

September 2021



Immaculate Conception

Monthly Newsletter

Immaculate Conception Catholic Church

Parishioner **Rhema Pizem**

Finds Home and Family in Dedicated Service

Dedicated parishioner Rhema Pizem spends ample time serving and ministering here at Immaculate Conception. Her outgoing personality and smiling face add joy and energy to parish life — but this hasn't always been the case. For many years, Rhema and her husband, John, fell away from the Catholic Church. When John became ill, however, hospital visits from Immaculate Conception parishioners initiated the process of coming home.

"Something just moved both of us," Rhema says. "We decided to start going back to church and Immaculate Conception just felt like home."

The journey began with simple weekly Mass attendance. Then, one Sunday Rhema felt a surprising tug on her heart. Impressed by the Eucharistic Ministers, she stepped out of her comfort zone and asked a fellow parishioner how to get involved. She was put in touch with Deacon Paul, received training, and was surprised by what transpired.

"Something came over me the first time I served as a Eucharistic Minister," Rhema says. "I was almost in tears. The joy that came out of it was overwhelming."

Rhema then began to expand her volunteerism with John's full support. Her list of involvement is now quite extensive and spans from the Legion of Mary and

continued on back cover



Rhema Pizem with her late husband, John

Immaculate Conception

CATHOLIC CHURCH

Stewardship and Evangelization: Using Our Time and Talents to Spread the Good News

Jesus came to save the world and to draw all men to Him. When we think of the salvific work of Christ, many of us think of His life, death, resurrection, and His ascension into glory. And while those salvific events are of primary importance in salvation history, it doesn't end there.

Christ wants everyone to know the salvation He has won for them. He wants every soul to experience heavenly glory. Therefore, after having conquered death through His cross and resurrection, Christ commissioned His disciples to carry the Gospel to the world. They were charged to “preach the Gospel to all nations,” winning, through their words and examples, souls for the kingdom! What a task! The disciples were overwhelmed at the thought of carrying the Gospel to all nations after Christ had returned to heaven. But the Lord assured them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). When the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the feast of Pentecost, all those in the crowd were amazed. They all spoke in different tongues, preaching the same message, and everyone there could understand!

And so it was that the Church was established through the power of the Spirit and for the purpose

of evangelization. Each of us has been baptized in that Spirit, and through that, made a member of the Church. It is, thus, up to each and every one of us to actively participate in the Church's mission – proclaiming the Good News to all the world and building up the Kingdom of God!

Each of us must re-evaluate how we are using the gifts God has given us to build up His Kingdom. Do we preach the Good News in all that we do and say? The same Spirit that descended upon the apostles that first Pentecost remains with us now, giving us the strength and courage to labor in the vineyard of the world.

Christ came to save the world, and He established the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation” (*Christifideles Laici*, 2), by which many people throughout the world would know the glory of His truth. St. Paul describes the Church as one body with many parts. And just as each part of the body has a particular function, each member of the Church has a particular calling, but united as one body in the Spirit, all of the members are to carry out the Church's one mission. How is God calling you to carry out this mission? What particular gifts has He given you with which you ought to build the Kingdom?

Each of us must re-evaluate how we are using the gifts God has given us to build up His Kingdom. Do we preach the Good News in all that we do and say? The same Spirit that descended upon the apostles that first Pentecost remains with us now, giving us the strength and courage to labor in the vineyard of the world.



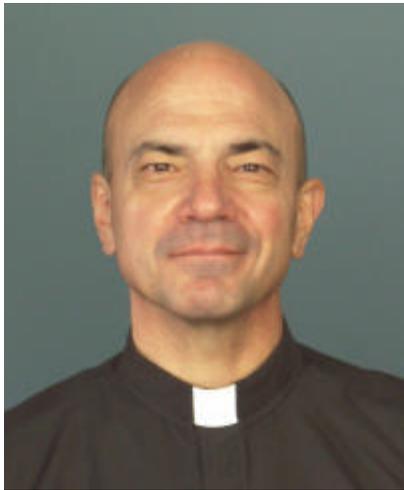


Dear Parishioners,

In his letters, St. Paul often began by greeting his “brothers and sisters.” Every time I read one of these letters, it reminds me that you and I truly are sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, the Church, but especially here in our parish. We need to understand that we are indeed a family, and the way we see and treat one another is fundamental to the health and happiness of this family.

