

OUR LADY

Star of the Sea

CATHOLIC CHURCH

BRINGING CHRIST TO OTHERS
IN OUR COMMUNITY

EUCHARISTIC MINISTERS TO

HOSPITALS, NURSING HOMES AND PRISONS

INSIDE

- 3 Passionate for the Stewardship Way of Life
- 4 Our Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion-
- 6 Join the Ranks and Honor the Dignity of Life in October
- 7 Rosary for the Sick: *Providing Comfort Through Our Lady's Intercession*

This year has brought a new appreciation for some of the simple things that we had previously never questioned. From meeting up with friends at a restaurant to flying out of state to visit family, or even just going to the grocery store or running errands — the events of 2020 have helped us to realize how much we, as a society, take for granted. And among those things was the ability to gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ, each week, to celebrate Mass together.

For many of us, as lifelong Catholics, this was the longest period away from the celebration of Mass, and from being able to receive the Eucharist. While we share in a longing to be united with Christ in this way, we are also more closely united with those who have suffered this loss in their pre-COVID lives, whether in the hospital, nursing home, or in prison.

Here at Our Lady Star of the Sea, a dedicated group of parishioners serves to bring the Eucharist to those who are ill or imprisoned, and although their ministry currently looks a bit different due to current safety precautions, their own loss of the Eucharist during the pandemic has only increased their desire to return to bringing Him to others.

“We all realized during the pandemic, at home, watching TV Mass — everybody missed the Eucharist,” says parishioner Bob McKeefrey, who is involved in bringing Communion to Baptist Hospital in downtown Jacksonville, Ponte Vedra Gardens nursing home, and Florida State Prison and Union Correctional Institute in Raiford.



Members of the prison ministry team from Our Lady Star of the Sea bring the Eucharist to those who are incarcerated in solitary confinement and on death row.



EUCCHARISTIC MINISTERS TO HOSPITALS, NURSING HOMES AND PRISONS

“You can’t have a more impactful experience than bringing our Lord to people, whether they be sick, dying or in prison. Those are the people God tells us, not to forget — those who are sick and dying, in prison. People say you get more out of giving, and that’s true. It’s a trip into the world with the Holy Spirit, to do something special for people who really need it. It’s a ministry that gives back to you tenfold.” — Bob McKeefrey

continued from front cover

Bob initially became involved in this ministry several years ago, wanting to find a way to give back to the community. However, it wasn’t long before he realized that the ministry was helping Him grow in his relationship with God and he couldn’t imagine giving it up.

“It’s the closest feeling I have [to God] when I’m ministering to them,” Bob says. “You can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit when you’re praying with them and when you’re giving them Communion, and when you leave your time with them, it’s like you’re walking on air. It’s something very special that you’re doing for the least of His children, those who are forgotten in prison, those who are afraid and sick in the hospitals.”

In the hospital and nursing homes, Bob brings Communion and prays with the Catholics and their families who are there. In the prisons, he visits those who are on death row, or in solitary confinement. In his experience, the reverence and gratitude for the Eucharist shown by the inmates is often striking and humbling.

“When you’re there, you can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and you get that great sense of peace,” Bob says. “It’s a true honor to do it.”

“I find that the level of reverence shown by people incarcerated for years in prisons, is thoroughly remarkable,” he adds. “You would wish everybody has an appreciation for the Eucharist.”

Bob’s own faith has grown in witnessing the power of the Eucharist, as he shares it with others and watches God’s Presence in action.

“Sometimes in the hospital, you bring peace to somebody who is desperate — they’re concerned, confused, anxious,” Bob says. “You pray with them, you give them our Lord and suddenly you see this peace come across their face. It’s pretty remarkable — it makes you want to keep going back.”

Bob encourages his fellow parishioners to consider becoming involved in this ministry, going to those they feel called to serve.

