

CONNECTIONS

A Collection of Stories Connecting Disciples
of Jesus with One Another and the Lord

May
2023



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of Jesus to Share God's Love and Transform the World.**



Evangelization • Community • Discipleship • Ministry • Worship

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You know that old saying, "April showers bring May flowers." It's true! We've certainly had a bit of rain this April. Now the May flowers are blooming.

In our own lives of discipleship, we have each experienced rainstorms and difficulties. In many instances, those challenges lead to a renewed or deepened faith in the Lord as we continue to follow him, and where he leads us. Perhaps, at times, the very challenges and difficulties we encounter eventually move us to put down ever stronger roots as we open ourselves to God's many graces.

The path of discipleship is not always clear. Putting our lot in with the Lord may even open us to ridicule or rejection by others. For most of us today, that's the worst of it. In earlier times or in other parts of the world today, discipleship can lead to martyrdom. You know, the original Greek root word for "martyr" is "witness."

The witness you provide as a disciple of Christ may be dramatic or it may be subtle, but no matter what, it *is* a witness. As you move through this

month of May, there will be opportunities for you to witness to the goodness of God and the salvation won for us in Christ. It might be an encouraging word to a family member, or it may be a comforting hug to a friend. Whatever you do and whatever it is, do it for the love of Jesus!

As you contemplate your own witness to the Lord, remember that we are fueled for discipleship by a number of things, including, for example—

- personal and communal prayer,
- celebration of sacraments, especially the Eucharist,
- perusal and study of Scripture, and
- faith sharing among other disciples.

I hope you will enjoy the stories of witness found in this issue of *Connections*. There is a cost to discipleship, but it is one we are willing to pay, for in the end, we gain life, abundance of life, eternal life! Happy month of May to you as we continue to revel in the joy of Easter!

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The Viking Wire

In March 2015, Kelly Vergamini was at an open skate with her daughter Ashley and some good family friends. Everyone was having a great time. As they were skating, Ashley buzzed by Kelly, causing her to fall and hit her head on the ice. Unfortunately, this meant a trip to the hospital with a concussion. Or so that was what Kelly thought at the time.

"While getting a CT Scan, several technicians entered the room," recalls Kelly. "They all started reviewing the scan, and I knew something was wrong." Even though she felt something was not quite right, she was told to go home and get some rest. At a follow-up appointment two days later, she underwent further tests and an MRI. That's when her gut reaction ran headfirst into reality. "I was diagnosed with a Meningioma brain tumor the size of a golf ball."

At the time of her diagnosis, her son Jack was in first grade at Sacred Heart. Her daughter Ashley (now a sixth grader at SH) was five, and her son Michael (now a third grader at SH) was one and a half. And even though only one of her three children was a student at Sacred Heart, the outpouring from the community was incredible.



Kelly's children around the time of the surgery.
From Left, Michael, Jack, and Ashley

"When news got out about my diagnosis, the community was amazing!" says Kelly. "I had an awesome support group from our Sacred Heart family that really helped me navigate through it: Kerry Farley, Jessica Fleming, and Liz Smylie, among many others. We walked a 5K together in support of ABTA (American Brain Tumor Association). The moms in Jack's class were amazing as well, in addition to the parish staff. Suzie Danstrom (who worked at the parish office and whom I had never met) called to tell me she was on her knees praying for me. I had so many people reach out to me - it truly was amazing, and my family and I felt so supported."

After some deliberation, the Vergamini Family made a plan. "My husband Jeff and I made the decision to have the tumor



removed, and I had the surgery in May," Kelly Says. "My oldest child, Jack, could sense how stressed I was. One day, he gave me a note in the kitchen that said, "Don't worry, Mommy, everything will be okay."

After the surgery, our school community rallied to the Vergamini Family in typical Sacred Heart fashion. "After the surgery, I couldn't drive my kids, make dinner, and things like that, so parents set up rides, brought food, and went for walks with me. I could not be left alone, so I had friends that would come over, walk to the end of the block with me, and then walk me back home. My first outing was to the end-of-school-year mass to which Liz brought me. It was a little awkward seeing everyone with a big scarf on my head, but everyone was again so supportive."

We see these connections all the time, the merging of family and school, and health and recovery. Hopefully, you have noticed a theme in our stories; that Sacred Heart is more than a school; it is a family, and Kelly Vergamini is a living testament. "I was receiving support from everyone," says Kelly. "It's just incredible what an amazing and supportive family this school and Divine Mercy Parish are."



The Vergaminis in 2021.
Clockwise from left, Kelly, Jack, husband Jeff, Ashley, and Michael



From left:
Liz Smylie, Kelly, Kerry Farley and Jessica Fleming.

SHARING GOOD NEWS
BY BEING GOOD NEWS

Point of View

PARISHIONERS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Terry and Bruce Carmichael | Connections
By Liz Riggs

"What's your name?"

