



St. John the Baptist

CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Strengthening Our Parents Through Spiritual Renewal

As a parent, we are always striving to do what is best for our children. We work hard to ensure that they are well fed, well educated, and that they grow up into well-rounded, happy individuals. But sometimes, the most important thing that we can do for our children is take time for ourselves – time set aside for our own spiritual renewal, and time spent in conversation with God.

“When it comes to the faith, you, as the parent, are the number one educator of your child,” explains Director of Religious Education Carol Shelton. “But if you aren’t close to God, you really can’t help your children establish that relationship. That is why it is so important that we create opportunities for parents to take time for themselves so that they can reestablish their own relationship with God.”

Trying to create these “opportunities” for renewal, St. John the Baptist recently hosted its first God Is! Day of Renewal on Saturday, Oct. 22. Created by Evangelize All Ministries, this retreat is a day-long journey designed to bring people into a deeper relationship with Christ. Taking a Trinitarian approach, the day includes testimonies and talks from other parents and parishioners, small-group discussions, time



“I noticed people bonding together,” says DRE Carol Shelton. “They had opportunities to share their own lives — moments when God touched them.”



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St. John the Baptist

Being a Good Christmas Steward

The Christmas season is fast approaching. We have already made our gift lists, and perhaps even checked them twice. First on the list is family, followed by friends, our children's teachers and coaches, and maybe even the mailman. Christmas inspires us to give our family and friends gifts of love and appreciation, in gratitude towards all they do for us during the year. The very idea of holiday gift giving — a display of love and gratefulness to those who have touched our lives — is parallel to the concept of stewardship. When we give to God, we are effectively saying "thanks" for all He has done for us.

Think of all God has done for you this year. How have His loving arms embraced you? Maybe He has answered a special prayer intention. Maybe He has created a job opportunity for an unemployed loved one. He may have helped safely bring a new baby into the family, or instilled peace during a particularly difficult time. God's blessings are countless, and the abundant gifts He bestows upon us are given freely out of incomprehensible love — despite our unworthiness.

Think of the ways you respond to God's bountiful blessings. How do you choose to show Him your thankfulness? As we prepare for the coming of Christ

during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan — but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.

The very first name on the list — above our spouse, children, relatives, and friends — should be God's name. As disciples of Christ, we are called to give God our "first fruits," not our leftovers. We should joyfully place God first on our gift-giving lists, not out of guilt or as an afterthought, but out of love and appreciation.

Stewardship allows us to tangibly give a Christmas gift to God through our time, talent and treasure. We give God gifts of time through prayer, such as spending time before the Blessed Sacrament or praying the Rosary. We can give our talents to God by way of simple charitable

actions, such as bringing a meal to a hard-pressed neighbor, or watching a young mother's children so that she is able to prepare for her own family's Christmas celebration. And as for treasure, we can give God a portion of our income this Christmas by dropping an extra dollar in the collection basket. Whatever choices you make this season, make the decision to be a good Christmas steward.

As we prepare for the coming of Christ during Advent, will we remember to add Jesus' name to our list? Uncle John wants a new drill, and Grandpa definitely needs a new cardigan — but what does Jesus want? It is His birthday we are celebrating, after all.



A Letter From Our Pastor

Advent: Moving Toward a Time of Fulfilled Hope

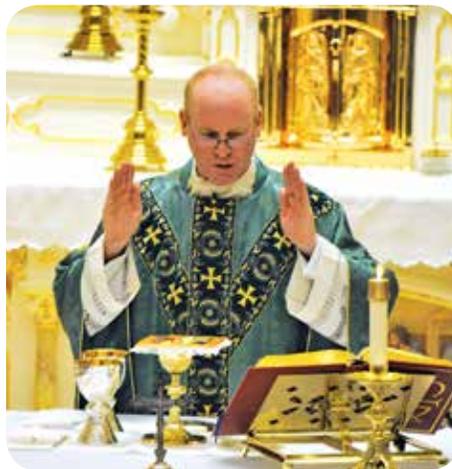
Dear Parishioners,

There is never a time during the year when we cannot pause and reflect on who and what we are and how we conduct our lives, both as a parish and as people of God. But this time of year in particular lends itself to just that.

