

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CATHOLIC PARISH

Drawing Near to Christ Through Our Parish Mission

So, what's on your calendar for Feb. 26 through 28? If it's not coming to our parish mission, you may want to get out your pen!

The parish mission aims to bring spiritual renewal to our parish community in a beautiful way. Deacon Donald R. McArdle will lead the mission. A deacon for 38 years in the Diocese of Savannah, Deacon Don and his wife, Pat, have nine children and 25 grandchildren. Formerly, he practiced as a CPA for 40 years.

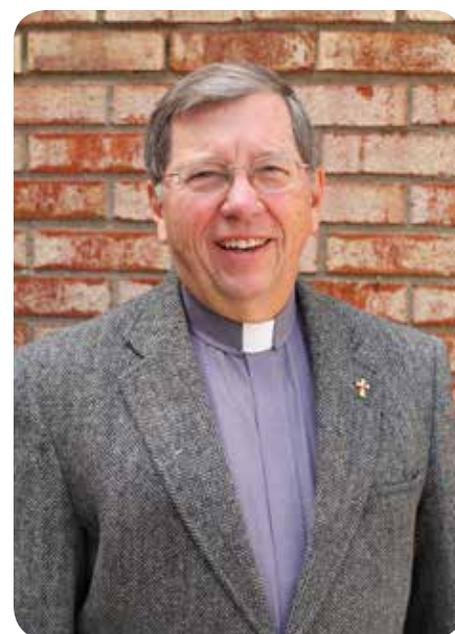
"I encourage parishioners to come to the mission, because it will be a special time to get away and give Christ more time to speak to their hearts about what He wants to say to each one of them," Deacon Don says. "I believe that it is so important for adult Catholics to continue pursuing faith formation because our faith is the most important thing in our lives — much more important than our career, our golf game, our physical condition, etc."

Deacon Don will preach at all Sunday Masses and then lead the mission during the second week of Lent — on Feb. 26, 27 and 28, beginning at 7 each evening.

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— Deacon Donald R. McArdle, Diocese of Savannah



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The Eucharist and Stewardship as a Way of Life

More than 20 years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a pastoral letter titled *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. This document was an invitation to follow Christ Who gave of Himself for us. Each of us is called to serve our neighbors and to be stewards of God's creation and of all that has been entrusted to us. However, to truly understand stewardship, we must look to the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is the total gift of our loving Savior to us. Stewardship is our response to that gift.

Even the word "Eucharist" implies stewardship. The word "Eucharist" finds its roots in the Latin word *eucharistia*, which in turn came from the Greek word *eukaristos*, which meant, quite simply, "gratitude" or "thanksgiving." How fitting that we, who are called to be a stewardship people, celebrate at the focal point of every Mass an act of thanksgiving and gratitude — namely, the reception of Jesus' gift to us — the Eucharist.

In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the bishops speak of the Eucharist in this way: "The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity... we enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in Him, with one another. Here His love — indeed, His very Self — flows into us as disciples and, through us and our practice of stewardship to the entire human race."

When we receive Christ's Body in the Holy Eucharist, we hear the minister say, "The Body of Christ." To this, we respond, "Amen" — which means in Hebrew, "Yes; it is so." This is the essence of stewardship. We should enter the Church for Mass out of "gratitude." We recognize the presence of the Lord in Holy Communion, and then we truly receive the Lord. What is left for us to do is the fulfillment of stewardship — that is, sharing what we have received in love of God and neighbor. Our entire experience speaks to stewardship — we are grateful; we recognize the real presence of the Lord; we receive the Lord; and then we share what we have received.

Christ's gift to us through the Eucharist is an invitation to us. We are called to give beyond what is convenient or what may be comfortable. We are called to forgive even when forgiveness may not be deserved; we



are called to love even when that love is not returned. We are called to love as God loves us.

