



I attended the Easter vigil this year [and] remembered when I came into the church 16 years earlier. Everyone's sojourn is different, but for me, the Easter vigil was more a beginning than an end. Finding a place in this vast and ancient Church was not easy, but it has been a trial of grace, one in which the parts that were once the hardest became easier, even light and liberating. On Easter morning, I woke up with a handful of aphorisms in mind that might be of use to someone new to this church, from one who has been there, too—not always easily but gratefully.

## Pray constantly

Eagerness can wear off. Even then, St. Paul does not let us off the hook from praying without ceasing. Prayer is the start of an honest Christian life.

Memorize prayers. People don't memorize much anymore—can you even remember a phone number?—but the effort here is worth it. Aim for 10. Some of those can be the same in multiple languages, even ones you cannot speak. Some obvious ones, some not; some short, some long; some joyful, some penitential. Add some hymns to that as well. Then recite them to God and yourself whenever you can, when you are walking or waiting or sitting on the toilet, with the kind of foolish devotion that is sanity in God's eyes.

Also, pray your own words. Catholics can be bad at this. We rely so much on official liturgies that we do not practice speaking with God ourselves. Do it alone, with friends and in public. Make sure that if someone needs you to pray

with them for what they need in that moment, you know how. I start with prayer because, trust me, you are going to need it.

## The Church is a creature of the Fall

I became a Catholic while the Boston Globe abuse revelations were coming out. If you are coming in now, you know what I'm talking about. You could only become a Catholic in this period of scandal if you understand the Fall already. You have probably seen painful disappointment among those who were raised to think the church is perfect. Many of them have left upon discovering, so viscerally, that it is not.

The church, as Pope Francis put it, is a "hospital for sinners." Being a Catholic, including a Catholic priest, does not make anyone good. You will see lots and lots of evidence of this. Christianity is a way of declaring we want to be more worthy of what we know we will never deserve in this life. It is a commitment to strive after holiness and to help others do the same. Have no illusions. Hospitals are full of sick people.

Still, there are living saints among us in this church. They are not perfect either, but they can be really good. Find them, accept their peccadilloes, learn from them, and walk away if you need to. You will probably find them in places you least expect.

## There are many churches in one

What makes the Catholic Church catholic—that is, universal—is its ability to hold together diverse cultures and

## Tips from a convert

*Continued from page 1*

diverse ways of being Christian. This is a feature, not a bug. It is a beautiful variety: Explore it, across time and geography. Among them all, find the communities and charisms that call you, that suit your talents and challenge your shortcomings. You might find your calling in the church, for instance, through a particular religious order or through a lay movement or through a way of praying or a way of serving. Make sure it is a path that is in full communion with the Catholic whole, of course, but do not be scared away by simpletons who think there is only one kind of true Catholic.

When you find your place and your people, do not forget about the rest. If you feel at home in a certain small group, go to Mass with people of many groups. If one parish seems to speak your language, go from time to time to one where a different language is spoken.

Through our small-c catholicism, God teaches us about God. Sometimes God comes to us as familiar and tender, but God is also the truth that feels strange and foreign while being no less true.

### Honor different paths

As you find your place in the Church, be prepared to honor the ways of others. If you feel tempted to denounce some order or path within the Church, consider what purposes it serves. Consider how it travels to people and places where your path does not go. Recognize that we are interdependent. One reason for this kind of forbearance is that you never know how your life will redirect your calling. During my early years as a Catholic, my place was among renouncers. Those callings, however, have not fit well with the way I feel called to be a parent of small children more recently. I have had to find other saints, other ways of being. In years past, I might have looked at myself today and scoffed at my tepid moderation-in-most-things.

Get ready for that. Have mercy on yourself, and let yourself evolve among the many ways of being a Christian. This Church holds them together as one.

### Argue in charity

When some Christian communities encounter disagreement, they schism on a dime. Catholics don't do that. This means we have to create spaces where debate and argument can persist without tearing us apart. That is why, for instance, Catholics invented universities, at least in Europe. Perhaps it is also why the Church did not invent the internet.

We are a family, and families need to argue so the truth can come through. Some of the greatest saints—people now portrayed as benign servants of Rome, were courageous reformers in their time, challenging received beliefs and entrenched power. But a family argument only turns out well when we remember we are a family. Remember, Catholics believe that we are going to be stuck together for eternity.