Advent is often called “a season of hope.” However, it is more than that. We have choices and decisions to make at this time. This is the time when we must acknowledge the need for us to change attitudes and to welcome the light of Christ’s presence. In this way, we can contribute to bringing hope to a world that is starved for hope.

Of course, we approach this time of year with a spirit of confident expectation, but now is the time for us to be awake to Christ Whose presence is revealed as forgiveness, Whose peace reconciles our differences, and Whose hope should strengthen and lift up our hearts.

We have pointed out that each and every day is an opportunity for a new beginning. Our new Church liturgical year began on the First Sunday of Advent. We understand that Advent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas – but I would remind you that it is much more than that for us Catholics and Christians.



Christmas Schedule

Dec. 19
Reconciliation Service
7 p.m.

Mass Schedule
Christmas Eve — Dec. 24
4 p.m. and 11 p.m.

Christmas Day — Dec. 25
10 a.m.

It is a time for us to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming, as well. Much of what we do, our Scripture readings, our prayers, our traditions are built on that reality. One of the traditions in our Church and in many of our homes

is an Advent wreath. That custom is filled with meaning. The wreath tends to be circular in shape with four candles – three purple and one rose. The color purple is very evident at this time of year, just as it is during Lent. Purple represents prayer, penance, sacrifice, and good works.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, though, we light the rose candle. That is Gaudete Sunday, a day of rejoicing. Throughout Advent, the candles are lit in progression each week. This builds on the idea of expectation and hope that we may see as Christ’s first coming into the world, but we must also keep in mind that, at the same time, we are anticipating His Second Coming. We cannot ask ourselves often enough, “Are we ready?” Jesus and St. Paul and others remind us often that we do not and cannot know the time and the place.

The point is that the time is now for us. Yes, this is a time of hope, but we are heading toward a time of fulfilled hope. God bless you and yours at this special time of year.

In Christ,

Fr. Butler

Fr. Butler, Pastor

St. John the Baptist

A Faith Tested by Fire

Joanne Franzone Recalls the Day of the Our Lady

Dec. 1, 1958. It was 2:30 on a bitterly cold afternoon in Chicago. The students at Our Lady of the Angels School were close to finishing their lessons for the day, thinking already of dismissal and the walk or bus ride home, where they might drink something warm before going back out to play with the neighborhood kids. The day had passed just like any other at the school, but all of that would change in the next few minutes as a fire that began in the basement would start to make its way up into the hallways and classrooms. By the end of that fateful afternoon, 92 children and three nuns would lose their lives to the smoke and flames.

Parishioner Joanne Franzone, a 12-year-old seventh-grader at Our Lady of the Angels at the time, will forever remember every single moment of that tragic day.

“It was terrible,” she recalls. “It was almost the end of the day, and we smelled smoke coming through our floor. We were on the second floor, and when we opened the door, our nun kept her wits about her and let out so many children at a time. By the time my group got to the stairway, it was pretty much all black smoke and you couldn’t see anything. We were rolled down the stairs — our nun knew how frightened we were, so she rolled us down. When we got outside, we went across the street to the convent and we could see children still in the classrooms, standing in the windows waiting to get out.”

Panic filled the air as students began gathering in the church to warm up and pray. With the help of friends, Joanne began the frantic search for her siblings. In the church, she found her 10-year-old sister, Angela, but the two were not able to find their younger brother, Danny. Across the street from the church, Joanne recalls, a wonderfully kind grocer was allowing the students to



Photos of children who perished in the fire were featured on the front page of a Chicago newspaper.

use his phone. She called her father at work to let him know what was happening. Unbeknownst to Joanne, a friend of her grandmother had joined in the search for her brother and had already brought him home.

