



St. Rita

catholic community

A Letter From Our Pastoral Administrator

In Place: Reflections on Belonging

Farmer, poet, and philosopher Wendell Berry once wrote that the greatest danger facing our country today is that, “Increasingly, Americans – including, notoriously, their politicians – are not *from* anywhere.” Transportation is so easy, our world so wireless and our work so subject to shifting formations of markets that we forget how different, liquid and detached-from-place our lives have become. It’s a cliché to talk about “mobile society,” so much so that we don’t notice or at least can hardly name the haunting anxiety many of us feel about this brave, new, but perhaps crumbling world in which we no longer feel at home. Philosopher Michael Gillespie helps us understand something about how things have changed. “In previous ages,” he argues, “people have defined themselves in terms of their land or place, their race or ethnic group, their traditions or their gods...” What is different today is that we define ourselves more in terms of



time. “To be modern means to be ‘new,’ to be an unprecedented event in the flow of time... something different than anything that has come before...as self-originating, as free and creative in a radical sense, not merely as determined by tradition or governed by fate or providence.” It’s not as easy as it once was to see ourselves in terms of some grand, people-forming narrative – those stories which shaped

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Reflections on Belonging *continued from front cover*

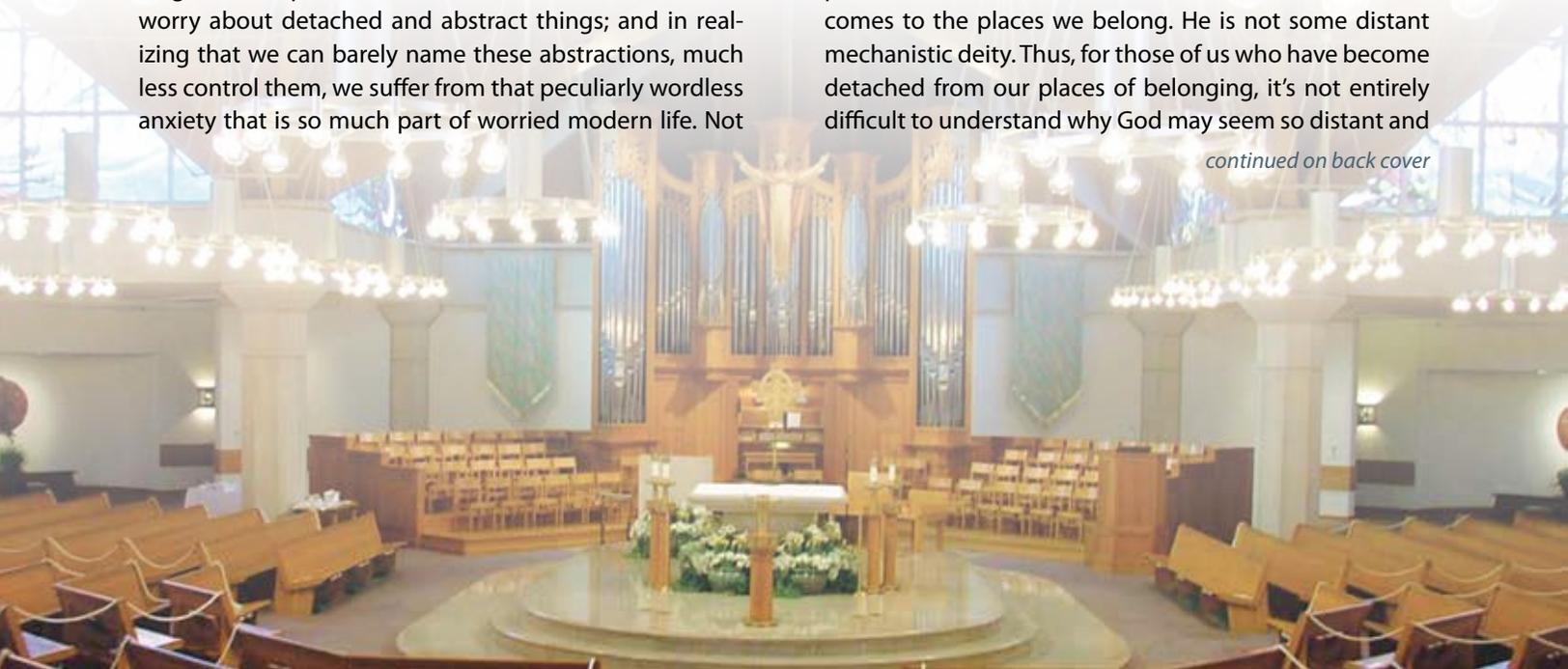
religion and nations. Even in the face of some of our new patriotisms, the power of the American story is more and more being called into question here and abroad. We don't see ourselves as we used to. Tense and silent, this sense of not belonging, of not being from anywhere, in many ways names our modern anxiety.