### This is not a private faith

It is fashionable nowadays for people to think and talk about faith as a private matter, as something solely between themselves and the divine, as a quiet way to begin the day or a personal journey that is nobody else's business.

This is foreign to the Catholic outlook. If Jesus had kept to himself, there would have been no cross. He promised to be among us when we gather. He knew that we need each other. You will see. Your prayer life will deepen when your Christian community life is honest and vibrant. Sometimes our interior faith carries us more, and sometimes the community carries us more, but one cannot stand on one foot for too long without losing balance.

Be Catholic in public. Not just Catholic—God made you to be more than your piety. Present yourself, to yourself and the world, as a human being made more human by your faith. I spent years embarrassed by my Catholic identity—as the dodgy disciples in the Gospel narratives foreshadow. My ambition was to sort this irregularity out through Herculean introspection and rationalization. It didn't work. I did not really integrate my faith into my sense of self—long after entering the Church officially, mind you—until being forced to present as Catholic quite vocally and uncomfortably in the world.

### Know the poor

At least since Constantine's conquest of Rome in the year 312, Catholicism has had a respectability problem. Religion needs to have a relationship with power to inhabit this fallen world, but that means people can use religion as a means to power as well. Doing so can even be for the good. Catholicism in the United States, for example, has been an important vehicle for helping immigrant communities into the middle class. A downside of that legacy, however, is how it can lead people to conflate Catholicism and classism.

Christ and the prophets speak with one voice: God dwells among the poor. We must know the poor because we are the poor. Even the most privileged among us have poverty in our souls, and we forget this when we blind ourselves to the crucifixions happening all around us. Some people hide from these in mansions and private jets. Some hide in addictions and endless therapies.

Some hide in social-justice proclamations, which can be as effective as riches in masking the lived reality of poverty. I should get off my own soapbox at this point. I do not have a litmus test to offer or even a definition, but you should know it when you see it: Even while enjoying the splendors and wonders of this Church, know the poor.

### Finally, welcome! Christ is risen.

*By Nathan Schneider. This essay first appeared in America Magazine, for Easter 2019.*

# All Things Considered

The sacraments of initiation this year at our Easter Vigil saw Endri Nazarko being Baptized, Confirmed and receiving Holy Communion. Katherine Anne Paquette came into Catholic Communion and was Confirmed. Kloie Janeen Roy, who missed receiving the sacrament with her classmates last fall, was Confirmed.

Because of Covid and quarantine, our RCIA program was kind of cobbled together this year. We're grateful that we were able to help those we could find their way into deeper faith. My apologies to those we may have lost in these past few months.

On Holy Thursday the parents of our First Communicants who were the stand-ins (sit-ins) for the apostles had their feet washed. This was one of the more moving iterations of the ceremony I've experienced. The idea of course is that we're creating a memory for a generation whose initial experience of their first Holy Communion is tied up with service. Later they will get the Catholic cultural trappings of dresses, suits and parties. But that will be filed away in their memories of witnessing the parish priests do a foot washing of their moms and dads who have given them a lifetime of service. Sometimes you have to work the plan long-range.

Our Holy Thursday first communicants included: Elena Decker, Evangeline Hartung, Evelyn Jensen, Leo Keagle, Matthew Kodanko (from last year's class), Josephine O'Reilly, Matteo Paonessa, Hudson Proudlock and Lucas VanMarcke.

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While we are still trying to figure out the safest and best practices for worship patterns here in the parish, we decided to retain the Thursday night

and Friday noon masses that we began in Lent. Truth be told, these are producing equal or better than the morning mass ever used to. And, these masses seem to be attracting some newer faces to the assembly as well.

Our weekday mass schedule goes back to when it preceded the school day here at St. Ambrose and the attendance of the students was part and parcel of that. Our High School closed in 1972 and St. Ambrose Academy closed in 2002 – so it's been a long time since we've had a student body at morning mass.

Coming out of a year's shutdown seems like a good time to experiment with new concepts. I now think we may have a chance of servicing more households with morning – afternoon – evening weekday mass options. So, to round things out, we're adding back the Tuesday morning mass.

