

# The Concept

Newsletter of Immaculate Conception Parish

## In this Issue

2

Lent and Stewardship of  
the Cross

3

A Steward's Guide to  
Lenten Commitments

4

Promoting Reverence,  
Supporting Development  
*The Holy Name Society*

6

Feast of St. Joseph,  
Husband of Mary,  
March 19

7

Parishioner Utilizes  
Retirement to Serve

37932 Euclid Avenue  
Rectory and Offices:  
37935 Wright Street  
Willoughby, OH 44094-5899  
Phone 440-942-4500  
[www.immaculate.net](http://www.immaculate.net)

## Teaching the Faith to Our Youngest Parishioners

### *The Sunday School Ministry*

**T**he Catholic Church teaches that lifelong faith formation should be a priority for all who seek to better understand the Faith, and to grow closer to Christ each and every day. For parents, this might spark the question, "What is the appropriate age for my children to first become involved in faith-based educational activities?"

"Habits start early, and if the will and the intellect are being directed that early towards the good, it's going to be a lifelong attraction to the good, whereas if they're simply left to their own devices at a young age, children may or may not develop a love for our Lord," says Christopher Hoag, Immaculate Conception Pastoral Associate in charge of catechesis. "The Church has always catechized from the youngest age. And children also need the actual graces that come with faith formation."

With this in mind, Immaculate Conception Parish offers the Sunday School ministry for children during the 10 a.m. Mass. Coordinated by Heather Kinney, this faith formation



opportunity is held in the school building in Classroom 103, and is available for children ages 3 to 5. The program offers age-appropriate lessons and activities for the children that teach them about the Catholic Faith while their parents celebrate the Mass.

"It's entirely Christ-based," Christopher explains. "It's not a babysitting service; it's a real faith formation program in which all of the activities are centered upon Jesus and

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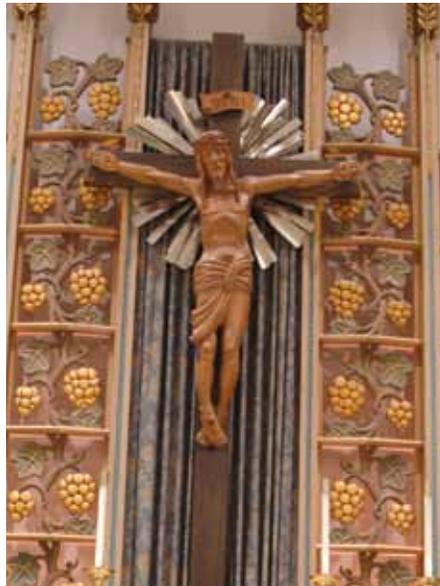
# The Concept

## Lent and Stewardship of the Cross

**T**he liturgical year is such a gift to us. As we turn the pages of the calendar, reflecting on the life of Christ, we have the opportunity to consider the most sublime events in the history of mankind. Of these events, perhaps none is more beautiful and worthy of contemplation than the one we are about to commemorate: Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for us on the Cross.

It is fitting and at the same time paradoxical — fitting that God should do it because only an infinite God could rid us of the infinite debt we owed by our sin; paradoxical that He not only did it, but wanted to do it out of pure love for us, His lowly creatures. What is Jesus trying to show us by this? Even more staggering, what is He really asking when He exhorts us, in turn, to take up our cross and follow Him?

Jesus gave His life for the Church and gave it freely, and He calls us to do the same. While some of us may in fact give our entire lives for the Church, for most of us, this giving takes place by a series of daily actions, both large and small, of Christ-like, sacrificial love — specifically, by giving our time, talent, and treasure for the good of the Church. And yet, by joining these actions with His and our hearts with His Heart, we have the chance to participate in that very same sacrifice. This month, let us take the time to examine our hearts and actions in light of Jesus' as we journey with Him toward the Cross:



### **A Lenten Stewardship Prayer**

*“O my God, teach me to be generous:  
to serve You as You deserve to be served;  
to give without counting the cost;  
to fight without fear of being wounded;  
to work without seeking rest;  
and to spend myself without expecting any  
reward,  
but the knowledge that I am doing your  
Holy will.”*

*-St. Ignatius of Loyola*

**Jesus gave Himself unselfishly and excessively.** Consider the manner of His sacrifice. One drop of Christ's blood would have been more than sufficient to save the entire human race, and yet Our Lord Jesus chose to shed every last bit. From start to finish, Jesus showed us by His passion that He wanted to do more than what was merely sufficient. If there was more He could give, He gave it. He never stopped to count the cost or to look for what He could get in return.

