



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

On Being a Parish

What's the point of a parish? It's not an academic question, but a deeply spiritual and imminently practical one. What is St. Rita Catholic Community? Why does it exist? Drawing near the end of our long building campaign, we would do well to return to these basic questions. For every type of community, it's good ever so often to pause and ask, "What's this all about?"

Exploring our tradition, we see that Christians have dwelt together from the earliest times — since Jesus called his disciples to follow him together as the "twelve" and the "seventy-two." Dioceses are rather ancient things. However, parish churches as we know them structurally are really the legacy of Charlemagne in the ninth century although the Greek word *paroikein* (in English, "parish") was used by the earliest Church fathers centuries before that.

And the meaning of *paroikein* is illuminating. It's twofold: First, it simply means "to live beside," and this makes sense given that a parish is the local embodiment of the universal Church comprised of persons living close

together. Yet, equally, the word translated into English as "parish" also means "foreigner" or "stranger" — the sense being that as Christians we are ultimately pilgrims on a journey living as stewards of the created world, knowing that our destiny is in heaven, and not as idolaters that make mere material well-being their ultimate concern (cf. 1 Pt. 2:11). This distinguishes a parish from say a book club or your fantasy football league. A Catholic parish is made up of faithful people committed to a particular form of life shaped by a particular hope. That is, members of a parish live intimately within the presence of Christ himself, trusting all the while that when Jesus "appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

This is what the Church means by "community." The *Code of Canon Law* describes a parish as a "definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis" (§515.1). By "community," we understand that our parish is constituted first as a communion of persons and not as buildings. All our property could be taken away, but as long as we

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Stewardship Hannah, the Good Steward

What should we do when our prayers are answered?

Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead, God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing

God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire

had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her faithfulness, God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”



“An Outstanding Catholic Institution”

Update on our Search for a New Principal for St. Rita Catholic School

For more than 25 years, we have been privileged to have as the Principal of our school Dr. Elena C. Hines. A native of Cuba, Dr. Hines holds a B.A. in French from LSU-New Orleans; a Master’s in French from Indiana University; and a doctorate in Private School Administration from the University of San Francisco. St. Rita’s first lay principal, Dr. Hines was named a National Distinguished Principal by the U.S. Department of Education in 2007.

Under her leadership our school was designated a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education. Our strong Catholic identity is evident not only by the Catholic symbols which greet you as you walk into the school, but also by our commitment to Gospel values and faith development for our students, as well as our faculty and staff.

“St. Rita School is an outstanding Catholic institution,” Dr. Hines says. “Note that I purposely mention ‘outstanding Catholic institution’ before I refer to how good it is academically. We are first and foremost a parochial school, which does not signify that we do not emphasize academic excellence, but it does mean that we treasure our Catholic values and our ties to the St. Rita Catholic Community.”

At the completion of the 2015-16 school year, Dr. Hines announced her intention of retiring at the end of the current school year. Obviously, the appointment of a new principal is not only important, but it is a difficult mission given Dr. Hines’ long tenure and success. Deacon Denis Corbin, our Parish Administrator, has been intimately involved with the effort to find a replacement for Dr. Hines from the beginning of that effort in May 2016.

“We knew from the onset that the task in front of us was a daunting one,” Deacon Corbin says. “However, we also understood how important it was to find the best possible replacement for Dr. Hines. Our first point of



contact was Dr. Matthew Vereecke, the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Dallas. We have worked closely with Dr. Vereecke and his staff throughout our search, following closely that office’s recommendations for procedures and processes and where it was most important to list the position. Of course, the position is listed with the diocesan office, but it is also listed with the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington D.C., and with several other key publications and organizations.

“We also recognized how important it was to include those with the greatest vested interest in the school,” Deacon Corbin adds. “On a regular basis, we have consulted with our parents, our school staff, our faculty, and our School Board. In fact, we asked all of them to complete a targeted survey which we have utilized in identifying the important characteristics for which we are looking in a new principal.”

