

THE CATCH



St. Peter's
Catholic Church

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HOPE

BY JOY GREGORY

HOW TO READY YOUR HEART AND HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

Are you looking for some ideas about how to make this Advent season especially meaningful? Then read on. Fr. Jonathan Gibson has pondered the same subject and he's got some suggestions for St. Peter's parishioners.

Catholics understand Advent as a time of preparation to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. "Advent is also an invitation," says Fr. Jonathan. "It's cold and dark and the ground is frozen, but we are invited to use this time to open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit." Drawing on the catechism of the Catholic Church, he notes that hope, the theme of the second Sunday of Advent, "is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit."

Experiencing his second Advent in the throes of a global pandemic, "I'm discovering more and more that I can't rely on my own strength to nurture my hope. It's the dependence on the Holy Spirit that guides my life," says Fr. Jonathan.

To strengthen our own dependence on the Holy Spirit this Advent, Fr. Jonathan reminds people that Advent is meant to be a penitential period of atonement. He likens this pre-Christmas season "to the early morning, a time when we're not-yet-busy with the day's work. As we wait for the sun to rise, we prepare ourselves spiritually for Christmas and open our hearts and minds to activities that bring us closer to God."

Many of the confirmation candidates he met this fall expressed an interest in being better people, says Fr. Jonathan. "A number of the kids chose St. Mother Teresa as their confirmation saint because what they saw in her was this heart of love and a true generosity for the poorest of the poor."

The parish priest wants his own flock to cultivate that same spirit of self-giving. This year, he's encouraging people to save the festive lights and feasting for the Christmas season that begins Dec. 25 and lasts until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on Jan. 9, 2022. Waiting builds anticipation. "We can use this time to reflect on the first coming of Christ and to prepare for the second coming. It's also a good time to think about how we can make room for a kind of "third" coming, which is Christ in our lives."

Stewardship as a lifestyle

A prayerful approach to stewardship is another way parishioners can prepare for this Christmas, says Dan Moro, President of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul ((SSVP) at St. Peter's. A member of the Knights of Columbus and a long-time parish volunteer, Moro volunteered with SSVP this summer after daily Scripture readings led him to seek new opportunities to serve the mission and ministry of his parish. "When I reached out to SSVP, I was ready to deliver hampers. After some conversations, I realized a leadership role was a better use of my talents. Honestly, it's just invigorating to see the commitment of the SSVP team in action—especially as they prepare the 65 hampers of gifts and food for 2021 Christmas Program."



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Moro also has a better understanding of how the parish's financial support during the Advent season enables SSVp's work throughout the rest of the year. "What I see is that St. Peter's supports the notion of stewardship as a lifestyle that's embraced by many parishioners."

Another Vincentian, Susan Wylie, is a retired Catholic school teacher who delivers hampers and organizes food drives at parish schools. This year, Wylie reached out to a school located in a neighbourhood where most SSVp hampers are delivered. Those children played a major role in decorating angels for the Angel Tree in the narthex. "The angels the children coloured were the start of a beautiful Christmas for the families we serve."

Wylie is also using her experience with SSVp to inspire a new stewardship initiative whereby Catholic school teachers across the Diocese of Calgary will be encouraged to volunteer with SSVp.

Intentional almsgiving

This Advent, Fr. Jonathan is grateful for the many ways parishioners support the parish. He's also hopeful parishioners will use this time of prayerful preparation to think about other ways they can get involved, since volunteering time and talents to parish ministries is a good way to practice intentional almsgiving.

FAITH

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI

A SAFE SANCTUARY IN TODAY'S STORMS

In tough times like the one we've been experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic, people often turn to their faith for answers, solace, peace and support.

It's a safe sanctuary in the storm.

And St. Peter's is there to help people in their faith journey by offering a variety of programs where they can deepen their faith, particularly in these tumultuous times.

From grief support to Bible and Faith Studies to Spiritual Directions and the Mothers' Support Group, resources and people are in place to guide people, and more importantly support them, along their journey.

