

ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON CATHOLIC CHURCH

A WELCOMING & INVITING PARISH • ALWAYS CHRIST-CENTERED AND WORD-BASED



JOIN US DEC. 3 FOR OUR *Parish Advent Retreat* *A Time to Refocus on Christ Through Stewardship*

This holiday season, we have an intentional opportunity to bring Christ back to the center of our Christmas celebration.

"A Parish Advent Retreat helps us refocus our attention on the Lord Jesus and His gifts of forgiveness, peace, and joy amid all the Christmas hoopla," says our pastor, Fr. Jose Panthaplamthottiyil. "Christmas is the anniversary celebration of the birth of Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, to save us from our sins and to give us life and to give it abundantly.

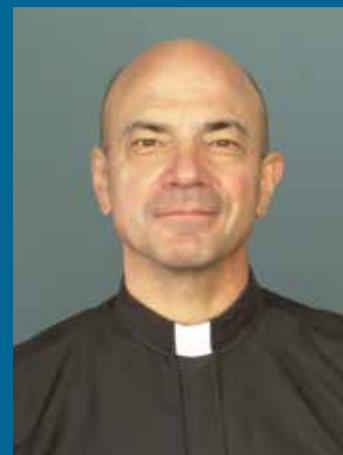
The Parish Advent Retreat is our faith community's annual time to pause and consider the real meaning of Christmas together. The retreat focuses

on the four pillars of stewardship — hospitality, prayer, formation, and service — and considers stewardship in the context of the Bible's teachings.

"Last year, the retreat preacher also inspired our faithful by talking about the three aspects of stewardship — time, talent, and treasure," Fr. Jose says. "The Advent Retreat helped us tremendously to promote our parish's stewardship culture. Moreover, it helped us prepare for the Christmas celebration more spiritually."

This year, our Advent Retreat will be on Dec. 3, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

"Fr. Michael Troha will be the preacher for the 2022 Advent Retreat," Fr. Jose says. "He is currently the pastor



Fr. Michael Troha will lead our 2022 Advent Retreat. Fr. Troha is currently the pastor of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Willoughby, Ohio.

continued on page 5

Meet the Mother Seton Outreach Ministry

Blessed to Serve the Needy of Flagler County

As we approach Christmas, most of us know the feeling of giving someone the perfect gift you know they will love. Those of us with the means to buy gifts probably can shower those we love and care about with things they don't need, like treats, toys, and convenience items. But, for many in Flagler County, the basics aren't covered, not to mention gifts for Christmas. That's where we come in as parishioners. Let's take the extra money this season and give it to those who don't have enough — those who struggle to pay rent or put food on the table. Supporting the Mother Seton Outreach is the perfect opportunity to help our neighbors throughout the area.

The Mother Seton Outreach is open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Volunteers from our parish staff the building so those in need can apply for funds to fulfill their needs — from a partial rent payment to their water or electric bill. The ministry pays those bills directly. There's also a food pantry that people in need can visit once per month.

"We are there to get people over a hump, whether they missed work after getting sick or having surgery or they lose a job," says longtime volunteer Teri Kennelly. "We can't afford to provide long-term support."

This Christmas, you can help those in need by grabbing a tag from the Angel Tree and buying gifts for a family. You'll never believe the smiles volunteers see when they distribute

the gifts. Help is also needed in the Mother Seton Outreach building to move and hand out the donated gifts.

Every dollar to support this ministry comes from donations from our parish. Likewise, every dollar donated is given out to those in need.

Teri handles the front desk on Wednesdays. She's been part of this ministry for 16 years after being asked by Sheila Smith. After teaching CCD for 20 years, Teri enjoyed the opportunity to serve in a new way. She's thankful to be part of this ministry, doing good work for those most in need.

"I told Sheila at that time I'd give this ministry 20 years," she says. "I have a feeling it will be more than that."

Teri has been touched by the stories of those who visit for help.

"You realize you really are helping even though it seems small," she says. "You can't imagine what even \$100 will do for a person in need. We really are helping people who are going through a rough time."

As Teri points out, every person who has supported this ministry is a ministry member. The donors make the difference — volunteers are simply there to distribute the money and food.

"Parishioners step up when we are in need of certain items in the food pantry," she says. "They are there when we need help."

Teri remembers a woman who came in and was elated to see pancakes with syrup. Other people



From Left to Right: Dot Bertram, Aileen Knox, & Ann Kraus.

have been thankful for coffee. She asks parishioners to consider donating other items besides canned food — although all items are needed and appreciated.