The Eucharist is stewardship celebrated. The Mass is more than a ritual. It is an actual encounter with God, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We need to respond to the Eucharist with our complete selves. What we experience in the Eucharist should, in turn, translate into our daily lives. We are committed to the Church, which is Christ's body. We show our love for His body by acts of charity and generosity. We spend time in prayer, expressing our gratitude and our love.

God's greatest gift to us is Christ's great love for us — this was shown when He was crucified on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to give us eternal life. God's love for us is without limit, and He offers Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Stewardship is how we respond to that gift.

A Letter From Our Pastor

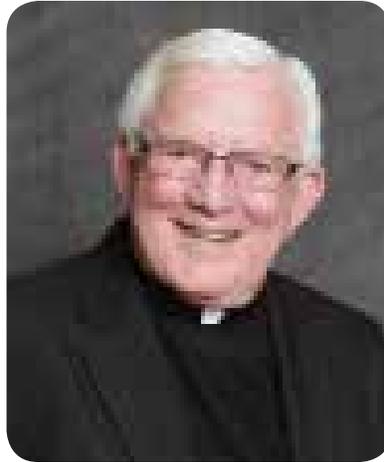
Preparing for Our Lenten Journey and Prioritizing the Gift of Time

Dear Parishioners,

Lent begins on Wednesday, Feb. 14, Ash Wednesday. Most of us are aware that Lent is a time of prayer, penance and giving alms. So, it would seem that Lent is a perfect time for stewardship. As we examine our lives and try to find ways to deepen our relationship with God, it is good to remember that whenever we give our time, talent, or treasure, we are living as better stewards.

For each of us, our relationship with God should be the first priority. God has given us the precious gift of time, so we need to thank Him for this gift by using it wisely. Stewardship of time is about how we spend every minute of every day. Most of us probably feel that we do not have enough time for all the things we hope to accomplish or achieve. However, each of us is given the same amount of time — 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week. So, how do we choose to use our time? We need to prioritize this gift of time, which means putting the most important things first.

If deepening our relationship with God is our first priority, then time spent in prayer, at Mass, in our personal lives through reading Holy Scriptures, and meditating on God's Holy Word should be paramount. Our second priority might be our relationship to our family. We need to spend time building a strong family unit filled with respect and love for life. And perhaps our third priority should be our relationship with our parish and our community of faith. Finally, we must spend time supporting others in their faith journeys and ministering to those in need.



We must remember that first requirement for our Lenten journey — prayer. Our Catholic faith is full of prayer forms and traditions that are available to us all. Find a prayer form that works for you, and truly cultivate your prayer life in order to connect and build a real, personal relationship with the Lord. We all need to carve out time during Lent by dedicating time to prayer. Perhaps it is only 10 minutes each day for quiet reflection on Holy Scripture. Or it may be something more substantial — perhaps a reflective weekend retreat.

We might consider Lent our own personal Stewardship Renewal season. Fasting, prayer and almsgiving should be what we try to do the entire year. But we must make an intentional effort to practice these during the 40 days of Lent. After all, 40 days comprises just over 10 percent of the year — and that is remarkably close to our stewardship tithe of 10 percent, isn't it?

God bless you in all you do, and especially during this holy time of Lent.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Holmberg". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rev. J. Michael Holmberg
Pastor

Our Catholic faith is full of prayer forms and traditions that are available to us all. Find a prayer form that works for you, and truly cultivate your prayer life in order to connect and build a real, personal relationship with the Lord.

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Meet the Alvarez

Music, Mathematics and Stewardship

For parishioner Minerva Cordero and her family, how they have shared their time and talents with others has truly impacted their faith and perspective — just one of the undeniably positive outcomes of stewardship.

“We see the world very differently after having this experience and working with these children,” Minerva says. “It’s a very strong reminder of how many blessings we have in our lives and how fortunate we are to be able to play a little part in making their lives a little better.”

Minerva and her husband, James Alvarez, have been parishioners at St. Vincent de Paul since they moved to Arlington in 2001. They’re parents to sons Alex Vourtsanis, 25, and Nicholas Alvarez, 17. They are also professors of mathematics at UT Arlington, and are serious about living out their Catholic faith and giving back to the community around them.

