

Please remember St. Rita Parish in your estate plans



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

A New Year and a Renewed Mission!

Dear Parishioners,

A new year brings new opportunities to St. Rita Catholic Community! Not only is there change afoot in our country and in our city, but also in our diocese and in our parish – all of which calls for prayer and positive thinking, the renewal of charity and the will to hope! Ours is an exciting time! A time to rely on the Holy Spirit and to trust in the providence of God.

We rejoice in the appointment of Bishop Edward J. Burns as the next Bishop of Dallas! He will be installed as bishop Feb. 9 at the Cathedral downtown. Here at St. Rita, we were particularly blessed to host our new bishop on his first day in Dallas as he called the diocese to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Here, in our parish, our new bishop began his ministry among us pointing to the Lord in the Eucharist. He bid us, “Stay close to Jesus Christ!” He pledged his faith to God and to his call. He invited all of us into the mission of the kingdom of God. He called us all to be joyful and faithful Catholic Christians. It was a momentous beginning – and one that, for me personally, I found inspiring.



Which instills within me hope and confidence about the opportunities we face this year at St. Rita. One of the first things on Bishop Burns’ to-do list will be to appoint a new pastor for St. Rita. And on that, I can offer you no inside information – because I have none! – I can only beg your prayers. We must in things like this trust instead of worry, keeping the faith that God has always taken care of us and will continue to do so. I’m excited about the future! And I think all of us should be excited!

As you know, too – and hopefully you’re praying about it – we are in the process of finding a new principal for our school. After decades of outstanding service, Dr. Hines will retire at the end of the year. Thus, we’re hard at work finding an excellent replacement. Hitherto, we’ve received over 30 applicants, formed a search committee, and are now in the process of selecting from among those applicants those we’d like to bring in for interviews. We are fortunate to be a school and community that is widely considered

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St. Rita Seniors Share Activities and Care for Each Other

The activities are Bingo and lunch outings – activities that our St. Rita Seniors enjoy. But if you look beyond the surface, you’ll see something much deeper.

“We watch out for each other,” says Fran Moorman, who coordinates the group. “We take care of each other a little bit.”

While it is easy for older persons to feel isolated from their community – their children are grown and have perhaps moved away, or their ability to get around and out may be limited – our St. Rita Seniors make sure all feel welcomed and no one is left out of activities. And Fran says our parish takes steps to make sure the seniors are cared for.

“A good thing is that the parish is very good to us,” Fran says. “They provide us with a meeting room, ice, ice tea, and coffee. There’s no access to a fridge or microwave, but there will be in the new building.

And everyone brings something to eat to our meetings and we share it.”

The St. Rita Seniors gather at noon on the first and third Tuesdays of the month for Bingo. There usually are between 12 to 15 at Bingo, and sometimes 20. They play Bingo for an hour and then break for the shared lunch at 1 p.m. After 45 minutes or so, the games continue so the group is finished and out of the building by 3 p.m.

“We like to be out by 3 p.m. or we get caught in the line of cars when the mothers pick up their children from school,” Fran says.

When the Commons building is completed, however, this no longer will be a timing issue.

“About four times a year, we go to the Olive Garden for lunch,” Fran says. “They are very nice to us, and they’ll put us in our own area, at one big table. And they give us all individual checks. We go on a day that we’d be playing Bingo. It

works out very well. It’s a break, we sit and talk, and lunch takes about two hours. Everyone enjoys it, and it is a good thing.”

Fran likes to make greeting cards, so if someone in the group is sick, she makes a card and everyone in the group signs it. The other members make sure Fran is notified if someone is ill.

“I have everyone’s birth date – not the year! – and I make birthday cards,” Fran says. “I don’t take it to Bingo [for signing] as the person it’s for would be there, and there’d be no surprise. So, I sign it ‘St. Rita Bingo,’ and send them out. I enjoy doing it.”

The care for each other continues even when there is a death in the group.

“We had a death in the group about one month ago,” Fran says. “And a couple people from our group went to the funeral. Each time there’s someone who dies,

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The St. Rita Seniors gather for their Christmas lunch on their regular meeting day. The group gathers at the church for Bingo and shared lunch, but has lunch at their favorite Olive Garden restaurant at other times during the year.