Celia Osenton, who is with the Mothers' Support Group, says this is the start of the 38th year in the parish for the group. It started up following the Synod in the early 1980s which wanted to find out what parishioners in the city needed from the Church.

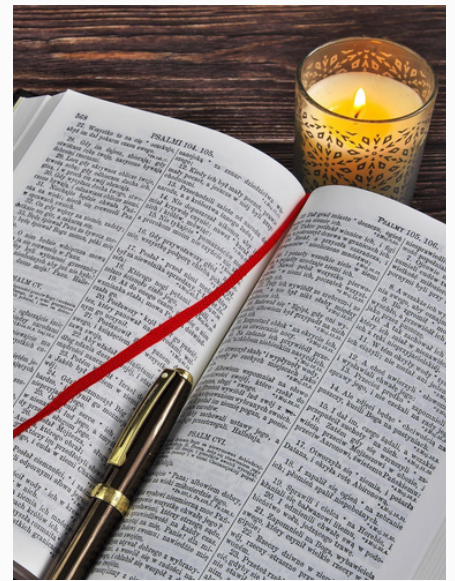
"Spiritual guidance came up. Spiritual support. Prayer groups. But they were also saying we need more general support with day to day living. The reality of raising families, raising children, today in a somewhat materialistic, non-faith type world," she says of the group that usually meets at the church on Friday mornings.

"The idea was to give mothers in the parish support in a common faith atmosphere with everything that they're faced as mothers . . . It's very much the practical side of things. I often think of Mother Mary."

Dixie Hawkins, ministry leader for the Bible and Faith Studies program that runs on Sunday evenings and a Chair of the Parish Council, says studies are conducted through the Formed website.

"We'll go back to have a Bible study but we switched to having a group Spiritual Direction because we saw there really was a need with the pandemic for people to have some type of faith formation," says Hawkins. "There were some people who were really struggling with it so we switched just for the one session our Bible study into having a group faith formation.."

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"It was to see if the need was out there in the parish. There will be in the future two options. We'll probably do the group formation and we'll probably go back to doing Bible studies and we did resort to doing them through Zoom rather than in person . . . We've gotten into the connection between people's mental and spiritual journeys and St. Peter's was quite adaptive to that, to try and provide people with the resources they were needing.

"It just shows the diversity St. Peter's has gone to, to reach out to those that are needing their faith and what they're experiencing."

Kathy Ervin, who is also a Chair on the Finance Council, says the Spiritual Directions ministry is fairly new to the parish and that was a response to the intersection of faith and mental health.

"It is intended for people to come and participate in spiritual conversations under the model of spiritual direction," she says, of the program which is held on every second Sunday evening. A Zoom session will also be up and running soon.

The church's mission statement is: "St Peter's is a rock, built on the Foundation of Truth, inspiring and equipping believers to be a Eucharistic People."

All the programs at the church support that mission in helping people along their faith journey.

RCIA

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI

BUILDING A NEW DESIRE FOR DEEPENING FAITH

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) is part of the earliest tradition of the Roman Catholic faith and an integral part of people's faith journey at St. Peter's.

The vision at St. Peter's is a process of adult formation in faith that would invite a larger aspect of the community to grasp the basic questions: Who is Jesus Christ? What am I looking for? And how do I answer Jesus' question when he says come and follow me?

Deacon Stephen Robinson and his wife Marjorie oversee the program with Marjorie acting as coordinator while the Deacon looks after the teaching part of it.

"Father Jonathan wants the RCIA to build a new desire for a deepening of faith," says Deacon Stephen.



The program began in late September with seven inquirers as they gradually learn the different aspects of Catholic beliefs and practices, culminating with baptism and entrance into the Catholic faith at the Easter Vigil.

"We have a pretty interesting group. Six of them are unbaptized, so preparing for baptism . . . We have one other person who is a baptized Christian who is preparing for full communion with the Church, to be confirmed. Some of them have children in the Catholic (school) system so they want to be more in tune with what their children are doing," says Deacon Stephen.

