

# C<sup>+</sup>ONNECTIONS

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

*September  
2023*



SUMMER HAPPENINGS AT DIVINE MERCY



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



**Evangelization • Community • Discipleship • Ministry • Worship**

## DIVINE MERCY PARISH

SACRED HEART CHURCH • ST. PHILIP THE APOSTLE CHURCH



We're back from a summer break with this latest issue of *Connections*. We've got more real-life stories of folks who follow Jesus as his disciples. These are people, like yourself, who are doing their best to become "good news" for others by living a gospel way of life.

Discipleship takes commitment and prayer. The prayer helps the commitment.

Here's a tip for your own daily prayer. Pray for God's blessings. Ask the Holy Spirit to bestow divine blessings upon you. As you pray for these blessings, add an important condition: request God's blessings so that you, in turn, might become a blessing for others.

In other words, disciples give away the goodness. We share the blessings of God with others. Read between the lines in the following stories of *Connections* and you will discover how disciples of Jesus like yourself are becoming a blessing for others.

And don't miss the findings from the Disciple Maker Index Survey that was conducted during Lent. We hope you'll find these top-line results as enlightening as we did. Thanks again for your participation.

Finally, join us at Party in the Park. With all that our committee has in store for you, it should be a really fun evening. See you there!

**Divine Mercy Parish Presents**

**PARTY in the PARK 2023**

Tons & Tons of Food \* Live Band: "Steely Dad" \* Backyard Games  
Beer, Wine, & Premium Wine\* Live Auction \* Whiskey & Cigar Bar  
Watch the Notre Dame/Ohio State Football Game with Us!

**Saturday, September 23, from 6 - 10 pm**

A grown-ups only casual "fun"raiser  
Clarkson Park, 1950 Willow Road, Northfield, IL

**Buy Your Tickets Today:**

[divinemercynorthshore.org/partyinthepark](https://divinemercynorthshore.org/partyinthepark)

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# DIVINE MERCY PARISH



## Parish Survey Findings

During the first quarter of 2023, the parishioners of Divine Mercy were asked to participate in the Archdiocesan-wide Disciple Maker Index Survey, which gave people an opportunity to reflect on their spiritual growth, level of involvement in the parish, as well as their satisfaction with the parish and parish related activities. Approximately 54 percent of our active\* parishioners completed the survey. (That's 235 completed surveys out of 435 average weekend mass-goers.) Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts. We appreciate your efforts in providing the parish with valuable insights into how we can enhance our faith and service-based community. Below is a brief overview of the survey findings. If something you read stirs anything in you, or if you have something to share, let us know! Email the Parish Council via Judy Pyke at [jpyke@divinemercynorthshore.org](mailto:jpyke@divinemercynorthshore.org).

### PARISH STRENGTHS

Based on the survey data, we have identified our top parish strengths.

*The following percentages show those who answered "agree or strongly agree" for each question.*

**90%**

know that scripture is the word of God.

**87%**

make time daily or weekly for individual prayer time.

**87%**

believe that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ.

**78%**

attend Mass weekly, with some attending daily.

**86%**

feel our parish communicates well and makes information readily available.

**75%**

understand that the Church is critical to their relationship with God.

### PARISH OPPORTUNITIES

*Although the results are encouraging, you have helped us identify some opportunities for growth.*

*These areas include:*



We will strengthen our **missionary discipleship** by enabling parishioners to share their personal witness stories, helping them feel confident to have a conversation about faith with family and friends, and inviting another person to a parish activity or Mass.



We will provide opportunities for parishioners to grow in their **confidence of Church teachings** so they can answer questions from others.



We will explore ways to ensure that preaching and **homilies connect faith with everyday life**.

### NEXT STEPS

*The survey results will help the Parish Council update our Parish Strategic Plan, particularly as we begin year two (Community). They will also be able to fine-tune the goals set forth for years three through five, which address missionary discipleship, ministry, and worship.*

\*Active parishioners are defined as regularly attending Mass and being active in one or more ministries.



# Connections Beyond Divine Mercy

On the weekend of September 9-10, Fr. Matt O'Donnell, pastor of St. Moses the Black, will be the presider at Divine Mercy weekend Masses at Sacred Heart Church.

St. Moses the Black is one of our two sharing parishes. The sharing parish program is unique to the Archdiocese of Chicago. It officially began on Holy Thursday 1976, although its roots date back to the late 1950s "twinning" relationships designed to build bridges between parishes that differ by race, ethnicity, economics, and geography. Through this partnership, long-term relationships are established with enormous benefits for both parishes.