Come the Summer, we'll have to rethink this schedule. Living through a pandemic has taught us the need to be flexible. So, try morning mass on Tuesdays. Schedule a family night for Mass on Thursdays. And if you are home, or on lunch hour – see you at Friday mass at noon.

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On Holy Saturday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, Michigan reported 8,413 new Covid cases, the state's highest daily case count since December 7<sup>th</sup> (St. Ambrose Day), when we saw 9,350 new cases. This put our State as the unenviable leader in what is being called the "fourth wave" of the pandemic.

In the first three weeks of

March, Covid hospitalizations in Michigan jumped 633 percent for unvaccinated people ages 30 to 39 – rising by 800 percent for those aged 40 to 49, according to Michigan Health and Hospital Association data.

This should be a wake-up call to everyone since we're now seeing an increasing number of severe illnesses and hospitalizations in younger individuals who have not been vaccinated. Please get vaccinated. If you have ethical questions about the use of the vaccines being offered, check out the article at <https://mycatholicdoctor.com/our-services/vaccines>.

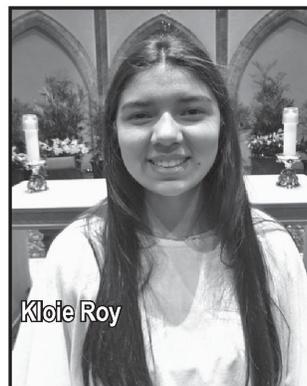
For worship, we'll continue to require masks and contact tracing. And even though the CDC has decided that the chance of contracting the Corona virus through surface transmission is lower than 1 in 10,000, we'll continue to sanitize the church building after each mass.

Despite the surge in the pandemic, the Archbishop's directive that we return to regular worship remains. Certainly, the fully vaccinated can comply. Remember, however, that there are very generous and common sense exemptions provided by the Archbishop for those who have a good reason to not attend mass in person.

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Meanwhile, our online video ministry is slowly perfecting itself and has a loyal following even out of state – even a few out of the country. We're sorry that a technical glitch prevented us from live-streaming our Good Friday service. The source of the problem

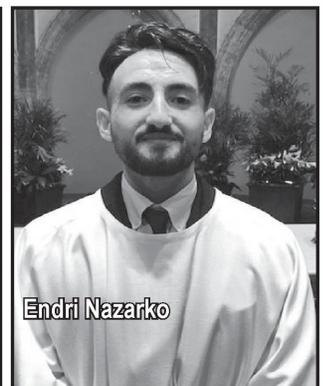
*Continued on page 4*



Kloie Roy



Katherine Paquette



Endri Nazarko

## All Things Considered

*Continued from page three...*

was a zealous electrician repairing a line to the baptismal font lights that morning before *Tre Ore* services. He discovered a cable that he did not recognize and disconnected it. That cable, was the video feed.

We enjoyed the presence of a live assembly for Holy Week and Easter. We saw attendance numbers easily surpass those of Christmas – a sign of vaccinated people venturing out now.

On Holy Thursday, we celebrated with 100 persons at the Eucharist, augmented by the families of nine first communicants. We were electronically joined with 319 other households in real time.

As noted, the Good Friday services video feed was lost, but 82 worshipped in person. The real winner in terms of Fridays was our Stations for Justice, which over the Fridays of Lent accumulated a total of 1,035 views.

There were 101 persons at the Easter Vigil where “glow sticks” replaced congregational candles this year. An additional 500 viewers participated in the live-broadcast that night. The following day, since we were not able to get a camera crew, we re-broadcast the Saturday night vigil on Easter Sunday where an additional 331 households joined during that day.

The largest in-person attendance over the holiday was the 8:30 mass on Easter Sunday morning with 155 of the faithful safely spaced out in the room. The 11:15 mass also saw a nice assembly numbering 136 persons filling the room.

Given those attendance numbers last weekend, we’ll retain the two Sunday masses as long as we draw a reasonable number of worshippers. It’s anybody’s guess where we might be with all of this by the Summer. Let’s say that until Pentecost, May 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup>, you can expect the 8:30 and 11:15 Sunday masses to remain. We’ll tape the Saturday 4:00 vigil mass and re-broadcast it the next day.

