Gifts of St. Laurence

A Stewardship Newsletter
Christmas 2015

Dear Parish Family,

With joy and gladness we welcome the completion of our Ave Maria Parish Life Center. It is a time of new life and expanded opportunities to serve for our parish of St. Laurence. Cardinal DiNardo blessed the Center on Sunday, December 6. We will have a Christmas Eve Mass there at 4:15 p.m., and on Monday, January 4, it will be fully operating and open to the world.

Thousands of people participated in this beautiful project and I am so grateful to you. There are a few people that we all owe a huge debt of gratitude to for their untold hours of dedicated, brilliant, loving service. The Ave Maria Center would not be close to what it is without the leadership of our Facilities Director, Deanna Ennis, and our Building Committee of Steve Ewbank, Marybeth Trevino, John Heinemann, Al Sander, and Bill Hickl. Tom Terry died nearly 2½ years ago, but he too played a significant role on the committee before then. I cannot tell you how grateful I am to these wonderful parishioners. I hope all of you will see the work of your hands soon. It will serve tens of thousands of people for many decades to come.

I am writing this letter shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris. This event is a revolting and repugnant manifestation of evil at its horrid worst. We are all called upon to reverence the preciousness of human life wherever we find it. This is the polar opposite. There is much to pray for in our world, our country, our families. And we will pray here at St. Laurence, together, constantly and with determined humility and zeal.

St. Theresa said that more things are accomplished by prayer than the world dreams of. Psalm 46 says, "Be still and know that I am God, supreme among the nations, supreme on the earth." We pray for protection, wisdom, discernment and courage.

I pray you have a beautiful Advent and Christmas, everyone. And come to Heart of Worship on February 6.

In Christ's love,

Fr. Drew Wood

Fr. Drew Wood, Pastor

Blessing of the Ave Maria Center

Sunday, December 6, 2015

On the feast of St. Nicholas, Cardinal DiNardo visited St. Laurence to bless the newly completed Ave Maria Parish Life Center. This 80,000 square foot facility will be the new home for our Weekday Children's Program and the primary location for all religious education, ministry meetings, spiritual direction and events of all sizes benefiting our entire community.

Over 800 people attended the event. After assembling in the Marian Hall for a brief, but beautiful liturgy to bless the building, attendees were encouraged to tour the building on their own to take in the beauty of such points of interest as the Oratory of the Rosary, the Courtyard of the Holy Family and the stunning Ave Maria stained glass window in the St. Anne Room.

Fr. Drew expressed his gratitude to the parish for their generous contributions to the capital campaign and to St. Laurence Facilities Director Deanna Ennis and the Building Committee of Steve Ewbank, Bill Hickl, John Heinemann, Al Sander & Marybeth Trevino, who steered this project. The result of this collaborative effort is a new home for catechesis, community, outreach and evangelization for generations to come.

Ave Maria Stained Glass Window

Inspired by the stained glass window in the Co-Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, this window was created for us by the same artists. Rich in Marian symbolism, such as the intertwined A & M, the crown, 12 stars and a spray of lilies, it appears on our front facade to serve as a beautiful means for evangelization in our community.

Holy Family Statue

This unique statue of Jesus, Mary & Joseph is located in the Holy Family Courtyard, depicting a scene from the daily life of the Holy Family with Jesus as a young adolescent. Families today can relate to Mary in the traditional role of educating and preserving the faith, with Jesus listening intently, and Joseph, always gentle and protective.

Wedding at Cana Mosaic

Located in the Oratory of the Rosary, this mosaic depicts the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine at the Wedding at Cana, one of the Luminous Mysteries. The Holy Mother plays an important role as she urges the servants (and urges us today) to "do whatever he tells you." This artwork was created by the same studio as the Ave Maria stained glass window.

Be a part of it!

It's not too late to donate to the "May Your Glory Shine" campaign. To date, over $7.6 million has been pledged in support of this facility which will benefit our entire parish community. Visit **www.stlaurence.org/ave-maria-parish-life-center** or contact Tony Oltremari, Parish Administrator, at 281-980-9812 to learn more.

ST. LAURENCE
Growing as an Engaged Church

Last month, adult parishioners had an opportunity to complete a parishioner engagement survey, the ME25, and the results are in!