For Divine Mercy parishioner Jim Carey, visits to our sharing parish St. Moses the Black have become a valued part of his regular schedule. "I learned about St. Moses, then St. Columbanus, when they became our sharing parish about 15 years ago," Jim says. "Then pastor, Fr. Matt Eyerman, visited for Sunday Mass, along with their choir. Matt was spectacular, the music was great, and even my kids loved it."



From that moment, Jim was hooked. While remaining an active volunteer at his home parish, he found himself also drawn to the parish at 331 E. 71st Street in Chicago. "I started visiting Columbanus myself for the Christmas gift drive. That grew to an occasional Sunday, including Midnight Mass at Christmas, and helping at the food pantry where they serve 700 families."

Over the years, Jim has always found the trip worthwhile. "Of course, their neighborhood has undeniable issues," he says. "It's 25 miles — and a world away — from where we live. I think that's exactly why we should go there. What I found on 71st Street is the opposite of the stereotype. Fr. Matt O'Donnell leads a vibrant, welcoming Christian community that is serious about radical hospitality."

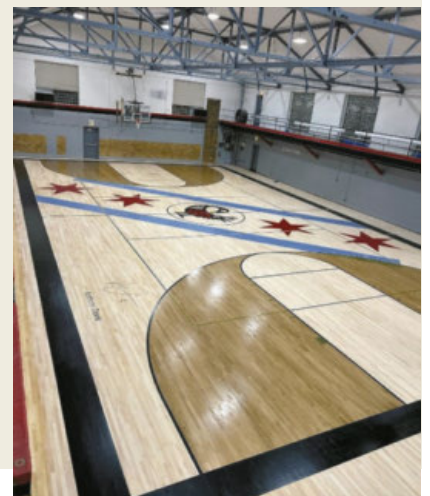
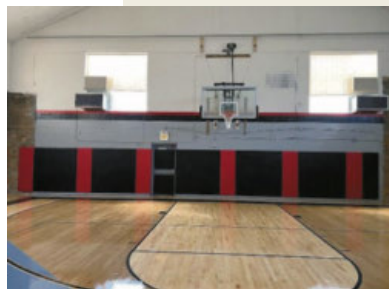
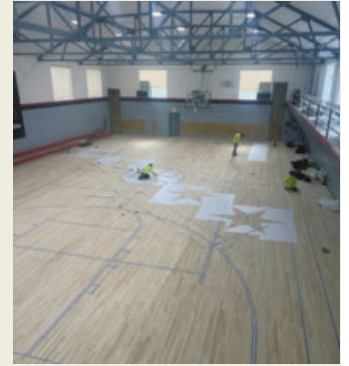
The St. Moses the Black community has had a huge impact on Jim's personal faith. "They have always been very kind to me. I'm reminded that we're all God's children, and that I should work harder to share His love and His blessings. I always feel great when I drive home from St. Moses, and I thank them for making me a small part of their community."

## ATHLETIC CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

St. Moses the Black is in the process of completing a total renovation of its Athletic Center, with repairs totaling nearly \$1 million. While their fundraising has already raised over \$700K, including a \$30K donation from Divine Mercy Parish to fulfill a commitment made in conjunction with Sacred Heart's Legacy of the Heart capital campaign, additional revenue is needed.

The Athletic Center at St. Moses the Black is the long-time home of the premier elementary basketball league in Chicago. The league was started in 1977, exclusively for south-side Catholic elementary teams. In 2000, the league opened to public schools. Over 40 years later, this league includes teams from across the city and suburbs. Its member schools are diverse in backgrounds, race, and religion.

With the new renovations in place, the Athletic Center will be able to host youth basketball, youth volleyball, and other events that are vital to the community for many years to come.



# The Viking Wire

## CONNECTIONS AT SACRED HEART SCHOOL

The following is a letter that our new principal, Jodi Reuter, wrote to school parents just before the start of the new school year. We wanted to share it with all of you so that you may witness the joy, enthusiasm and exhilaration that this new year brings.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dear Sacred Heart Families,

August 20th has held a special place in my mind, heart, and spirit ever since I decided to join this wonderful community. It has been circled with a big, red marker on my calendar for months! Today we look forward to having a great kick-off to our school year with the annual Ice Cream Social after 4:30 Mass. We are also holding a Pep Rally for the students who are joining us for the 23-24 academic year. We hope that you can join our teachers and staff for a casual meet and greet and tour the building.