Our spiritual family doesn’t stop at the walls of our church, but rather, extends to include every man and woman created in God’s image and likeness. You may be familiar with the term “Catholic Social Teaching,” part of which is built on a commitment to the poor. These are the beliefs that guide Catholics on how to apply the faith to all aspects of life, and they lay the framework for the Church’s teachings on the dignity and sacredness of human life. Once we make a commitment to be disciples of Jesus and pursue stewardship as a way of life, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching become very easy to incorporate into our lives.

Catholic Social Teaching has been around since those first followers of Jesus tried to balance their new faith with the realities of living in a world of Roman oppression. Jesus reminded His disciples then, just as He reminds us now, that caring for and administering to the poor should be at the core of all we do. Recall when the Lord said in Matthew, “For I was hungry and you gave me



food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was ill and you cared for me; I was in prison and you visited me.”

This is our foundation as we seek to embody mercy and justice to our fellow man and should be one of our major goals as a faith community. Many of our parish ministries provide for us an opportunity to do just as Jesus asked — to serve those most in need. As

we move into the fall season, with Thanksgiving, Advent, and Christmas soon to follow, now is a good time for us to recommit ourselves to addressing the needs we see around us — both as a parish society and as individuals.

I am proud of our collective efforts in assisting and serving the poor, but I also know that we can do more. Many of us personally need to get involved in these efforts. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has a great love and regard for the poor and, like Jesus, he reminds us often of what we need to do. Pope Francis once said in a homily, “The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty.” Together, we can make a difference.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Fr. Michael Troha

Immaculate Conception

CATHOLIC CHURCH

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT

Once again, it's time for our Annual Stewardship Renewal. Every year, someone asks, as you may have asked yourself, "Didn't we just have a Stewardship Renewal? Aren't we sufficiently 'renewed' by now?" Yes, we had a Stewardship Renewal last year, and we're going to have one next year, too! This is an annual occurrence – part of the rhythm of parish life at Immaculate Conception. Just as the Church proposes a time of spiritual renewal each Lent, we believe in the importance of a yearly examination of commitment. Is the Lord asking you to give more time, talent, or treasure to our parish this year? The following Q&A about our Stewardship Renewal should help you discern your commitments to Immaculate Conception this year.

Commitment Weekend is
October 9-10. Don't forget to bring
your Commitment Card to Mass!

I feel like my life is already too full with family obligations and work obligations. I barely even have time to relax. How can I possibly share my time and talents with Immaculate Conception?

We all have many obligations to our families, jobs, schools, and other endeavors. But we also all have the same number of hours in the day with which to accomplish these things. The issue is not how much time we have, but how we prioritize that time.

Before you fill out your Commitment Card, take some time to reflect on your priorities, and where God fits into your day-to-day life. Remember, living as true stewards of God's gifts involves giving back the first fruits of what He has given to us in thanksgiving, not the "leftovers."

I am happy with my current level of parish participation. Why do I need to keep filling out a Commitment Card every year?

As part of the renewal process, it is important that we consider our current level of participation in parish life at Immaculate Conception. Sometimes, the call to stewardship involves the quality of service in addition to its quantity. In looking through the opportunities for ministry available at the parish, you may find yourself drawn to a new ministry you haven't tried before, or new ways to share of your time with God to enrich and enlighten your prayer life. So, even though your current level of parish participation might not change drastically, the ways in which you participate may evolve as you grow in living the stewardship way of life.

Even if you end up continuing to participate in the exact same ministries as you have in the past, marking and turning in a Commitment Card means you have reviewed your present ministries and re-committed yourself to them.

I'm not very active in the Church and, frankly, feel like it may be too late to get involved. Why should I fill out a Commitment Card?

It's never too late to renew your faith life, and filling out a Commitment Card is a simple step through which you can immediately re-enter the life of the parish. Our parish community is not here to judge you, but to welcome and nourish you in your faith journey. Begin by checking the box that says, "Attend weekly Mass and Holy Days of Obligation," and take some time to discern additional ways in which God is calling you from that starting point.

I'm physically unable to attend Mass or be active in parish life at Immaculate Conception. Is there any reason for me to submit a Commitment Card?