Both James and Minerva were raised in the Church, and being involved in the parish was something that came somewhat naturally. James who has been involved in music ministry his whole life, has been involved in the choir for

many years, and currently serves as a cantor. Minerva has taught children’s Faith Formation classes, and has served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, bringing the Eucharist to those in nursing homes.

Their most recent adventure in stewardship, however, began at their youngest son’s initiation, uniting their family’s love of service — and numbers.

After going through an open-heart surgery and receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation during his sophomore year of high school, Nicholas was determined to find ways to give back to his community. As an all-state violinist, he had already found a way to share his musical talent, participating alongside James, in the Music Ministry at St. Vincent de Paul. But it wasn’t long before he found another unique way to contribute, using his passion for mathematics to make a difference in the lives of others as a tutor with Catholic Charities Refugee Program.

“Nicholas had volunteer hours he had to do for Confirmation, and Minerva and I got excited,” James recalls of how



(From left) Nicholas Alvarez, Alex Vourtsanis, James Alvarez and Minerva Cordero find unique ways to use their interests and passions to serve God and others.

Arce Family

and a Heart of Service

it all started. “We thought that this would be a great thing to do. Not only did we get to use mathematics to help the kids, but we also got to do it as a family.”

Now, James, Minerva and Nicholas all serve as math tutors with Catholic Charities, for refugee children, in Arlington and Ft. Worth each Sunday. This ministry has impacted each of them in ways they didn’t expect.

“These young people have already experienced so much in their lives, it’s extremely humbling,” Minerva says. “It’s very interesting for me to see Nicholas interacting with them, to see how their experiences in life are so different — they’re worlds apart.”

“Seeing these kids, our eyes were opened,” Nicholas says. “How humbled we felt to be able to be teaching them. It was really beautiful.”

For James, serving refugees is an opportunity to live out the faith that they profess in words, though their actions.

“Part of being a Christian family is practicing what we believe in, and part of that is taking care of those who are less fortunate than we are, those who have been estranged or pushed out of their own countries,” James says.

“What did you do for the least of these? ‘What you did for the least of these, you did for me,’” Minerva continues, recalling Matthew 25:40. “Seeing these children — it’s a reminder of how much we need to do something to help.”

Serving together has also become an opportunity to strengthen their relationships with each other.

“It becomes quality family time,” Minerva says. “When you’re doing ministries at the church, it is family time and it makes you realize you’re part of a bigger family — the family of God.

“When you serve others, the greatest benefit comes to you,” she adds. “The benefit and the blessings we get as a family, it’s unbelievable.”

They remind other families to start by emphasizing the faith at home and then look for ways to use their particular interests and talents to give back, always keeping in mind that children learn from example.

“In your home, focus on prayer and having conversations about what you believe God wants you to do, and then find something you really feel called to,” James says. “For different people, that will be different things. See how you can

“We see the world very differently after having this experience and working with these children. It’s a very strong reminder of how many blessings we have in our lives and how fortunate we are to be able to play a little part in making their lives a little better.” — Minerva Cordero

give back and where you feel comfortable, and gently nudge your kids in that direction. Lead by example, and don’t be afraid to involve your kids in your ministry.”

Now, a senior in high school, preparing to study mathematics and music at MIT, Nicholas encourages other young people to make the most of their time, finding ways to serve those around them.

“Seeing everything that’s happened to the refugees made me realize, I can be doing so much by giving back — now I wish that I’d been doing it longer!” Nicholas says, encouraging other teenagers. “Use whatever talents you can and try to contribute in a unique way!”

James and Minerva also encourage busy families to find ways to serve and give back, trusting that God will provide the time.

“It was overwhelming when we started this,” says James of their busy life, filled with careers, school and involvement at the parish. “I was thinking, ‘Can I really add this to my plate?’ But the very first day we did it, I was like, ‘I’m so glad we did this.’”

