

CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter Connecting Disciples of Jesus
with One Another and the Lord

**December
2022**

We are a Welcoming Community that Inspires Disciples of Jesus
to Share God's Love and Transform the World.



DIVINE MERCY PARISH

SACRED HEART CHURCH · ST. PHILIP THE APOSTLE CHURCH



I am a sucker for little twinkling lights. We are getting closer to the season when folks will adorn their homes, yards, trees and bushes with little twinkling lights that brighten the night.

Maybe it's the time of year. Winter, with its gloominess and early sunsets and long, dark nights filled with cold and wind. Maybe it's the memories triggered by the sights and sounds of the season that harken back to my childhood.

Whatever it is, the twinkling lights are a delight to see. They warm my heart and soul. They make me smile. As I walk or drive by festive displays, I want to applaud, albeit with only one hand as I am driving.

What do you like best about this time of year?

Decorations, crackling fireplaces, eggnog, crèche displays, wrapping paper, the smell of mulled wine or scented candles, 24-hour Christmas carols and songs on the radio, Handel's *Messiah*, Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*, and *It's a Wonderful Life*. All these things and more make it a rich, wonderful season.

Add to all that, the Story which we celebrate. It's a true story from long ago, which in our own hearts and lives, gets not only retold, but made present again by God's grace. The Story of the Incarnation, divinity taking on our humanity, to save and redeem us. That Good News Story is reflected in

the lives of disciples who "play it forward" by beautiful words and deeds. Enjoy the articles in this month's issue of *Connections*, which highlight beautiful reflections of the Good News. They are lights twinkling and shining bright in our world.

Rev. Steve



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A FAMILY AFFAIR

By Kathy Handelman

The Rick family knows what it means to be “all in” when it comes to Children’s Ministry and parish life.

Stephanie and Jon and their three boys, Jameson (junior at New Trier), Evan (8th grade), and Owen (4th grade) roll up their sleeves when it comes to supporting Children’s Ministry. Consider this: Stephanie Rick, a 3rd grade teacher at Avoca West School, is often the first warm and welcoming face children and families see when they walk into sessions on Sunday mornings. Stephanie greets, helps children find classrooms, picks up attendance sheets, manages a myriad of service projects and more every single Sunday that we are in session. “I love helping and, after teaching all week, it is great to just be a worker bee,” she modestly exclaims. Stephanie is more than a worker bee – she helps coordinate all the working parts, which come together fast and furiously on a typical Sunday morning. In addition, she has served on the Children’s Ministry Board since 2019, always lending a hand and providing perspective on how we can bring the children and families closer to the faith.

That’s not all. Jon Rick, Stephanie’s husband, jumps in each week to manage traffic outside the school, ensuring that nearly 225 children who come running out of sessions at the same time get safely into their cars or across busy Gage Street. He often is seen during sessions hauling canned goods or coats that we have collected, helping us get them back to the parish offices for pick up by the Divine Mercy team who delivers them to St. Moses the Black or another worthy charity.

Jameson Rick, the junior at New Trier, is in his second year serving as a catechist aide. Last year he helped out in 7th grade, supporting catechists as they reviewed the compelling Youth Alpha videos with students in small groups. This year, he inquired if he could serve as an aide in the 8th grade, helping catechists and also experiencing Confirmation with his younger brother Evan. Jameson not only serves as an

aide, he has stepped up to be a small group leader and is learning firsthand how to lead a pack of 8th graders in discussing anything from the saints to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. “He is learning how to lead the group,” Stephanie explained, “how to motivate them to talk and share their thoughts.” As many know, that can be a tall order on a Sunday morning. The experience has shown him the importance of preparing for and thinking through all the material that will be covered each day.



Confirmand Evan Rick also helps out in the many Rick family service endeavors. Need the Pageant sets moved from the attic at Hyde Park Day School? The four guys show up to give a hand. Need them moved back right after the performance? They are on it. Whether it is managing traffic at one of the early drive-in Masses or carrying boxes, these guys are there.

Owen Rick, the 4th grader, is right in the pack, but has found other ways to help as well. Recently we needed 300 donut holes



(Continued on next page)

Parishioners You Should Know

(Continued from previous page)

bagged before Mass into 150 small bags. Gloves on, Owen went right to the task and not only did a great job bagging but even took the time to make sure they were nicely displayed on the trays.



In raising their own children, Stephanie and Jon wanted the same experience for them that they had growing up. "I knew that the only way to be a part of a faith community is to get involved," Stephanie noted. "It feels good. You meet new people. And you learn that the more you give, the more you receive."

Quite simply, "The more we get involved, the closer we feel to our parish," Stephanie said. She recalls growing up in Dixon, Illinois, the location of Ronald Reagan's boyhood home. Stephanie is one of six children with 35 "big and loud" first cousins nearby. "My mom is a very devout Catholic," Stephanie said, "and my grandma was very faithful to her church." Stephanie remembers making wreaths with her grandma at Christmas, which were sold at the church bazaar or selling other crafts at the sidewalk sale in the summer. "The church was the center of our community. Our parents sent us to Catholic school from grade school through high school and we were taught that God comes first.