Of course! Your prayers are just as important to the success of our parish community in carrying out its mission as ministry participation and financial

OUR Annual Stewardship Renewal

contributions. Take a moment to look over some of the opportunities to spend quiet time with God listed in the “Stewardship of Time” section of the Commitment Card, and take a step towards growing in your relationship with Christ and His Church.

I’m reluctant to make a financial pledge for the year in case my circumstances change and I’m unable to fulfill it. Should I?

Your Commitment Card is not a legally binding contract; it is a pledge of intentions. Make your pledge based on what you are setting out to do to give back to God, and do your best to fulfill that pledge. If your financial circumstances change, your gift will likely change, as well, but it is still important to prioritize God first. Nobody is going to send the bill collector to your house if you can’t fulfill your pledge due to a change in your financial situation! But we’ve all got to start somewhere, and it’s important that we begin our commitment by writing down our goals for giving back of our gifts to God.

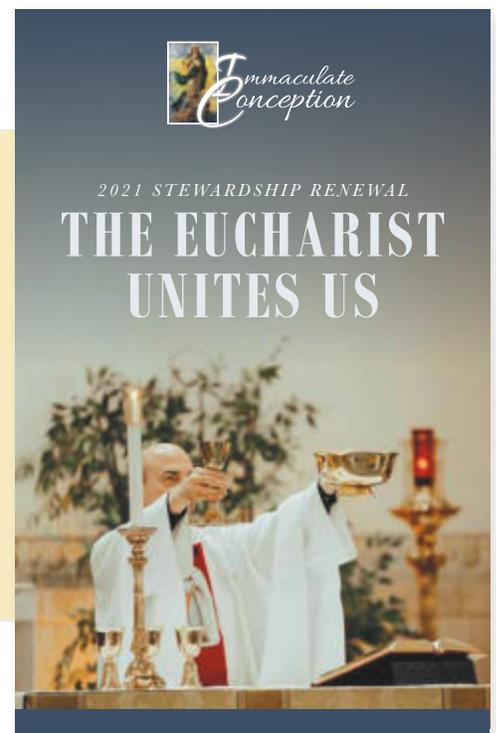
I’ve expressed interest in a ministry in the past through filling out a Commitment Card, but nobody from the parish ever followed up with me about it.

While we do our best to consistently follow up with everyone who has shown interest in the opportunities for ministry at Immaculate Conception, we are human, and we sometimes fall short in our follow-up. If this has happened to you in the past, we sincerely apologize, and we encourage you to renew your interest in any activities in which you might like to participate by filling out a Commitment Card this year. Every year, we go into the renewal with every intention of making sure that everyone who has expressed interest is contacted with more information, and we will do so again this year.

I don’t agree with everything that goes on at Immaculate Conception. I feel like when I fill out a Commitment Card, it condones the things I disagree with.

In filling out a Commitment Card, you are not making a pledge between yourself and Immaculate Conception; you are making a pledge between yourself and God. Disagreements occur in life. This is a part of being human, and we respect the opinions of each and every member of our parish family. But it is of utmost importance that each of us fulfills our discipleship of Christ by growing in our relationship with Him and utilizing the gifts He has given us to carry out His mission on Earth, regardless of disagreements or misunderstandings. Beyond helping the parish, filling out a Commitment Card expresses a devotion to spiritual growth and a strong belief in the Catholic faith.

Every parish family receives a special “Stewardship Package” in the mail that further explains our parish’s vision of stewardship. It includes a booklet that describes every ministry in the parish, as well as your Commitment Card





ST. RAPHAEL



ST. GABRIEL



ST. MICHAEL

Celebrating the Feast of the Archangels

Every Sept. 29, the Church celebrates the feast day of the Archangels — St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael. We are blessed to be inspired by these “servants and messengers of God” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 329).

The term “archangels” has its Scriptural basis in the New Testament (1 Thes 4:16, Jude 1:9), indicating a chief or leading angel. “Archangel” generally refers to St. Michael, St. Gabriel, and St. Raphael, as they are the three angels most frequently mentioned throughout Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The fact that these three angels are mentioned by name on multiple occasions indicates the significance of their roles in the history of salvation. It is because of these important roles that we take pause to celebrate on Sept. 29.

St. Michael is mentioned by name on several occasions in Sacred Scripture (Dn 10:13, Rev 12:7), and his role in the Tradition of the Church has been extensively documented. He has been widely referred to as the “great prince,” and is most often associated with the apocalypse — the final battle against Satan. Christian Tradition gives St. Michael four different roles, but he has primarily been regarded as the patron and protector of the Church.

