



ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Newsletter of St. Francis of Assisi Parish, Spring 2022, Volume 2, Issue 2

Why is the San Damiano Cross So Special to Our Parish?

By Karen Wegand and Ann Elwell

One of the reasons our parish is unique is that it is the only parish in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau to be named for St. Francis of Assisi.



Andrew Sehie leads the May 15 Mass recessional with the San Damiano cross held high.

“Go, rebuild my Church.” These were the words St. Francis heard Christ speak to him as he prayed before a crucifix--and he took them literally. He set out to rebuild the

San Damiano church building which was in disrepair.

Eventually, Francis of Assisi came to realize Christ was asking him to repair the Church, not a single structure. Soon, this humble man gave away all he owned and began to serve the poor. His sincerity of heart attracted followers and led to a renewal of the Church.

The unusual crucifix Francis prayed before, the San Damiano cross, has long been associated with the famous saint.

Visitors to our parish often ask about the

“The San Damiano cross has symbolized a mission to bring renewal to the Church.”

processional cross used at Mass, which is the San Damiano design. Several parishioners wear this crucifix as necklaces, signifying the faith of our patron saint.

Fr. Mike McDevitt, our priest-in-residence, has given away more than 1,000 San Damiano crosses to friends, family and others. “I tell them, ‘Go, rebuild our Church,’” said Fr. Mike. “We need that now, spiritually. Our Church needs some rebuilding.”

Fr. Mike has a special affection for St.

Francis as he spent eight years studying with Franciscans. He has visited Assisi three times, including the Basilica of St. Francis and the crypt containing the saint’s remains.

The San Damiano cross is called an “icon cross” because its images are meant to teach and so strengthen the faith of the people, according to [St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church](#), Houston. On the crucifix are at least 31 icons of angels and people whose lives were touched by Jesus.

The most striking image is the figure of Christ. The website [Monastery Icons](#) explains, “It is not the body of a corpse, but of God Himself, . . . radiating the hope of the Resurrection. The Savior looks directly at us with a compassionate gaze . . . He does not hang on the Cross, but rather seems to be supporting it, standing in His full stature.”

Franciscans regard [this cross](#) as a symbol of their mission to commit their lives to rebuilding the Church by following the teachings of Christ. In fact, for many Catholics over many centuries, the San Damiano cross has symbolized a mission to bring renewal to the Church.



Fr. Mike McDevitt

Who’s in the Pews? — Antoinette Barffour

By Karen Wegand, parishioner



Familiar faces at our Sunday Mass are those of Antoinette and Maxwell Barffour and their three sons.

Originally from Kumasi, a large metropolitan city in Ghana, West Africa, the Barffours came to our parish in 2017 from St. Matthew’s Parish in St. Louis. Maxwell’s profession is as a biomedical scientist and Antoinette is a French and linguistics professor at Missouri State University.

In spite of their busy lives, they find time to take part in Eucharistic Adoration, rosary, adult faith for-

mation and the prayer group after Mass. Antoinette states that what they like best about our parish is, “It offers adult formation as well as children’s religion classes.” They also find it to be a kind and welcoming parish.

When they find the time, the Barffours enjoy playing the guitar and singing, and watching movies.

We are happy that this busy family chooses to be members of our parish family.

Future of the Church Found in PSR Classes Today

By Ann Elwell, parishioner

The room itself isn't really a *room*; more like a slice partitioned from one end of the Community Room. Carpet squares work as seating. A modest chalk board announces the day's lesson.

Classrooms for students and teachers in the St. Francis faith formation program may be bare bones. But inside those "rooms" are smiling faces, eager hands in the air and a warmth that extends to every child.

Each Sunday morning, September to May, volunteer catechists gather their classes for a new lesson on being Catholic Christians growing up in Nixa. This is faith formation in the truest sense and these teachers are preparing the future of our Church, arguably a most essential ministry.

"It's about instilling in (our children) that God loves them," explains coordinator of religious education Renee Truby. "Once (children) get the feeling God loves them—the parish loves them—and they're open to that, the rest falls in place."

About 66 children in grades Pre-K to 6 are enrolled in the Sunday Parish School of Religion program. Junior High and High School students meet separately, under the direction of Deacon Gary Steffes, director of religious education.

A couple of teachers are professional educators but most aren't. "Our PSR teachers lead with their hearts. It's about the love of doing it," Renee said. "Our church is family. Some kids don't get that at home, but they find it in our faith formation program. We thrive and survive from the love we get from our parish. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ."

Renee said she doesn't have to do much recruiting to fill teacher positions. So often, the right people come forward at the right time "with the love of God in their hearts," she said.

Renee and her family are moving to Florida this summer, leaving big shoes to fill. Deacon Gary and his team are looking for teachers and assistants for the coming school year.

All prospective PSR teachers must complete a diocesan training program called Virtus® Protecting God's Children. This program is required for all volunteers who have regular contact with children.