TRP

## Literacy Fundraiser

We’re always in the mood for helping the friends of an old friend, Sr. Marie Cyril Delisi who was once the principal here at St. Ambrose Academy. Join Epiphany Education Center online as they host their 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Literacy Fundraiser at Noon on Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup>. Epiphany will post a link to the Online Silent Auction item list on their Facebook page @Epiphanyedcenter on Saturday April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 12 noon. Just follow directions to place your bid.

Every donation will receive complimentary Bingo Raffle ticket/s. Donations of: \$100 or less = 1 Ticket • \$101-\$500 = 2 Tickets • \$501 or more= 3 Tickets

The Bingo Drawing will be held live at noon on their Facebook page. The Raffle prize is “Detroit’s Favorite Things” gift basket (value \$200+)

Donations may be mailed to 5555 Conner, Suite 3258, Detroit 48213, or online at PayPal: paypal.me/epiphanyeducationcen

## Paper, Plastic or Electronic?

With limited attendance at Masses resulting in a lower-than-normal offertory count, at St. Ambrose we’re looking for ways to reduce operational expenses.

**Please consider moving from paper offertory envelopes and switching to eGiving through ParishSOFT Giving. Signing up with a recurring gift is easy, and ParishSOFT will help if you need assistance.**

eGiving is one of the most effective ways to lower our day-to-day costs. Checks and offertory envelopes mean added costs for paper, printing, mailing and extra staff time to tabulate and process. When people switch to eGiving, the saving is significant, and it makes a difference for our parish. In addition, e-Gifts are recorded automatically by our financial database system, which helps ensure accurate giving attribution for parishioners on their taxable giving reports. Your recurring gifts through ParishSOFT eGiving will allow our parish to operate efficiently and be there for those who need us.

**If you are already e-giving through Givelify or Simply Said/Christian Financial, try switching to ParishSOFT eGiving.** If you need any assistance setting up your gift – or making the switch from your current e-giving – call the parish at 313-822-2814 or email Peggy O’Connor in the office at stambrose@comcast.net

## Catholic Youth Organization Spring Sports

Track & Field is open to 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders who attend St. Clare School, St. Clare Religious Education or St. Ambrose Religious Education. All skill levels are welcomed.

Here’s what you need to know. Registration forms must be completed and turned in as early as possible at practice. These are located at [www.stclarem.org/athletics](http://www.stclarem.org/athletics) on the left hand side “Sports Registration Form”. We will also be posting updates on Facebook at [facebook.com/scmathletics](https://facebook.com/scmathletics)

- The cost for the season will be \$125, which will include a sweatshirt for each athlete to keep. If there is a problem with the fee, please contact Bob Conway ([bconway@stclarem.org](mailto:bconway@stclarem.org)). We never want a student to not participate due to fees. Checks can be made out to St. Clare Athletics.
- Practices will meet outside the Sweeney Center “Game Day” doors (doors that face St. Clare School). The first two practices are scheduled for Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:00 p.m. and Thursday, April 15<sup>th</sup> from 5:30-7:00 p.m.
- Temperatures and COVID-protocol questions will take place. Masks are required.

If you have any other questions, please contact Coach Harris or Athletic Director Bob Conway at [bconway@stclarem.org](mailto:bconway@stclarem.org). Go Falcons!

## Faith Formation Station

*“Christian joy does not arise on the fringes of reality, by ignoring it or acting as if it did not exist. Christian joy is born from a call – the same call that Saint Joseph received – to embrace and protect human life especially that of the holy innocents of our own day.” – Pope Francis, 12-28-16*

As April is Child Abuse Prevention Month, it is a good time to review what policies and programs our Archdiocese of Detroit mandates and what we offer and institute in our programming at St. Ambrose in Religious Education. The Archdiocese of Detroit takes seriously every allegation of sexual abuse and exploitation; they are committed to protecting children and adults from harm. The AoD's Safe Environment program is in place to help prevent sexual abuse within our community and to heal the wounds of past victims.

Every person connected to the Archdiocese of Detroit, whether clergy, employee or volunteer, is required to submit to certain protocols before possibly coming in contact with a child. All employees, catechists, and volunteers in our religious education program are required to participate in the following:

- Mandatory training called Protecting God's Children
- Archdiocesan Policy on Criminal History Background Checks
- Adherence to a code of conduct for employees, religious and clergy
- Enforcing a code of conduct for volunteers
- Safe Environment Policy

Additionally, safe environment programming is offered to all of our students through the Circle of Grace program. Circle of Grace is the approved safe environment training program for elementary and high school students enrolled in religious education in the Archdiocese.

