



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Newsletter of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Summer 2021, Volume 1, Issue 2

Dust off your bike and meet up with these cyclists

By Ann Elwell, parishioner

Up ahead, the trail curves to the right then a slight downhill, no pedaling needed. Sunlight and shadows make patterns on the pavement.

Like so many Saturday mornings, a group of bicyclists who also happen to be St. Francis parishioners are riding a trail near Nixa, finding fitness and friendship along the way.

“It’s for leisure—it’s not a race,” smiled Linda Howard. She and her husband Terry have been cycling for years. Lately, friends from the parish have joined them on these casual rides: first Deb Harris then Barb Rogers and later, Mike Ecker. Others meet up when they can. “Our goals are basically to try to stay healthy, exercise and fellowship. We’d love to have more join us,” Linda said.

Ozark Greenways trails provide choices

for distance, scenery and ease (or difficulty) of ride. The group typically avoids roadways.

No experience is necessary; bike and helmet are the only requirements. A cycle with gears is preferable for occasional hills, “but you can always walk those hills instead,” Linda said.

Most weekend rides cover 20 to 25 miles which take one and a half to two hours. On Mondays and Thursdays, the rides are 10 to 12 miles, sometimes just five to eight. There’s been talk of future rides on the Katy Trail or the Buena Vista to Bentonville, Ark. route.

Linda believes in the benefits of cycling. “I think you definitely could learn a lot about yourself, what you’re capable of. Age is not a factor. Look at me!”



St. Francis parishioners Linda Howard, left, Deb Harris, Barb Rogers and Terry Howard cycle regularly and are hoping other parishioners will join them.

Parish bids goodbye to Father Colby

John and Sara Walraven and sons say goodbye to Fr. Colby Elbert after his final Mass at St. Francis on June 27. A parish breakfast and presentation of gifts on June 13 honored Fr. Colby for four years as associate pastor of our parish. Among the gifts presented to him was a statue of St. Francis of Assisi.



Who’s in the Pews? — Art Schweiss

By Karen Wegand, parishioner



Among the faces at Wednesday night and Sunday morning Masses, you’ll find Art Schweiss. If he happens to be wearing a red shirt, it’s probably because he’s a St. Louis Cardinals fan.

An only child, Art was born in St. Genevieve, located in Southeast Missouri, and attended Valle Catholic Schools all 12 years.

Art worked as manager of manufacturing at a clothing factory in Louisiana for 16 years and another 29 years as vice-president at five factories in Dexter,

Mo., where he was also on the board of directors.

Art recalls the most important day of his life as his wedding day to JoAnn, 61 years ago. Following closely on his list are the births of sons Brad, Jeff and Mark and daughters Dana and DeNeen. He has eight grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren.

A founding member of St. Francis Parish, Art is a Fourth Degree in the Knights of Columbus. He praises our parish family, mentioning especially the wonderful parishioners, priests and deacon.

St. Louis Artist Realizes True Vocation in Sacred Art

By Karen Holland, parishioner



Madonna, 2020, oil on canvas, by Gwyneth Thompson-Briggs, used with permission

What is sacred art? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops explains that sacred art is “true and beautiful” when “evoking and glorifying, in faith and adoration, the transcendent mystery of God.” The bishops continue, “Genuine sacred art draws man to adoration, to prayer, and to the love

of God, Creator and Savior, the Holy One and Sanctifier.”

Lawrence Feingold, associate professor of theology and philosophy at Kenrick-Glennon Seminary, states that sacred art is important because “we come to know about spiritual things through our imagination, through our senses.” He adds that this can be a difficult mission because our current culture is not explicitly Christian. Sacred art “helps ‘translate’ Divine revelation into ways we can see,” Feingold says, and every generation and culture needs this translation.

St. Louis artist Gwyneth Thompson-Briggs began her career as an artist at the tender age of five, painting continuously. Along the way she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design, Denver, then advanced degrees in physics and engineering from the Colorado School of Mines in Golden. She taught college-level math for two years while studying drawing and painting on her own.

In 2014 she moved to New England to study the Boston School technique of impressionism and then began to devote herself full-time to art and design. Two years ago, she began her focus on contempo-

rary sacred art.

Making a living as an artist can be difficult for many and even impossible for most unless the artist realizes true vocation is centered in the gift of art as sacred. Thompson-Briggs has done just that. Her works include a portrait of St. Augustine for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, devotional portraits, altarpieces and Stations of the Cross. They are displayed in churches, schools and private homes in the United States and Europe.

Thompson-Briggs lives in St. Louis with her husband and three children where they attend daily Mass at their parish. Many of her works can be viewed on her website: gwyneththompsonbriggs.com. Many might think only wealthy individuals can afford to own sacred art but Thompson-Briggs believes every person with a love for Christ and his Church should have the privilege to own artwork.

“Sacred art helps translate Divine revelation into ways we can see.”

Father Mike Marks Half Century as Priest

Children and youth of the parish helped Fr. Mike McDevitt celebrate the 50th anniversary of his priestly ordination after Mass on May 23. Our parish’s priest-in-residence, Fr. Mike spent 46 years in priestly ministry, retiring in 2017. He continues to be active in parish life here at St. Francis.



