



# ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

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

## Showing Their Love of God One Stitch at a Time

By Karen Wegand, parishioner

If you wander by the O'Reilly Community Room on a Thursday afternoon, you're likely to hear many sounds, from hearty laughter to the quiet murmur of women praying the rosary. These are the sounds of the loyal and determined women who make up the Loving Stitches quilting group at St. Francis.

For 15 years, they have been meeting weekly, September through May, to create quilts for people in need living in the Nixa area. The number of women who participate is usually between 12 and 19, some of them original members.

In speaking with them, it quickly becomes apparent that making quilts is just a small part of their

giving experience. The friendships they have formed are considered life-long. They share laughter, sorrow and compassion with each other as they work to follow Christ's example to bring comfort to those in need. Several of the women recalled joining the group at difficult times in their lives and finding the strength they needed in the unwavering trust in the Lord that is so present in this group.

It's not always quilts. When a desperate request came from the social service agency The Kitchen, Inc., they put their quilt making on hold and sewed 50 pairs of curtains and piles of fitted crib sheets for families at the Missouri Hotel. Another time they planned, cooked, and served a dinner for 60 homeless teenagers at Rare Breed,



*Gathered for quilting and conversation on a recent Thursday were (from left) Rosie Brookner, Delores Voet, JoAnn Schweiss, Virginia Pojar, Katie Bond and Marguerite Gorman-Fray, some of the members of Loving Stitches.*

a program for at-risk youth. One year at Christmas they took parts of old donated quilts and fashioned them into stockings for all children in our parish religion classes.

Despite the pandemic, Loving Stitches members finished 54 quilts and gave them to homeless veterans and clients of Least of These, a Christian County food

pantry. Members have a custom: Before the quilts are delivered, they are surrounded by a circle of participating stitchers who pray them into God's hands, asking only that they find their way to those most in need of shelter for their bodies and hope for their souls.

## Who's in the Pews? Jennifer Griest-Logan

By Ann Elwell, parishioner



Look for Jennifer Griest-Logan at Sunday 9:30 a.m. Mass. She and her husband Trevor are parents to five children: Taytum, 21, Taylor, 17, and Turner, 16, Logan and Brylan, 13, and Harloe, 8, Griest.

Jennifer works as the infection prevention and

employee health manager at Jordan Valley Community Health Center.

A member of St. Francis almost since its founding, she counts the baptisms of Brylan and Harloe as among her best memories. "The beautiful song (music director) Debbie Durham

personalized for us was so special," Jennifer said. "Being a parishioner at St. Francis means being invested spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. It's such a great parish to share the amazing gifts God has blessed each of us with."

# St. Francis of Assisi Sponsors March for Life in Nixa

By Deacon Gary Steffes



*Despite cold, blustery wind, marchers, including Father Tom and Father Colby, covered a route through downtown Nixa.*

After a damp morning, dry weather greeted nearly 50 participants in a parking lot near downtown Nixa on January 24, while another dozen gathered at St. Francis of Assisi to pray a rosary for the sanctity of life. Some called it "unprecedented," others called it a "beautiful witness to life."

While Catholics came from Kimberling City, Springfield and Nixa, the event had an ecumenical flavor as non-Catholics from the community were also present to witness support for life from conception to natural death.

Following a welcome, an opening prayer by Msgr. Tom Reidy, and Bishop Edward Rice's message delivered by Nick Lund-Molfese of the diocesan

Social Ministry Office, the group of marchers set out on a route that featured long and short options while others remained near the starting point to hold signs and pray for the sanctity of life.

Marchers held signs of various designs, including several prepared by our Loving Stitches ladies, by parish

families, while still others were obtained from the Knights of Columbus, and various other pro-life organizations. Many participants offered individual personal prayers during the march, small groups also prayed the rosary together and the Glorious and Sorrowful Mysteries could be heard by passersby during the two-hour march.

In addition to witnessing with signs and marching, a cleaning brigade was formed, and several members of the group picked up trash along the way. Prayers were also offered as marchers passed a nursing home, an assisted living facility, and several churches.

Joining the effort were Msgr. Tom Reidy, Fr. Colby Elbert, Fr. Michael McDevitt, and Deacon Gary Steffes. Special thanks are extended

to Carl Schimek who promoted the event and manned an information table along with his young helpers. We also thank our church rosary-leader, Rosie Brookner and Pastor David Pearson and The Bridge Church who allowed the group to assemble in their parking lot. Several men and women of the parish assisted with safety and served as crossing guards.

To cap it off, a donation jar yielded \$120 in funds which was split 50/50 to the Life House Crisis Maternity Home and Pregnancy Care Center, both in Springfield.

Support for a culture of life will be needed in the coming days, weeks, months, and years and we will look to the Church faithful to answer the call in prayer, word, and action.