**Jesus made His sacrifice a supreme act of love for the Church.** Counter-cultural even to this day, Jesus actually upheld sacrifice as desirable — as the most perfect way to show our love: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:13). In His infinite wisdom, Jesus now offers this path to us as the way to holiness: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk. 9:23).

**Jesus gave Himself willingly and even joyfully.** “No one takes [My life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again” (Jn. 10:18). At the first Eucharist, Jesus even went so far as to say, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you” (Lk. 22:15). Needless to say, the Passover sacrifice to which Jesus referred was not a symbolic one, but was in fact His very Body and Blood. He would give for us through the sacrifice of the Cross.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make our hearts more like Yours.

## A Letter From Our Pastor

# A Steward's Guide to Lenten Commitments

Dear Parishioners,

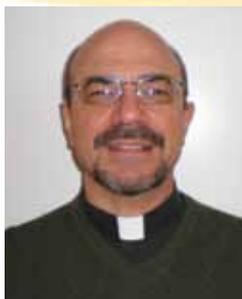
**M**aking a Lenten commitment is simple. What's hard is keeping it! The Lenten commitments we make ourselves are frequently a lot like New Year's resolutions – they sound good, but we don't get far into the new year before they've been broken and then abandoned.

If you are like me, you approached Ash Wednesday with the intention of doing better than you did last year. But as March drags on, it seems as though we'll never get to Easter. Our enthusiasm wanes, and it seems harder and harder to keep our commitment. And then we begin to wonder, "What's the point?"

Often, we realize we've already broken our commitment in some way – perhaps we decided we'd pray a decade of the Rosary every evening, but we were too tired one night or simply forgot. Maybe we slipped up and ate a cheeseburger on the first Friday in Lent, even though we know that all Fridays in Lent are days of abstinence from meat. So we conclude that we just can't keep a good Lent and so give up trying to make it a special season in any way.

If you're tempted to give up, don't do it! Just pick up where you left off, ask God for forgiveness, and begin again. Our Lenten commitments should challenge us, and we can grow spiritually. We can even benefit from our failures if they help us better realize how much we need God's grace.

After all, nothing worthwhile is accomplished without discipline and structure. Whether it's a football player in training or a musician practicing an instrument or a medical student mastering the intricacies of the human body, hard work, discipline and even frustration



will be part of the process. Only those who keep at it will master the skills those activities demand.

The spiritual life follows the same principles. Spiritual growth requires hard work and discipline and practice. Making our wills conform to God's will is the result of repeated efforts over a period of years.

It is true that sometimes we need to reevaluate our Lenten commitments. If we are aware we're consistently failing in some point, we may need to modify it. But normally the value of our Lenten commitments comes from our steady, day-to-day observance of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving all through the season.

But when we fail, we should remember the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). He had failed miserably. Suppose he had concluded, "I've blown it. I rejected my father and my home. There's no way I can go back." He'd have given up in despair. But "coming to his senses," he decides to return home in penitence, to be a servant. But when he arrives home, he's welcomed with joy and restored to his position.

This parable sets forth the pattern we should follow when we fail in our Lenten commitments. Begin our observance again, and keeping on trudging the whole length of March, until we come to the joys of Easter. God our Father will welcome us. Then we will indeed be ready to celebrate.

In Christ,

Fr. Troha

# The Concept

## *Promoting Reverence, Supporting Development* **The Holy Name Society**



*“You find different roles and different ways that you can serve in the parish. The people in the group are not just good people, but they’re nice people, too.”*

*– Vice President Larry Schnieders*

Looking for a way to get more involved and support our parish? Look no further than the Holy Name Society.

The Holy Name Society is an international Catholic organization that is dedicated to promoting the reverent respect for the names of God and Jesus. The Society has been around for hundreds of years, and today there are millions of active members around the world.

“You find different roles and different ways that you can serve in the parish,” says Vice President Larry Schnieders. “The people in the group are not just good people, but they’re nice people, too.”

Here at Immaculate Conception, the Holy Name Society promotes active participation in the parish and provides opportunities for parishioners to be involved. The ministry takes part in many parish activities, such as the Spiritual Apostolate, Oktoberfest, Parish Council and Right to Life, as well as many behind-the-scenes ministries.

“We do try to be a source if we need another Usher or Eucharistic Minister,” Larry says. “Many of the members of those ministries are in Holy Name. We try to support our pastor in different initiatives, such as attendance for different retreats in the parish.”