"When people come in, we try to keep it light and share a laugh," Teri says. "No one wants to admit they need help."

For Teri, this ministry is not only rewarding, but it has also helped her grow in faith.

"You just feel the Holy Spirit is right there with you," Teri says. "When it all comes together, and that person says, 'I don't know what I would have done without you today,' you know the Holy Spirit is right there."

Please support the Mother Seton Outreach Ministry by donating gifts, food or money in the box at the front of the church.

A Letter From The Pastor

Unwrapping Gifts of Stewardship

Dear Parishioners,

Most people associate “stewardship” with giving. Some think it is a desperate plea for giving some of your time, talent, and treasure to a worthy cause. It may be a noble gesture of generosity that identifies a “faithful steward” so common at this time of year. For some comes an understanding of the stewardship way of life, that brings joy and blessings from giving back a portion of the gifts received from God.

At Christmas, when gift giving and receiving is most common, should it not also be a time when the stewardship way of life becomes the gift that is unwrapped by our consciousness and treasured by our faith? After all, the first gift of Christmas was the gift of God’s own son.

For those who may be still struggling with understanding the stewardship way of life, that may be a stretch for them to accept even at this time of year.

When is the last time you unwrapped a gift that gave you so much peace of mind and heart? Maybe you haven’t ever been aware of receiving such a gift or maybe God is just waiting for you to unwrap what He has always wanted you to have. Perhaps it is the gift God wants you to



have this year for Christmas.

The catalyst for stewardship is gratitude. As we recognize that all we have is a gift from God, it lights up our gratitude as if it were a large Christmas tree with too many lights on it to be counted. All we can do is look at it with wonder and awe and be grateful for what we see, what we have, and the opportunity to give back something in gratitude. It is more than just a “holiday stewardship,” which

seems to be so common at this time of year. It is what is at the core of the stewardship way of life and once that gift is unwrapped, our conversion takes hold, and our lives are transformed into faithful stewardship intended by our God.

My hope and prayer for you and your family are that each and all of you be blessed this season of God’s grace, unwrapping the gift of stewardship in your lives, and finding the joy and peace of “His” during this season of grace and all year long.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Jose Panthaplamthottiyil, CMI
Pastor



FAITH & FELLOWSHIP ADULT GROUP

When the Lord placed a call on her heart, Mary Ann Witek worked hard to see it through. In 2016, a year after moving to Palm Coast from Connecticut, she felt a strong urge to begin an adult group here at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

"I had been a member of the young adult group called the Greenwich Forum at St. Mary's Parish in Greenwich, Conn.," Mary Ann says. "During my last two years, I became involved with the leadership team. The Lord granted the grace for me to find priests and laity for presentations and work with them on the topics of discussion, to organize a small canned-food drive each year at Thanksgiving for our group to donate to the Parish Pantry, and to help organize the Christmas Party."

Having been involved with such a ministry elsewhere, Mary Ann wanted to bring the ministry to her new parish.

"But at that time, I was still suffering severely from fibromyalgia," she says. "Yet, it was so strong that I still asked Fr. Jason, the pastor at this time, about forming one. He said that if I knew a person who would do it, he would. I knew of no one, and since I was unable to, I



Mary Ann Witek (above) works with Deacon Ed Wolff and his wife, Theresa to facilitate the Faith & Fellowship Group at our parish.



Deacon Ed Wolff and his wife, Theresa

spoke to my spiritual director about this giant urge that absolutely would not go away. He advised me to ask the Lord to bless my plans to form a group, which I did."

Eventually, Mary Ann's quality of life improved and she gained the strength to respond to the call God placed on her heart. That was how the Faith & Fellowship Adult Group formed a couple of years ago.

According to its mission statement, the Faith & Fellowship Adult Group's mission is to "engage the adult parish community of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, as well as all Catholics and adults of other religious faiths or beliefs in the surrounding Palm Coast area, to a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the fullness of truth, beauty, and richness of Catholic faith and spirituality."

The group meets on the third Friday of each month in the Rectory Room. Each meeting begins with a song related to the topic of that particular month, followed by a prayer led by Deacon Ed Wolff, who facilitates the meeting. Deacon Ed's wife, Theresa, also assists with the ministry. There is a presentation geared toward the interest of the participants, then the meeting

"I always leave the meeting more inspired by both what I've learned and how beautiful it is to see the spiritual growth and energetic participation of the group members."