This seemingly simple question can have a tremendous impact.

Whether Terry and Bruce Carmichael are tutoring refugee children or delivering items to a homeless man at a busy Chicago intersection, they ask the question: "What's your name?" And then, they take the time to really listen without judgement.

Inspired by his parents and a beloved aunt, Bruce shares that helping others was instilled in him at a very early age; he never knew anything else. Terry has also been inspired by others and shares,

"I guess it comes from what is engrained in my heart. It comes from what Jesus asks us to do: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, take care of the sick... He asks us to do these things for Him. I ask so much of Jesus, that, of course, I can do this little bit. It's not a sacrifice, but a gift, to give back to Him."

"I have called you by name; you are mine."

In everything they do, they have made it their own personal mission to make sure others feel *seen*.

A few years ago, after Terry retired from her position as an associate teacher, she began volunteering at a refugee empowerment center in Chicago called FORA (Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America). FORA's mission is to ensure access to education for refugee families - many of whom fled from persecution.

As such, Terry is doing what she loves to do: teaching and building meaningful relationships with children. Bruce joined her at the center the following year, and together, they volunteer as literacy and math tutors two days a week. This work brings them a great deal of joy and happiness as they get to witness so much progress in these young children who have been through so much. They also appreciate the parents' support as they constantly instill importance of education as well.

In addition to their tutoring and other outreach efforts, Terry and Bruce are also active members of Divine Mercy Parish. They have volunteered in various capacities, including religious education, soup kitchens, and in the Alpha program, which Terry attended and where she currently helps with hospitality.

When asked "What makes Divine Mercy different from other parishes?", Bruce responded, "Sacred Heart [Divine Mercy] feels very much like a neighborhood parish, unlike some of

the other parishes we have been members of over the past 40+ years which were more like commuter parishes. As a result, Sacred Heart feels very much like home, as opposed to somewhere we go on Sunday mornings." Terry added, "Divine Mercy Parish has so many opportunities to join a ministry to make a difference in the lives of others - in our village, the city of Chicago, and in other



Parishioners You Should Know (continued)

countries. Our parish has longstanding relationships with several of the organizations we support. The parishioners who belong to a certain ministry seem to be involved for years. Divine Mercy is loyal!"

"Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans." ~John Lennon

Over the years, the Carmichaels have experienced several moves across the country - from Chicago to Oklahoma, to Evanston, to Houston, to Atlanta, and back to Winnetka, where they have lived for the past 21 years. Through their

moves, they have learned the importance of reaching out to others, moving out of their comfort zone and building relationships. When they are not working or volunteering, Terry and Bruce can be found spending time with their three grown children, three grandchildren (with one on the way!) and their friends.

For more information on Forging Opportunities for Refugees in America (FORA), please follow this link: <https://www.refugeefora.org/>.

Connections at Divine Mercy



The Tasse Family celebrated the baptisms of Jordan (6), Cameron (5) and Cole (3).



Judy Pyke interviewing Emily Mysel of Family Services of Glencoe about care for our seniors at the recent Women's Network gathering.



Fr. Steve letting the Children's Ministry Kindergarteners smell the Sacred Chrism during their tour of Sacred Heart Church.



Two Uncle Pete's Moments: The monthly gathering to make sack dinners for the less fortunate (above) and sorting donations of toiletries, socks, undies, coats, hats & gloves (right). THANK YOU!



The recent Parent-Tot Playgroup gathering at St. Philip the Apostle.

Engaging Children's Hearts

BIG SHOES TO FILL: JOE MCGOWAN

Throughout his parish volunteer life, Joe McGowan has always tried to find a replacement before he stepped down from one of his myriad volunteer roles. After 20 years of serving as a Divine Mercy catechist, these are going to be big shoes to fill.

Soon after Joe and his wife Lisa moved to the community and Divine Mercy Parish from Evanston in 2002, the young dad headed to the Children's Ministry office with his three-year-old daughter, Molly, inquiring if he could become her Pre-Kindergarten catechist the following year. Molly was angelic throughout the entire interview, taking a long, peaceful nap on her father's lap. But Sister Betty Tranel, who ran Children's Ministry for 10 years, broke the news to Joe – we have two fabulous Pre-K catechists, but I sure could use you in 5th grade.



Off he went and he has never looked back. He has taught all three of his daughters when they were in 2nd, 4th and 8th grade – and he has likely served as the catechist for more than 350 Confirmands throughout his years of readying children to be confirmed. "Many years I taught two grades," he recalled, "as I would teach both Sunday mornings and Sunday nights." He even taught summer sessions to 7th graders who needed some catch-up catechesis.

Throughout there were profound moments and funny moments, Joe noted, recalling that when he and longtime co-catechist Mike Pearson were teaching 4th grade they asked the children who Judas was. One young man blurted out, "He's the guy that ratted out Jesus!" While Joe and Mike attempted to give a more politically correct answer, "Inside we were dying," he recalled.