In the weeks and months ahead, we will make it a priority to review these numbers for areas of strength, which we can build upon, and areas that represent our greatest opportunities for improvement. Following is a quick topline report of our scores. To view the full engagement survey report, please visit the parish website.

www.stlaurence.org/get-engaged

ME25 Statement	Why this measure is important	% parishioners who Agree (4) or Strongly Agree (5)	
		4+5	5
As a member of my parish, I know what's expected of me.	*We need to know what we expect of each other, in order for St. Laurence to be a place where each of us has a sense of belonging.*	**74%**	**36%**
In my parish, my spiritual needs are met.	*The parish is a place in which each of us should find spiritual support.*	**80%**	**44%**
In my parish, I regularly have the opportunity to do what I do best.	*We need to be able to discover our talents and offer them in service to God and others.*	**67%**	**34%**
In the last month, I received recognition or praise from someone in my parish.	*We need our service to be recognized so we know that what we do is of value.*	**35%**	**17%**
The spiritual leaders in my parish seem to care about me as a person.	*Our leaders – priests, deacons, parish leaders and staff – strengthen our parish by telling us we matter through their care.*	**68%**	**36%**
There is someone in my parish who encourages my spiritual development.	*We know we matter when we have someone who encourages our life of faith.*	**54%**	**28%**
As a member of my parish, my opinions seem to count.	*Every person's thoughts are important! This is one important way we grow as a parish.*	**57%**	**26%**
The mission or purpose of my parish makes me feel my participation is important.	*It takes each of us to participate in order for us to be the community we can be.*	**70%**	**35%**
The other members of my parish are committed to spiritual growth.	*When we really belong, we look around and see others who are growing in faith like us.*	**77%**	**37%**
Aside from family members, I have a best friend in my parish.	*We each need to know there is someone in our parish whom we can turn to, in joy or in need.*	**46%**	**28%**
In the last six months, someone in my parish has talked to me about the progress of my spiritual growth.	*It is important that each of us has someone who cares enough about us to ask about our spiritual life. That is a sign that we are growing together.*	**25%**	**12%**
In my parish, I have opportunities to learn and grow.	*Our parish should be a place for everyone to learn about our faith and to grow as a result.*	**79%**	**45%**

St. Laurence: Growing as an Engaged Church

The ME25 measures Parishioner Engagement & Spiritual Commitment

Parishioner Engagement is an emotional connection to the parish community. Research by the Gallup organization tells us that people who are engaged in their parish are vastly more likely to be Spiritually Committed individuals. ***Spiritually committed*** people are much more likely to be happy with their lives (even in the midst of trial or challenge); they are also more likely to invite others to worship or attend an event in their community, they are more likely to give selflessly of their time and their resources, and they are more likely to serve in wonderful ways. In other words, they are living disciples!

How engaged are we?

In the ME25 survey that over **3,800** of us completed, **32%** of the people who responded answered the questions in a way that demonstrates parishioner engagement. This compares to a **national average of 16% among all Catholics**. Compared to other churches committed to growing in engagement (those who have taken the ME25), the national Catholic average is **30%** and national All Faiths average is **31%**. When you visit a parish other than St. Laurence and return saying it "feels" good to be back with your community, you are experiencing us as a **community growing in engagement**.

32% ENGAGED

Loyal members with a strong psychological connection to St. Laurence. They are spiritually committed, more likely to invite friends to parish events and give generously, both of their financial gifts and in their commitment of time.

49% NOT ENGAGED

Members who may attend regularly, but are not psychologically connected to the parish. Their connection is more social than spiritual. They give moderately but not sacrificially, and they may do a minimal amount of service. They are less likely to invite others and are more likely to leave.

19% ACTIVELY DISENGAGED

These members usually show up only once or twice a year. They can tell you what parish they belong to, but maybe not know Fr. Drew, Fr. Jaison or Fr. Simon by name. However, this group also includes those who may regularly attend Mass, but are unhappy... and everyone knows it.

Where do we go from here?

Now that the results are in, we have a starting place to measure engagement! The full report is posted on our parish website and we will begin to pull together teams of parishioners, ministry leaders, staff and clergy to develop a long-term plan for addressing big issues and to identify easy steps we can take right now that can make a difference. Two years from now, we'll conduct the same survey and see if we've been able to make any progress.

Why should we bother to do this?

Consider our parish mission statement: We the people of St. Laurence are centered in the love of Christ and live to glorify God in all we do. Are we doing that? Are we even close? How do we help others know Jesus Christ so they can live their life here on earth as one of his disciples? This is the goal. To help one another to be centered in the love of Jesus and demonstrate that love in all we do.

SERVE THE LORD WITH GLADNESS

13th Annual Heart of Worship
Saturday, February 6, 2016
11:30 am – 9:00 pm

"Shout joyfully to the LORD, all you lands; serve the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful song."

