope John Paul II, on the Mystery and Worship of the Holy Eucharist, April 1980.



A S.M.A.R.T. Remark

By

Jessica Smith

It was “Ring Around the Rosie” that made me get choked up that day. Since becoming a mother, little moments like this continuously strike me in an odd way so that I see the beauty in their simplicity. I got the telltale lump in my throat that morning because my daughter finally joined the group without needing my help. When my partner in coordination of the group, Michelle Balbat, called cheerfully to the children, “Okay! Time for Ring Around the Rosie!” the kids in attendance bounded over to her on our play mat, eager to end our special time in what has become the trademark S.M.A.R.T. Program way. I turned to take my daughter’s hand and lead her over to the group, but she had already gone. Instead of my hand, she held the hand of the little boy next to her as they, and the rest of the group, spun round and round and “all fell down” rather happily together.

I got choked up merely because the vision of what Michelle, Kathy Long and I had in mind for the S.M.A.R.T. Program had just come to fruition in front of me. Yes, we had wanted a place for the children of our parish and surrounding area to come for songs, stories, craft and playtime. But above all, we wanted the children to become friends, to become comfortable with one another and themselves, and to broaden their horizons.

On a very small scale, watching the kids play

hand-in-hand, I knew we’d accomplished it.

Having recently completed our eight-week long S.M.A.R.T. (Supporting Moms and Raising Toddlers) session, as well as a four-week summer series, I know I speak for all involved in saying that it was very successful. Each week, a theme was chosen for the kids and adults on which to focus, as well as a color of the week. We began with a prayer, asking God to help us all be good friends to others and thanking Him for loving us. Often, we’d then proceed into a song, story, or discussion of that week’s theme. Some of the subjects on which we focused were healthy eating habits, teeth, the ocean, weather, springtime, Easter, family, art and nature. After that, it was on to craft time, and then snack and playtime. It was wonderful to see the children participate and get to know them on a deeper level, and to eventually see their personalities blossom. Their exuberance was uplifting and so much fun.

I myself enjoyed connecting with other moms and being able to chat about our children, share opinions and advice, or just recount a recent fiasco (and as caregivers of toddlers, there are always plenty to share!).

As we prepare for another session to begin in September, the children continue to gather each week during the summer on mini “field trips” to explore our greater community. We’ve visited local playgrounds, gone blueberry picking, and watched a magic show at an outdoor venue.

It touches me that on some level, they are learning that Church is not only a place for Mass,

but for fellowship and fun, and that our faith includes our community and those that live around us.

I remember that Michelle once told me that having this at our parish is important to her because of the recent implementation of the Generations of Faith program. To me, this means that in offering this outreach to moms, grandmas, other caregivers and their children, we are also embracing the youngest generation of our parish and hopefully passing on to them the seeds of faith that will continue to be sown through prayer, fellowship and fun.

As my daughter breathlessly got to her feet that day and exclaimed “Rosie! Rosie!” to start the game again, I swallowed the lump in my throat and smiled. She and her new friends are on their way to big things in life; and I think they’ve had quite the S.M.A.R.T. beginning.

The S.M.A.R.T. Program is beginning again soon with a wonderful curriculum! The program will put the focus on our Catholic faith, and teach our children about different Bible stories and how much Jesus loves us through songs, stories, and crafts. It will run for six weeks, from September 21st-October 26th from 10-11:30AM in the Parish Hall. All caregivers with children preschool age and younger are welcome.

The cost is \$20 per family. You may call the Parish Office to sign up, or contact Jessica Smith at (978) 970-1136 with any questions. Hope to see you there!



Parish Nurse Ministry presents...

Health Fair

October 15th, 2005

9:30am-2:00pm

- Child Safety
- Advanced Directives/Health Care Proxy
- Elder Services
- Valuable Info
- Free Samples & Handouts
- Healthy Heart
- Preventative & Alternative Medicine
- Glucose/Cholesterol Screening
- Blood Pressure
- Body Fat Analysis

- Support Groups
- Patient Rights
- Spirituality – Prayer/Meditation
- Medical Alarms
- Depression/Anxiety
- De-stressing your life
- GI Solutions

Meet with community Health Professionals:

Doctor, Dentist, Pharmacist, Chiropractor, Town Nurse, Fitness Instructor, VNA, Red Cross Representative, Nutritionist, and other community service personnel such as Fire, Police and public service officials.

