



OUR LADY *Star of the Sea* CATHOLIC CHURCH

Sponsor Couples Encourage Good Communication in Marriage

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When a couple gets married, they make a commitment to stick together through thick and thin. Our Lady Star of the Sea helps these couples through marriage preparation, including the Sponsor Couples program. Sponsor couples help foster good communication between engaged couples, helping them to build a strong foundation as they enter into the Sacrament of Marriage.

“The purpose of our role is to facilitate discussions,” says Gerard (Jerry) Elias. “Now is the time — if there is anything that hasn’t been discussed, or that could be detrimental long-term, you want to know about it now and make sure you are making the right decision. It’s a matter of opening up with one another and discussing anything and everything.”

One of eight sponsor couples, Jerry and his wife, Lillian, have served as a sponsor couples for almost 20 years. Jerry and Lillian meet with engaged couples in their home, one-on-one.

“As part of their marriage preparation for the diocese, the couples take what’s called a FOCCUS survey,” Lillian says. “I think that many couples have already discussed a lot of what is on there — but if a couple hasn’t, it brings it up for them, so they can get started discussing these issues before they get married. It really opens up their channels of communication.”

“The parish sends the results to us,” Jerry adds. “We don’t see what their answers were, but we do get summaries in various categories, and we can see where they agreed, disagreed or were unsure. It is a very valuable tool, and we



Gerard (Jerry) and Lillian Elias



Grace Within Formation Series Offers Chance to Grow, Bond and Be Rejuvenated

For women, modern life is particularly busy and, at times, challenging and stressful. Pulled in seemingly a hundred different directions, there seems to be always something we are supposed to do, or there is someplace we're supposed to be. And in the midst of these demands, it can be hard to carve out time for ourselves and our relationship with Christ, and to find time to refuel our spiritual tank. This, says Our Lady Star of the Sea parishioner Andie Schwipper, is what makes the Grace Within fellowship and formation series so important to our parish, uniquely allowing women to grow in their Christian journey together.

"Grace Within brings together women of all ages and life experiences to be part of a spiritual process that affirms their own sacred dignity," Andie says. "It talks a lot about women's sacred dignity, helping them understand their true self — who we were created to be deep down inside."

Formerly known as M.O.M.S., this small-group formation series brings women together for an intimate exploration of topics such as self-esteem, everyday spirituality, Christian friendships and the discernment of gifts. The group never consists of more than 12 members, creating a close-knit, judgment-free environment where women can share freely. The result, Andie says, is truly beautiful as women hold one another accountable and grow in lasting friendships.

"It's just creates a place where we can listen to one another, bringing women together in these wonderful, faith-centered friendships," Andie says. "I just loved the way women



would share their own individual perspective on things. Oftentimes, that perspective would end up being such a blessing to the other women."

This allows women to "drop the mom guilt," Andie adds, and focus instead on the unique gifts and talents that God has given them. Thus, in a truly beautiful way, women end up celebrating one another's differences while also being united by the commonality of their femininity and their Catholic faith.

"I love the encouragement the ladies end up giving one another," Andie says. "People always see the gifts in other people faster than they see their own, so when you're

in this group of ladies, you'll hear them say things like, 'Jill, you're so fantastic at this,' or 'Joy, you're so good at this.' This ends up providing the ladies with real clarity on what their particular calling is, as well as the encouragement that is often needed to take action."

Over the years, the study has produced many fruits within our community such as book studies, Wednesday play dates and spiritual book exchanges. Yet, most importantly of all, Grace Within allows women to become more in tune with God. For by learning about themselves as God's daughters, they're also given the tools to better recognize the grace-filled moments of life, and to find opportunities for prayer amidst the busyness of daily living.

"I know it might seem like a big commitment," Andie says. "But in reality, it's only once a week to give yourself time to learn and to just grow, bond and, finally, receive and give encouragement. It truly is so worth those two hours of your week."

Our Lady Star of the Sea's next Grace Within series will begin on Monday, Aug. 27, immediately after morning school carline. Registration cost is \$30 for materials. Please contact Andie Schwipper at 912-230-6268 for more information or visit <http://www.withinministries.org/grace-within.html>.



A Letter from Our Pastor

What Is the Real Purpose of Our Lives?

Dear Parishioners,

Do you ever think about your purpose in life? Even as a priest, I certainly do. There are days and times of frustration when I think, “What am I really supposed to do? What does God want me to do? Why am I here?” For eons, philosophers have considered these very questions and written about them.

But the truth is that we, as Catholics, already know the answers.

When we consider the many facets of life in our parish community, there are numerous activities and endeavors that go beyond attending Mass. From fundraising efforts, to social outreach/service, childcare and more, there are many ways in which we serve our community.

Yet, as we undertake these important pursuits — both within and outside of the parish — we must always remember that our ultimate goal is salvation. After all, the only reason we exist, the only reason our Church exists, is the same as the reason Jesus joined us and became a part of us here on earth — He came to save humanity.