Psalm 100 is the inspiration for this year's Heart of Worship, a full day of praise & worship, great speakers and dinner, followed by Mass and Eucharistic Adoration. Bishop Brendan Cahill, the newly ordained bishop of the Diocese of Victoria, will set the tone for the day as the keynote speaker, with Sr. Miriam James Heidland and Ennie Hickman adding their perspective to the theme of serving with gladness.

Each year on the Saturday before Lent begins, Fr. Drew offers Heart of Worship to his parishioners and visitors from all across the Archdiocese and state as an opportunity to grow closer to Jesus, the Heart of our worship. Surrounded by 1,400 other Catholics on this same journey, it is a chance for each of us to recharge, renew and move forward in faith. This daylong event is open to everyone 6th grade and older and the cost to attend is $20; register before January 15, and the cost is just $15. Registration is available online at **www.stlaurence.org/HOW** and in-person at the parish office.

Bishop Brendan Cahill is a product of Houston's St. Mary's Seminary. He served in local parishes before being appointed rector of St. Mary Seminary, then director of Clergy Formation and Chaplaincy Services for our Archdiocese. This past June, Pope Francis appointed him as the Third Bishop of Victoria. Sr. Miriam James is an author and popular speaker who is a part of a global missionary community, the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity (SOLT). Ennie Hickman is a regular Steubenville presenter and serves as president of Adore Ministries, dedicated to bringing the message of Jesus to the marginalized and the forgotten.

Come be inspired by these three great speakers to "serve the Lord with gladness." For more information, please visit the parish website or call the parish office at 281-980-9812.

Mary, Star of Evangelization: Reflection on the Advent Parish Mission

By Lee Schmoe

For the last couple of months I have been looking forward to our Advent mission; asking myself what will I learn, how will I be changed? Then I found out our speaker, Bishop Sam Jacobs, was going to talk about Mary. Wonderful! This has been my year of Mary - starting with my January 1st birthday (which is also the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God), in September a 2-week Marian pilgrimage with Fr. Santy in France, and the long anticipated opening of our new Ave Maria Parish Life Center.

In the first session, Bishop Sam explained that Mary is our Mother of Mercy. When wrapped in her compassionate arms of mercy we can approach with confidence our God so rich in mercy and graces. In fact, to help the world focus on the power of God's unlimited mercy, Pope Francis has declared a Year of Mercy beginning December 8.

In the second session, Bishop Sam explained how Mary is the model and Star of Evangelization, that above all things she wants to bring me and you to her son, Jesus Christ. She is Christ's first disciple and evangelist. He explained five key steps of evangelism using Mary's visit to Elizabeth as an example:

1. Ponder in your heart and treasure what God has done for you
2. Leave the security of your comfort zone
3. Have personal encounters with others
4. Proclaim God's deeds in our own lives and those of others
5. Continue to journey and evangelize with this person for a period of time

At the end of each session, the Bishop gave each of us an Advent challenge – challenges that I pass on to you:

- For Christmas, what gift are you going to give Jesus? How about daily acts of love? Every day until Christmas write at least one act of love you did on a piece of paper and put it in a box. On Christmas, open the box and read each one to Christ.
- Invite one person to join you at Christmas Mass. Begin by praying for that person and then gently, yet persistently, encourage them to say yes. They may say no, but through this act of love you are one step closer to being the person that God wants you to become.

Find audio recordings of Bishop Sam Jacobs' Advent Parish Mission at www.stlaurence.org/parishmission.

Serving with Gladness: Gift Giving With a Grin

By Angela Rankin

The Leo Club of St. Laurence is the junior chapter of the largest volunteer organization in the world, known as the Lions Club International. The Leos began at St. Laurence Catholic School in 2002, and is now the largest club at the school, committed to serving their parish, school, and community.

At Christmas, the Leos of St. Laurence, comprised of one hundred 7th and 8th graders, partners with the Rainbow Room, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children and families in crisis, to provide Christmas gifts to Rainbow children.

Wish lists are given to the Leos and teams are formed to purchase gifts from the lists, not to exceed $100 per child. To make this shopping trip possible, the Leos raise money throughout the school year by holding bake sales, and they are grateful for the generosity of sponsors, such as The Meadows Foundation.

After shopping for the gifts on the wish lists, the Leos wrap, bag, label and deliver the gifts to the Rainbow Room. The smiles on the children's faces make all the work worthwhile and the Leos learn the power of giving and at the same time, a new appreciation for all they have. The Leos truly learn how to "serve the Lord with gladness."