This past week, we welcomed new staff to Sacred Heart school, as well as returning faculty. I wish you could have seen how everyone gathered together for the first time, and you could feel the buzz about them! Laughter, hugs, smiles, jokes, and a general sense of joy filled the room. I looked around and took mental snapshots of these moments because I know they can be fleeting.

As we dove into our business and discussed the year ahead, I shared a book I read over the summer called



*The Power of Moments* by Chip & Dan Heath. This book came across my desk in the spring and from the first page I was hooked. It is not specific to education, but more so leadership and how we can create “moments” for any given situation. I consider our teachers and staff the leaders of their classrooms and subject areas. As an individual, I asked them to think about how they can make that First Day of School moment special for the students and class. As a team, the staff and I

talked about what makes a school successful and how we can “step into our greatness” this year. Lastly, we reflected, prayed on, and fully embraced the idea that Sacred Heart School is AWESOME and that we are all in on this journey!

So, I ask: Are you ready to have great moments with us this year? We hope so because we are ready, too!

Sincerely,  
Mrs. Jodi Reuter



Ice Cream Social 2023



First School Mass of the Year



Teachers prepare for the new school year.



Fun in Mr. Comstock's Music Class

Think back to one of your first days of school. What do you remember about that day?



# Engaging Children's Hearts

## BOBBIE WEISS: "AN ORDINARY PERSON" WITH AN EXTRAORDINARY FAITH

Bobbie Weiss calls herself "just an ordinary person," but anyone who knows her can see that she has an extraordinary faith. Bobbie has been an actively involved Divine Mercy parishioner since she and her husband, Paul, moved to their Northbrook home as newlyweds in 1979. Their son, also Paul, arrived in 1990. He attended St. Philip the Apostle school up until 7<sup>th</sup> grade when it closed. He then finished up at St. Joseph's in Wilmette before going on to Loyola Academy and University of Dayton.

All along the way, Bobbie has been involved upfront and behind the scenes. In her quiet, unassuming way, she gets things done. And, just because she is humble and modest, don't think for a minute that she doesn't have strong convictions, beliefs and a desire to improve the many things she is involved in. Take Children's Ministry, for example. For the past 11 years, Bobbie has been a member of the Children's Ministry Board. She has decided it is time to step down, but the hopes and dreams she has for the children in this ministry will long endure. A typical call in early summer yielded just a few of her suggestions.

- "We need to offer hospitality for the parents, giving them an opportunity to get to know one another, chat about their children and of course build community."
- "We need to spice up the experiences for children in 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>-and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. A field trip, movie in the gym, bringing together different ages and giving the children a chance to get to know one another. It's important that we engage them."
- "We need to get the children to Temple Jeremiah so they can understand the Jewish traditions and culture."
- "It would be nice to pull the teachers together for a retreat where they can gather, share ideas and brainstorm!"

And, of course, she is right on all accounts and, because of Bobbie, these ideas take shape.

Born in Chicago, Bobbie received all her sacraments at Immaculate Conception Church on the northwest side. The family lived seven houses from the church. When her mother allowed her to take a brief stint away from religious education ("I think I was afraid of the nuns who taught us after school"), she was forever drawn back in. She attended Taft High School and Carroll College in Waukesha, Wisconsin. Bobbie was teaching pre-school in Beloit, Wisconsin, when she was set up with her husband Paul through a co-worker's family, what she calls an "arranged marriage!"

"Faith has always been an important part of my life," Bobbie notes, matter of factly. What she underestimates are the contributions she and her husband Paul have made through the years: she has served on the Women's Guild and Crafty Ladies; as a sacristan, including doing the laundry following

Mass; with the mom's and tots group; as a room parent and on the school board; as a Eucharistic Minister and she also jumped in to help her friend Liza Frenzel teach the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for years. "I just love that age and the sacraments," she says. When we brought back the First Communion Retreat this year, a large effort involving a lot of volunteers, Bobbie offered to help the children make their plates. For his part, Paul has ushered at St. Philip's for years and always helps out with all Bobbie's "let's do this" endeavors.

On the Children's Ministry Board, Bobbie has encouraged us to get the children to Mass more often, which led to bringing back grade-level Masses. "We need to get them to Mass as often as we can and make it as interesting as we can," she adds. "By offering our faith, talking, praying and believing, we will bring the children into the faith."