From A Different Angle

Commentary by Karen Wegand, parishioner

In May and June, we had the occasion to celebrate Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Have you ever asked yourself how well you really know your parents? Oh, sure, if you are a teen, you probably recognize the anger in your dad’s voice when you do something that displeases him. Or know when your mom calls you by your first and middle name that she means business. I’m talking about

adults, as well, who are lucky enough to still have living parents. How well do you know them as individuals?

Have you ever asked them if they had childhood dreams for the future or big disappointments in life? How did they get along with their parents and grandparents? Did they laugh together, cry together and share their feelings or did they have to hide their

feelings to avoid controversy? How do they feel about the way they look? Are they comfortable in a crowd? Did you ever ask them if they feel loved?

What a lot of doors this conversation could open. And, young or old, the joy will be overwhelming that you cared enough to ask.

Church Cleaning Leads to Friends, Fellowship

By Ann Elwell, parishioner

Many hands make light work. Never is this proverb more true than when it comes to cleaning a space as large as St. Francis of Assisi Church. Throughout the week, parishioners use the sanctuary, gathering space, bathrooms, community room—so all require regular cleaning.

A few small teams of parishioners devote a couple of hours each week to this job. Many have been stewards of our church building since it was built. *But their numbers are shrinking.*

"A donation of time is extremely valuable."

The rewards for this service are many, say these volunteers. For Harold Kuppinger, it's

been a great way to meet parishioners, beyond the "Hi, how are you's" in the parking lot. "The idea is to become part of the parish," Harold said. "It's important."

When she joined St. Francis, Jean Stehle found being part of a cleaning team helped her get to know others. "We have a wonderful team," she said. Her group regularly goes out for dinner after they finish.

Katie Bond heads a team that meets on Thursday morning. Coffee and her homemade cinnamon rolls are often the reward for a sparkling church. "We've come to be good friends," Katie said.

Randy Sehie has taken on regular cleaning of bathrooms. "With so many people, they need cleaning each week," he said.

All these volunteers agree: More cleaners are needed. Consider: You can work independently or as part of a group. Katie says she will provide direction for any new group; just contact her. You can join an existing group. The hours are flexible. Most volunteers spend about two hours or less, about once a month.

Katie explains it this way: "Since we're a Total Stewardship Parish, we need a few more to chip in—and we need younger people." If your family financial budget is tight, a donation of time is extremely valuable and a great way to be part of the life of the parish. Contact Sheri at the parish office: 417-725-1975 or office@stfranciscnixa.org



Above: Sanctuary carpet gets a vacuuming from Becky Magnuson, a regular with Cleaning Team 4.

Left: Katie Bond, left, and Kathy Berkebugler share their time each month, cleaning the church building.

"It's a great way to meet parishioners."



Why Curse a Fig Tree?

Did you ever hear a Gospel reading that didn't quite make sense? Why did Jesus curse a fig tree that had no fruit even though it was not the season for it to bear fruit? What is the significance of the colt that had never been ridden? Why does Jesus say, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

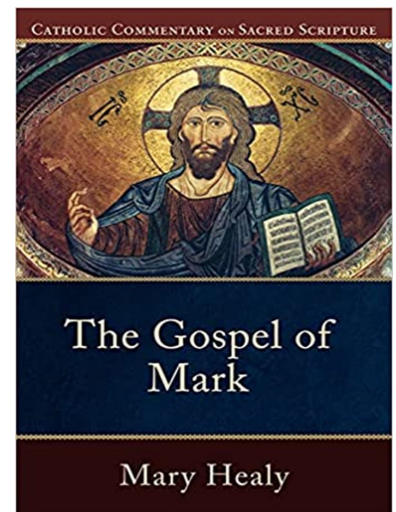
Many of our Gospel readings this year are from the Book of Mark. I have found Mary Healy's *The Gospel of Mark* interesting and easy to understand as she relates events back to the Old Testament and to the culture of the times. Her commentary interprets Scripture in light of Catholic tradition. It offers more than brief study guides yet is less daunting than scholarly com-

mentaries.

Healy is an international speaker on Scripture, general editor of *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* and author of two of its volumes.

In 2014, Pope Francis appointed Healy as one of the first three women to serve on the Pontifical Biblical Commission, a body established to ensure proper interpretation and defense of Sacred Scripture.

The *Gospel of Mark* by Mary Healy is available at DeSales Book Store, Springfield. Owner Tracy King, a St. Francis parishioner, offers a discount if you mention this newsletter article.



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We're on a Roll!

You're reading the second issue of the St. Francis of Assisi parish newsletter where our focus is on parishioners and the many ways they find to serve the Lord and each other. We hope you enjoy these stories and regular features like Who's in the Pews. A new issue will be published each quarter. Let us know what you like and dislike by contacting one of our team members, below.

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Small actions, big impact from our trash pickup day



Above: Our parish trash pickup is a family-friendly activity bringing together parishioners of all generations to make a difference. The next parish trash pickup will be this fall.



Left: Our parish has adopted a section of South Main Street in Nixa between Mount Vernon Street (Highway 14) and Hillside Drive. The first parish trash pickup event was May 1.

Right: Nash Roberts and Ron Pojar worked together to clean up Main Street, Nixa. If you see trash on your walk, while at the playground or on your visit to the store, pick it up! Change starts with each of us.