“You can’t have a more impactful experience than bringing our Lord to people, whether they be sick, dying, or in prison,” Bob says. “Those are the people God tells us, not to forget — those who are sick and dying, in prison. People say you get more out of giving, and that’s true. It’s a trip into the world with the Holy Spirit, to do something special for people who really need it. It’s a ministry that gives back to you tenfold.”

If you would like more information, or to become involved in bringing the Eucharist to those in hospitals, nursing homes or prison, please contact the Parish Office at 904-285-2698.



A Letter from Our Pastor

Passionate for the STEWARDSHIP Way of Life

Dear Parishioners,

Often when reading the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles in the New Testament, I recognize that the writers were genuinely passionate about having an opportunity to put into words an expression of the faith they have in Jesus Christ. I am inspired by the passion expressed by those who live what they believe. Having the courage and the enthusiasm to express their thoughts, and to embrace and cherish it as if it were the most important thing in the world, translates into a passion for Christ and a passion to be His disciple.

I ask myself on a regular basis, do I have that same passion as Jesus' disciples? I pray that I do. But if I don't, I have to wonder why, and must reflect upon what is keeping me from being passionate about my faith. Without being genuinely passionate about our faith, can any of us genuinely embrace the stewardship way of life?

The Food Network broadcasts a program called *Chopped*, which features professional chefs who are challenged to use designated ingredients to prepare a dish. Using the time they have been given, and the skills and talents they possess, they must compete against each other while attempting to impress a panel of judges. In what they say and do, their passion for who they are and what they can do with all that has been given them is more than

obvious. They demonstrate confidence, enthusiasm, creativity and a desire to use their talent. Even if they get eliminated, they know they have done their best — and will continue to do so, with an ongoing passion.

Should we not have the same kind of passion for being a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Stewardship is the best way to passionately express and live out our call to be a disciple of Christ. The New Testament is filled with passages that confirm the stewardship way of life. How passionate are we about being those faithful stewards using the gifts given to us by God, and using our precious time to use those gifts for the greater glory of God? How do we move from merely thinking that stewardship is something others do, to being passionate about it enough to live our lives as a committed disciple of Christ? It isn't possible to be truly passionate about something unless we are genuinely convinced it is God's will, and we know it and feel it in our hearts. Genuine passion begins in the heart. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are ignited to believe that the Word of God is calling each of us to express our love and devotion to Him — and we can do this by living out the stewardship life. Do you think we are up to that? Well, to do so is to be passionate about it.



I pray and hope that we all become better and more passionate about being disciples of the Lord. I believe there is great potential for all of us. If we trust God enough to do what it takes to be passionate about the stewardship way of life, our lives will become the truest expression of discipleship. While the world tries to convince us there are other things to be passionate about, our hearts should be telling us loud and clear that the stewardship way of life is the most important. It always has been, and it always will be.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. Keith Brennan
Pastor



OUR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS

The Gift That Keeps Giving

Longtime Eucharistic Minister and current ministry coordinator Cathy Damone says it was her own parents' example which first made her consider becoming part of this privileged ministry.

"They were both Eucharistic Ministers for 30, 40 years," Cathy says. "I watched them as I grew, serving at both daily Mass and every Sunday. My mom got sick and suffered from Alzheimer's, but my dad continued to serve until his 80s. He did it until he couldn't walk up the steps anymore. He was really my inspiration. I could see how much joy they got and how much closer to Jesus they got through it."

So when Our Lady Star of the Sea announced years ago that they needed additional ministers, Cathy says she jumped at the opportunity to follow in her parents' footsteps. Now, 15 years later, Cathy continues to joyously serve, working alongside Louanne Hawkins to ensure that Eucharistic Ministers are trained and ready to serve at the Lord's Table.

"I like to say that the ministry uses four hands and two brains,"



Through this privileged ministry, laypeople are able to bring the Body and Blood of our Lord to others.

Cathy says. "Louanne handles all the scheduling and computer stuff, while I take on more of the hands-on training. I truly could not manage this ministry without her."