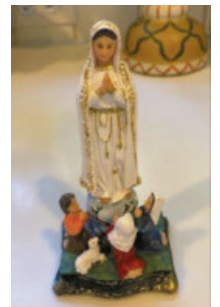
Bobbie lives her faith each and every day. She loves to visit churches and is devoted to Mary: "She's my mainstay, and my second mother. She listens, consoles and makes me feel better. Plus, she's an in to Jesus," she says with a twinkle in her eye. "I try not to ask for things," she continues, "but sometimes I do. And I express my gratitude a lot." When asked if she feels her prayers are answered, she is quick to respond: "Oh, yes, it happens almost every single day."

Bobbie is a born nurturer. She lives by a "we just do it" attitude. No questions asked. If something needs to be done at St. Philip's, Bobbie has an innate ability to get it done. For Super Fun Saturday, Bobbie was the go-to person to help set everything up. Opportunity for a Blood Drive? Bobbie is first to say, "Oh, we can do that." And the list goes on and on. Her can-do spirit always extends to making things better for the children: "The littlest of things can make a big difference" she says, and "it all adds up to something."

"It's been a good run," Bobbie says. "If you have faith and want to share it, somehow people will feel that." Thanks to Bobbie, we do.



Paul and Bobbie Weiss



Our Lady of Fatima - a small retirement gift for Bobbie.

# Connected Through Community

Think back to Divine Mercy Sunday in April – our parish feast day. In the Gospel that Sunday, we heard the story of doubting Thomas, who refused to believe in the risen Lord until he saw Him with his own eyes and touched his wounds. Thomas wasn't in the room when the Lord appeared to the disciples, he wasn't a part of that community experience.

Here at Divine Mercy, we want everyone who comes through our doors to feel a sense of belonging!

Experiencing Alpha has been key to our efforts to renew and invigorate our parish. Recently, we've heard from these parishioners about their Alpha experiences: Alison Kehrer, Hunter Williams, Crystal and Peter Haben, Ivan Puljic, Dave Dillon, and Dan Kotin. Here are a few of the thoughts they've shared:

- **Why did you decide to participate in Alpha?**

Generally, our guests have been invited by an acquaintance or their curiosity just got the better of them after hearing about Alpha and seeing information promoting an upcoming course. Peter's decision was a little different. Crystal, his wife, joined Alpha to answer questions she had as she discerned full reception into the Catholic faith. Peter agreed to accompany Crystal to the 1<sup>st</sup> session – only. Well, he enjoyed it so much he stayed through the whole course and ended up on the Alpha team! Dave Dillon admitted to himself that he'd been a parishioner for many years but felt that he knew no one. He joined Alpha and made a whole new set of friends.

- **What did you expect from the course and what surprised you?**

All of our Alpha speakers admitted to not really knowing what to expect. All hoped it wasn't a meeting where they'd be lectured to or "indoctrinated." Instead, all found the sessions very interactive, with lots of participation in the discussions, asking questions, sharing their ideas and concerns. No question was off limits. No judgement or criticism. Topics ran the gamut from love, life, work, and family, to Christianity, faith, God, and the Church. Alpha is a safe place to share, be heard and make friends.

- **What happens during a typical Alpha session?**

Hospitality is a *huge* part of the Alpha experience. Guests and team gather for an in-person session to catch-up and get better acquainted then share a meal. This is

followed by a short 25-30 minute video on a specific topic such as "Is there more to Life than this?" or "Who is Jesus" and "Why did he Die?" Small groups then discuss the videos – this is where questions, concerns, perspectives are shared. The magic of Alpha is in building new friendships by sharing a meal and our thoughts.



Dave Dillon, Dan Kotin, Ivan Puljic, Crystal and Peter Haben sharing their Alpha stories.

- **How have you been personally affected by Alpha? And would others benefit by attending Alpha?**

Our speakers were able to grow in their faith as persons (even if they'd been "cradle Catholics"), build new friendships and gain a stronger sense of belonging at Divine Mercy. They all agreed that participating in Alpha could benefit *anyone*. Just "come and see!"

Maybe think about Alpha this way: Belong, Believe, Become.

**Belong** to a community that knows and cares about you. Once you feel comfortable and valued and listened to in a group, you can open up to listening differently to the Gospel, finding new meaning in things you took for granted (or never even thought about before) and come to **believe** in the word of God and the real person of Jesus Christ. Then we start to **become** more like Jesus – caring, generous, loving, patient, kind, non-judgmental. We're more willing to put our faith into action – in big ways and small: even just a friendly smile for a stranger.

So, be bold! Join our Alpha community and help us live out our parish vision! Divine Mercy is a Welcoming Community that Inspires Disciples of Jesus to Share God's Love and Transform the World.



Discover more about Divine Mercy by visiting our website at [divinemercynorthshore.org](http://divinemercynorthshore.org).



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