

# THE GOOD NEWS

## St. Francis Church

### Lake of the Woods Plaza, Dunlap, IL

#### DECEMBER 2009

#### **Christmas Time at St. Francis**

As always, Christmas time is a time of remembrance, family gatherings, and sharing of love and gifts.

As Christians, our most important family is God's household, the Church. Sadly, in our day, many Christian families will gather to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but will not be in church to offer fitting worship to the One who is central to the whole celebration.

Some will not have an opportunity to worship at Christmas, either because their church offers no such worship, or because work or the scheduling of family events are allowed to take precedence over worship. If we allow that to happen, who — or what — are we really worshipping?

You have all heard me say many times that worship is our first responsibility, indeed, our most fundamental obligation, as followers of Christ. Society would like us to put shopping, gifts, eating and drinking ahead of worship. Satan would very much like that too.

Don't give in. If Jesus is not made central at this sacred time when we commemorate his birth, how will he be central in our life at any other time?

We will offer two Christmas masses. I hope each of you will be with God's Family in worship this Christmas:

**Christmas Eve, December 24<sup>th</sup>:**

**7:30 PM: Family Eucharist**

**10:30 PM: Midnight Eucharist**

Praise to Jesus Christ, whose birth was the birth of our salvation!

#### **Alpha Course Concludes**

We've just finished a very successful Alpha Course. Special thanks to Greg Hnilicka who lead the course for us, to Annie for giving him up to us for so many Sunday evenings, and to Nell German, assistant leader. Thanks to all who took part.

We will begin the next course after the first of the year. Be praying about someone you know who is not yet a Christian, or who is struggling with their faith, so you can invite them along on the next course.

Watch the newsletter and announcements for dates.

#### **Pledge Drive**

Thanks to all who have submitted their written financial pledge for next year. We are still far short of our goal, but want to say an early thanks to those who have already responded with your commitment!

Don't forget to turn in your Gifts & Talents commitment as well. Your gifts and time are extremely valuable to us too!

#### **Cookie Walk**

By Debbie Welch

Want a variety of cookies, but no time to bake all of them? Remember our annual Cookie Walk on Dec. 16. after 10:00 am mass. Bring 3 or 4 dozen of your favorite cookie. They will be placed on a table, for you to select your

favorites, and will sell for \$5.00 per pound. Boxes will be provided. This is great for parties, gifts, and cookie monsters! If you don't want to bake cookies, you can still buy them.

### **News on the Care Craft Ministry**

By Candice Hogden

St. Francis has embarked on a new kind of ministry called Care Craft Ministry. We started in September of this year, meeting monthly. The group has met three times with our next date on Dec 6, 2009 after Sunday Mass.

The ministry involves making crafts of any kind, the individual's choice. While making the craft the person prays for the person they plan to give it to. When finished, Father John blesses the craft during Sunday Mass and the individual personally gives it to the intended person.

At our meeting time we eat lunch which is our brown bag special. We talk and share ideas. We may teach how to do a craft or we work on what we bring. So, far 2 scarves have been blessed by Father John. One person is learning to crochet. Another received ideas through the craft books to start their project. Others have expressed an interest.

This is another way to share our gifts and talents with others. It is another way to serve for Christ. Please join us if you are interested. If you have any questions contact Candice at 309-264-5949.

**Let's Craft Away!!!**

### **Holy Humor**

A Sunday School teacher asked her little children, as they were on their way into church service,  
"And why is it necessary to be quiet in Church?"  
One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping."

I had been teaching my three year old daughter, the Lord's prayer. For several evenings at bedtime, she would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer. "Lead us not into temptation, "she prayed, "but deliver us some E-mail. Amen"

### **God Works In Mysterious Ways**

After starting a new diet I altered my drive to work to avoid passing my favorite bakery. I accidentally drove by the bakery this morning and as I approached, there in the window were a host of goodies. I felt this was no accident, so I prayed, "Lord, it's up to you, if you want me to have any of those delicious goodies, create a parking place for me directly in front of the bakery." And sure enough, on the eighth trip around the block, there it was! God is so good!

### **Mission & Outreach Report**

Mission & Outreach Chairs,  
Deacon Ron +  
Julie Neilson

We were able to collect and deliver a large "tub" of canned food for the Rescue Ministries, the men were very pleased. Thanks to all who help fill the tub.

St. Francis hosted our 3rd blood drive with the American Red Cross and we are pleased to report 18 units were collected, our goal was 20. Thanks to Susan Stranski, John Gamage, Mary-Kay Gamage, Fr. John and Lori Harris your help was very much appreciated, we couldn't have done it without you!