Though every liturgical ministry plays an important role in the

Mass, Cathy says that the role of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a particularly privileged one. This is because the Eucharistic Minister is handling the actual Body and Blood of our Lord, physically bringing Him to His people.

continued on page 5

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MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Keeps on Giving

“I don’t even know how to explain the feeling,” Cathy says. “It’s a tremendous privilege and honor — an experience that is just unbelievable. This was even truer these last few months when we couldn’t attend Mass or receive Holy Communion because of COVID-19. When we came back in May, I just couldn’t stop the tears from flowing the first time I received and helped distribute Communion again.”

Cathy says it’s the privileged nature of the ministry, however, that often holds people back from joining. They feel unworthy of such a role. However, the truth is, none of us is worthy of the great gift of the Eucharist. It’s about humbly accepting His love and gratefully sharing that with others.

“None of us is better than anyone else,” Cathy says. “The truth is, none of us are worthy. It’s His great gift to us.”

The ministry is consequently open to any parishioner who is over the age of 16 and has received the Sacrament of Confirmation. New ministers must participate in an in-person training session, which covers both the theology behind, as well as more practical aspects of the ministry. Once completed, Eucharistic Ministers may then begin serving at the Mass and level of frequency they prefer.

“It’s really quite easy,” Cathy says. “Everybody attends church and all you



A Eucharistic Minister prepares the sacred vessels for Mass.

need to do is take that one hour and be a Eucharistic Minister during the Mass you are already attending. We’ll give you whatever Mass you want, on the day and time you want. You can serve every week or once a month. It’s completely up to you and your preferences.”

Not only are young people welcome in this ministry, but there is actually a great need for younger Eucharistic Ministers. This has become even more evident during the current COVID-19 pandemic, which has prevented many of our usual ministers from serving due to age or underlying health issues.

“I would say 70 percent of our current ministers are over 60,” Cathy says. “So a good percent of them can’t serve during this pandemic and it’s literally breaking their hearts. I would really, really love to see people in their 20s, 30s and even 40s become part of this ministry. I promise you won’t regret it. I grow in my faith through it every week, both through working with the rest of the Eucharistic Ministers and through giving the Lord to the parishioners. It draws you so much more deeply into the liturgy.”

If you would like more information about the Eucharistic Ministers, please contact Cathy Damone at 904-742-0596 or cathydamone@yahoo.com.



JOIN THE RANKS AND HONOR

the Dignity of Life in October

All Catholics are summoned to action — this month, and beyond.

October is Respect Life Month. And as we face the looming culture of death, we are all summoned to action. An apostolic exhortation by Pope St. John Paul II, titled *Ecclesia in America*, described this culture of death's effects on the “powerless” within American society:

“I am thinking here of unborn children, helpless victims of abortion; the elderly and the incurably ill, subjected at times to euthanasia; and the many other people relegated to the margins of society by consumerism and materialism. Nor can I fail to mention the unnecessary recourse to the death penalty... Faced with this distressing reality, the Church community intends to commit itself all the more to the defense of the culture of life” (*Ecclesia in America* 63).

Respect Life Month is the perfect time to prayerfully examine our consciences in light of these critical issues, which directly violate the dignity of the human person. This includes not only the evil of abortion, but also euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, capital punishment, and contraception — all of which are vital contributors to the pervasive culture of death.

So we must individually ask ourselves, “Do I, in my personal, day-to-day choices, respect life? If so, do I boldly proclaim this belief or merely stand idle? Do I exercise my right to vote and support candidates who promote a culture of life? Am I known within my home, family, and/or workplace as someone that respects life?”

As with every movement of a Christian heart towards goodness, it is imperative that our efforts issue forth from a prayerful foundation. The work of the Holy Spirit allows us to receive the zeal necessary to promote the sanctity of human life, even in the face of suffering.

This October, please pray for a revitalization of the culture of life. Every night, as a family, meditate on the prayer from John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. As you pray, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with apostolic boldness, and ask the Lord to guide your heart towards ways in which you can personally contribute to the culture of life.