— MARY ANN WITEK

Engaging Community, Growing in Christ

is closed out with a prayer. Group members have the opportunity for fellowship, and the presentations can be revisited on YouTube for members to further discern or ask follow-up questions.

"I very much enjoy meeting parishioners and talking about the group with them," Mary Ann says. "It's a blessing because when they come to the meeting, we all share fellowship with one another, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, I've made many new friends. Then I'll see them at Holy

Mass or another parish event and it's like having an extended family — a beautiful parish family."

The group seeks to foster stewardship by encouraging spiritual growth among its participants. Mary Ann, while she assists with leading the group, also enjoys being part of the conversation.

"I always leave the meeting more inspired by both what I've learned and how beautiful it is to see the spiritual growth and energetic participation of the group members," she says.

For more information, please contact Mary Ann Witek at maryawitek@yahoo.com, or Deacon Ed at Wolffpack@bellsouth.net or 904-501-9507.

Parish Advent Retreat *continued from front cover*

of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Willoughby, Ohio."

There will be other opportunities to center ourselves on Christ during this season through the sacraments — particularly through Reconciliation.

"Our Advent Confessions will be at 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 13, and we expect more than a dozen priests to be present to hear Confessions," Fr. Jose says. "We will also hear Confessions from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 19, during which the Blessed Sacrament will be exposed on the main altar for adoration."

This year, our Christmas Vigil Mass will take

place at 4 p.m. on Saturday, Dec. 24, followed by Masses at 7 p.m. and midnight. On Christmas Day, Masses will be at 8 a.m., 10 a.m., 12 p.m., and 5 p.m. in Spanish.

Everyone is welcome to attend the Parish Advent Retreat. Let us use this moment to focus ourselves, our families, and our faith community on Christ as we enter into the Advent season.

"We welcome and encourage our parishioners and all others to attend the Advent Retreat," Fr. Jose says. "This will be an excellent opportunity for them to prepare for the joyful Christmas celebration spiritually."

For more information about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's Parish Advent Retreat, please reach out to Fr. Jose Panthaplamthottiyil at 386-445-2246 or info@seaspcfl.org.

WITNESS TALK ON

Editor's Note: The following is the text version of the Lay Witness talk given by parishioners Ron and Pam Cowles at Masses during our recent Stewardship Renewal Commitment Weekend.

Ron: My name is Ron Cowles, and this is my wife, Pam Cowles. We have been married for 52 years. We have five children, two adopted, and have fostered 65 newborns for Catholic Home Bureau. We have been parishioners at SEAS since 2007. We have lived in Palm Coast almost longer than we have lived anywhere else in the country (15 years). Our Pastor, Fr. Jose, asked us to act as lay witnesses about stewardship at this Mass by sharing our personal stewardship of time, talent, and treasure.

First, we should tell you that we tithe (treasure). Second, we volunteer a lot (time and talent). Pam is the parish nurse, and I'm a greeter, among other things.

As a greeter, I'm asked, "Why do I do what I do?" I usually answer jokingly, "I need more penance than most." Actually, there are two reasons — one, God has been very good to us, and we want to give back; two, we both would like to live with God someday.

Pam: Our early life, like most young couples, was focused on establishing our careers and having a family. Just getting through the day was an accomplishment. I attended Mass on Sundays and shared our treasure with the weekly collection. My father had impressed upon me the importance of tithing to the church. Luke 6:38 says, "Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, crushed down, full and running over, they will give to you. For in the same measure as you give, it will be given to you again." My father once told me that he had called several banks and asked them for a 100-percent return on his money, and they had all hung up on him. He decided to give it to the church.

Our involvement in the church grew with our kids attending Catholic school. Now we were not only tithing, but also paying tuition. This required some sacrifices on our part, but we felt that the benefits outweighed them. There were times that we struggled when unexpected expenses came up, but we were always taken care of, with no debt collectors at the door.

I can remember our first Capital Campaign. Ron was not yet Catholic, the church that we were attending was in the school hall, and they were looking to build a church. Things were a little tight for us at the time, and I was afraid to commit to a pledge (or even ask Ron, for that matter). Imagine my surprise when the church volunteer came to talk with us and explained the need, and Ron readily agreed to help, believing that we should support the church that we belonged to. He later told me that his father was a big church supporter, but they were poor as farmers, so they supported the church, some financially but mostly with labor. He and his dad built a sanctuary for their church in Star, Idaho (it was the size of Seton Hall).

Ron: Becoming foster parents was something I had never considered, but what a rewarding experience! Pam said she wanted to provide foster care to newborn babies to give mothers considering abortions the option of having their baby and knowing they would be adopted. Interestingly, when she contacted Catholic Charities, they said they had little demand for such a service. We were never without a foster baby. God again intervened.