*Sharing the "Respect Life" message were St. Francis parishioners and non-Catholic neighbors joining for the Jan. 24 march.*

## From Chicago to Nixa, Deep Faith Propels Pastor Forward

By Ann Elwell, parishioner

For Father Tom Reidy, the throughline between Bally Eigue, Ireland and Nixa, Missouri is a family's deep Catholic faith.

A priest for more than 50 years and pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Parish since 2011, Father Tom rises each morning to pray. Readied, he begins a day that will be filled with encounters with people into the night.

There's the 6:30 a.m. Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Springfield, where he also serves as pastor. That might be followed by a hospital visit or a chat with second graders at the elementary school at SEAS. There may be meetings with staff, a private conversation with a man thinking of becoming Catholic, meetings at The Catholic Center, evening meetings with councils at both SEAS and St. Francis. Lots of meetings.

It's a schedule many who are younger than 81 would find exhausting. But Father Tom seems to pull energy from them. Could it be the Irish in him?

Arriving in the U.S. from the tiny Irish coastal town of Bally Eigue, Father Tom's parents settled in the Irish stronghold of south side Chicago and raised three children: Tim, Ann Marie and Tom.

"Where I lived, everyone was Catholic," the priest remembers. He and

his neighborhood friends filled the three-story Catholic school. At St. Gabriel Parish, he was an altar server and his family, faithful members.

There was always time for baseball. His brother was a traditional south side White Sox fan. But they were very competitive so little brother Tom decided his team would be the Cubs from north side Wrigley Field. His parents took the boys to watch both teams and occasionally, altar servers took a field trip to the games via the "L," Chicago's elevated subway.

While a high school senior, Father Tom heard of a minor seminary, St. Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa. In those days, every family hoped at least one son would become a priest. "But I always wanted to be a priest," he said. The big city left behind, Father Tom earned a bachelor's degree then headed to Conception Seminary in northwest Missouri.

Through his Chicago pastor, Father Tom became acquainted with Bishop Ignatius Strecker of the new Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. Soon he would become a priest for the mostly rural diocese. Scarcely five percent of the population was Catholic. Never mind. "I was so excited to start my priesthood," he said.



*Applause and smiles all 'round for Father Tom Reidy as St. Francis Parish celebrated his 80th birthday in February, 2020. (Photo by Patty Marquez)*

Father Tom was first assigned an associate pastor at St. Agnes Cathedral, Springfield, and his trajectory was set: In five years he was appointed administrator of the cathedral parish. By 1974 he was named diocesan chancellor and in 1984, vicar general. Pope John Paul II named him a monsignor at the same time, as is customary for vicars general in the Catholic Church. He has served in leadership roles for six of the seven bishops of the diocese. Twice he was called to be administrator of the diocese, in between bishops.

While taking on these roles, Father Tom has served as pastor of some of the diocese's largest parishes. How does he get it all done? "I've always had great staff," he deferred. "And you just have to

pray. Sometimes things just don't get done and I hate that." Of his years as priest and pastor, he says, "It's just a great life. I love the work."

Those who know him say Father Tom's personal warmth and Irish wit make him easy to know. He says his sense of humor comes from "the people I hang around with."

As St. Francis Parish looks beyond its first 15 years, Father Tom has hopes and dreams. First, he's looking post-pandemic to churches full of people. Then, a permanent church building is important. "I hope we can continue to grow as a parish, really get to know one another, really serve the poor as St. Francis did," he said. "I hope we can grow in faith, hope and love."

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## Our First Issue!

Welcome to the first issue of the St. Francis of Assisi parish newsletter! Our focus is on our parishioners and the many ways they find to serve the Lord and each other. We hope you'll enjoy reading these stories and regular tidbits like Who's in the Pews and Funny Church Signs. 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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## Helping Our Street Corner Friends

Idea Share from Karen Wegand, parishioner

For years, I struggled with the dilemma of whether or not God wanted me to respond to street people holding signs asking for money. I couldn't bear to see them struggling, yet I hesitated to give them money that

could be used for drugs or alcohol. Three years ago, I found a solution when I started making what I call "God Loves You" bags.

Gallon Ziploc bags always contain a new pair of socks and, in winter, a stocking cap. A sandwich bag holds a purse-sized hand sanitizer, ChapStick, a small bottle of aspirin, a handful of cough drops and a half dozen Band-Aids. A store where everything is a dollar or less is my usual source for these items as well as a folding toothbrush kit (when I can

find them).

Snacks vary, but I have found many things to include: cracker and cheese packs, chicken or tuna salad in a can, Vienna sausages, smoked beef sticks, individual fruit pies and small packs of nuts, raisins or other dried fruits.

Each bag gets three or four items--whatever I have room for. The finishing touch is a message written on the front that simply states, "God Loves You." And that is the greatest gift of all.



'God Loves You' Bag

**"God loves the world through you and through me."**

- St. Teresa of Calcutta  
(Mother Teresa)