One of the major parts of the ministry’s activity in our parish is their annual Reverse Raffle, which took place last month. For this event, the Holy Name Society sells 200 tickets for a grand prize, which is \$3000, as well as tickets for smaller prizes.

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Holy Name members and their families coordinate and staff the event, which also includes a dinner and a silent auction.

The ministry uses the money raised during this event to fund a yearly scholarship. The scholarship is awarded to a student from our parish school who chooses to attend a Catholic high school. The scholarship consists of \$1,000 a year for each of the four years the student is in high school.

“It allows us to support a student from our parish that’s deciding to attend a Catholic high school where they can develop their spiritual life,” Larry says. “It’s always easier to develop your spiritual life in a Catholic school.”

For all that the Holy Name Society does for our parish, it is only fitting that this ministry also benefits its members. But where the parish benefits in very visible ways, the Holy Name members are affected on the inside.

“I definitely pray more,” Larry says. “That was probably the quickest thing that happened, and the most obvious. I’m more aware of everything that’s going on at the parish. Before, I would go to Mass every week, but I found myself just going through the motions. This has forced me to connect to it more often during the week. That’s helped me spiritually, too.”

For more information about the Holy Name Society, call Jack Petersen at 440-951-2045.

## The Sunday School Ministry

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the Catholic Faith. It includes a lot of Bible stories and lessons in virtue, and really involves molding basic faith and basic morals within the students.”

The program operates from September until May, mirroring the academic year. Registration is required, and includes a \$40 registration fee, but parents can register their children at any time during the year and pay a pro-rated fee.

“Those who use it who I’ve spoken to, they really appreciate that we have the program,” Christopher says. “And in my own experience, I’ve noticed that those who have had the Sunday School program, when they come into first grade in the PSR program, they usually adapt better to the formal classroom setting with faith formation than those that have not had that background.”

For Christopher, helping to build a faith foundation for young people is an extremely rewarding ministry, and he says that he couldn’t picture himself doing anything else.

“From the time I was young, I’ve just had this burning love for the Church, and the idea of spreading that love is what motivates my ministry,” he says. “There’s a good feeling you get when years pass and you see someone you were working with when they were a child or teen, you meet them 10 years later, and you see that there is really a seed that has blossomed in their own spiritual life.”

All parents with children ages 3 to 5 are encouraged to take advantage of this special opportunity for spiritual growth. For more information on the Sunday School ministry, or to register, please call Heather Kinney at 440-749-0907.

# The Concept

## Feast of St. Joseph, Husband of Mary, March 19

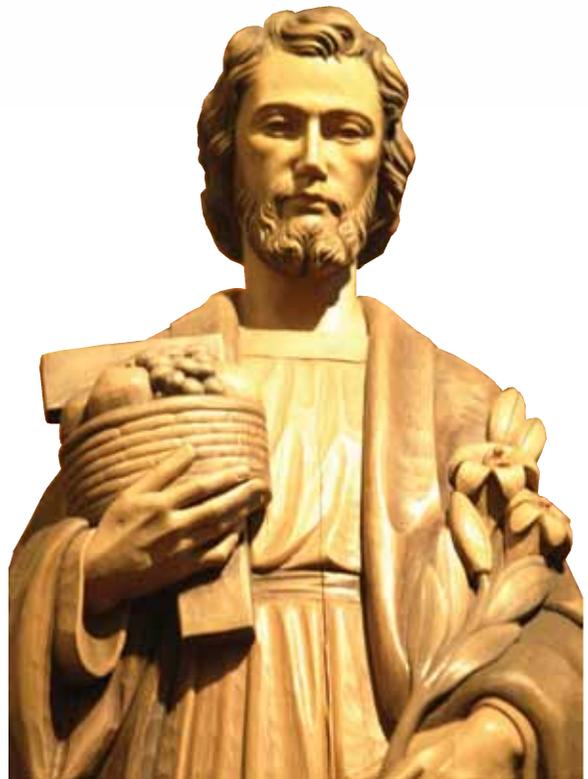
**D**evotion to St. Joseph began relatively late in Church history, primarily because his role of husband to Mary and head of the Holy Family was underplayed in early Christianity by many unauthenticated legends of Christ's childhood. These legends almost always portrayed Joseph as an old man, a simple guardian of Mary and Jesus.

Modern theology places Joseph in a much more important position. Because of his true, sacramental marriage to Mary, Joseph shared in Mary's parenthood; Joseph was a father to Jesus in every way except physical generation. Joseph appeared publicly as the natural father of Jesus, thus shielding the virginity of Mary and the reputation of Jesus. Joseph's fatherly love, authority, and watchful service were all necessary circumstances in God's plan for the Incarnation.

