

The Concept

Newsletter of Immaculate Conception Parish

A Letter From Our Pastor

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Answering the Call to Serve

Dear Parishioners,

Recently I was elected by the members of the Priest Retirement Board to be the chairman of this group for the next two years. I didn't want to be chairman of the board. In fact, at the last meeting, when it was time to make nominations, I quickly nominated someone else so that I would not be chosen. However, the other priest refused the nomination and then quickly nominated me instead. No one else would even accept a nomination.

I, too, wanted to refuse. But before the meeting began I was conversing with the other priests, and we all shared an opinion that, in our parishes, we have people willing to volunteer, but very few who are willing to accept leadership positions within parish ministries. How could I criticize others for doing something that I myself am guilty of? So that is how I got elected.

We are in our sixth year of living stewardship as a way of life at Immaculate Conception Parish. Even before we started on our path of stewardship, we have always had generous parishioners who truly love our parish and who come forward to serve in parish groups and ministries. Our Annual Stewardship Renewal each October provides us with a convenient way to showcase the various ministries of our parish, to encourage people to use their gifts and talents in a particular ministry, and to allow parishioners to make a one-year commitment to a ministry.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of living stewardship as a parish is that we have



had over 200 parishioners who previously were not involved in any parish ministry come forward and get involved in sharing their talents. We have seen several new ministries get a good start, like the Society of Mother Teresa, Wellness ministry, the Prayer Shawl ministry, the Hospitality

Committee, Mass Greeters, Building Church/Welcoming All, the Parish Beautification Team, the Transportation ministry, and others. Parishioners continue to support the liturgical and catechetical ministries.

But we also need parishioners to accept positions of leadership within the ministries of the parish. Sometimes, we feel over-extended in our church and civic involvements. Others perhaps don't know where they could fit in leading a ministry while driving children to sports practices and other commitments. Still others don't want the burden of suffering the criticism and gossip that come with being a leader.

So pray for me this month as I chair my first meeting of the Retirement Board. Join me in praying that leaders will come forth from our parish to generously answer the call to serve.

In Christ,

Fr. Troha

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Carrying on Mother Teresa's Legacy *Marty Hughes Honored with 2010 Helping Hands Award*

For as long as he can remember, parishioner Marty Hughes has had great admiration for Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her work. And it was this admiration and Blessed Mother Teresa's example that inspired Marty to establish the Society of Mother Teresa three years ago.

"I have always loved the poor and stuck up for the poor," Marty explains. "I wanted to have a way to serve them first-hand like Mother Teresa did."

For the past three years, Marty has had the privilege to do just that along with 35 other dedicated volunteers. They provide meals and other services to the homebound, poor, sick, and lonely in our area. They buy food, prepare meals and deliver the meals to those in need. But their service doesn't stop there. The society's volunteers do whatever they can to serve those in need.

"We will help with anything," Marty says. "We want to be there for them, to serve them."

Marty is proud of the work that the society he established has done over the last few years, but he doesn't see it as his success. He believes that the success of this ministry is a result of God working in the world. So, when the Council on Aging presented Marty with the Helping Hands Award at its yearly meeting, recognizing

the tremendous work he continues to do, he was taken aback.



"I kept telling them that I am not the one who ought to get honored," Marty says. "There are so many others who help make the work of the society possible and, on top of that, it really is God's work we do. We want God to get the glory. I am merely His servant. God is the founder of this ministry. He is the one who we all work for."

Yet it is precisely this attitude, and his selfless motivation, that makes Marty worthy of recognition for all he does. Marty serves as an incredible example to all of us. He lives and loves to serve, and he sees his ability to serve the poor as a blessing.

"The poor are a gift to us," Marty says. "They give us the opportunity to serve God in a special way. Without the poor, we would have nothing to share. We are privileged to share our lives with them and to offer them love in this way."

Marty offers us a tremendous example of living true Christian discipleship, a life of selfless service. Immaculate Conception Parish would like to congratulate him on this well-deserved honor from the Council on Aging.