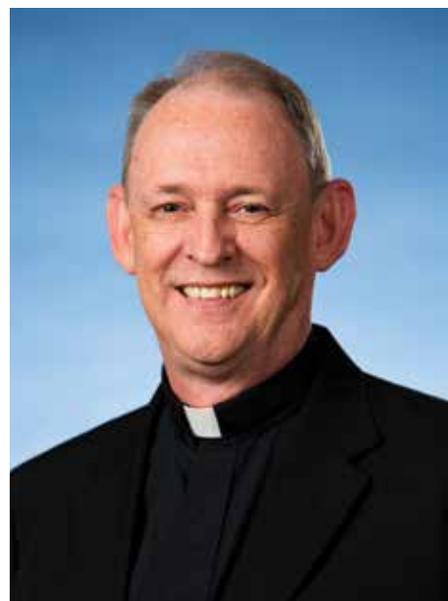
We use the term the “body of Christ” to describe the Church with

Christ as the head. We are all parts of that body, and the parts of the body must move in the same direction as the body itself — it simply won’t function if the parts are moving in different directions. We are all in this together.

When our lives are complete, we do not base our success or failure on how much money we have, or whether or not we are famous. Nor does our success or failure depend upon the difference between health and sickness, or pleasure and pain, or even being nice or nasty. Rather, it is the difference between being saved and not being saved.

I often think of my family members who have already crossed the bridge of salvation, and as a priest, I deal with that issue with others on a very regular basis. Sometimes, I wonder if they ever fully realized that salvation was the answer to so many of our questions in life.

I am surrounded by memories of those who have gone before, as are almost all of you. We are apt to use the term “the communion of saints” in many ways in our Church.



Someday, we will know more about the “communion of saints” and how it all works. In the meantime, we pray for everyone who has gone before us, hoping they have made it home.

Pray for me as I pray for you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Keith Brennan
Pastor

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Council of Catholic Women End-of-Year L

*We would like to thank all involved in the CCW
all those who helped put this wonderful*





Dinner: Faith, Fellowship and a Great Meal

Thank you for a great year, and we extend our gratitude to everyone who joined us for our end-of-year event together for May 17.





LOUANNE HAWKINS *Sees the Value*

As the coordinator of the Human Life & Dignity Ministry at Our Lady Star of the Sea, LouAnne Hawkins will tell you that each and every life is valuable, as each life belongs first and foremost to our Lord Jesus Christ. From her own life experiences, LouAnne has come to realize just how much our heavenly Father truly loves us and finds us each worthy of being a part of His family in faith.

LouAnne became the coordinator of our Human Life & Dignity Ministry about three years ago. She had already been participating in the cause for many years, both in our parish and at the University of North Florida, where she worked as a professor in the psychology department.

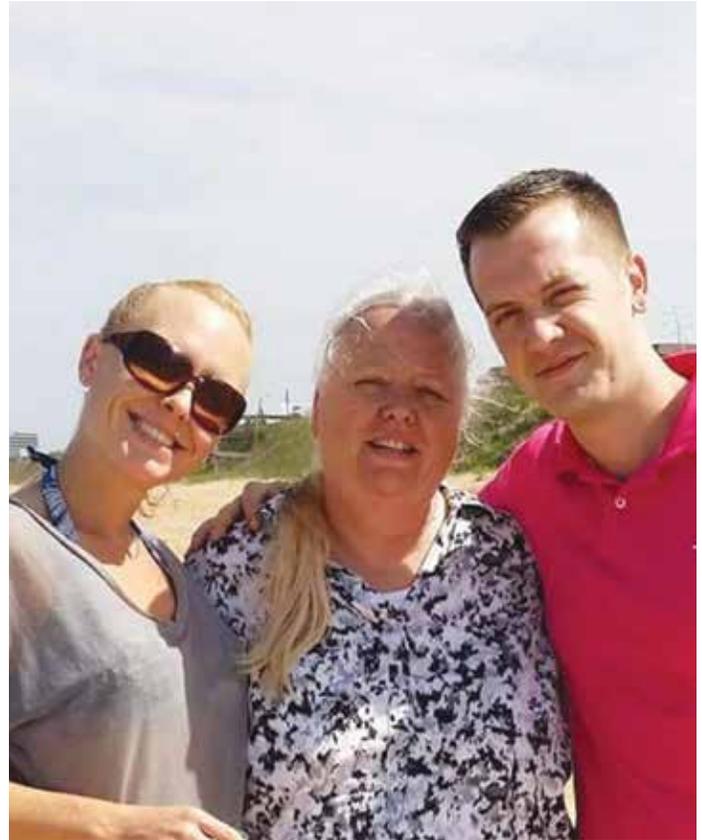
“It has always been a passion for me,” she says. “I think we’re watching as the tide for respect life is slowly turning. The newer generations are actually more pro-life than my generation.”

As LouAnne is quick to point out, supporting the pro-life movement involves fighting for the right to life for all different groups of people.

“We should never stop fighting for the unborn because they have no voice,” she says. “Now I’m working for The Arc in Jacksonville, working with the intellectually disabled. There is a war on people with disabilities — if you’re not perfect, they say you aren’t worthy. The Lord made all of us and we all have gifts and weaknesses, and we are all valuable. It’s about fighting that fight.”

