

February 2021



Immaculate Conception

Monthly Newsletter

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

Stewardship in the Family Retreat:

INVITING PARISHIONERS ON A CLOSER WALK WITH CHRIST

Catholic Stewardship Consultants co-founder Lisa McArdle has been having conversations with pastors and other parish leaders all over the country about stewardship development for close to 25 years. Not long ago, however, Lisa was so inspired by one of these conversations that she created an entirely new retreat experience.

Lisa will be bringing her experience to Immaculate Conception on March 6, as our parish will host this special event titled “Stewardship in the Family.”

“I was speaking with a gentleman recently, and he apologized because he felt he hadn’t been a good steward in the parish,” Lisa says. “He had been the primary caretaker for his father and told me that his father had just passed, and now he hoped to be a better steward in the parish. My heart just broke because what he didn’t understand was that he had been living as a steward in the best way he could by taking care of his family.”

Following that conversation, Lisa knew she had a mission — helping people understand that we are all called to holiness and that this call most often begins right in our own homes. With this in mind, Lisa has started

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As a co-founder of Catholic Stewardship Consultants, Lisa McArdle has been having conversations on the topic of stewardship with people all over the country for close to 25 years. With this in mind, Lisa has begun leading retreats on the theme of Stewardship in the Family. We are blessed to have Lisa bring this retreat to our parish.

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CATHOLIC CHURCH

Stewardship in the Family Retreat *continued from front cover*

to lead retreats on the theme of Stewardship in the Family. We are blessed that Lisa is bringing her experience to Immaculate Conception to facilitate this retreat for our parish. That experience includes her stewardship journey, as well as her work with CSC, a Christ-centered organization that works with parishes around the nation to help parishioners grow in discipleship through stewardship.

In contrast to many other spiritual experiences, the "Stewardship in the Family" retreat will feature laypeople as leaders. Lisa is a mother of five daughters ranging in age from 9 to 24, and she also is a new grandmother. With that, she has experienced the challenges and rewards of family life. Her talks at the retreat will highlight the spiritual transformation that happens when stewardship becomes central to life as a Catholic family.

"We are all called to live as stewards," Lisa says. "It's not just for saints or pastors or Pope Francis. Stewardship doesn't just begin and end in our parish families, either; it begins at home in our domestic churches. Ultimately, that is where it is taught, and where it resonates the most."

The daylong retreat will begin with Mass on a Saturday morning, followed by two talks, as well as time for journaling and Eucharistic Adoration. After enjoying fellowship over lunch, attendees will reflect on one more presentation before the day concludes by mid-afternoon.

As a busy mother, Lisa knows that it is not always easy to carve out time for a retreat. Often, however, that is the very reason we should make time to do so!

"Families are so busy now that we don't know how to stop," she says. "Learning to be still and finding out what God is calling us to is so important, and to be centered in our faith is now more essential than ever. A priest once told me that we were created as human beings, not 'human doings,' and yet we're so busy doing that we never stop to reflect. It's a gift to stop and make sure we're on the path where God wants us."

Lisa hopes that parishioners attending this retreat will return home with a renewed sense of their mission in this world. This mission does not begin and end in our parish but instead informs how we live our lives, every day and everywhere.

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— Lisa McArdle, Stewardship in the Family Retreat Leader

A Letter From Our Pastor

Sharing Love in Different Ways

Dear Parishioners,

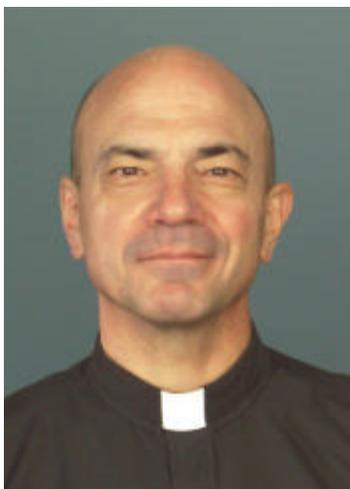
What's the most widely observed saint's day in February – the one that's kept even by those who aren't practicing Catholics? Undoubtedly, it would be St. Valentine's Day, Feb. 14.

The irony is that his feast isn't even on the General Roman Calendar of feasts to be observed throughout the world. That doesn't mean that he's not recognized as a real, historical person, or as a genuine saint, but only that his influence throughout the Church has not been as significant as that of other saints.

So who was St. Valentine? There are several St. Valentines, as the name was not a rare one in the ancient Roman Empire, but the saint we celebrate was a priest of Rome martyred in the late third century. Still, that doesn't explain how his feast came to be celebrated as the day one sends letters, cards and presents as expressions of romantic love.

The truth is that the custom of sending tokens of love comes not from any direct connection with St. Valentine, but from the ancient belief that birds begin to pair off on Feb. 14. And if courtship in the natural world occurred then, it must be appropriate for humans, as well. The association between St. Valentine and love notes is a later development.