We will continue to collect minor medical items for our friends in the Dominican Republic items needed are: Band-Aids, gauze, medical tape, antibiotic cream, cotton balls/pads and alcohol pads. As 2009 comes to an end we are exploring new ideas on how to reach our community, if you have a thought, please join us at our monthly meeting. Our goal is to help grow St. Francis and meet the needs of the community as well as those of our parish.

### **My Utmost for His Highest**

By Deacon Ron Neilson

Father John once suggested that I might enjoy reading a daily devotional written by Oswald Chambers. I have followed Fr. John's suggestion and often run across really great phrases or short paragraphs that have tremendous insight into my spiritual life. I would like to share with you my thoughts in the hope that you will be encouraged to share your thought with me or someone else.

"The Lord does not give me rules, He makes His standard very clear, and if my relationship to

Him is that of love, I will do what he says without any hesitation. If I hesitate, it is because I love someone else in competition with Him, viz., myself. Jesus Christ will not help me obey Him, I must obey Him; and when I do obey Him, I fulfill my spiritual destiny.”

It constantly amazes me how a difficult concept is clarified when someone tells me a simple truth. Within this short paragraph I start to grasp the notion of why God will not just fix my problems or cure my difficulties. It also indicates to me that it is up to me to know what will separate me from the love of God. My free will is involved. In other words, God says: “My grace is sufficient for you.” It then becomes my responsibility to accept that freely given Grace, and willingly enter into a fully trusting and mutual loving relationship with my Creator, Advocate and Lord.

### **Family**

By Candice Hogden  
11/14/09

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4) “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2) Then God started making the world and everything in it: day, night, land, water, vegetation, seeds of all kinds, moon stars, creatures, animals, man, and then woman. Why did God do all that? I wonder if it was all about family.

God had an eternal family so to speak. It consisted of God, his son, and God’s Spirit. They were in communion with each other before all the world began. But God wanted more family. “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26a) He then said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). He then caused man to have a deep sleep and he took a rib from man “and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man

he made into a woman and brought her to the man.” (Genesis 2:22) “And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31a) God blessed all he made and said to be fruitful and multiply. Man did multiply and throughout scripture God wanted to commune with his people. He wanted to talk to them and direct them.

Today he still wants to interact with us. He wants us to lean on him, to come to him, to talk to him, to walk with him, to be with him, to rest with him, to learn from him, to work with him to fulfill his purpose. All these facets resemble facets in a family. Don’t family members lean on one another for comfort, guidance, and love? Don’t parents say to their children, “When you’re troubled just come to me and we’ll work it out”? Don’t children want to be included in their parents lives, the circumstances they face, the feelings they have? Don’t parents and children say “Why don’t you just talk to me?” Don’t parents say to their kids sometimes, “Let’s just go for a walk, maybe talk a little or just hang out”? Or maybe they say, walk with me, come along side of me in the sense of understanding what it is like being me. Don’t families just need to “be” with each other, not proving anything, just accepting each other where they are at, sitting on the couch together, giving a hug in a grieving situation, taking your hands and patting them saying its okay, just being with each other? Don’t family members say “Hey lets quit all the busyness and just relax today, maybe read a book, go to a ballgame, play monopoly, go for a bike ride, go camping etc?” It’s saying that they need a break and time alone as a family. Don’t family members learn from each other all the time, maybe through making mistakes, forgiving one another, sharing what each has learned each day, learning through ups and downs of life? Don’t families work together to accomplish goals whether its doing lawn work, cleaning the house, making plans for a trip, deciding what interests to pursue, working together to make the day go smoothly? The concept of family is a big deal. It includes so many dimensions and God wanted all of what a family could be.

So we had the eternal family which became an earthly family. When the earthly family of Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden of

Eden and broke the pure way of doing family, God eventually had to rescue the many subsequent disobedient generations and send his only son to us born of a virgin whose name was Mary. We all know the Christmas story. If not, read Luke 2:1-20. We now have the Holy Family, Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus, the savior to mankind. Joseph and Mary were ordinary people who just happened to be chosen by God to carry the divine child of God and become the Holy Family. But they still did all the things that families do. They ate meals together and did their daily chores. Mary and Joseph had parental worries and, anxieties too, like the time the 12 year old Jesus was in the temple and did not follow his parents home from the feast of the Passover. They looked everywhere for him thinking he was with them. And had to back track to Jerusalem where they found him in the temple (Luke 2:41-52)

Jesus had other brothers too mentioned in Mark 3:31. Don't you think there had to be some disagreements between the siblings and talks to work things out? Don't you think this family was learning from each other through all they encountered? The time when Jesus was in the temple and his parents found him there. Jesus said, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them and his mother kept all these things in her heart." ( Luke 2: 49, 51b)

Then we have another kind of family, the Family of God through Jesus. Jesus' mother and brothers were calling for him. "And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you." and he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" and looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mark 3: 32-35) This is a big, important facet to remember. We who believe in Jesus, the son of God and do the will of God are now included in His family! We are part of the eternal family of God! This also means that through Jesus coming as a baby to Mary under the law we are redeemed "so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his son into our hearts , crying 'Abba! Father!'