St. Gabriel is mentioned by name in Scripture (Lk 1:19), and Tradition has also assigned him implicit roles within Scripture where he is not specifically mentioned. Most important, however, is St. Gabriel’s role as the messenger of God, delivering to Mary the announcement of the birth of Our Savior (Lk 1:26).

St. Raphael is mentioned by name only in the Book of Tobit, where he is responsible for healing Tobias. Raphael means “God has healed” and thus, he has also often been associated with the “angel of the Lord” (Jn 5:4).

The feast day on Sept. 29 gives each of us the opportunity to consider our own role in the Church, as we gratefully commemorate the Archangels responsible for carrying out their roles of defender, messenger, and healer.

MEN'S PRAYER GROUP:

Gathering in His Name and Sharing in Fellowship

Men don't always have a chance to gather, pray and talk about faith. But such opportunities to engage spiritually are just as important for men as they are for women. After all, as Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

Fortunately, we are blessed with such an opportunity for engagement at our parish through the Men's Prayer Group. Larry Schnieders helps coordinate the group, which meets at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month in one of the parish meeting rooms. This past summer, members were meeting at Larry's home and their families were invited, as well.

"After not being able to meet in person for so long, people are excited to be around one another," Larry says.

Usually, about 15 to 20 men attend the monthly meetings, during which they read Scripture, build relationships and talk about faith issues that relate specifically to men.

In this year of St. Joseph, the men completed a 33-day consecration to St. Joseph which ended last month on the feast of Our Lady of Knock. The men even brewed a special beer to celebrate the consecration.

One advantage of the Men's Prayer Group is that men can come whenever it works for them, and there is no obligation to attend each session.

"The family is the first priority," Larry says. "We always keep those who can't come in our prayers."

Over the years, the group has focused on a variety of topics — learning about saints, the liturgical calendar, and Catholic traditions, to name a few.



"Being a part of this group, I enjoy just being with men of all ages," Larry says. "We have those who are newly married, to those who are empty nesters and everyone in between. We learn a lot from one another."

Larry became Catholic 37 years ago, but he finds there is plenty to learn from the other men in the group. He appreciates what each and every member brings to the gatherings.

"I'm just the coordinator," Larry says. "The men who are there actually make it happen."

All men of the parish are invited to get involved. This is a way to share in fellowship with other men and dive into the challenges facing men when it comes to practicing the faith.

"All the men are open to sharing, which makes it easy to talk about issues that you wouldn't normally talk about," Larry says.

Larry asks that the people of our parish pray for this group, as well as the Women's Prayer Group.

If you would like more information, or to get involved,
contact Larry Schnieders at 440-951-5629 or ohioschn@sbcglobal.net.

Immaculate Conception

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Parishioner Rhema Pizem *continued from front cover*

the Stewardship Committee, the Parish Council, and the Social Committee. Her deepest love, however, is found in teaching children through the Parish School of Religion. Unable to have children of her own, the Lord blessed Rhema with a special heart for sharing her faith with her spiritual kids.

“They are like my own little kids,” Rhema says, laughing. “When I saw my first class of kindergartners make their First Communion, I probably cried harder than anybody! It felt like my own child – only I had 10 of them!”

While she grew in communion and fellowship with members of Immaculate Conception, Rhema remained physically distant from her blood relatives. It was at this time that John passed away. Afraid of facing this trial alone, she was amazed when her fellow parishioners stepped forward with overwhelming encouragement.

“I never knew I could have such support,” Rhema says. “I was flabbergasted. They rallied around me and I now look at Immaculate as my family.”

Looking back, Rhema acknowledges that for many years she felt unfulfilled but was unable to decipher the source of her longing. She is now deeply content and has come to realize her journey in service has been transformational. With this wisdom at heart, Rhema encourages all parishioners to get involved.

“Don’t be afraid to ask,” Rhema says. “Step out of that comfort zone! If you are thinking about something in the back of your mind, or are interested in a ministry, approach someone and ask. Do not be afraid.”

Sometimes it takes a small act of trust to begin a new chapter in life – and we can rest assured that God is never outdone in generosity. The Immaculate Conception parish family is waiting with open arms. Welcome home, Rhema!