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Phil and Maureen Blase With Parish

Born and raised in the Midwest, Phil and Maureen Blase both grew up with wonderful examples of stewardship. As adults, this not only inspired them to get involved here at St. Rita, but also to be that example for their own children.

"We are both cradle Catholics and our families were very involved in church," Maureen says. "Phil's mom was Episcopalian, but attended the Catholic church and eventually converted. Phil learned to have a strong respect for all religions. Phil's dad is an accountant and was always on the finance committee of those days. Both of our mothers sang in church choirs, and it was always expected that we as children participate at the church with whatever gifts God gave us, period."

Phil and Maureen met in college and moved to Dallas in 1995, immediately finding a home at St. Rita. The Blases have three children – Katie, who is a sophomore at Oklahoma State University; Michael, a junior at Jesuit High School; and Jack, a freshman at Jesuit. All three children attended St. Rita Catholic School from kindergarten through eighth grade, and were all altar servers starting in fifth grade.



The Blase family

For many years, Phil and Maureen were very active in St. Rita's school committees and activities, but over time they found that something was missing.

"We recognized that although we attended Mass every Sunday, and the kids served, our volunteer involvement tended to be focused on the kids' activities – and the kids were getting older!" Maureen says. "So we consciously reflected on what kind of example we wanted to be, and if we were doing enough. I think that stewardship is learned, and that it was very important for us to model that. A few friends suggested we get involved in a few things, and lend our expertise, and from there it went."

Phil is an architect and Maureen is in the mechanical contracting business, which has given them the knowledge and perspective to serve on the parish's Building Committee. They started out when the parish began its *Building the Future* campaign, which worked to improve and update the parish's physical infrastructure. Since then, Phil has also gotten involved as a liaison to the school Advisory Council, a Eucharistic Minister, a former Pastoral Council member, and a current Building Committee member. Maureen, in addition to remaining on the Building Committee, serves on the Pastoral Council and as a liaison to the Finance Council.

se Share Their Talents Community

As a result of their involvement, the Blases have been able to call the parish community home.

"In our community, it really feels like everyone knows everyone, even in a city like Dallas," Phil says. "We know so many families who have been here for three or four generations, and so it's a unique peer group where you know your kids' friends' parents, and their parents, and so on."

"My mom used to say that we should surround ourselves with good people – we have done that here and have learned from them," Maureen adds. "We have really been blessed to know these fami-

lies, especially since we don't have extended family down here."

Through their service and fellowship, Phil and Maureen have also personally grown in faith.

"I think being involved has helped to better me as a person," Maureen says. "We have busy lives, with kids and us both working. This has helped me focus on being a more prayerful person."

"It has helped me to appreciate what we have, and has helped us to be more aware of our blessings on a day-to-day basis," Phil says.

The Blases encourage all parishioners to find ways in which

to contribute time and talent to the parish – and to enjoy the spiritual and personal growth they can gain as a result.

"Every simple act of giving back is important, and it's so true that we often get more out of it than we give!" Maureen says. "I challenge people even just to introduce themselves to the people around them, and they'll see how warm and welcoming we are here at St. Rita. Everyone wants those kinds of friendships and personal touches, and it always helps to make those connections just as we have."

Update on our Search for a New Principal for St. Rita Catholic School *continued from page 3*

Officially, applications closed on Dec. 31, 2016.

"We have analyzed all the applicants and narrowed the number to 35 initially," Deacon Corbin says. "Our timeline is to have finalists ascertained by mid spring. After Easter, from the end of April to mid May, we hope to make a decision and a job offer. Again we will involve our key people in that decision."

A review of the listed tasks of the incoming principal certainly indicates the wide scope of the job,

as well as how well Dr. Hines has approached these responsibilities for many years. Included in the duties of the principal are – spiritual guidance and growth of all members and all facets of the school; management and formation of teachers and staff members; development of curriculum; oversight of student discipline; coordination of recruitment and retention activities; management of student interventions; and program design and coordination.