"Some are people who have been just really kind of searching for the faith that they want to settle in and are choosing to go deeper into the Catholic faith."



RCIA is a process developed by the Roman Catholic Church for prospective converts to Catholicism who are above the age of infant baptism. Candidates are gradually introduced to aspects of Catholic beliefs and practices.

The RCIA is a return to the earliest traditions of our Church which took place between the second and the fifth centuries of the Christian era, according to the Calgary Diocese.

It is a four-part process that prepares adults to discover God's design for their lives, to get to know Jesus better and to receive the Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

Deacon Stephen says the model of the early Church included the whole community gathering and sharing its faith with others who were seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ and seeing Him as a fulfillment of history.



"The goal has been to see how close we could come to following the model of the early Church where people would first be evangelized and that's the key. The Church saw their role as evangelizing, demonstrating and inviting people into a living relationship with Jesus Christ," he says.

"What's happened over time, it's become a process of just simply teaching people about Catholic teachings. Father Jonathan has a vision that's he's been sharing with the whole parish as he's seeing RCIA being on the forefront, the leading edge, of a new way of thinking about evangelizing people so that they actually see this living relationship with Christ and then want to go deeper into the sacraments and to the teachings."





STEWARDSHIP AT HOME

BY JOY GREGORY

YOU CAN SUPPORT PARISH LIFE FROM HOME

The Catholic mass always ends with a profound message of hope when worshippers, emboldened by God's grace, are invited to "go in peace" as they take Christ's work into the world. At St. Peter's, that message is celebrated by the way many parishioners nurture their faith community by volunteering for ministries they can do from home.

Several of these initiatives are supported by CWL-led projects, says president Jean Dinnigan. "During the pandemic, some CWL members have been checking in on others by phone. It's simple, but it's also a real act of compassion and care."

Here are some of the other ways parishioners can serve the community:

Prayer Chain

Phone: 403-241-7489

Email: cmj75@shaw.ca

Organized by the CWL, the Prayer Chain links people in need of prayers to people who will pray for them. Organizer Catherine Jeffery says there are more than 200 names on the current prayer list, which is confidential. The Prayer Chain takes requests from the Pastoral Care Team, parish office, and from parishioners. People can reach out on behalf of themselves, their families and friends, or other parishioners. Some Prayer Chain participants pray for people individually; others say prayers for the whole list. "We have had some beautiful and poignant stories shared with us over the years about the solace people have received knowing they are being prayed for," says Jeffery.

Prayer Shawls

Email: ann.dowling2410@gmail.com

Today's Prayer Shawl ministry, another CWL initiative, has about 25 contributors. Organizer Ann Dowling says financial and yarn donations are welcome, as are new crafters. She expects the group to complete about 180 shawls in 2021. Some shawls are given to people receiving pastoral care. Others are gifted through the Society of St. Vincent de Paul or by request. Shawls have been sent as far as Ontario and California.

While they typically knit or crochet shawls and lap quilts for people in physical and spiritual need, the group has also made hats and slippers. One year, they made slippers for residents of a seniors' home in Chestermere.

SSVP Dispatch

Phone: 403-288-9040

Email: svdp@st-peters.ca

SSVP at St. Peter's depends on a list of rotating dispatchers, all of whom work from home. When it's their week to volunteer, they receive a smart phone linked to the SSVP phone line. Dispatchers can answer calls as they come in, or set aside a time that day/evening to respond. If a hamper is needed, the dispatcher calls or emails Vincentians who deliver hampers. (The delivery folks arrange pickup and delivery of food and gift cards.) Training is provided and the schedule is flexible.

Church Linens

Email: pam.carton@st-peters.ca

Parish volunteers wash and press the altar cloths used at Mass, and wash and fold towels used at baptisms. Volunteers work in rotation and typically have a week to clean and return the linens