St. Rita Seniors Share Activities and Care for Each Other *continued from page 2*

usually two or three go to the funeral. This group brings us closer to God, and gives some a good reason to get up and get going. We get some new people who may come a few times, and Bingo isn't for everyone. But membership stays about the same. The members seem to care for one another, and they have become friends, and not just the people who sit at their Bingo table."

Fran says, to her mind, the Bingo and lunch outings are valuable activities for the seniors.

"We have gals there in their 90s, and 95 I think is the oldest, but they enjoy Bingo," Fran says. "It's just enough activity, and if someone has a problem following along, we have them sit next to someone to help, and on we go. There's lots of socializing and that's good."

If someone needs a ride for the activities, Fran says she can make arrangements for them.

"It's predominately women, but we do have single men and couples," Fran says. "A couple people are found-

ing members of the parish, which is more than 50 years old. It gives our seniors a way to be active, and keep connected to the parish. They have the feeling the parish cares about them and wants to provide this. And this is very valid. Older people at times feel like they're put out to pasture, and this keeps us connected and involved to some extent.

"It's a very nice group of older people," Fran continues. "They enjoy getting out twice a month. It brings them together for socialization."

If you are interested in joining the St. Rita Seniors or would like more information, please call Fran Moorman at 972-863-3847.

A New Year and a Renewed Mission! *continued from front cover*

desirable – because it is! – and this gives us an advantage in selecting an outstanding new principal. As I have told our various councils and our parents: at the school, ours is a culture of faith, hope, and love – *and* educational excellence. We will settle for nothing less in our new principal. These children are given us in sacred trust. Thus, we will treat their education and formation accordingly – as sacred. Please keep this in your daily prayers!

Also, as we draw near to the end of our building projects hopefully this spring, completing our momentous vision of faith that will carry our community well into the future, let us all now refocus our energies upon the basic mission of the Gospel, on being here at St. Rita what the Church is by the grace of God. Let us recommit ourselves as a community of "life, charity and truth," to quote Vatican II, finding our purpose

always as an instrument of God's love and redemption of all people. We've built everything we've built for this mission, so let's not let up, let's get to work! From construction to evangelization – that's our task! And again, this excites me more than I can say – what the Spirit will do through us!

So, very simply, just trust God! Let God be God; you and I – let's be faithful! Let's love and pray and worship and rejoice and serve and forgive. May we be the Church. May we be Christ for one another. May we share God's love with everyone – in this world so in need of it!

God bless you!

Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield
Pastoral Administrator

a PLACE FOR the Children's Liturgy

It's OK to admit it – if you're a parent, there has probably been at least a Sunday or two when you felt uneasy about going to Mass. Maybe it's after a particularly difficult week with an ornery preschooler, or maybe it happens when you start to doubt that your 6-year-old is getting anything out of the liturgy each week. But, sooner or later, if you have children, it will probably happen to you.

It can be a challenging and sometimes daunting task to keep young children engaged, or even just relatively quiet and non-disruptive for an hour, in the pew.

Here at St. Rita's, we want Sunday Mass to be an opportunity for all our parishioners to pray and grow closer to God and their parish community. And we're aware that, for many young children, trying to sit still for an hour may not be the best way to do that.

With this in mind, our young parishioners are invited to join us for Children's Liturgy of the Word, or CLOW, each Saturday evening, at the 5:30 p.m. Vigil Mass – and soon, also at the 9 a.m. Sunday Mass. CLOW is designed to give young children – generally ages 4-10 – an opportunity to listen to



the Mass readings and learn about them, at their level. CLOW meets in the sacristy, where two catechists lead them in age-appropriate reflections, crafts and activities, all designed to help them understand and apply Scripture in their lives.

"Our 'homily' is more of a discussion, back and forth between the leaders and children," says Abby Sikes, who has served with CLOW for several years, and began coordinating the 5:30 Vigil Mass volunteers this past fall. "For my children,

when an adult is talking at them, especially in a large group, they tend to let their minds wander, or check out. Because the children back in the sacristy are participating and they're giving their examples and their thoughts, I think it helps them work through what the readings are about and understand the Gospel."