Keeping Body, Mind & Spirit healthy and in-balance!



Saint Francis Parish

**115 Wheeler Road
Dracut, Massachusetts 01826**

Phone: 978-452-6611

Fax: 978-452-0772

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER 2005						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3
4	5 Labor Day Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.	6	7	8 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	9	10 K-8 Teachers Meeting 9:00-1:00pm
11 11th Grade Confirmation GOLF TOUR- NAMENT	12 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. K-8 Parents Meeting 7:00pm –8:00pm	13	14 Scripture Study Book of Ruth 9:30-11:00am (6-weeks)	15 K-8 Parents Meeting 7:00-8:00pm Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	16	17 Parish Show 8:00 pm (Dracut High)
18 Parish Show 2:00pm (Dracut High)	19 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	20	21 S.M.A.R.T. Program begins 10:00-11:30am Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am or 7:15-8:30pm	22 40-HOUR DEVOTION BEGINS Contemplative Prayer Group 7-8:30 p.m.	23	24 Closing Mass “Forty-Hour” Devotion 4:00pm
25 GOF Event Parish Picnic	26 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Confirmation Parents Meeting 7:00-8:00pm	27 Confirma- tion Practice 7:00-8:30pm	28 S.M.A.R.T. Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am Parents Meeting K-8 7:00- 8:00pm	29 Contempla- tive Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	30 Confirma- tion 7:00pm	1 Blessing of the Animals 10:00am

OCTOBER 2005						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2 6th Annual Hike for Hope 1:00p.m. Merrimack College <u>10th Gr. Confirma- tion 5 p.m.</u>	3 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	4 Parents Meeting K-8 7:00-8:00pm	5 S.M.A.R.T. Program 10:00-11:30am Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am	6 Olan Mills 3:00-9:30pm By Appt. Contemplative Prayer Group	7 Olan Mills 3:00-9:30pm By Appt.	8 Olan Mills 10:00am-5:00pm By Appt.
9	10 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Columbus Day	11 Grade 2 Parents’ Sacrament Prep. 7:00-8:00pm	12 S.M.A.R.T. Program 10:00-11:30am Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am or 7:15-8:30pm	13 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30p.m.	14	15 9th Grade Retreat 8:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Health Fair 9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.
16 10th Grade Confirmation 5 p.m.	17 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	18	19 S.M.A.R.T. Program 10:00-11:30am Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am	20 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	21	22
23	24 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Gr. 2 Parents Sacrament Prep 7:00-8:00pm	25	26 S.M.A.R.T. Program 10:00-11:30am or 7:15-8:30pm	27 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	28	29 Peer Leader Retreat 9:00am Eucharistic Con- gress for Teach- ers
30 10th Grade. Confirmation 5 p.m.	31 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Halloween					

CALENDAR OF EVENTS AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SCHEDULE

NOVEMBER 2005						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2 Scripture Study 7:15-8:30pm	3 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	4	5
6 9th Grade Confirmation 5 pm	7 Adoration 9:30a.m.-6:00p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	8	9 Scripture Study 9:30-11:00am or 7:15-8:30pm ADVENT	10 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	11 Veterans' Day	12 9th Grade Retreat 8:30-6:00pm
13 9th Grade Confirmation 5 pm	14 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.	15	16 Scripture Study 9:30a.m.-11a.m.	17 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	18	19 Christmas CRAFT FAIR Catechetical Congress Randolph, MA.
20 Dracut Ecumenical Service 9th Grade Confirmation	21 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	22	23	24 Thanksgiving Day	25	26
27	28 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.	29	30 Scripture Study			

DECEMBER 2005						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	2	3 GOF Event ADVENT
4 GOF Event ADVENT	5 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	6 GOF Event ADVENT 5:30p.m.-7:30p.m.	7 Scripture Study	8 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm GOF Event-ADVENT	9	10
11 Grade 9 Confirmation 5-7p.m. Christmas Concert 4:30 p.m.	12 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Retreat 6:30-8:00pm	13 Retreat 6:30-8:00pm	14	15 Contemplative Prayer Group 7:00-8:30pm	16	17
18	19 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Bereavement Support Group 7 p.m.	20	21	22	23	24
25 Christmas Day	26 Adoration 9:30 a.m.-6:00 p.m.	27	28	29	30	31