The goal of the Circle of Grace program is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others. Circle of Grace is the love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others. It is the recognition that God is with us always and is there to help us in difficult situations.

Through the Circle of Grace Program, adults assist children and youth to recognize God's love by understanding that each of us lives and moves within a Circle of Grace. The Circle of Grace program teaches children and young people to seek help from a trusted adult, reinforcing God's presence in real-life struggles.

Typically, throughout the religious education year, the program director facilitates scheduled programming in kindergarten through grade 8. This year as our families are learning together at home, the Circle of Grace program is being taught in a homeschool format by parents and caregivers.

Lastly, all teens in the Archdiocese in grades 9-12 who volunteer with children in vacation Bible school, sports teams, and religious education classrooms are required to attend a Called to Serve workshop. Called to Serve is an interactive safe environment training program for teens in our Catholic High Schools and Parishes. Participants leave empowered to:

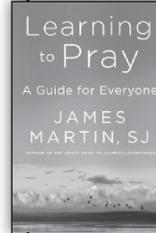
- Use talents to effectively & responsibly serve others
- Work with and be role models for children
- Communicate and partner with adult supervisors
- Interact appropriately with peers
- Recognize and respond to inappropriate behavior

### Rel. Ed. Program Reminders:

Circle of Grace Verification Forms: Don't forget to sign and turn in via mail or email the signed Circle of Grace verification form no later than April 15, 2021. The parish is audited for program compliance; therefore, it is important that all our families turn in their forms. Thank you.

Kelly Woolums

## Marcellina's Book Club



In **Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone**, Jesuit James Martin, one of America's most beloved spiritual leaders and the New York Times bestselling author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* and *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* teaches anyone to converse with God in this comprehensive guide to prayer.

Martin lays out the different styles and traditions of prayer throughout Christian history and invites us to experiment and discover which works best to feed our soul and build intimacy with our Creator.

Father Martin makes clear there is not one secret formula for praying. But like any relationship, each person can discover the best style for building an intimate relationship with God, regardless of religion or denomination. Prayer, he teaches us, is open and accessible to anyone willing to open their heart.

## The Beehive

is the parish weekly bulletin of the St. Ambrose Catholic Community Detroit/Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan

**Pastor:** Rev. Timothy R. Pelc

**Pastoral Minister:** Charles Dropiewski

**Religious Education:** Kelly Anne Woolums

**Minister of Music:** Dr. Norah Duncan IV

**Office Manager:** Peggy O'Connor

**Secretary:** Mary Urbanski

### Sacramental Celebrations

**Masses:** On the Lord's Day –

Saturday Vigil - 4:00 p.m.

Sunday - 8:30 & 11:15 a.m.

**Baptism:** Arrangements for both adults and infants to be made by contacting the rectory.

**Penance:** As announced and by appointment.

**Marriage:** Couples should contact the rectory office a minimum of six months in advance of the proposed date to make arrangements.

**Funeral:** Normally celebrated within one week after the deceased's passing.

### Directory

**Parish Office:** 15020 Hampton

Grosse Pointe Park, Michigan 48230

**Tel:** (313) 822-2814 **Fax:** (313) 822-9838

**Email address:** stambrose@comcast.net

**Religious Education:** (313) 332-5633

**Pastoral Ministry:** (313) 332-5631

**Ark Scheduling:** (313) 822-2814

**Parish Website:** stambrosechurch.net

## Liturgy Schedule

**April 12**

*Easter Weekday*

**April 13**

*St. Martin I, pope & martyr*

8:30 a.m. Mass – Lee Beard, Ralph Thompson

**April 14**

*Easter Weekday*

**April 15**

*Easter Weekday*

7 p.m. Mass – Joseph Eagan

Edward & Jane Klein, Annabelle Mrosinski

**April 16**

*Easter Weekday*

12 p.m. Mass – John & Anne Blake,

Maryanne Blake, Brian Blake

**April 17**

*Third Sunday of Easter*

4 p.m. Mass – For All People

**April 18**

*Third Sunday of Easter*

8:30 a.m. Mass – For All People

11:15 a.m. Mass – For All People

## Spending Spotlight

Imagine cooks in a busy kitchen on Holy Thursday, preparing the Good Friday Lenten Dinner when the drain backs up, due to spilled grease in the trap. Universal Plumbing to the rescue, fixing the problem and saving the last Lenten Dinner of the year. Cost? \$1,600, not including clean up.