Some, though, think this good and liberating. No longer bound by our particular stories, we're now free to seek out some new more global or virtual communion. I'm less convinced than these cultural optimists. Being detached from our particular stories and particular places, in my opinion, has made this world more frightening and abstract. For example, now we worry about something called "the economy," some abstract thing most of us know nothing about but which most of us fear. We worry also about something called "the environment," again something we can't really conceive. We used to worry about Phyllis and Bob who owned the shop across the street. And we used to worry about our neighbor's crop, about the soil beneath our feet. Now we worry about detached and abstract things; and in realizing that we can barely name these abstractions, much less control them, we suffer from that peculiarly wordless anxiety that is so much part of worried modern life. Not

knowing where we're from and worrying about these detached and abstract things, we suffer from what psychiatrist Mindy Thompson Fullilove called "root shock," our "reaction to the destruction of all or part of one's emotional ecosystem." Speaking to the *New York Times*, Martin Cottingham exemplified just this sort of thing. Reacting to the closure of his local Catholic school he said, "The world can change, but if you got your school, your church, your sports all within a couple of blocks, you're safe." Losing our harbors of belonging is traumatic and fearful. We're beginning to forget who we are because we've forgot where we're from.

And it's hard to be a Christian having lost sense of belonging. The God whom we've been told about for generations is a God that is certainly transcendent and infinite, but also local, immediate, and personal. The God of Jews and Christians makes himself known to a lone wandering shepherd, to a farmer, to an elderly couple, to a young girl – all belonging to a particular tribe within a particular nation. Our God is an intimate, local God that comes to the places we belong. He is not some distant mechanistic deity. Thus, for those of us who have become detached from our places of belonging, it's not entirely difficult to understand why God may seem so distant and

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Nourishing the Body of Christ Through Sisterhood

There is something special about gathering around the dinner table with friends and loved ones. Not only does it nourish our bodies through the meals provided on its surface, but the dinner table also indirectly feeds our souls through the relationships that are forged and deepened around it. This can be seen clearly through St. Rita's Mother's Ministry, which was first created within the homelike atmosphere provided by a friend's table.

"It all started two years ago when a group of us gathered together," says ministry coordinator Julie Billmeier. "It was a group of women who had all expressed an interest in starting a mother's ministry. So, we gathered one day around a friend's kitchen table and brainstormed what our dreams and plans were for the ministry. After that, the ministry just kind of solidified and took form."

Based upon those early dreams and ideas, the Mother's Ministry is designed to support, strengthen and empower women in their roles as Catholic wives and mothers. This is first accomplished through the ministry's monthly gatherings. Coming together the second Tuesday of each month from 7-8:30 p.m., women are enriched by main speakers and small-group discussions.

"We try to have topics that relate to all mothers, no matter where they are in life," Julie says. "For me personally, it gives me really good ideas on things to do with my own family. I'm given a window into what other women are doing in their own homes with their children, learning about both their successes and struggles. In the process, I'm able to get a better perspective on my own motherhood."

The Mother's Ministry also provides monthly book studies for its members. All book study groups meet during the third week of the month on various days and times, allowing members to choose what fits best with their



*Some of the current leaders from St. Rita's
Mothers Ministry*

schedules. Each group reads the same book, however, unifying them with the whole.

"We usually read a chapter a month, gather together at the time that you've signed up for, and then share with one another our thoughts and feelings on the month's reading," Julie says.

Recognizing that women need more than sharing and discussion to

flourish, the ministry also provides periodic social gatherings, allowing parish women to simply come and enjoy one another's company. For mothers with younger children, members also frequently plan play dates allowing whole families to grow and support each other. For Julie, mother of three, this has been a particular blessing of the ministry.

"It's really helped solidify my family's sense of community here at St. Rita's," Julie says. "I've gotten to really know these women through the book studies or various activities that have also allowed our children to get to know one another. I would definitely say that one of the greatest blessings of this ministry has been the deep, spiritual friendships where moms are personally, one-on-one supporting each other through both prayer and conversation."

Finally, the ministry works to encompass service in a wide variety of ways, helping its women embrace stewardship as wives and mothers. To name just a few, the ministry coordinates meals for new mothers or for members needing extra help, plans an Easter egg hunt each year for the entire parish, hosts an annual women's retreat, and helps set up for large parish events.

"We are always trying to discover how we as a ministry can better serve the parish," Julie says. "And we're able to include our kids in almost all of the services we do, which is another important part of our ministry and stewardship as mothers."

*If you would like to learn more about this ministry, or to get involved,
please contact Julie Billmeier at 214-868-4049 or StRitaMothers@gmail.com.*

Empowering Students

When Mr. Michael Wixted tells people that he teaches middle school, one recurring response is “I don’t know how you handle that.” But for Mr. Wixted, teaching middle school is a joy, and he recognizes the important task of ministering the faith to his students.