Nevertheless, it's not wrong to connect the two. Love has many aspects, and our conception of it is richer if we keep more than one of them in mind. Martyr-



dom is the result of loving God more than our earthly life. St. Valentine was a martyr because of his love – his love for Jesus Christ and His Church. If he had not loved God so much, he could have repudiated his Lord and saved his life. We, in turn, express our love by sending cards and gifts on St. Valentine's Day.

But isn't that what stewardship as a way of life is – a little martyrdom? Not to push the image too far, but when we are faithful stewards, we give up a little portion of our lives out of our own love for Christ. Most Christians will not be called

on to be martyrs, in the sense of forfeiting our physical lives for God. But we are called to give up some of our comforts, indulgences and riches because of our love for Him.

So then, as you prepare to celebrate and share your love with your Valentine this month, remember St. Valentine and his love for Christ. As well, keep in mind that God loves us, and return that love with your own toward Him. Loving God will be reflected in how you prioritize your use of the time, talent and treasure God has entrusted to you. As St. John wrote (1 Jn 4:19), "We love because he first loved us."

Happy St. Valentine's Day!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Michael Troha



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ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY:

Giving Parishioners an Opportunity

As Catholic Christians, we are called to bring the light and love of Christ to all those we encounter. In the Gospels, the parables and commands of Jesus make it clear that we are asked to come to the aid of the less fortunate. This service can take many different forms according to the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Here at Immaculate Conception, we are blessed to be able to serve many of our neighbors in need through the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

President of our parish St. Vincent de Paul Society, Sue Penicka, was so drawn to this international organization's commitment to serving the poor that it led her to the Catholic faith. She joined the Society as soon as she became a member of the Church in April 2017, finding in this ministry a powerful way of living out the Gospel call.

"It is in the faces of the poor that we encounter Jesus Himself," Sue says. "The vocation of the Society's members is to follow Christ through service to those in need and to bear witness to His compassionate and liberating love. It gives you an opportunity to provide assistance directly to individuals in need in our own community, to truly make a difference in their lives."

To receive services through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, individuals or families contact the ministry. Typically, representatives from the Society then visit the home of the person requesting assistance and determine how he or she can best be helped. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these meetings have moved to outdoor locations. This past year, continuing to find ways to safely meet with someone in person has been essential to the ministry.

"You get a much better picture of a person's needs beyond the material when you actually have the opportunity to look them in the eye and hear their stories," Sue says. "Their stories of courage and resilience in extremely difficult situations is inspiring."

With the needs of members of our community varying greatly, there are countless ways for parishioners to serve through the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

"We have many roles in St. Vincent de Paul that challenge us to live out our faith in very practical ways," Sue says. "Participation in collections is an important piece, and any time there is a collection, there is a need for manpower to gather the items, sort and then distribute or deliver. On a day-



In May 2020, the annual St. Vincent de Paul "Stuff the Truck" event collected essential items such as toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, dish soap, and liquid cleanser for those in need.



Every Christmas, the St. Vincent de Paul Society adopts families in need who reside in Willoughby and collect items for them through the parish Giving Tree.

to Help Our Neighbors in Need

to-day basis, returning phone calls, meeting people, running errands — like food pick-up, or delivering gift cards and donations — are constant needs.

“Whatever your gifts may be, there is a way to serve the poor,” she adds. “Whether it’s the ability to give financially or materially, or listen with a compassionate heart, or simply pray for the needs of others, St. Vincent de Paul provides an avenue to do so.”

Participating in the St. Vincent de Paul Society provides a truly rewarding opportunity to answer the Gospel call to serve. Sue is thankful for the

priceless gift of this ministry and for the generous parishioners who continue to lend their time, talent, and treasure to help their neighbors in need.

“It is not humanly possible to take care of all needs of any one individual or family, but we can do something for just about anyone we encounter,” she says. “Immaculate Conception is an extremely generous parish, and it would not be possible to do anything to help those less fortunate if it were not for the generosity of the parish all year round. Thank you for living your faith and being faithful witnesses to the goodness of God.”

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— Sue Penicka

Are you interested in learning more about the St. Vincent de Paul Society at Immaculate Conception? We are always looking for more parishioners to answer Christ’s call to service! For more information, please email ICSVDP@gmail.com, leave a message at 440-946-4500, ext. 107, or call 440-375-1548. Meetings take place on the second Wednesday of each month, either in person or by Zoom.

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LIVING LENT IN

2021

During the 40 days that Jesus spent fasting and praying in the desert, Satan was constantly tempting Him. He preyed on Jesus' humanity, trying desperately to get Him to test God. Of course, we all know that it didn't work. As Jesus is 100 percent God at the same time that He is 100 percent man, the devil was unable to take hold of Him.