## Scriptures for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Week of Easter

**April 15**

Is 65: 17-21

**April 12**

Acts 4: 23-31

Ps 2: 1-9

Jn 3: 1-8

**April 13**

Acts 4: 32-37

Ps 93: 1-2, 5

Jn 3: 7b-15

**April 14**

Acts 5: 17-26

Ps 34: 2-9

Jn 3: 16-21

**April 15**

Acts 5: 27-33

Ps 34: 2, 9, 17-20

Jn 3: 31-36

**April 16**

Acts 5: 34-42

Ps 27: 1, 4, 13-14

Jn 6: 1-15

**April 17**

Acts 6: 1-7

Ps 33: 1-2, 4-5, 18-19

Jn 6: 16-21

**April 18**

Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19

Ps 4: 2, 4, 7-9

1 Jn 2: 1-5a

Lk 24: 35-48

## Third Sunday of Easter

**Saturday at 4:00 p.m.** (broadcast online, Sunday beginning at 8:00 a.m.)

**Sunday at 8:30 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.**

Seating at mass is now up to 50% of the building's capacity  
– roughly 300 persons.

To participate electronically, go to: [facebook.com/stambroseparish](https://facebook.com/stambroseparish) where the Saturday liturgy will be available for viewing starting at 8 a.m. on Sunday.

**The general dispensation from the Sunday obligation has ended – with particular dispensations granted. For specifics, visit [aod.org/comehometohope-dispensation](https://aod.org/comehometohope-dispensation)**

## Your Envelope Speaks ... the Inside Story

To operate, each week our parish requires a *minimum* of..... \$10,100.00

*On Easter Sunday, April 4, 2021*

in envelopes we received ..... \$7,820.00

in the loose collection ..... \$3,634.00

in electronic donations ..... \$3,381.00

for a total of ..... \$14,835.00

**Over** budget for the week.....\$4,735.00

Number of envelopes mailed ..... 709

Number of envelopes used .....80

## Morning of Reflection

Where did he go? The tomb is empty! Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and is calling each of us to new life. Easter is a season filled with joy and calls us all to enter into the life of resurrection. Resurrection is all around us. What may look like an empty place in our hearts and lives may be the initial signs of new life. The Capuchin Retreat Center invites you to come to a Morning reflection on April 20<sup>th</sup>.

Registration is required. Please register by calling (248) 651-4826 to reserve your spot. Recommended donation is \$35 per person. The Capuchin Retreat Center is located on 62460 Mt. Vernon in Washington, Michigan.



## Our Sick

Please pray for those who are seriously ill or who are hospitalized: Bp. Thomas Gumbleton, Mae Christine Busque, Pat Blake, Karen Culver, Donald Miriani, Bonnie McKenna, Jeanne Noto, David Schumacker, Matthew Elias, George Bucec, Emilie Kasper, Darby O'Toole, Anna Noto Billings, Eileen O'Brien, Liz Linne, Donna Barnes, Alexandra Cullen, Charmaine Kaptur, Frank Gregory, Alex Billiu, Jerry Hansen, Jackie Walkowski, Kristen Kingzett, Maria Simcina, Brian Tague, Sharif Hannan, Shirley Whelan, Anne Purvis, Chris Walsh, Jerry Gutowski, Kevin O'Connor, Mike Lesnau and those suffering and hospitalized worldwide with COVID-19.

## Open Door Policy

“Open Door Policy” podcast is a tribute to Blessed Solanus Casey, God’s doorkeeper, and it reflects on our need to let people walk into our lives and tell us their experience of God. It is a vessel for disciples to share their experiences and bear witness to the life-changing power of Christ.

Join hosts Emily Mentock and Fr. Patrick Gonyeau to hear inspiring testimonies from disciples across metro Detroit of what led them to Jesus and how he changed their lives.