“Also, Florida has had a lot of death penalty cases overturned due to DNA evidence,” LouAnne continues. “We can’t afford to kill anyone — that should not be our choice. So I feel we absolutely have to fight for people on death row. There are just so many different cases where we need to be advocating on the frontlines. We’re trying to branch out and make sure we’re more inclusive of all life issues.”

LouAnne’s belief in the value of all people as the treasured children of God has only been strengthened over the years. Having drifted from the Church in the



LouAnne Hawkins (center) with her daughter, Annie Hawkins, and son, Wil Hawkins

past, she fully returned to the Catholic faith 15 years ago, realizing that the Church is her true home.

LouAnne’s experience of coming home to the Church has only solidified her belief that God loves unconditionally each and every life He has created.

“It’s kind of like when your family is accepting no matter what your situation is,” she says of her return to the Church. “That’s the same of the faith — you’re always welcomed back. No one is a better example of unconditional love than the Father. No matter what you do, He always welcomes you back. I can’t think of anything more important than that.”

LouAnne had strayed from her faith following a disappointing experience her family had while her



in Each and Every Child of God

mother was dying of cancer. The years she spent away from the Church brought more heartache, as LouAnne's first husband left, and then passed away.

Then, when the daughter of her second husband, became interested in exploring different faiths, LouAnne was brought back to the Church. Since both of them had been raised Catholic, they thought it made sense to start there.

"We thought, 'Okay, let's take her to a Catholic Church,' and then being there, it felt like home," LouAnne says. "Regardless of whether I had been practicing, I've always been Catholic — it's just who I am. When I was 15, I had wanted to be a nun more than anything in the universe. I would help clean the pews and helped as a sacristan. So, returning to my faith just seemed natural. It was a 'coming home' experience, that place you were meant to be all along."

LouAnne also credits our previous pastor, Msgr. Daniel Logan, with helping her find her way back to the Church. She had first experienced Msgr. Logan's pastoral care as a teenager, when he was the president of Bishop Kenny High School, where her parents both taught. She still remembers the loving support he showed her family during her mother's illness and death. After she returned to the Church and found her way to Our Lady Star of the Sea, Msgr. Logan encouraged her to serve in many ways, and she is thankful for the opportunities he provided her to get involved in parish life again.

Now, LouAnne feels blessed that her family has cultivated such an active faith life. She, her husband and her adult son, serve as Eucharistic Ministers. LouAnne began teaching CCD this past year when her oldest grandchild began attending the classes, and she loves watching her grandchildren growing up in the faith. LouAnne has also found great fulfillment in the lay ministry formation program sponsored by our diocese. She has just completed the first of the program's three years, and looks forward to the Saturday meetings all week long!

Reflecting on the 15 years that she spent away from the Church, LouAnne can see clearly that God always remained with her. Continuing to serve the Lord and His people in any way she can is her way of thanking Him for the incredible sacrifice He made for us all.

"I had this epiphany several years ago when I was watching *The Passion of the Christ* — there will never be a time that I can match the sacrifice of Jesus Christ or His Blessed Mother," she says. "I could take on every service in the universe, and I could never match the sacrifice that God made for us.

"We are all the body of Christ," she continues. "So, the closest I will ever get to serving the Lord is to serve His people, and I can't imagine anything more gratifying or humbling. I get so much more out of this than I ever give. I'm so much more at peace than I've ever been."

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— LouAnne Hawkins



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Sponsor Couples Encourage Good Communication in Marriage *continued from front cover*

make sure that they fully discuss and understand why they answered something the way they did.”

As a sponsor couple, Lillian and Jerry go through the survey point-by-point with the engaged couple and facilitate their conversation and discussion. At the end of the session, they take notes back to the parish, and priests then have the opportunity to advise the couple as needed.

Lillian and Jerry greatly enjoy working with engaged couples and find that their communication skills are honed as a result.

“We enjoy seeing people starting out, and a lot of times we’ll be smiling when they leave because it brings us back to when we were dating,” Lillian says. “My favorite part is

meeting all these young couples — sometimes we run into them at church, and we see that they have children or that the wife is pregnant. It’s nice to see.

“It also makes us stop and think about how we communicate,” she adds. “It makes me feel good to know that we are encouraging young couples to talk and communicate, and to keep that communication going.”

“We try to go into it with a positive attitude so we can give a good example,” Jerry says. “Since we are in such a family-oriented parish, and a warm and giving parish, we enjoy helping out in this way. This is one way we can help the parish grow.”

All married couples are welcome to support the parish through this ministry! If you're interested in becoming a sponsor couple, or if you have any questions, please contact Lillian and Jerry Elias at jlpcelia@aol.com or 904-285-6646.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday Vigil - 5:30 p.m. | Sunday - 7:30 a.m.; 9:00 a.m.; 11:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Daily (Monday to Saturday) - 8:30 a.m. | Wednesday - 7:00 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation: Wednesdays from 6:00-6:45 p.m.

Saturdays from 4:00-5:00 p.m.