“Somehow things are getting done at work and at home, and all the things we’re supposed to do on our Sunday afternoon and evenings, they’re getting done somehow,” Minerva says with a smile. “It’s a little bit of time on our part, but it means so much to these children.”

“I think the more that we give of our time, talent, and treasure, we feel blessings in so many ways,” James adds. “We want to give as much as we can, because when we give a lot, we always receive so much more.”

Lenten Practices: **Penance and Abstinence**

For many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say "goodbye" to meat on Fridays and "hello" to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hard-wired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing that Catholics definitely understand, it's adhering to the laws of tradition. Indeed, the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the Scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence, and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence.

First, all humans are sinners. Second, penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God. Third, the Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance. And finally, Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.

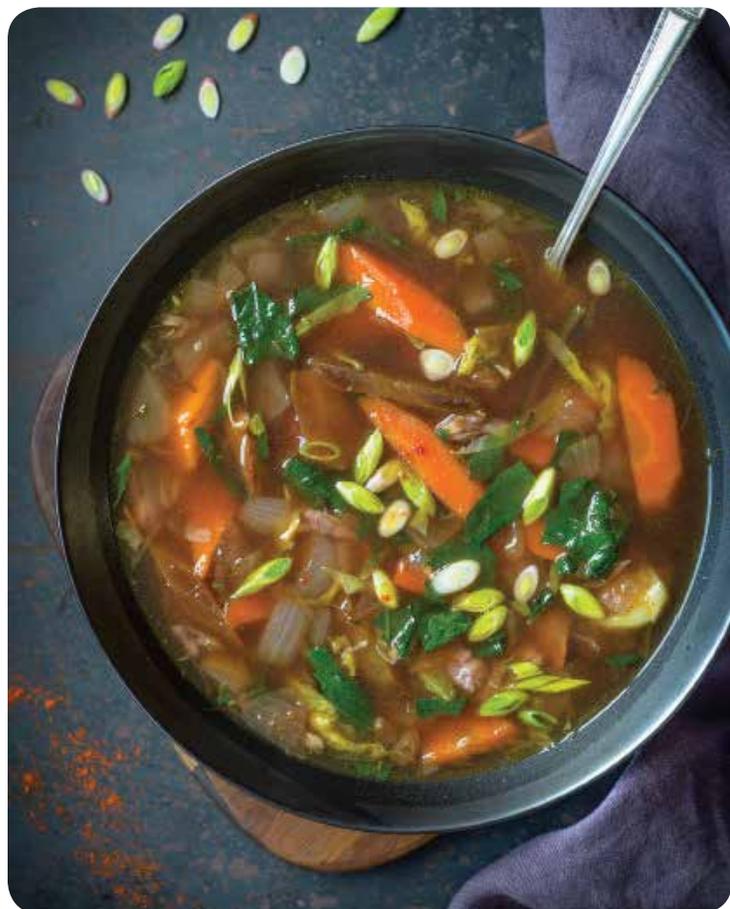
The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ – they are not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, which falls on Feb. 14 this year, and Good Friday, falling this year on March 30. And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent.

Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.

But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others – just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind – "by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own" (*Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence*, 15).

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time, talent and treasure. The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.



Meet The Farr Family

Discovering the Blessings of Involvement and Service

“Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” — Luke 12:48

For parishioners Christopher and Stacie Farr, Christ’s words in the Gospel of Luke sum up what it means to live a stewardship lifestyle. For considering themselves to be truly blessed in their life together, they strive daily to find ways to express their love and gratitude to Christ.

“We have lived a very, very blessed life,” Christopher says. “To me, stewardship is an opportunity to thank God for the many blessings He has given us by giving back to others.”

“It’s a calling and the ultimate way to live your faith without words,” Stacie adds. “The Lord opens opportunities for you to say ‘yes’ to Him, and then awaits our response.”