" ( Galatians 4: 6-7) We have the Spirit of God in us wanting to cry out to our Eternal Father, wanting to commune with Him, to reach out to Him, to seek and know Him, to Worship Him, to do His will, to do His work on earth for his eternal Glory! We meet with some of the family of God when we go to church and fellowship with other people in God's family. We talk and learn and commune with them with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all in the midst of those who congregate with each other.

It is indeed a humble honor to be a part of this eternal family!

Being a part of this eternal family comes with great responsibility. Christ sets the example of this responsibility with all his teachings in the Holy Scriptures and his ultimate sacrifice on the cross. His sacrifice gave us back the new opportunity to experience what a pure family could be like. The varying degrees experienced of this kind of pure family depends totally on us, our surrender of our lives to His will, our devotion to Him, and our commitment to His will. When we give all, he rushes in to our hearts with sweet communion and the Spirit within us calls all the more "Abba! Father!". We have an eternal thirst for God which only he can fill. He fills the deep crevices of our disappointments, losses, disillusionments, fears, emotional and physical pains, sadness, worries, anxieties, loneliness. He replaces them with His peace, His love for us, His Hope for our lives, His freshness of life, His personal self. He builds us up to then go forth in His Spirit to bring in new members to join the Family of God. You may look in your neighborhood, your workplace, your exercise club, your school, your grocery store, your social club and the list goes on. Each in its own can become a family within a family. Face it, we all crave a family atmosphere that is safe to be ourselves, a place where we feel loved, a place you can learn and talk and be okay to have feelings, a place you can call home. You can have that kind of family with Christ. We are adopted in his family.

So, you see the idea of family is a big thing. It all started with the eternal family, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. He then created an earthly family with Adam and Eve and their descendents. Then two ordinary

people were picked by God to become part of the Holy Family. Jesus taught us if we do the will of God we are in God's family and he said that our family is all people who surround us. Wherever we go can become a potential family of sorts. We are to be responsible for telling others of the family of God they can be apart of.

God is all about having a Family and thanks to Jesus we are reconnected back to Him. So, this Christmas as we look upon the Holy Family let us remember that God loves and believes in Family. When all is said and done, being a part of his family is all that really matters. Be assured he will commune with us, work with us,

talk and walk with us, comfort and teach us, guide and discipline us, and give totally of himself to you and me. That's what families do. In Luke 11:13 Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

Let us humbly honor him. Let us adore him and worship him. In your heart, walk to the manger scene and bow before the Christ child, the son of God and thank him for bringing us back into the pure family of God.

**Dates to remember:**

**Sunday Dec. 6:** Purchase your gift cards at St. Francis from Gary and Sheryl Diemer.

Lunch at Bernardi's following coffee hour.

Care Craft Ministry following coffee hour.

SHARE registration after 10:00 am mass.

Peoria Deanery Youth Mass, St. Francis 5:00, followed by dinner and a visit from St. Nick.

**Saturday December 12:** St. Andrew's Cookie Exchange and Luncheon. 12:30 pm.

**Sunday December 13:** Lessons and Carols, Christ Church, Moline at 6:00 pm.

**Sunday December 16:** St. Francis annual Cookie Walk, after 10:00 am mass.

**Saturday December 19:** SHARE Pick-up: 10:30 am.

**Sunday December 20:** Hanging of the Greens, after 10:00 am mass.

**YouthQuake January 15 – 17,** Asheville, North Carolina.

Details of various events are posted on the bulletin board in the Parish Hall.

**If you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd.**

## How To contact Us:

Snail Mail: 12200 N. Brentfield Dr. Dunlap, IL. 61525

**Emergencies: 309-264-7489**

Email: [office@saintfrancischurch.net](mailto:office@saintfrancischurch.net)

St. Francis Office: 309-243-2404 Fax: 309-243-2404

Fr. John Spencer: 309-274-3952

Fr. Louis Mahue: 309-691-6125