"Plus we don't get nearly as fussy as parents get with wiggles," she adds, smiling. "There's not much that can go on back there that's distracting. The little ones tend to sit

THE LITTLE ONES

Liturgy of the Word

very still because they're in awe of the older children talking and want to hear what they have to say."

Abby hopes that CLOW will help children to begin making a habit of listening to God's Word and incorporating it into their daily lives, a practice that will hopefully serve them for years to come.

"I hope it makes them feel more connected as participants, versus an audience," Abby says. "It helps them to know that they can apply the Gospel to their everyday lives. 'We learned this, how are you going to go put this into practice?' Hopefully they go and put it into practice, so they're actually living the Gospel. I hope that it leads to them being more involved in the church when they're older."

Through serving with CLOW, Abby has also found her own faith being strengthened.

"I pull out the readings ahead of time, and I read them and I think about them, and I look up other resources – it helps me in my own personal study," she says. "Since I have this important role of starting the dialogue with the children, I want to make sure I understand it."

Abby invites families with young children who have not yet experienced CLOW to come and see what it is all about.

"We'll often have parents sit in, and we'd love to have them," she says. "Come back, listen and see what it is, and if it's a good fit for your child."

"I enjoy the Mass more, because I know my children are enjoying the Mass – I'm not concentrated

on 'Be quiet! Are you listening?'" she adds, with a smile. "I can get more out of the Mass, when I know my children are getting it on their level. I can concentrate on what the priest is trying to teach us, and I enjoy my kids getting to go because they get so much out of it."

She also encourages fellow parishioners, especially busy moms, to become involved in this ministry. Most catechists are scheduled to serve at Mass twice each quarter.

"We're so busy and we have so much to do, but you're going to go to Mass anyway," Abby says. "The only time outside of Mass is studying and preparing for your reading, and you can do that any time that's convenient for you. Especially if you have kids the age that they can come back with you, then it's a win-win."

For more information on Children's Liturgy of the Word, please contact Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation Susan Sheetz at 972-934-8388, ext. 6502. If you would like to volunteer with CLOW at the 5:30 p.m. Saturday Vigil Mass, please contact coordinator Abby Sikes at 432-853-3966 or asikes@rendallsikes.com. If you would like to volunteer with the new CLOW at the 9 a.m. Sunday Mass, please contact coordinator Jenny Kricken at jenniferkricken@yahoo.com.

A Saint for Life: St. Gianna Beretta Molla

As disciples of Christ, the Lord of Life, we are called to respect and defend the life of every human being, from conception until natural death.

In today's world, a pro-life mindset is not only largely unpopular, but sometimes even dangerous.

However, the facts remain the same – the gift of life determines our humanity, and as Catholic Christians, we are responsible for its protection. With the strong examples of people such as St. Gianna Beretta Molla, we are able to witness the value of being a people of faith, a people living to build up a culture resting on Christ's values – a culture of life.

From early childhood, Gianna lived an exemplary Christian life. She attended daily Mass with her mother and her brothers, and was a faithful member of Catholic Action, a lay apostolate dedicated to worldwide evangelization. Gianna often wrote beautiful prayers to the Lord, promising to follow His will no matter the consequences.

As a teenager, Gianna understood the importance of obeying God's will and made a series of resolutions to always follow His guidance. "I wish to die rather than commit a mortal sin," young Gianna once wrote. Yet, at the time, Gianna was not aware of what God had in store for her life.



Throughout her life, Gianna constantly prayed, "O Jesus, I promise You to submit myself to all that You permit to happen to me, make me only know Your will." As her life progressed, Gianna would live such prayers in a radical way.

In 1961, as the mother of three and pregnant with her fourth child, Gianna was diagnosed with uterine cancer. To preserve her health and life, doctors suggested Gianna undergo a radical hysterectomy — a surgery that would undoubtedly save her life, but consequently terminate her pregnancy. Gianna decided to wait for God's direction. Doctors removed portions of the tumor, but knew that complete eradication would require a full hysterectomy. However, Gianna

was determined to keep her uterus intact, and determined to give birth to her unborn baby. Knowing the serious dangers ahead, Gianna instructed her husband a few days prior to delivery, "If you must decide between me and the baby, have no hesitation: choose – and I demand it – the baby, save him."