Beauty Takes Time

The Parish Beautification Team

For two years, Michelangelo carved a single slab of marble into one of the most magnificent sculptures ever created, the *Pietà*. It took him over four years to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. God took seven days to create the world and all of its creatures when He could have done it in an instant. Art, beauty, and their creation take time.

This creative process is apparent here at Immaculate Conception in many ways, especially in the upkeep of our parish grounds. The Parish Beautification Team, led by Mary Jo Timbers-Mrozek, takes on a major role and invests a large amount of time into maintaining and enhancing the grounds of Immaculate Conception.

“Everyone on the committee is giving back in a small way to help with the overall appearance of our church,” Mary Jo says. “We are all proud of our work and feel good about giving back.”

As committee chair, Mary Jo is responsible for pulling the volunteers together and organizing their gifts of time and talent. The team weeds, mulches, plants flowers, waters, edges beds, and much more.

“People come and go, and work on their spots and gardens as time allows,” Mary Jo says. “We don’t have a lot of organized or scheduled time together. Volunteers give as much time as they have and, for some people, that’s to weed and water now and again. It’s nice because no one is locked into hours; they can stop by at 8 a.m. or 8 p.m.”

There are approximately 20 volunteers on the Parish Beautification Team. Mary Jo has been volunteering

with the team for over five years and has chaired the committee for the last two years. Chairing the committee is a perfect fit for Mary Jo considering her green thumb, and the fact that she is a school teacher and has time off from work in the summer to devote to the parish grounds.



“A lot of us work full-time and are on other committees,” Mary Jo says. “The team is made up of people who like to garden and who want to help make the church look pretty and aesthetically pleasing for all the parish members. We’re not in

it for the gratification or applause. This team is a great behind-the-scenes way to give back.

“A lot of volunteers return year after year, and we have several new volunteers this year,” Mary Jo says. “It’s a nice system, Father seems pleased, and everyone is always saying how nice the flowers look. We have a lot of different types of flowers, and you can see the variety of volunteers’ tastes. A statue of St. Francis was added last year and we just put in a bunch of roses that were donated by the statue of Mary.”

Mary Jo has found great fulfillment in serving with the Parish Beautification team, and she says that it also gives her an opportunity to spend quiet time in prayer.

“I’m not giving it up anytime soon,” she says. “It’s very peaceful working on the gardens. You can weed and pray a Rosary at the same time.”

Volunteers are always welcome. Anyone interested in joining the Parish Beautification Team can contact the parish office 440-942-4500.

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Fostering a Welcoming Atmosphere at Immaculate Conception *The Hospitality Committee*

Four years ago, Jeaninne Hozian joined Immaculate Conception's Hospitality Committee because she loves to cook, and she wanted to share her gifts with the parish community.

"We are a stewardship parish," Jeaninne says. "This means that, as parishioners, we give of our time, talent, and treasure. The one real talent that I have is cooking, and I love to do it. So I figured, 'What better way to give back than through something that involves cooking?'"

Since that time, Jeaninne has thoroughly enjoyed serving our parish through the Hospitality Committee. And what she has found is that it is not only others who are served when she offers her time and talents in this way; Jeaninne herself has also been positively impacted by serving this ministry.

"I have grown deeply in my faith through my involvement," she says. "I have found that, for me, there is no better way to grow in faith than involvement in our parish. I am constantly reminded of the importance of our Faith, the core of our life. And on top of that, my involvement in the Hospitality Committee has brought my family into the life of the parish in a very interactive way. They all serve with me."

Jeaninne, who now serves as the co-chair of the Hospitality Committee together with Ron Felter, and the other 10 members of the committee work to organize, coordinate, and cook for many parish events

throughout the year. The group hosts wine-tasting events and clambakes. Its members also cook and serve for special events, like Fr. Lou's retirement, Fr. Patrick Anderson's ordination celebration, parish missions, retreats, and more.



"We are there to bring the parish together," Ron says. "We want to support the parish and help to strengthen the bond between our parishioners through social and spiritual events."

"If it involves food, we are there!" Jeaninne laughs.