“For me, that was the time when my faith was strengthened the most, and it was because of teachers and coaches and my pastor who had such a big impact on me,” says Mr. Wixted, who teaches seventh and eighth-grade religion at St. Rita School, and is coach for boys’ basketball. “So, the opportunity to hopefully be a positive role model and make a difference in their lives, as people did for me – that is just an opportunity I couldn’t pass up.”

Mr. Wixted is originally from Philadelphia, and he attended Villanova University as an undergraduate, with plans to attend law school. But just before graduation, he changed his mind and joined Notre Dame’s two-year service program, which brought him to serve at St. Elizabeth’s in south Dallas, and allowed him to finish the program with a master’s degree in Education. He decided to continue his education – and stay in Dallas – and is currently working on his



Along with teaching middle school religion, Mr. Wixted coached the eighth D1 boys’ basketball team to winning the championship this year.

master’s in Educational Leadership, a program from which he will graduate this May.

Having grown up in Catholic schools, Mr. Wixted appreciates the unique value and blessing of Catholic education. One of his favorite things to teach is Christian moral principles.

“I make them really use critical thinking, and they have to use their faith to back up the answers they give for different situations and dilemmas,” Mr. Wixted says. “It’s one clear way for them to see how to apply their faith and reason to different real-life situations. I

hope that they go from just knowing all the facts about the faith to truly living their faith.”

From studying Scripture and Theology of the Body, to a more traditional religious curriculum, it is Mr. Wixted’s hope that his students will not only grow in their knowledge of the faith, but also in holiness.

“I talk a lot about how I want them to be both theologians and saints, but for me, them being saints is the more important of the two,” he says. “They need to know the teachings of the Church, but if they know them and aren’t living them, it’s all for naught.”

for a Lifetime of Faith

He also hopes that they'll come to realize the importance of service and giving to those less fortunate.

"I want the kids to understand how fortunate they are and how blessed they've been by God, and share their gifts and treasures with others," says Mr. Wixted, explaining that the class participates in a number of service projects throughout the year.

Mr. Wixted takes seriously his role of forming the young people of St. Rita's, hoping that the foundation they gain during their time at our school will serve them for years to come.

"This is the most critical time," he says. "In the world we live in, there are so many distractions and options and choices for them. They need a foundation in order to be able to have the opportunity to make good choices.

"These kids are going to be our future leaders," he continues. "The way that technology and science is advancing, they're going to be tasked with solving problems that don't even yet exist, and we want and need people who are rooted in faith and morals and



Mr. Michael Wixted inside the Notre Dame football locker room

convictions making decisions in the future. Teaching is a great responsibility, but it's an awesome responsibility. It's an opportunity to make positive change and I love that opportunity."

Of all the things he teaches, there's two things that Mr. Wixted most hopes to become part of his students' lives.

"First, prayer," he says. "Hopefully, I've instilled in them that everyone's relationship with God is different, and so whatever way the communicate with God is okay, as long as you're doing it. And also the virtues – we talk a lot about virtue and vice. It's really important that they are actually living what they say they believe. I always talk to them about how actions speak louder than words."

And while he's certainly passed on a great amount of knowledge to his students in the past couple of years, they aren't the only ones who've had the opportunity to learn and grow.

"I never wanted it to be 'I'm the teacher and the kids in front of me are the students,'" Mr. Wixted says. "We're learning from each other and we're growing together."

He encourages other who may be unsure of their career path to consider the important task of education.

"There is no greater joy in life than to serve a cause greater than yourself," Mr. Wixted says. "For me, teaching is the most direct way to hopefully have a positive impact on the lives of young people."

If you would like more information on St. Rita School, please visit our website, www.strita.net.

Summer Activities Abound for Parish Youth



Whether it's having fun each day at Vacation Bible School, when youngsters from the community come together to grow closer to Jesus, to having a lifelong faith experience at the Steubenville Lone Star Conference, our parish youth have a summer filled with opportunities to grow in faith.



Our parish youth have an exciting summer of activities waiting for them here at St. Rita!

Our Family Vacation Bible School is opening its sixth year through the Office of Children's Faith Formation. The week begins at 6:30 p.m. on June 25 in our dining hall. The session will run from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. through June 29.

"Mom and Dad will come with the kids to participate in Vacation Bible School," Susan Sheetz, Coordinator of Children's Faith Formation. "One session is for children from 3 years old to those going into the fifth grade. We also have another session, 'IMPACT,' for kids going into sixth to eighth grade. It runs at the same time."

The fee for Vacation Bible School is \$45 per family, and it includes all the activities and snacks – and surprises.