Serving with Gladness
For the sake of the flock

By Captain Patrick Coffman, USMC
Son of Richard & Karen Coffman, Parishioners

The idea of "service" to me is the act of offering yourself for the benefit of others. In a society that links happiness and individuality, the notion that selflessness brings joy is underappreciated. Jesus shows us the path to fulfillment through service, and as the Good Shepherd, reveals the full spectrum of devotion, from compassion to strength.

Though the shepherd's life is fraught with danger, there is redemptive joy gained by enduring hardships for the sake of the flock. The shepherd leads, but also serves the flock, responsible for their every need. The shepherd's crook is not merely a walking staff, but also a weapon for the defense of the flock. Watching over the sheep at night, shepherds lie down across the breach of the pen to offer themselves as the first line of defense. Military service parallels these ideas, and it is through the companionship of the Good Shepherd Himself that we are able to joyfully carry out our life's calling.

Our service presents unique opportunities to serve God's people around the world. The U.S. military often leads relief efforts following natural disasters and illness outbreaks. Even in war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan, humanitarian missions are a staple of operations.

Our families are critical in this mission, for they sacrifice every bit as much as we do; they live these same values. Military spouse and family networks are some of the most active communities of support and outreach that I have witnessed. In both joy and sorrow, they serve and support each other for the greater good.

I am reminded of St. Ignatius Loyola, an old soldier, who founded the Jesuits upon the motto Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam. For the Greater Glory of God. I cannot think of a more fitting phrase to describe not only military service, but the general call to serve the Lord in our Catholic faith.

Serving with Gladness
One dinner at a time

By Marc & June Sherman

Our family got involved in Share God's Bounty as a service project for RCIA a few years ago, not knowing much about it, other than it was a good idea. Since then, it has become one of our favorite ways to volunteer at St. Laurence. Why? As our kids would say, "It's fun to do God's work!" Share God's Bounty brings an organized effort that is fueled by putting EVERYONE in your family to work. The kids get excited because there is a job for each person of the family, from the kids packing the boxes and transporting them, to the pick-up points, to the adults directing the traffic and loading up the cars. Yes, it's fun, but it's also a beautiful lesson for our children on the importance of stewardship and helping our neighbors.

Share God's Bounty comes alive when you reach out to a family in need and take in their loving and gracious reactions. You see first-hand the overabundance of love we have at St. Laurence that truly makes a difference one Thanksgiving dinner at a time. This is one among the many beautiful ways parishioners "Serve the Lord with Gladness" at St. Laurence Catholic Church.

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3100 Sweetwater Blvd.
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281.980.9812
For event details see our website at www.stlaurence.org

Christmas 2015 Mass Schedule

Christmas Eve - Thursday, Dec 24
4:00pm - 6:30pm - 9:00pm - 12:00am Midnight
(Arrive at 11:30pm for Lessons & Carols)
In the Church

4:15pm - Mass at the Ave Maria Center

Christmas Day - Friday, December 25
8:00am - 10:00am - 12:00pm
In the Church

Holy Family - Sunday, Dec 27
(Regular Sunday Mass Schedule)
Sat 5:00pm Vigil
Sun 7:30, 9:00, 11:00am, and 12:45, 5:00pm
In the Church

Solemnity of Mary - Friday, Jan 1
HOLY DAY OF OBLIGATION
Thursday, Dec 31 - 5:00pm &
12:00am Midnight Mass
Friday, Jan 1 - 9:00am - 11:00am - 1:00pm
In the Church

MASS SCHEDULE

Daily Masses
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday
7:30 a.m. & 12:00 p.m.
Wednesday 7:30 a.m. & 6:30 p.m.
Friday 8:15 a.m. & 12:00 p.m.
Saturday 8:30 a.m.

Sunday Masses
Saturday 5:00 p.m.
Sunday 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m.,
11:00 a.m., 12:45 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

Misa en Español
Segundo y cuarto sábado del
mes a 7:00 pm en La Capilla
de la Misericordia Divina

Sacramento de Reconciliación
en Español será ofrecido antes
de la misa del 6:00 pm a 6:45 pm

Reconciliation
Saturday after morning Mass
Saturday 4:00 pm to 4:45 pm
Wednesday: 5:30 pm to 6:20 pm
Mon.-Thur. after morning Mass

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo

St. Laurence Catholic Church
Rev. Drew Wood, Pastor
Rev. Jaison Thomas, M.S.F.S., Parochial Vicar
Rev. Simon Kipiti, Parochial Vicar

Deacon Rey Arellano, Deacon Albert Bothe
Deacon Don Burns, Deacon Charles Plant

The Gifts of St. Laurence is a quarterly publication designed, written and published by St. Laurence parishioners.
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