For more information on this important process, please contact Deacon Denis Corbin in the parish office at 972-934-8388, or Dr. Matthew Vereecke at 214-379-2830.

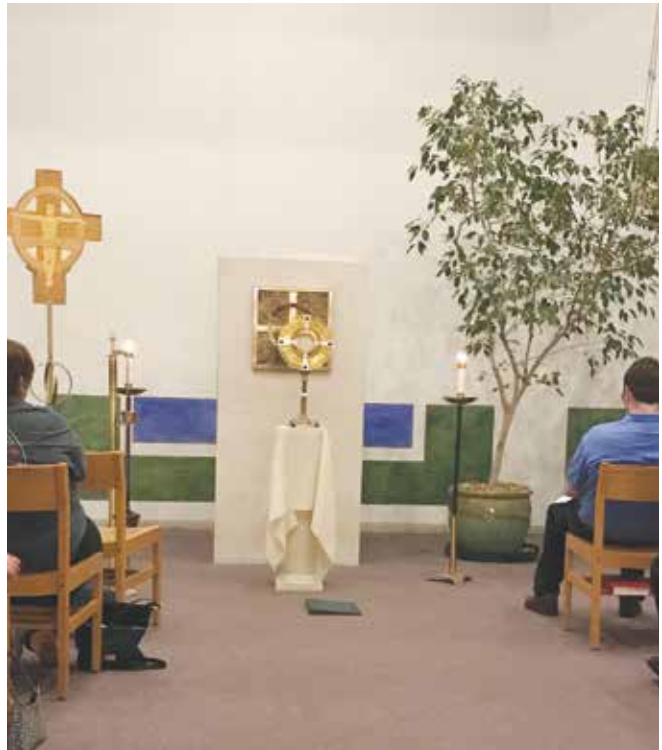
Eucharistic Adoration

By Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield

Christ identified himself with the bread and wine of the Eucharist. He first did so in Capernaum saying, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever." He immediately intensified this statement by saying, "my flesh is real food, and my blood is real drink" (John 6:51,55). Later, in the Upper Room, he identified himself again with the bread and wine of Passover saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Even after his resurrection, Jesus is still identified with the bread and wine of the Eucharist as both Luke and Paul teach (Luke 24:28-32; 1 Corinthians 10:16).

Ever since Peter said, "You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68), the Church has always believed this. Ignatius of Antioch, writing at the dawn of the second century, distinguished right-believing Christians from false believers who "will not admit that the Eucharist is the self-same body of our Savior Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, and which the Father in his goodness afterwards raised up again" (*To the Smyrnaens*, 7). The belief of the Church is stated clearly by the end of the second century in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons: "For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to eternity" (*Against Heresies*, 4.18.5).

Of course believing in the Eucharistic presence of Jesus influenced worship. In addition to normal Eucharistic gatherings, known as the "breaking of the bread," there is early evidence of worship or adoration of Jesus in the Eucharistic bread. There are traces of such adoration in Spain as early as the sixth century, for example. By the 12th century, elevating the newly consecrated bread and wine within the Mass was commonplace in the West, and by the thirteenth century, Eucharistic adoration took root



in the West with the promulgation of the Feast of Corpus Christi in 1247.

The purpose of such extra-liturgical adoration is simply to cultivate and extend the beauty and grace of Communion. Eucharistic adoration is a way to savor the presence of Jesus, to contemplate the gift of his passion and his risen body and blood. Thus, we offer this time of adoration and spiritual communion. At St. Rita we celebrate Holy Hour with Benediction every Thursday evening during Confessions and all day on the first Friday of the month. Christians have been doing this for centuries, and so do we. And countless souls have been blessed in the experience. Echoing Saint John Paul II, "May our adoration never cease" (*Dominicae Cenaes*, 3).