In 1994, Pam returned to college to become a nurse, and we adopted two children through the Catholic Home Bureau of New York. Pam began a Parish Nursing Program at our parish and I, along with our son (who by this time was in college) began teaching an eighth-grade CCD class together. We made a pretty good team (good cop, bad cop) and grew in our faith through the process.

When I retired for the second time, we realized that maintaining the property in New York would be too costly. We began looking to relocate. Pam, originally from California, wanted to move to a warmer climate, as she stated: "Sun, sand, and surf." Our second son, who was now an Emergency Room Physician, had recently moved to Jacksonville, Fla. Looking to be closer to our

STEWARDSHIP

by Ron and Pam Cowles

grandchildren, we started looking at Florida as an option for us. I believe her statement was, “You moved me five times — my turn!”

Pam: We started looking online, starting with churches. I was attracted to SEAS because they already had a Parish Nursing Ministry. There were also two hospitals in the area offering sign-on bonuses to relocate!

God calling. I worked for three years at Florida Hospital Flagler before retiring. During that time, I became active in the Parish Nursing Ministry and taught PREP classes to third and, later, seventh-graders. After retiring, it has freed me to be able to give even more time to the church — expanding the Nurse Ministry to a Health Ministry, establishing support groups, and outreach to those in need in their homes, all of this with help from many volunteers.

It doesn't take great talent to help others. As St. Teresa says, every small act offered with great love becomes a prayer. We have mopped floors, cleaned toilets, and bleached pews for COVID. I have also been known to ask for your blood! In 2017, I felt a calling toward the Secular Franciscans here at SEAS, and I was professed in 2019. I have been truly blessed and received much more than I have given. My daily prayer is that I may draw one person closer to Christ by my example.

Ron: When we first moved to Palm Coast, SEAS was initiating a Capital Campaign to pay off the mortgage. I had the fortune of meeting Cliff Lewis, who was heading the campaign. What a wonderful man — he made a difficult assignment fun and gave me a good understanding of the parish.

When the Campaign began winding down, our new Pastor, Fr. Jim May, reestablished the Parish Council. He asked me to join since I was new to the



Ron and Pam Cowles with their son, Jason, and his girlfriend, Brianna

parish. That was quite a learning experience because I was asked to develop the NORMS or bylaws for the Council. I also met some very dedicated people, in addition to Fr. Jim. Part of the bylaws was that there would be term limits for Council members, the one-year term limit for the Chair. I was the first to violate this NORM and remained on the Council for six years.

Upon exiting the Council, Fr. Richard Pagano asked me to contact Carole Storme about joining the Spiritual Life Committee, taxed with initiating

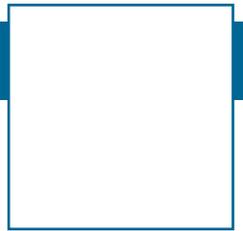
and promoting events for the church. What a privilege and experience. One notable experience that I was assigned was hosting two Ministry Fairs. That exposed me to all the ministries of the parish. I have stayed with the SLC for the last seven years and have also joined the Multicultural Ministry — two of what I consider to be very important ministries in the parish. In 2019, I joined the Knights of Columbus. I am now a fourth-degree Knight.

Pam: We truly feel that our faith community is our family. We would ask that you prayerfully consider what it is that you have to offer to God. Age or expertise is not an issue — you just need to open your heart to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We have two 90-plus-year-old greeters who volunteered as examples for us to follow! Please look over the Stewardship Renewal Packet that you received in the mail. It is self-explanatory. Do you have some time that you could spend in prayer? We have adoration and many active prayer groups. Do you have a special talent or a willing mind and body that you could help with a project, daily task, or someone in need? What can you share of your treasure? Can you do more? Remember, what you give, you shall receive in full measure! God Bless!



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UPCOMING EVENTS

Advent and Christmas

December 3, 9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

*Advent Stewardship Retreat with
Fr. Michael Troha*

December 13, 5.00 p.m.

Advent Penance Service

December 15, 6.00 p.m.

*St. Elizabeth Ann Seton School
Christmas Concert*

December 19

*All-day Adoration and Confessions,
9.00 a.m. – 9.00 p.m.*

Christmas Masses:

December 24

4.00 pm, 7 pm & Midnight

December 25

*8.00 a.m., 10 a.m., Noon,
& 5:00 p.m. (Spanish)*