Ron points out, however, that involvement in the Hospitality Committee does not

require culinary talent – only a desire to serve.

"We need help with all kinds of things," he says. "If you have a talent for decorating, or you can help with clean up, etc., we could use your help."

In addition to hosting parish events when the need arises, the Hospitality Committee meets prior to each event to plan its activities.

"The meetings serve to help us coordinate things," Jeaninne says. "We figure out what needs to be done and who can do what. Then, when everyone shows up at the actual event, things are in order and the events themselves flow smoothly."

If you are interested in participating in this ministry or would like more information, please contact Ron Felter at 440-942-4500 or Jeaninne Hozian at 440-256-4933.

Stewardship's "Supreme Teacher" *Following Christ's Example*

Former President and Five-Star General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "You don't lead by hitting people over the head – that's assault, not leadership." President Eisenhower's words are blunt and humorous, but he makes a great point. Almost any successful endeavor in life requires the benefit of strong leadership. And a truly effective leader does not lead by simply telling others what to do, but by providing a strong example of how to carry oneself on a daily basis.

This is no different for us in our lives as Catholic Christians. As individuals who face a myriad of difficult choices every day, we require a leader who, through word *and* example, can show us the path to living according to God's will. For us, Jesus is the supreme teacher of every aspect of Christian life, and His life



rather, in setting aside self, He is filled with the Father's will, and He is fulfilled in just this way" (20).

*"You don't lead by hitting people over the head – that's **assault**, not **leadership**."*
-General Dwight D. Eisenhower

as documented in the gospels is a model that we should strive to imitate in living as good Christians. And as we have learned, stewardship – the sharing of the gifts that God has given to us – is a big part of Christian life, and one for which Jesus left many examples of successful living.

Jesus' nature of selfless service, documented many times throughout the New Testament and culminating with His death for our sins, is an underlying aspect of living the stewardship way of life. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops points out in its pastoral document *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, "In Jesus' teaching and life, self-emptying is fundamental. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake;

Jesus points out to Peter in Matthew's gospel that this "self-emptying" requires sacrifice, but ultimately leads to "eternal life in the age to come" (Mk 10:30). But the Christian steward's ultimate reward is not his or her only benefit from

living the stewardship way of life. By sharing of our time, talents and treasure and living in imitation of Christ, we can relate more closely to Him in sharing, in a small way, in His sacrifice. "To be a Christian disciple is a rewarding way of life, a way of companionship with Jesus, as a part of it is itself a source of deep joy. Those who live this way are happy people who have found the meaning and purpose of living" (*Stewardship*, 21).

The next time you are frustrated or unsure of how to best respond to God's gifts in stewardship, take a moment to open up the Bible. Jesus may not "hit us over the head" in His leadership, but He does provide numerous examples through His actions and teachings of how to live as one of His disciples.

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Letting Prayer Work Wonders for the Church AVILAS

When the members of AVILAS lift their intentions in prayer, they often get some pretty incredible responses.

“We have seen many answers to our prayers over the years,” says Mary Ingraham, who coordinates AVILAS along with Mary Ann Takacs and Dolores Fratino. “For example, since I joined AVILAS, we have had two seminarians from our parish go into the priesthood and become priests.”

AVILAS is an organization of people who hear the gentle command of Jesus: “The harvest is good but laborers are scarce. Beg the harvest master to send out laborers to gather the harvest” (Mt 9:37-38). Members pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life, and for the perseverance of those who have already consecrated their lives to God. Members of the AVILAS prayer group meet on the third Tuesday of each month at Immaculate Conception, beginning their gatherings with attendance of the 7:45 a.m. Mass.

During their meetings, lifting their hearts to God with trust, the members of AVILAS pray for ill and retired priests, missionaries, vowed religious men and women, deacons, the Holy Father and the bishops. They also ask the “harvest master” to help children and their parents discern God’s will in their lives. In addition, the diocese occasionally sends out a newsletter to AVILAS members with meditations that they can use during prayer.