“I had an older cousin who lived down the street, and she appeared with coats for Angela and me and walked us home,” Joanne says. “We walked past fire trucks that were lined up six or eight blocks down the street because they needed to get water from everywhere they could. When we got home, my brother was at the table drinking hot cocoa. I’ve never been so happy to see him in my life!”

On the afternoon of the fire, Joanne’s mother had been downtown for a doctor’s appointment. At the time she heard the news on the radio, they were already reporting 40 children killed in the fire. When she arrived home, she remained locked in her car in the driveway, praying for the safety of her children. Facing a mother’s worst fear, she was unable to make herself go into the house until she could see all three of her children coming out the front door to greet her.

The evening of the tragedy was a test of faith for the community, as friends and neighbors of Joanne’s family either continued to search for their children or learned that they had been lost in the fire. In several cases, families lost multiple children when those that had escaped returned to the fire to search for their siblings.

In the days and months following the fire, the faith community of Our Lady of the Angels pulled together in a tremendously inspiring way.

“It was incredible,” says Joanne. “We were a tight-knit, largely ethnic community — with a lot of Italians — and everybody was supporting each other. Every-

ody of the Angels School Tragedy

body was going to the hospital to visit the kids there. At Mass, there was so much camaraderie because of what had happened. Everybody was talking to each other, supporting each other. For those that had children that were lost or injured, the support was incredible. The priests were outstanding, and they were so sad that they couldn't have saved more kids. They were there constantly with us, always supporting us."

Support for the grieving families extended beyond the parish community as well. At Queen of Heaven Catholic Cemetery in Hillside, a beautiful shrine to the Blessed Mother was built in memory of the children who died in the fire, and even those families who could not afford a burial were provided one there. In some ways, the fire came to affect the whole city.

"I could talk to a complete stranger now, and if I say I went to Our Lady of the Angels, they know all about it," Joanne says. "It's something that really identified and put a mark on the city."

For those who survived the fire, that day forever marked their lives, as well. Having witnessed the loss of so many, Joanne feels called to live out her faith in service to others.

"[After the fire], Masses were about the lost souls and about those who survived — that God had them survive for a reason," she says. "I really feel that I'm a very outgoing person and I felt there was a reason God had for me to just help people or be with people, and talk to people. At my other parish, I did what I could, but I was working and my kids were in school. I feel like now, at St. John, it's my time to really be a part of the church and participate in any way I can."

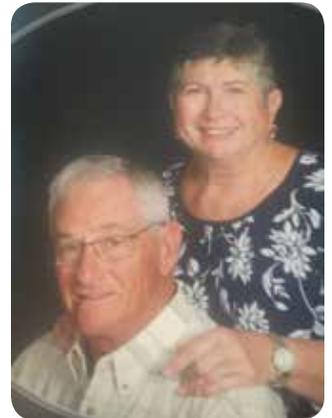
"The experience of the fire made me really believe in my faith," she continues. "It made me a very protective and hands-on mother and grandmother, and it's made me a better and more compassionate person."

Despite suffering from a traumatic back injury that she sustained when the children rolled down the stairs to escape the fire, Joanne does not let that stop her from serving in the parish. In addition to being an usher and a Eucharistic Minister, Joanne also helps with funeral

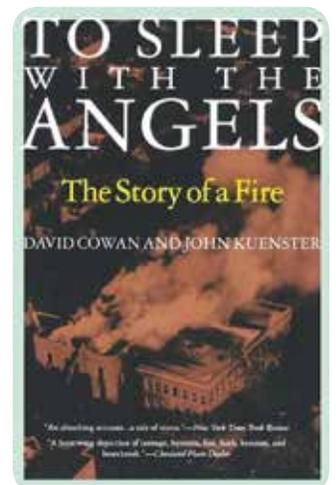
lunches and brings Communion to the sick. She and her husband, Michael, were both raised in Italian-American families that put an emphasis on living out their Catholic faith. They have, in turn, passed these values down to their three children, who are continuing to pass the faith on to their own children. And having grown up hearing the story of the school fire, their son, Michael, now serves his community as a firefighter.