Joseph was born in Judea or Galilee in the first century B.C. Little is stated in the Bible about the influence Joseph had on Jesus. History tells us he brought Mary and Jesus to the temple each Passover and taught Jesus the carpentry trade. He seems to be the silent family man who shows his love for his family by providing them with security. The very safety of Mary and Jesus was guarded by Joseph when he took his family into Egypt to avoid the massacre of male babies ordered by King Herod.

In the history of the Church, the veneration of Joseph began in the West with the introduction of the Feast of St. Joseph into the calendar in the late 15th century.

In 1870 at the end of the First Vatican Council, Pope Pius IX declared St. Joseph to be the patron of the Universal Church. He is also the patron of carpenters, workers, fathers, and a happy death given that he died in the presence of Mary and Jesus. The title of Joseph's March 19 feast day is "Husband of Mary." Pope Pius XII later declared May 1 to be the feast of St. Joseph the Worker, to counteract the Communist May Day holiday.



### ***A traditional prayer to St. Joseph***

*O Blessed Saint Joseph, faithful guardian and protector of virgins, to whom God entrusted Jesus and Mary, I implore you by the love which you did bear them, to preserve me from every defilement of soul and body, that I may always serve them in holiness and purity of love. Amen.*

# Parishioner Utilizes Retirement to Serve

When longtime Immaculate Conception parishioner John Perry retired from a successful career in accounting two years ago, he added a number of ministries to his already very full plate at the parish.

John and Joan, his wife of more than 40 years, came to the parish in 1973. Blessed with a passion for singing, they both joined the choir. Through his experience with the choir, John found himself getting involved in more and more ministries over the years.

“Once you get involved in one organization, you start to meet people and make friends, and those folks are in other organizations, and that leads you to being more and more involved,” John says. “Immaculate Conception has always been a very active parish: the pastor at the time we joined, Fr. Curran, was a very friendly person and knew everyone’s name, and he made a point of talking about what was going on at the parish. He was instrumental in getting people involved and establishing that sort of environment.”

In his almost 40 years at the parish, John has been very active in the Knights of Columbus. At one time, he served as the council’s Grand Knight, and he currently shares his accounting expertise as the council’s treasurer. He is an active member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Society of Mother Teresa, and he is also an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at Mass and to the homebound.

“I converted from Protestantism when Joan and I got married, but growing up, my parents were always very active in the Methodist Church,” John says. “In



fact, my brother is a minister, so being active in the church is natural for me. It helps that our church is active in talking about stewardship, as well. Our pastor always encourages people to be good stewards, and I feel like stewardship is an obligation and a calling.”

Since retiring, John has made a point of using his extra time to help others.

“I looked forward to helping out more in the church after my retirement,” John says. “There were things that I’d wanted to do but hadn’t had enough time for.”

A perfect example of the stewardship way of life in practice, John has adapted the giving of his time and talents to his retirement lifestyle.

“Since I have more time now, I’ve found good ways to use it,” John says. “I particularly enjoy taking Communion to the hospital and working with the Mother Teresa Society delivering meals. A fellow St. Vincent de Paul member saw a need for feeding needy families and founded the Society of Mother Teresa. I’d known that I wanted to help out with the needy people in the community so I’ve been helping out with that for about two years now.”

However we choose to serve the church, John very much encourages everyone to take an active role in the life of the parish.

“I’ve always thought that everyone should be active in their parish and helping out however they can,” John says. “Everyone has certain talents and abilities; whatever your talents are that’s where the church needs your help!”

# Immaculate Conception

Catholic Church

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**March 26-28**

*Lenten Mission: Please check the bulletin or parish Web site for more information.*

## Lenten Schedule

**April 1**

Palm Sunday: 8 a.m., 10 a.m. and 12 p.m.

**April 2-4**

Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday Masses: 12 p.m.

**April 4**

Tenebrae: 7 p.m.

**April 5**

Holy Thursday, Mass of the Lord's Supper: 7 p.m.

**April 6**

Good Friday: Stations 12 p.m., Celebration of the Lord's Passion 3 p.m., Stations of the Cross 7 p.m.

**April 7**

Holy Saturday: Blessing of Easter Food 12 p.m.,  
Easter Vigil 9:30 p.m.

**April 8**

Easter Sunday: 8 a.m., 10 a.m., and 12 p.m..