The call is clear, the stakes are set, and all Catholics are summoned to action. How will you respond?

POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II'S PRAYER FOR THE REVITALIZATION OF THE CULTURE OF LIFE

O Mary,
bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life
Look down, O Mother,
upon the vast numbers
of babies not allowed to be born,
of the poor whose lives are made difficult,
of men and women
who are victims of brutal violence,
of the elderly and the sick killed
by indifference or out of misguided mercy.

Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love
to the people of our time.

Obtain for them the grace
to accept that Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives and
the courage to bear witness to it
resolutely, in order to build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilization of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*



ROSARY FOR THE SICK:

Providing Comfort Through Our Lady's Intercession

Having what can only be described as a tumultuous faith life during his early years, parishioner Bob Grano says it was Our Lady's protection that brought him back through a dramatic, near-death experience.

"I was driving on Butler Blvd. at the time, traveling home from a job," Bob says. "I started to blackout and lost complete control of my car. I went down an embankment into heavy traffic. There were oncoming cars from a big office building, yet somehow I avoided the cars heading instead into the bushes. I walked away from that accident without a single scratch on me, and I firmly believe that it was the Blessed Mother protecting me."

In and out of his faith before that experience, Bob says that Our Lady used this experience to spiritually awaken and bring him back into the fold. Bob later became passionate about helping others — particularly those suffering or near death — bringing them back to Jesus through Mary and her powerful prayer of the Rosary.

"I kept on hearing about people in very, very dire straits in their life — dying," Bob says. "I would go to see them and pray the Rosary with them. Then I started asking people to join me. Eventually, we were doing this often."

Over time, this became known as the Rosary for the Sick Ministry. Its purpose is to bring comfort to and spiritually intercede for those who are sick and preparing for death, while also reminding them that they aren't alone in their time of suffering.

"Usually, we visited people with very serious illnesses," Bob says. "Sometimes we would do it at the church at Our Lady Star of the Sea, other times in the sick person's home. Before we would pray the Rosary, I would have the person we were praying for say a few things about themselves and what they were experiencing."

In so doing, the prayer warriors hope to bring comfort and even conversion to the sick person, while providing them with peace during their current trials and

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"All are welcome and it's the easiest ministry to be in. All you have to do is receive an email from me to pray for someone or send me an email to have someone prayed for. We don't meet — we don't have any big get-togethers. We just ask that you join us in prayer. Our hope is to get as many people as possible praying the Rosary." — Bob Grano



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Rosary for the Sick *continued from page 7*

helping to prepare their souls should they meet their Maker.

“Several times I’ve seen people come back to Church through this ministry,” Bob says. “The most notable was the father of a very good friend of mine who had left the Catholic Church for about 40 years because he couldn’t understand how God had abandoned His Son to die on the cross. So about 30 of us came out one day and prayed the Rosary in his house, though the father did not come out. A few days later though, Msgr. Leo went to see the father and started talking to him. Before you know it, he heard his confession and gave him Communion. The man ended up dying the next week and if that wasn’t the Blessed Mother’s intervention, then nothing was.”

As jobs and family obligations made physical gatherings more and more difficult, the Rosary for the Sick Ministry eventually transitioned to a mostly-remote operation. Parishioners now send Bob requests for prayers, and then he passes on that information to a mailing list of over 200 people. They are each then asked to pray the Rosary privately at home, interceding for the person in need.

“All are welcome and it’s the easiest ministry to be in,” Bob says. “All you have to do is receive an email from me to pray for someone or send me an email to have someone prayed for. We don’t meet — we don’t have any big get-togethers. We just ask that you join us in prayer. Our hope is to get as many people as possible praying the Rosary.”

Bob and his devoted wife, Donna, have been married for 37 years. He has four children and four grandchildren.

If you would like more information, or to join the ministry, please contact Bob Grano at 904-273-0256 or Rgrano5784@gmail.com.

For Current Mass schedule, please visit our website at www.olsspvb.org.