Christopher and Stacie first became part of our St. Vincent de Paul community 19 years ago, shortly after graduating from Texas Tech. Seeking to build upon the profound faith experiences they had each had during their college years, the then-engaged couple was anxious to find a vibrant parish family that would continue guiding them in their faith journey. And when they finally came across our parish, Christopher says, it was love at first sight.

Since then, the Farris have strived to find ways to become active parishioners amidst the pressures of jobs and responsibilities of raising their two children. Christopher has ushered for the 10:45 a.m. Mass for nearly 15 years and remains an active member of our parish’s Men’s Club, in which he currently serves as the President. He has also participated in several Christmas presentations and enjoys playing an active part in the annual Palm Sunday Passion Play. Stacie, meanwhile, continues to utilize her teaching expertise by assisting in the parish nursery, teaching both at the Learning Center and parish Religious Education, and serving as a regular volunteer for Vacation Bible School. She also enjoys serving as a Eucharistic Minister, an Ulster Project Counselor, and participating with Noreen’s Nourishment.

Yet, similar to how the talents multiplied when the faithful servants put them to good use, Christopher and Stacie have repeatedly found that the blessings of ministry involvement far outweigh the time and sacrifice that goes into them.

“Finding small opportunities to aid in the growth and development of the St. Vincent de Paul community has been a



The Farr family

deeply rewarding experience,” Christopher says. “The Men’s Club in particular has had a profound impact on me as a Christian man, helping me look for practical ways to live out my faith as a way of life.”

“It has been so wonderful to have those opportunities to teach the young ones and become that example to them, especially since I also teach within the community,” Stacie says. “Some of my weekly students have had the opportunity to see me acting out my faith in both the classroom and at church, which is a true blessing.”

Over the years, the couple has felt blessed to have truly laid roots here, watching their relationship with God, one another, and their fellow parishioners deepen and grow. Playing a crucial part in this growth has been their intentional decision to serve in whatever way possible — to give what they have and embrace their stewardship calling wholeheartedly.

“This is our home,” Stacie says. “We have friends that we love like family because they *are* family — our church family. The Lord has answered my childhood prayers for that sense of belonging. I have roots and definitely feel like I belong here. And for that, I feel very blessed and thankful.”

“It’s all about having real purpose in life,” Christopher adds. “Where’s the fun in working hard if you don’t take time to give back? A life without stewardship would be very unrewarding.”



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MASSES

Saturday Vigil: 5:30 p.m.

Sunday: 9 a.m., 10:45 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.

Weekdays: (M/Th/Fr) 8:45 a.m. in the chapel
(Wed) 6:00 p.m. in the chapel

Holy Days: 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Tuesday Morning Prayer: 8:45 p.m. in the chapel

Confessions: Saturday: 4-5 p.m. in the chapel

Drawing Near to Christ Through Our Parish Mission

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The mission will take place in the context of Evening Prayer with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and a talk by Deacon Don on some aspect of Stewardship. The main topic of the mission will be “Growing as Disciples of Jesus.”

“I would like to give an overall refresher on how stewardship helps us grow as disciples and, more specifically, how the use of our time and talent in the service of God can help us grow,” Deacon Don says. “The mission will primarily be a time of prayer to help us all reconnect with our Lord and Savior. Evening Prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament with music will help foster a prayerful atmosphere.”

When asked what he hopes attendees gain from the mission, Deacon Don says, “I hope that it helps people

get better connected to Jesus and seek His direction in their life — for the rest of Lent, as well as for the rest of their lives.”

As expressed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in the pastoral letter, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, “Stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives. Disciples who practice stewardship recognize God as the origin of life, the giver of freedom, the source of all they have and are and will be.”

This parish mission may be an ideal opportunity to reflect on what this compelling statement means to each one of us on our spiritual journey.

There is no fee to attend the parish mission and people do not need to register for it. For more information, please contact Director of Stewardship and Ministry, Renée Bader in the parish office at 817-478-8206.