“Prayer is so important nowadays,” Mary says. “However, it is difficult to pray in this day and age because the world is so mixed up. We need to pray to help those who are trying to persevere in the religious life and priesthood, especially because they are having such difficulties nowadays. By participating in AVILAS, we feel we are doing the best we can to help them, as well as encourage more vocations, which are so badly needed.”

Mary has been a member of AVILAS for over 10 years, and has thoroughly enjoyed the blessings it has brought into her life. Not only does it help fulfill her stewardship commitment, but it also brings her special friendships along the way.

“Even though we don’t have any formal meetings, we share some fellowship and go out for breakfast from time to time after we meet,” Mary says. “Furthermore, being in this ministry has helped me be a more prayerful person.”



As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Prayer groups, indeed ‘schools of prayer,’ are today one of the signs and one of the driving forces of renewal of prayer in the Church” (CCC , 2689).

Mary opened her heart to God’s call to join this “school of prayer.” What about you?

Those who are interested in letting prayer work wonders for the Church through AVILAS, or would like to put in prayer requests, can contact Mary at 440-946-4879. Or, simply come to a meeting. All men and women of prayer are more than welcome to attend!

From Funnyman to Sainthood

The Faith Journey of St. Genesisus

Being a performer and a comedian may sound like a fun way to make a living.

St. Genesisus, an outstanding actor, playwright and comedian in late Imperial Rome, certainly did have some fun for a while. But his career and life came to an abrupt end when his work ultimately led him to Christ.

Genesisus was a comedian of some renown, but in the fourth century, Christians were often discouraged from becoming actors because ancient Roman comedy was highly sexual, crude and offensive.

In the year 303, the Emperor Diocletian launched what would be the last great Roman persecution against the Christian Church. So, Genesisus used the persecution as an opportunity to write a comedy about Christianity. He thought it might attract the attention of the Emperor, increase his fame, and make him some money in the process.

Genesisus approached leaders of the Christian community in Rome and presented himself as a catechumen seeking baptism. He was then invited into a period of instruction in the Faith, in order to learn the beliefs of the Christians. He was particularly taken by the idea of baptism. But at the time, he had no plans to convert to the Faith. It was all just a part of his plan to research new material to use for his comedy.

But a strange thing happened to Genesisus as he began to work on his play, which was to be a comedy on baptism. As Genesisus began teaching the other actors about baptism, he began to believe, and a desire to be baptized grew within his heart.

The opening night of the play was a great success, with the Emperor Diocletian in attendance. But at some



point during the play, the Holy Spirit touched Genesisus. He was no longer acting. “You fools, I wish to die a Christian,” Genesisus said. When the other actors asked him why, he said, “All my life I have been a fugitive, and only today have I found God.”

Everyone, especially the Emperor, laughed as Genesisus spoke. Genesisus, standing in a pulpit designed to look like the goddess Venus, began to preach to the audience. He told the crowd how he once hated Christians and enjoyed insulting them. He told the crowd how he deserted his own family as a child because they were Christians.

From there, Genesisus addressed the emperor, stating that he wrote the play to mock Christians, but had

been converted on the spot during the course of the play, by the power of Holy Spirit. “I now know that the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God, the Light, the Truth and the Mercy of all who have received his gift of baptism,” Genesisus said. “O great Emperor, believe in these mysteries! I will teach you, and you will know the Lord Jesus Christ is the true God.”

Diocletian was furious and stopped the play, having the troupe arrested and beaten. Genesisus was condemned to torture until he sacrificed to the gods. Through all of his sufferings, he continued to confess that Jesus was God. When this failed to break his spirit, Diocletian ordered Genesisus be beheaded. His final words were, “Our Lord Jesus Christ is God and we shall have life in His name.”

St. Genesisus is the patron of comedians and actors. His feast day is August 25.

Immaculate Conception

Catholic Church

37935 Wright Street
Willoughby, OH 44094-5899

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Mass Schedule

Saturday

5 p.m. Vigil Mass

Sunday

8 a.m., 10 a.m., and noon

Monday thru Thursday

7:45 a.m. in the rectory chapel

Friday

Tridentine Mass in the rectory chapel, 7:30 p.m.