Do you feel called to help with this ministry? Our children, our future, are waiting for you. Contact Deacon Gary for more information: garyds73@yahoo.com

The Most Amazing Thing I Learned in PSR . . .

In St. Francis religion classes this year, our children learned lots, thanks to dedicated teachers. We asked the kids, "What's the most amazing thing you learned in PSR this school year?"

Luke Truby, 7, grade 1

"God is very special. Jesus died on a cross. And he came alive."

Lincoln Lukavsky, 7, grade 1

"God comes down and prays on bread. It becomes Jesus."



Paisley Lantz, 7, grade 2

"First reconciliation—it wasn't scary!"



Dax Hampel, 5, Pre-K

"Jesus rose! And there are 50 days of Easter season."



Edden Martinez, 10 grade 4

"I will receive Jesus in First Communion."



Ryder Schmitz, 10, grade 4

"I learned Abraham was the first person who got a promise with God. He said, 'You'll have many sons, and a few would be kings.'"



Alice Silvey, 6, grade 1

"Thanksgiving is for giving thanks and to show love."



Allie Kauffman, 7, grade 1

"That Jesus was the greatest thing of all on earth. I used to think it was people."

May Crowning Honors Mary



Following a longstanding Catholic tradition, children in PSR classes honored Mary on the first Sunday in May. Harloe Griest placed a crown of flowers on a statue of Mary, then a procession of children placed flowers nearby. The congregation sang, “On this day, O beautiful Mother, On this day we give thee our love.” The May Crowning symbolizes Mary’s significance as the mother of Jesus. (Photos of crowning by Jennifer Griest)



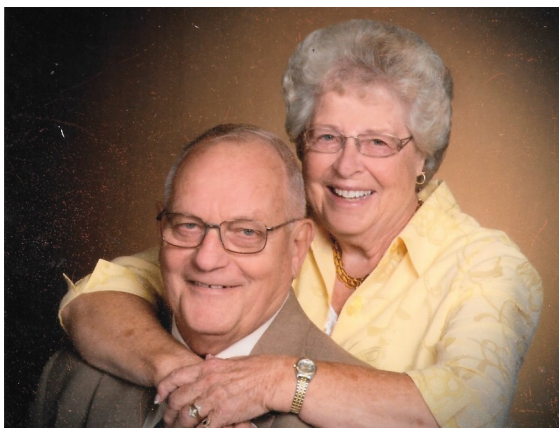
Who was Marty Pojar?

Namesake Scholarship Awarded Yearly by Knights of Columbus

By Karen Wegand, parishioner

Since 2017, our Knights of Columbus chapter has awarded the Marty Pojar Scholarship to select graduating high school students of our parish.

Many of you who have joined St. Francis of Assisi Parish since then may ask, “Who was Marty Pojar?” He was a beloved member of our parish; husband of Virginia and father of Ron Pojar; his grandchildren and great grandchildren bless our parish today.



Marty Pojar, pictured with wife Virginia, was a mentor to many young people throughout his life.

Marty was a smile, a handshake, a hug, and a joy to us all. He worked hard to build our fledgling parish until poor health made it impossible to continue.

A Master Chief Boatswain’s Mate in the U.S. Coast Guard, Marty served our country for 26 years. After retirement, he was hired as a custodian in the Elkhorn, Nebraska, Public School

District and became a mentor to students for 19 more years.

Mr. Pojar” was the students’ hero who

would dig through trash bags when they accidentally threw away their retainers with their lunch bags or when they needed their glasses fixed. Most memorably, he once noticed a blind boy being teased for his clumsiness in the cafeteria. He went to the principal who supported his idea to

have the boy’s class go to lunch blindfolded--for a week. Not only did it stop the teasing, but it became a regular event in that school to teach compassion and love for disabled persons.

Marty passed away in October 2017. We will always be thankful that God sent Marty to be a shining example of what being a joyful Christian is all about.

Pojar Scholarship Recipients

2017

Nora Thompson

2018

John Carter

Corrie Carnahan

Kaitlyn Rispoli

2019

No scholarship awarded

2020

Matt Ecker

Eros Sustaita

2021

Andrew Sehie

Anna Alviar

2022 To be announced mid-June

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Share Your Ideas

Welcome to the second issue of the St. Francis of Assisi parish newsletter for 2022. We focus on you, our parishioners, and the many ways you serve the Lord and others. You probably have an idea or two for a feature story. Or, maybe you'd like to comment on a story or photo. Please contact one of our team members, below. New issues are published three to four times per year. Thank you for reading!

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Celebrating First Communion at St. Francis



After months of study in our Parish School of Religion, eight children received their First Holy Communion on May 8. Pictured at left are (front row) Edden Martinez, Addy Lukavsky, Charlie Ellis, Paisley Lantz, Maddox Lechner and (row 2) Hazel Underwood, Dane Hazen, Samantha McKnight with (top row) Deacon Gary Steffes, Pastor Tom Reidy and Fr. Mike McDevitt. Catechist for the class was Renee Truby. May the blessings of Christ be on them always. (Photos by Patty Marquez)