Yet, the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert communicates an all-important truth to us. Jesus, the God-man, experienced everything we have and everything we ever will as human beings. Satan even tried to tempt Him, just as he tempts us every day. But because Jesus is God at the same time that He is human, He had no tendency to give in to Satan's attempts.

Even so, Christ fought Satan tooth and nail, putting him in his place — "Get away, Satan! It is written, 'The Lord, your God, shall you worship, and Him alone shall you serve'" (Matthew 4:10). At that, the devil left Him.

We all find ourselves in similar situations. We live in a world wrought with sin, and, in his ever-so-cunning way, Satan makes the sinful look appealing. We must stand firm in our faith and tell Satan to "get away," just as Jesus did. Only then will we truly experience the

glory of the salvation that Christ came to give. Lent offers us a particular time to fight Satan, taking courage in the resurrection that we are preparing to celebrate. It is a time that we spend focused on strengthening our relationships with the Lord. Armed with His power, which we receive in many different ways, we can resist the temptations of the devil and accept the salvation Christ offers each one of us.

How can we do this? Get to know the Lord through prayer. Read the Scriptures often. St. Jerome tells us that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ. So, we must be steeped in Scripture. Read it daily — chapter by chapter, or verse by verse. It is, after all, the Word of God! Draw close to the Blessed Mother — she is eager to bring us to her Son. Join her at the cross, where she witnessed her most precious Son die for each one of us. Pray the Rosary — individually and as a family. It is a powerful prayer through which, with Mary, we walk through Christ's life, His Death, and His resurrection. Unite with Christ Himself in His suffering.

Let us focus on the spirit of the season. We are to be preparing ourselves, just as Christ did, for the great event that won for us salvation!



The Religious Liberty and Country Prayer Group

Offering Prayers for Liberty and Our Nation

A dedicated group of parishioners has been meeting twice a month to pray not only for religious liberty but also for our nation. The Religious Liberty and Country Prayer Group are continuing the devotions originated by the late Shirley Marsh.

The group of 13 had been meeting in the evening of the second and fourth Sundays of the month, but currently are meeting from 2:30-3:30 p.m. on second and fourth Thursdays in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. Ages range from those in their 30s to members in their 80s.

“We had always met on Sunday night, but several members preferred to meet during the daytime hours,” says Dolores Fratino, who coordinates the group.

Shirley Marsh founded the group five years ago because she believed there was a need to pray for our nation and religious liberty.

“She is our inspiration for how we pray,” Dolores says.

The meetings follow the same format that Shirley had arranged. A patriotic song opens the meeting, and from there the group says the Rosary. From time to time, the group prays the Patriotic Rosary, which can be found at www.patrioticrosary.com. Each prayer in the Rosary is dedicated to some aspect of the United States. For example, each recitation of the Rosary is said according to one of the Mysteries. The Rosary is opened with each prayer dedicated as follows: Come Holy Spirit — For the Conversion of our Nation’s Capital; The Apostle’s Creed — For the Holy Father; Our Father — For Bishops, Priests and Religious; Three Hail Marys — For the Conversion of our Country; concluding with the Glory Be.

Each decade of the Rosary is dedicated to the 50 states. The following is to be prayed before each Hail Mary — *“We plead the Blood of Jesus over [name a different state for each Hail Mary]*

and every soul in that state.” Each state is named through the course of the Rosary. The group also sings a patriotic song between each decade.

After the saying of the Rosary, the prayer group then prays the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, followed by the Stations of the Cross. Prayers dedicated to religious liberty and to the Blessed Mother are said, followed by prayers for any intentions brought before the group. The meeting is concluded either with a song for the Blessed Mother or a patriotic song.

Before the election, the group extended their meeting times but did not make any plans for the Inauguration.

Those taking part have experienced a deepening of their faith.

“I think this has happened,” Dolores says. “Very much so. This a nice group who really enjoy the meetings.”

Anyone who is interested in joining the Religious Liberty and Country Prayer Group may call Dolores Fratino at 440-946-3712.

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Stewardship in the Family Retreat *continued from page 2*

“I encourage people to look at how they spend time with their families and what decisions they are making as a family of stewards,” she says. “God has given us all talents. Whether you are washing dishes, changing a diaper, cheering for your son at baseball games, caring for a parent — all of these things are important.”

All parishioners and visitors — from young parents to empty nesters to singles — are welcome to come to experience the spiritual growth that this retreat promises. A closer walk as disciples of Christ awaits you!

“I think that learning more about discipleship will transform hearts and transform lives,” Lisa says. “In turn, strengthening families will strengthen the parish. I think of the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta — ‘If you want to change the world, go home and love your family.’ It sounds so simple, but it’s so profound. If we all did that, it would have a ripple effect, and the world would be so much better.”