"Our overall theme is 'Maker Fun Factory – Created by God, Built for a Purpose,'" Susan says. "Every evening from Sunday through Wednesday, we'll do all the songs, skits, snacks, crafts, and games. Thursday night, we'll end with skits and songs, and then go into the church for a talk by our priest about our week. Then, our Knights of Columbus will serve us a brat and hot dog dinner, with snow

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Summer Activities Abound for Parish Youth

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cones for everyone! This will be our fellowship evening. It is an opportunity for all to meet other families and the new friends made. It's a wonderful end to the week."

Throughout the week, the children will have the opportunity to understand that God made them for a reason, and why.

"There are five to six parishes who will participate with us," Susan says. "It's open to everyone. We even have had non-Catholics attend. It's not just open to St. Rita Parish, and you don't have to be Catholic. It's just a great way to remind us that God is always there. We tend to take a vacation, but God is never on vacation from us. Vacation Bible School helps to reinforce that."

Susan notes that this is the second year for IMPACT that will combine fun and service.

"The kids will do a collection of toiletries and prepare personal bags for the Austin Street Shelter," Susan says. "Our volunteers help bring food to the shelter, and they'll also bring the toiletry bags. This will get the kids to think outside themselves. We did it last year, and the kids loved it."

Other activities are also in the works for our youth. Maribel Waldon, Coordinator of Youth Ministry and Confirmation Prep, says that the Summer in the Sun activities will begin June 1.

"These are kind of laid-back activities," she says. "We're looking to go to baseball games, museums, that sort of thing."

Although logistics are being determined at this writing, the YOU-Theology of the Body Program for teens will be offered, beginning June 4, and then running each Sunday through June and July.

"This is a great program for teens," Maribel says. "We minister to incoming ninth-graders, and we even get graduated seniors."

Our teens are already looking forward to attending the Steubenville Lone Star Conference June 23-25 at the Irving Convention Center.

"It's an amazing experience," Maribel says. "To secure a spot, there is a \$50 deposit, with the total fee \$200, which includes lodging, registration fee and meals."

It's important for teens to remain active in their faith during the summer.

"It's a time when it's easy to place youth ministry or faith formation in line with school," Maribel says. "But it's a reminder that faith growth is continuous. We want youth to have an active relationship with Jesus, and they need to talk to Him in prayer or liturgy, on a regular basis. It doesn't end on summer break."

Taking part in the youth activities gives the youth the chance to spend time with those they don't

normally see because all our youth don't attend the same high school.

"They can build solid friendships during their high school years and beyond that," Maribel says.

She also believes that the teens attending the Steubenville Conference will have the same powerful experience their fellow parish teens have had.

"We had such a beautiful thing," Maribel says of last year's event. "To see about 300 kids and their chaperones engaged in worship together. It's a cool thing for teens to see – to witness other young people strive to be in friendship with Jesus."

Lauren Ruzicka, St. Rita Young Adults Core Team, says that several fellowship events are in the planning stages.

"Watch the bulletin for details!" Lauren says.

Registration for the Family Vacation Bible School, IMPACT, Summer in the Sun, YOU-Theology of the Body, and the Steubenville Lone Star Conference can all be done online through our parish website at www.stritaparish.net.



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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.

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unreal. God wants to make His home with us, but we don't have homes anymore. This lost sense of belonging also contributes to our lost sense of sacredness. Again, quoting Wendell Berry, "There are no unsacred places/ there are only sacred places/ and desecrated places." The world is probably very beautiful, but unless we take time to give ourselves to a particular place, it will always be difficult to see the innumerable beauties of our little earth. Without belonging to a place, God is harder to find and His creation harder to love.

But what can we do? First, as Christians, we can remember that belonging is part of God's nature and plan. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all belong to each other perfectly, and in grace this Triune God of ours invites us to belong through Him, with Him, and in Him – "I in them and you in me," as Jesus prayed. Fundamental to our understanding of God is His invitation to belong in Him. Second, we must risk belonging to a place. A person interested in RCIA is often nervous about committing all year to the RCIA community. Many simply want to come into the Church discreetly by themselves. Yet, we make them

journey together as a community of persons, as people who have learned how to belong. We all need to learn how to belong, to risk belonging to a place. If we don't learn to belong to each other, it may very well be impossible to belong to God.

And finally, practically, why don't you just come to the place of St. Rita? Come into the sanctuary or the chapel, the new coffee bar in the Parish Commons. Meet a friend for lunch under a tree. Come to St. Rita some time and do nothing – just be here. Sit here and become a part of the place in silence, or in laughter. We've created new spaces for you to come and to engage in the blessed spiritual work of wasting time. Come discover spaces just to belong and be.

Come into this place and rest and waste time. Belong to this place, and you just might discover that God belongs to you. Lost, you will be found, and all your fears relieved.

pax,
Fr. Joshua