"My mom is a big part of my faith journey," Stephanie added, noting she teaches finance classes at her parish, providing budgeting lessons to those in need and also serves Meals on Wheels.

Stephanie and Jon met in Chicago through friends, but ironically grew up in "sister cities" in western Illinois. They soon realized they knew of each other and had "tons in common," including a strong Catholic faith.

For the boys, church life is part of their ever-busy lives. "It's fun and it makes me feel good," Owen added. "It's a time to be with my family, for all of us to be together."

Well-connected indeed.



Connected Through Alpha

I was part of Alpha online in the Spring of 2020. Prior to that, I had declined invitations to Alpha. I thought I didn't have time, or couldn't get away from household chores, the errands, and running the kids around to their various activities. How could I sacrifice an hour plus each week, just for myself?

Well, we all know what happened in the Spring of 2020. I had no more excuses!

In case you haven't heard of Alpha, it is a place to explore the Christian faith with others – and **all are welcome** – those who have been far away from the faith, those who have questions, as well as those of us who want to deepen our faith.

Alpha was one of my silver linings during the pandemic. I got to know people I wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. Each week we shared thoughts, feelings, stories, and prayer. I learned something from each of them, and I admired something about all of them. I carry the

experience with me as I continue to develop my own relationship with God.

And this year more than ever, people are looking for hope, peace, love and joy. Alpha is an opportunity to invite your friends, family, neighbors and coworkers to hear the Gospel, share faith, ask questions, and explore a relationship with Jesus.

Alpha is now running successfully both online and in person. There will be numerous in-person and online courses available in the new year.

Maybe you are not sure about joining. Try it for one week and decide whether Alpha is right for you. Come and see!

Sandy Norbot



Connecting on the Discipleship Pathway



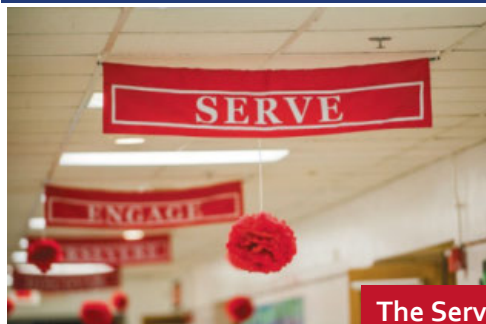
In Service

In Worship

In Alpha

In Service

The Viking Wire



The Serve banner that hangs in our halls.

TO SERVE

Those two simple words mean quite a lot. Serve is one of our core values at Sacred Heart School. Our core values, which also include Love, Engage, Discover, and Persevere, form the foundation of our mission to educate the hearts and minds of our students. These words hang on banners in our school halls, a constant reminder to our students and teachers of the importance of these values. Because here at Sacred Heart School, we believe in educating the heart as well as the mind. We all understand the mind part; that's what schools are supposed to do. But feeding the heart and the soul is just as important. That's why we spend so much time involving our students in service projects throughout our community.

Part of our school's mission is to impart the message to our students that helping others is good for your soul. Each year, we engage in various projects to help people in our community and teach our students the value of service. So far this fall, they have donated their time and efforts to two wonderful organizations – Feed My Starving Children and A Just Harvest.

A Just Harvest is a charity that fights poverty in Rogers Park and the greater Chicago community.



Last month, Sacred Heart students collected nine hundred and eighty-seven food items. For students like Sofia Popovici, helping others is not something that she takes for granted. "I think everyone here at Sacred Heart is pretty fortunate," she says. "Helping others who are less fortunate makes me feel good and like I have helped. The number of lives we changed with all the food we collected was huge."

For fellow eighth-grader Quinn Drehkoff, the chance to help others leaves him feeling satisfied and filled with good feelings. "At Sacred Heart, we learn to help others, and that means that a lot of times, you have to go out of your way to help." Quinn, along with his classmates and their siblings, donated his time to help Feed My Starving Children. Together, they packed one hundred and thirty-four boxes with food. That translates to twenty-eight thousand nine hundred and forty-four meals which will feed seventy-nine children for an entire year! How does that make him feel? "When I'm done helping others, I feel good," he says. "There are people in need out there, and it doesn't take much to help."

We are proud of our Sacred Heart students, and it's easy to see why. "At Loyola and beyond," says Quinn, "I will be involved in helping people." Not surprisingly, Sofia feels the same way. "We are exposed to service so much that it inspires us to do it even outside of school and for the rest of our lives," she says. "Service and helping others is what we do every day."

We do it every day. And we could not be prouder of Sofia, Quinn, and the rest of our Sacred Heart students for making the days brighter for those in need.



Quinn Drehkoff, far left, volunteering at Feed My Starving Children



Sofia Popovici carrying food to be delivered to A Just Harvest

Engaging Children's Hearts

Building Connections: Divine Mercy Parish The Children's Ministry Team

By Liz Riggs

"The best way to learn is to teach." ~Samuel Fifer, Catechist

We asked two of our catechists to share their experience in the program. While their responses differed, they share the common goal of sharing their faith and wanting to feel connected to their faith community.