In the latest episode Jordan and Napoli Beachnau join Fr. Patrick and Emily to discuss marriage as a vocation, a sacrament, and a way to live the Gospel. To listen go to [www.unleashthegospel.org/podcasts/open-door-policy](https://www.unleashthegospel.org/podcasts/open-door-policy).

## Stewardship: The Key to Parishes Continuing to Thrive During Pandemic

We are now more than one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, and over the past year, the Catholic Church as a whole and the parishes have faced challenges and hardships, unlike anything we have experienced in our lifetime.

From the suspension of public Masses to the cancellation of ministry activities and parish events, the impact of the pandemic has been felt by every one of the approximately 17,000 Catholic parishes in the United States. And even though we are seeing a light at the end of the tunnel, with the promise of a return to normal with the rollout of vaccines and COVID numbers on the decline in many areas around the country, the effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt for months and perhaps years to come for many Catholic parishes.

One of the biggest challenges many parishes have faced this past year has been a drop in offertory collections. According to a special report by “The Pillar” — a Catholic media organization that produces twice-weekly newsletters covering the Church in America — parishes saw on average a 12 percent drop in offertory collections between 2019 and 2020.

In this report, “The Pillar” created a database of 2019 and 2020 parish collections data from 100 parishes in dioceses in 10 selected ecclesiastical provinces across the U.S. The Pillar reported that 82 percent of the parishes examined “suffered a decrease in collections during 2020 compared to 2019. In normal times, those tithing dollars would go to support salaries and programs, repairs and utilities.”

However, “The Pillar” report also showcased some surprising findings, as parishes in several dioceses in some of the areas hit hardest by COVID in terms of lockdowns, infection, and death rates, and unemployment rate, actually saw its offertory numbers go up [*Editor’s Note: as we did at St. Ambrose*]. And across the board, the areas where offertory numbers remained steady or showed improvement during the pandemic shared a common thread. The most successful parishes were the ones with pastors who were engaged and involved and came up with innovative ways to remain connected to parishioners during the lockdowns and restrictions we continue to face, such as Mass attendance capacity, offices being closed or semi-open, and many ministries still on pause. What’s more, the most successful parishes in this report are ones with parish leaders who also took action and helped the members of the parish remain active and committed to ministry involvement, prayer, and keeping up with their financial giving.

**In other words, the parishes [ : Like St. Ambrose ] that found new ways to promote stewardship and active discipleship are the parishes that weathered the storm of the pandemic over the past 12 months.**

The concept of stewardship can help any parish not only weather any storm but thrive despite hard times, and the results we have seen during the pandemic are proof of that. What’s more, “The Pillar’s” recent findings drive that point home. While they may not have used the term “stewardship” when describing the positive things the successful parishes in its report have been doing to help offertory numbers to remain steady or improve, the report spells out actions that are without a doubt rooted in the principles of stewardship — returning a portion of one’s time, talent, and treasure back to God in gratitude for the gifts He has given us.

*By Eric McArdle for Catholic Stewardship Consultants, April 5, 2021*

## Dispensation Expired

While the general dispensation that relieved all Catholics in the Archdiocese from their moral obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days has expired, our Archbishop Vigneron said he will continue to grant “particular dispensations” to those in need, including those who are at high risk of Covid-19.

Others who may continue to be excused from their Sunday obligation include:

- Those who are ill or whose health would be significantly compromised were they to contract a communicable illness;
- Those who care for the sick, homebound or infirmed or someone in a high-risk category;
- Pregnant women;
- Those age 65 or older;
- Those who cannot attend Mass for other reasons (such as a lack of transportation or being turned away because of capacity limits); and
- Those who have “significant fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.”

Anyone who exhibits flu-like symptoms or believes they might be asymptotically carrying COVID-19 or another communicable illness also are asked not to attend Mass “as an act of justice and charity” toward others, Archbishop Vigneron states.

“In allowing the general dispensation to expire, we welcome back to Mass all Catholics who have already been engaged in other activities that would present a similar or greater risk of exposure, such as eating out at restaurants, traveling, partaking in non-essential shopping, and widening one’s circle of contacts,” the Archbishop wrote. “These individuals should also prepare to return to Mass in recognition of its preeminence in our lives as Catholics.”

Masses will still be offered online and serve as “a means to help Catholics nourish their souls” when they could not be present for Mass.

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