"This may sound corny," Joe said, "but when I present at work, even with a lot of practice, I still tend to flub a line or two. But when I teach religious education, I don't stumble. I find my words. I find an ease and peace with the material, even if I am spur of the moment doing the opening prayer. It's the Holy Spirit."

Joe fondly recalls the many 4th graders he took to sing at a local nursing home. After they sang for the residents gathered together, Joe Carey would walk the children up and down the halls playing his guitar and singing to those who were unable to come downstairs. "It was so touching," he said. While the pandemic halted some of those visits, this year we were able to carol for residents of North Shore Place, where Mike Pearson regularly serves as a Minister of Care. "While it is great to make lunches at home or even together as a group, there is nothing like that direct contact," Joe recalled.

One of his favorite things is the Saints Fair, in which the Confirmation candidates gather one Sunday during the fall and present to the younger children the saint they have chosen for their Confirmation name. "The pride they show after researching their saint is unbelievable," he noted.



Born in Indianapolis and raised in Holmdel, New Jersey, which was home to Bruce Springsteen for five years, Joe attended Catholic schools from first grade through Villanova, where his middle daughter is graduating from this year. He loves Villanova basketball. He was raised by devout, active parents and Joe and his brother and sister followed closely in their footsteps. He laughed recalling his dad walking through wedding receptions late on Saturday afternoons following the 2 p.m. Nuptial Mass, exclaiming, "That didn't count! You still have to go tomorrow!"

In the same way, his three girls rarely got a pass on attending religious education as Joe would hit the road bright and early on Sunday mornings with the girls in tow to race back, no matter if they were at the McGowan's lake house in Galena or a Dad-Daughter campout. "I always felt an enormous responsibility to be there," he noted.

Engaging Children's Hearts (Continued)

Joe will step down from teaching at the conclusion of this 20th year, giving him a bit more flexibility to cheer on the Villanova Wildcats in basketball or visit the Fighting Illini while visiting daughter Charlotte in Champaign. Regardless, his volunteer days with the parish are far from over. He has served as head usher for the past two years; was on the Children's Ministry board for four; led Pre-Cana with wife Lisa for the Archdiocese for three-plus years, preparing more than 70 couples at a time on Zoom; and he has led at least eight Alpha groups. He personally helped us launch and fund Uncle Pete's Ministry to the point that at the first session he bought all the food and made extra runs when we

were short on bread. He currently serves on the Evangelization Board, is a member of the Men's Book Club and he now has offered to accompany parishioners seeking support on their personal faith journey.

It's all part of the life of faith that defines Joe McGowan and we are the blessed recipients. "Faith is essential to me. It gives me the most satisfaction of everything outside of my family. Everything I am and all that I have done is because of faith."

Connected Through Community

SUSAN SEEBERG: THE IMPORTANCE OF RESOURCES TO OUR FAITH COMMUNITY

"It does not matter where one is in life, the incidence of some problems is universal," says Susan Seeberg. "There is a lot that needs to be done. We are Jesus at the well, and it is up to us to give people a sense of community."

After graduating college, Susan had an opportunity to work as a child welfare worker with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. "It seemed like a chance to serve others. I was an oddity, because everyone else in my college class seemed to be in business."

Susan remained with DCFS for 12 years until her youngest son, Jack, was born. Her husband, Dan, also committed to a career of service by becoming a teacher. He is a long-time faculty member and head coach for boys cross-country and track & field at Loyola Academy.

Susan's role with DCFS put her on the front lines of child welfare during the late-80s and early-90s. This showed her a world that was different from the home she and Dan were creating in Northfield. After leaving full-time work to be a stay-at-home mom, she continued consulting for DCFS by



facilitating a foster parent support network, among other things. She also volunteered with "One Love," an organization that provides education for young people about healthy and unhealthy relationships. (Visit <https://www.joinonelove.org/> for more information.)

Recently retired from her second career as a mortgage consultant with Wintrust, Susan is an active leader at Divine Mercy Parish. She is currently a member (and Chairperson) of the Parish Council, chairperson of the parish's "Party in the Park" fundraiser, and a recent Alpha group leader.

In January 2023, she also became part of a 12-person group identifying issues important to parishioners' health and well-being. "It's so important for our faith community to be aware of the many types of services available to us," said Susan Seeberg. "Knowledge helps us to make a plan, and the plan helps to move us forward."

Take the Pastoral Care Survey by May 14

The simple pastoral care survey can be found online ([click here](#) or scan the QR code below) and in the back of church through May 14. All parishioners are asked to take the survey. This will identify the areas of greatest need and help our parish plan to meet those needs.



Discover more about Divine Mercy by visiting our website at divinemercynorthshore.org.

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