The Catechists: Samuel Fifer and Jeff Link

What have you learned about yourself, the teen volunteers, the children in your class, and/or the curriculum?

Sam: Everyone has a unique set of circumstances and gifts, and a point of view that is valuable and worth sharing. They are all different, but they reflect our society. Some are eager to learn more about God, some are skeptical, some are there only because Mom and Dad want them to be there. I believe the COVID experience has been harmful – it has caused us to redefine community and that includes the communities we find in classrooms.

There are many ways to teach children, but the Youth Alpha (for 7th Grade and above) is challenging and rewarding because it gives students a chance to form a relationship with Jesus that goes beyond academic knowledge. Hopefully, once they establish that kind of relationship they can explore the richness of Catholicism, including the many gifts handed down to us through the ages, for the rest of their lives.

The Church faces a lot of challenges – how do we compete with the pull of secular culture, being one of the toughest. But I have learned that we Catechists get one hour a week and the parents, who we know are busy, get the other 167; the parents are their children's primary catechists and we are merely the backup. It would be great if, while we are teaching the children, someone else is catechizing the parents.

Jeff: I take what I've learned, which involves both my mind and heart, and spread that out to other parts of my life. I've learned how to slow down and communicate. I've switched my approach at work, I've become more confident, more calm, and a better person. By helping with Children's Ministry, I'm helping myself.

The kids are constantly surprising me with their insights and reflections - they are so smart! The teen aides add so much to our discussions. Because they are closer to the kids' ages,

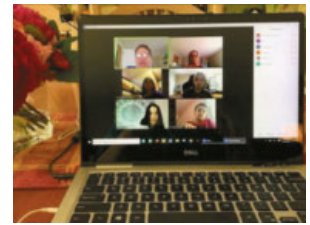
they are more relatable. I know I can always call on one of the aides if the class is quiet - they encourage participation. The aides also help with technology, including the smart boards in the classroom (and I'm in IT!).

I feel that my responsibility is to help the children interact in their faith...always knowing that someone else is helping, God has their back.

For more information on Divine Mercy's Children's Ministry, please contact Kathy Handelman, Director of Children's Ministry.



Sam Fifer, here serving as a Lector at Mass, one of his many roles at the parish!



One of Jeff Link's Many online sessions during the pandemic.

Some of the statistics for the
2022-2023
Children's Ministry year:

28 Catechists
18 Teen Aides
140 Families
244 Children enrolled

We're grateful for all!



Some of our catechists and aides pictured with Bishop Bartosic earlier this year.

Connected Through Service

COMMUNITY PARTNER A JUST HARVEST REOPENS DINING ROOM

On the third Sunday of November – for the first time since the pandemic began – five volunteers from Divine Mercy joined staff from A Just Harvest to serve over 80 meals. The lunches included homemade chicken casseroles made by two parishioners and by one of our Sacred Heart School teachers whose Girl Scout troop made casseroles.

While some guests elected to receive take-out style meals that they became accustomed to in the last two years, many chose to come into the dining room to escape the cold, have a cup of coffee and a hot meal, and chat with others. David Crawford, who coordinates the dining room and its kitchen, was clearly happy to have diners back inside. A Just Harvest is currently the only facility in the area serving meals every day.



Crawford admits that the transition back to full operation has been difficult. The community kitchen is supported primarily through donations and service by a network of faith-based organizations and churches, and that network has changed a great deal. He is finding it challenging to connect with the people coordinating programs so he can encourage them to become involved again.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Divine Mercy Parish will continue to provide food and volunteer servers on the third Sunday of each month. Our next date is December 18. For this we will need six volunteers on that Sunday, all age 12 or older, to serve lunch from 11 am to 2:30 pm.

In addition, volunteers are needed to bring the following to the Parish Center on Saturday, December 17th:

- chicken casseroles (recipe provided)
- hot vegetable
- fruit
- salad
- homemade cookies

A person with a large car is also needed to deliver items to A Just Harvest on Saturday afternoon between approximately 2-3 pm. To sign up as a volunteer, please visit divinemercynorthshore.org/outreach or contact Liz McGowen, Lmcgowen@divinemercynorthshore.org or 847-446-0856 ext. 108.



Thanks to our helpers: Isabella Velasquez, Ava Graham and Tonya & Charlie Wallach!



CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

CHRISTMAS EVE
SACRED HEART
3:00 P.M.
5:00 P.M.
10:00 P.M.

CAROLS
BEFORE ALL THE
MASSES!

CHRISTMAS EVE
ST. PHILIP
6:30 P.M.
CHRISTMAS DAY
10:00 A.M.

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847-446-0856

www.divinemercynorthshore.org

WEEKEND MASSES

Saturday: Sacred Heart Church - 5pm

Sunday: St. Philip the Apostle Church - 8am
Sacred Heart Church - 10am
Sacred Heart Church - 4:30pm

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