Helping Others and Growing in Faith Through Prayer

"No special talents are required, no meetings – all that is needed is to pray. It's a very small time commitment, and you can pray throughout the day, before meals, or while driving in the car. You just pray a few times a day for those needing support. It's a very powerful prayer chain." – Marianne Sondak

Parishes are like families – and what better way to look out for your fellow family members than by praying? Through St. Rita's Prayer Chain, group members take specific prayer requests for their fellow parishioners. Conducted through email, each request is accepted and prayed for with genuine care – no prayer request is too big or too small!

The ministry began about 30 years ago, when parishioner Kay Neuhoff was inspired by a Protestant friend's similar ministry at her church. At the beginning, the ministry operated as a phone chain, but eventually switched over to an email chain – although some ministry members still prefer to be called with prayer requests. The Prayer Chain currently numbers about 380 members.

The Prayer Chain's first link begins with Kay – anyone is welcome to send prayer requests directly to her. Kay, along with ministry member Marianne Sondak, sends out the requests to the other members via email – they also make calls to the members who have requested it on Mondays and Fridays.

"Once they get the prayer requests, they immediately start praying," Kay says. "We have had prayers answered, and we also get some requests for prayers of Thanksgiving when that happens. It's always good to thank the Lord for answering prayers."

"We always pray individually for concerns given to us, and the base has been expanded to include both our own St. Rita parishioners and their extended families

and friends," Marianne says. "Many share their answered prayers. When I had surgery 15-plus years ago, I was very nervous. But when the day came, I had a blanket of calmness over me. I could feel the support and great comfort from the prayers, and I wasn't afraid. This was so important to me, and I'm sure it helps the other parishioners, families and friends involved."

The Prayer Chain is a great way for people with busy schedules to get involved.

"I've been in the ministry for over 20 years," Marianne says. "At the time that I joined, I was working long hours, and traveling quite a bit. I had little to no time to get involved in parish activities, but I could always pray.

"No special talents are required, no meetings – all that is needed is to pray," she continues. "It's a very small time commitment, and you can pray throughout the day, before meals, or while driving in the car. You just pray a few times a day for those needing support. It's a very powerful prayer chain."

Over the years, Kay has truly enjoyed knowing that so many people are praying for the intentions of parishioners.

"It's always wonderful to add new names to the list, and to know that I have the ability to start the request and send it out to so many people," Kay says. "It's very rewarding to know that so many people are praying.

"Keep sending in the requests," she adds. "I'm here to take them!"

If you would like to join the Prayer Chain, or if you have a prayer request, please contact Kay Neuhoff at krn3@sbcglobal.net or Marianne Sondak at msondak@sbcglobal.net.



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Weekday Masses

Monday-Friday, 5:30 p.m.
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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.

On Being a Parish *continued from front cover*

remain a communion of faithful people, we remain St. Rita Catholic Community. That is, positively, what binds us together is something profound and lasting, something that “never ends,” something “that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7-8).

That is, what binds us together is love. Echoing Paul, the *Catechism* is clear: “Above all,” it teaches “charity ‘binds everything together in perfect harmony’” (815). Love is that pervasive reality that characterizes everything we do. Fundamentally, the love that makes a parish is exemplified in our common faith and worship and in our apostolic unity with Bishop Burns, the other bishops, and also our Holy Father. When someone dismisses the Church as an “institution,” that person really has failed to learn anything deep about love. Of course there are sins and failures, but love endures such things. To reject the Church because she’s merely an “institution” is like rejecting your

family because you can describe it sociologically or financially. Such reductive conclusions may be true, but they are also totally devoid of love. Christians see things differently. We see love.

What does this mean for the average parishioner? Simply this: What do you do for love? What do you give for love? What do you say for love? Do your words build up or tear down? Do your actions inspire or offend? Love makes a parish. What about your life shares and shows love? Love has been the theme of our parish for over half a century. May it continue until we pilgrims are brought home.

God bless you,

Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield,
Pastoral Administrator