Joanne is still amazed by the ripple effect that the fire at Our Lady of the Angels School, as well as the strengthening of faith and community that followed the tragic event, has had in so many lives. She knows she is not alone when she says that this life-changing experience has inspired her to live each day to the fullest, serving God and His people the best she can.

"You just never know what's going to happen," she says. "You can't take life for granted."



Joanne Franzone with her husband, Michael.



Cover image of To Sleep With the Angels, a full account of the story of the fire at Our Lady of the Angels School.



Joanne Franzone with her younger siblings, Angela and Danny — all three survived the fire at Our Lady of the Angels School.

Seminarian John Kladar

When John Kladar was a little boy, he was in awe of the priesthood. In fact, the main reason he volunteered as an altar server at his home parish of St. Peter in South Beloit, Ill., was because he believed he had the best seat in the church for watching the priest celebrate Mass. And in the amazing way God works, that very same little boy who liked to be near the altar would grow up and one day serve in St. Peter's Basilica during a Good Friday Mass with Pope Francis.

So how, then, does a little boy growing up in Illinois one day find himself studying for the priesthood in Rome, Italy? For John, the answer is easy – it began with a close-knit family and a strong faith foundation.

John would be the first to admit that one of the biggest influences on who he is today rests with his supporting family. While both his parents put faith front and center in their day-to-day-lives – praying the Rosary as a family, discussing Sunday's readings while driving to Mass, and reading the lives of the saints – they each also influenced John in different ways. From his father, John had someone to look up to, and always had a great deal of respect for his work ethic, intelligence, and dedication to his faith life – especially with his weekly Holy Hour at 3 a.m. every Wednesday. He also witnessed how his father sacrificed for his family. From his mother, John says she taught him how to connect and communicate with people. Furthermore, she was determined to homeschool all their children through grade school, and was thus able to incorporate much of the Catholic faith into the lessons.

“My father is one of the smartest people I know, and as a graduate in engineering from the University of Illinois, he definitely understands what it means to take academics seriously and he expected nothing less from us kids,” John says. “On the other side, my mother wanted to make sure that at every aspect of our educational experience there was an opportunity to grow closer to Christ. These were the two guiding principles that led to my parents' decision to homeschool us.”

And as the older brother to three sisters, John has good things to say about them, too.

“All three of my sisters are very smart, beautiful and driven,” John says. “All three are very good at keeping my pride down, because whether in athletics or academics, I think they have accomplished more than I had at their respective ages. I greatly appreciate how our friendships have matured as we cross the threshold into adulthood. And I look forward to that continuing.”

By the time John began high school, and even during his first year of college, he had abandoned the idea of the priesthood to focus more on sports and academics. Life was busy, and there were distractions. But during his sophomore year, he became friends with a priest from his home parish who not only encouraged John to be vigilant

about growing in faith, but also suggested that John return to the practice of weekly confession and to spend more time in the Adoration Chapel. Then, one night during his Christmas break, something profound happened.



Seminarian John Kladar on a day trip to Assisi with his sisters, Mary-Katherine, Madeline and Kristina.



North American Martyrs team for the Clericus Cup. “Every year in Rome, we participate in the Clericus Cup,” seminarian John Kladar says. “It is in the spring and we are one of the 16 seminaries that participate.”

The Journey From Illinois to Rome, and Back Again

“I went to adoration knowing that I need to go to confession, and as soon as I got there a priest was leaving the chapel, so I asked him if he would hear my confession,” John says. “What followed afterwards was some of the most peaceful prayer I have ever experienced in my life. For about 45 minutes, I felt really close to Our Lord in the Eucharist. I then remembered how my parish priest encouraged me to talk to our Lord just as you would talk to a close friend. For the first time, I started a conversation by asking, ‘Lord, how are You?’ It was not an audible conversation, but I knew what the Lord was saying and I got the sense that He was upset. When I asked why, He told me I was the reason — that He had given me so many gifts, talents and blessings, and that I was turning my back on Him and using what He had given me for my own satisfaction. It was then I realized that I was in front of Truth Himself and the Truth had broken through the lies that I had been telling myself for many years.”