As it turned out, Gianna's tumor had progressed so far that a few days after she delivered her fourth child, she passed away – a martyr for her child! Caring for the life of her unborn child meant the loss of her own life, but such knowledge never weakened her respect for life in the least. Gianna knew that her child's life was just as valuable as her own, and she needed to care for both of them. Gianna ultimately lost her life because she wasn't willing to sacrifice her child for her own sake. What a strong woman!

Though this seems radical, we are all called to respect the lives of the unborn just as Gianna did, and Gianna's fate only secures for us the reward we will receive if we work to build a culture of life, just as she did. In April 1994, Gianna Beretta Molla was beatified by Pope St. John Paul II, and in May 2004, she was declared a saint. Because St. Gianna lived as a defender of life, she now enjoys eternal life with the Almighty God! Let us heed her example and build a culture of life!

Catholic Schools Week

Celebrating Work of St. Rita School

When our St. Rita School students celebrate Catholic Schools Week from Jan. 29 through Feb. 4, they will be putting into action the theme of “Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service.”

“A highlight of the week will be a ‘Water Walk,’ to raise money for the charitable organization, H2O for life,” says our Principal, Dr. Elena Hines. “The organization is working on providing water in affected communities in Africa. If someone wishes to donate online, they can log on to www.crowdrise.com/st-rita-catholic-school-fundraiser-for-south-sudan-school-4.”

Dr. Hines is also looking forward to inviting parishioners to an Open House on Sunday, Jan. 29.

“We like to invite parishioners who may not have children in school,” she says. “We’re excited because we have all new construction, a new building.”

On Monday, the students will have a kickoff assembly for the week, featuring a motivational singer.

“We’re asking students to write letters to someone who has been an influence on their Catholic faith,” Dr. Hines says. “They’ll write the letters at home and bring them in. Portions of the letters will be read at the Friday school Mass.”

A student-favorite activity is returning this year.

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“We get to celebrate what we do – teach about our faith. We get to highlight things we do, and get the community involved, and thank our community. We try to show that we’re here, and we’re doing a great job.”

– Dr. Elena Hines, Principal



During last year’s teacher-student volleyball game, the eighth-grade girls team defeated the faculty. This year, the faculty aims to defend their honor!



Our celebration of Catholic Schools Week traditionally opens with an assembly for all the students.



Students enjoy a crafts session during Catholic Schools Week.



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Weekday Masses

Monday-Friday, 5:30 p.m.
Wednesday-Saturday, 8:00 a.m.

Weekend Masses

Saturday, 5:30 p.m.
Sunday, 7:30 a.m., 9:00 a.m., 10:45 a.m.,
12:30 p.m. (Bilingual), 5:30 p.m.

Catholic Schools Week *continued from page 7*

“Back by popular demand is Buddy Bingo,” Dr. Hines says. “The little ones play Bingo with their sixth-grade Prayer Buddies, and they really like that. The other students will also play.”

From Wednesday through Friday of the week, parents will have an opportunity to meet with their children’s teachers. The fifth-grade meetings will be held on Wednesday, the third and

fourth on Thursday, and Pre-K to second on Friday.

“On the days of the visits, parents can bring their children lunches from ‘outside,’ and the kids love it,” Dr. Hines says.

On Friday, the all-school Mass will be followed by the Teacher-Student Volleyball Game, a Catholic Schools Week tradition.

“We play the eighth-grade girls volleyball team,” Dr. Hines

says. “Last year, they beat us – we have to defend our honor!”

With all the activities planned during Catholic Schools Week, everything points to an important message.

“We get to celebrate what we do – teach about our faith,” Dr. Hines says. “We get to highlight things we do, and get the community involved, and thank our community. We try to show that we’re here, and we’re doing a great job.”

For parents interested in a tour of the school at any time, please contact Sonbol Mannas, admissions director, at smannas@strita.net.