At that moment, John says he was truly open to God’s will and that the Lord wanted him to start discerning the priesthood. He told his parents, talked to his parish priest, and asked for a spiritual director. Within two months John had contacted the Vocation Director for our diocese and began the application process.

In thinking back on his discernment journey, John points out that we all have a vocation and that we are all called to be saints. But if one learns anything from hearing John’s story, he hopes it is this — that

we don’t have a crisis in vocations, we have a crisis in hearing our vocations. We need to learn to hear, and to listen.

Today, John is studying at the Pontifical North American College (PNAC) in Rome, Italy. He is in his third year of theology and in his sixth year of formation — next fall, he will be ordained a transitional deacon and, God willing, will be ordained a priest for the Diocese of Rockford in June of 2018.

In 2005, that little boy who loved to be an altar server so that he could be that much closer to the priest was one of 15 seminarians studying at the PNAC chosen to serve with Pope Francis during the Good Friday Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica. That morning during rehearsal, John learned that, because he and another classmate were the tallest, they were assigned the task of carrying the candles that would lead the Procession of the Cross. As an added blessing, John was not only able to meet Pope Francis, but he and five others were chosen to help vest him before Mass started.

“I love living in Rome,” John says. “The Church is very alive here, and I will treasure the mo-

ments I spent with our Holy Father for the rest of my life. And even though it has been tough to be away from family and friends, I think this time away has helped me grow in appreciation for the Diocese of Rockford and has confirmed for me that this is the place I want to serve the people of God for the rest of my life.”



Seminarian John Kladar meeting the Holy Father on Good Friday of Holy Week 2015.



Seminarian John Kladar hiking while on retreat in Greccio, Italy.



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Mass Times

Saturdays 5:00 PM
Sundays 8:00 and 10:30 AM
Weekdays:
Tuesdays 6:30 PM
M, W, Th, F 7:00 AM

Sacrament of Reconciliation

Tuesdays 5:00 PM
Saturdays 4:00 PM
or by appointment

Adoration

Tuesdays 5-6 PM and
First Fridays 7:30 AM-7:00 PM with
Benediction 7:00 PM

Strengthening Our Parents *continued from front cover*

for personal reflection, and opportunities for sacramental renewal through Reconciliation, adoration, and the Mass.

In the process, says Carol, parishioners are strengthened in their vocation as parent and religious educator. Because of this, parents with children currently undergoing sacramental preparation classes were particularly encouraged to attend the God Is! Day of Renewal.

“Any time a parent gains a stronger relationship with God, the child is also brought in,” Carol says. “That relationship with our Lord becomes so much more important to the parent and, through them, the entire family. It ends up strengthening the entire family, too.”

Though only the first time offered, Carol felt the initial retreat was very fruitful. She witnessed parents bonding with one another, as they were able to share, either through actual talks or small-group sessions, how God has touched their lives.

“It definitely brought parents together,” Carol says. “Much like any other retreat, people come into it not really knowing what to expect, but as the day goes on, they begin to really set in and open themselves up to what God wants them to receive.”

When it comes to stewardship, raising our children into godly men and women is a key element of what it’s all about. Yet, this is only possible through God’s grace, which in turn can only be received through time spent in prayer. That is why St. John the Baptist parish plans to offer the God Is! Day of Renewal annually, helping parents to set that time aside for spiritual rejuvenation.

“Stewardship is taking that time or taking that money that you have and devoting that to God,” Carol says. “This day of renewal is an opportunity to take or make some time to truly be with God – to build your relationship with Him and to become strengthened in your vocation as a parent.”

If you would like to learn more about upcoming retreat offerings, as well as other opportunities for spiritual rejuvenation, please contact Carol Shelton at either carolshelton@stjbsom.org or 815-970-1928.