

# CONNECTIONS

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

**November  
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



## SEASONS CHANGE

I am looking out the window as I write this. Leaves are turning colors from mostly green to a riot of brown, yellow, gold, and red. Not only are they turning colors, leaves are gently falling from the trees, a sure sign that we are into a change of seasons.

We have no choice in the matter. Whether we want it to be fall or winter, or not, those seasons come upon us.

As the seasons change, we are required to adjust. I've pulled out my hoodie and light jacket. Eventually, as it turns colder, I will grab my winter coat from the closet. It would be foolish to run around outside in shirtsleeves when the temperature hits freezing.

We are accustomed to adjusting to the change of seasons. We are much less accustomed to adjusting to change in the Church.

I clearly remember my dad being completely disgruntled when the Latin Mass was set aside for the English-language Mass in 1969-1970. He never really got over the change.

Today, as a Church, we are no longer dealing with massive ritual changes to the liturgy or the way in which sacraments are celebrated. Occasionally, Rome or the Bishop's Conference will tweak something minor in one of the rites.

There are much bigger changes afoot, changes we must address and adjust our practices accordingly. Involvement in

organized religion is declining. Every study out there confirms this reality. People are less and less inclined to participate in any organized religion across the board. It's not just us Catholics.

All organized religions in the Western world are experiencing a loss of membership. There are a combination of reasons for this decline, most notably secularization, individualism and consumerism—hallmarks of contemporary life.

At the same time, this season of change in which we find ourselves as a Church holds great opportunity for us. According to a recent Archdiocesan survey, 59% of Millennials and 53% of Gen Z say they are "spiritually hungry."

The challenge for us as a Church is to meet those who are spiritually hungry where they are at and then feed that hunger. Do you know someone in those age cohorts, some one perhaps in your family or among your friends?

Pass this *Connections* on to them. Invite them to come to Mass or to Alpha with you. Share with them how faith in Jesus makes your life better.

Let's connect! Let's face the season we are in with spirit and hope!

## STAFF YOU SHOULD KNOW

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## Building Connections: Divine Mercy Parish Christopher O'Donnell | Parishioner By Liz Riggs

"I want to make a difference each day."

One quick glance at Christopher O'Donnell's weekly schedule reveals a man who is literally always on the go.

Husband. Father. Grandfather. Brother. Marine. Financial Advisor. Volunteer. Friend.

These are some of his many roles. He has always tried to lead his life with purpose and humility.

Born and raised in Detroit, Chris credits his father, a physician, as his inspiration. Dr. Dayton O'Donnell worked around the clock. His unwavering care and concern for others was woven into the fabric of the family. Chris recalls that his father often came home in the middle of the day to take a quick nap before returning to his patients at the hospital. Dr. O'Donnell and others founded the St. Frances Cabrini Clinic in Detroit, serving under-resourced people from the neighborhood with their health care needs. Chris and his brothers often helped out and it was there that he learned to have compassion and serve those in need unconditionally.

A true man for others, Chris is proud of his Jesuit, Catholic education. He attended Regis University in Denver, Colorado, where he majored in economics and minored in business and philosophy. He went on to Marquette

University in Milwaukee to pursue a Master of Economics degree, followed by three years active duty as an officer in the Marine Corps. He continued in the reserves, retiring as a Colonel in 2000.

"You don't have time."

One of the greatest life lessons Chris learned in his early twenties is that time is a valuable and limited resource; when you realize something isn't working and/or your efforts are not appreciated, you should let go of that pursuit and find something else.



Thankfully, Chris followed his own lead and left an initial job at American Airlines to join Continental Bank, where he thrived. When he was asked to relocate to an assignment in Canada, he did not hesitate. There he met his wife, Patricia. In 1977, the family moved to Winnetka, eventually joining Sacred Heart Parish, where they immediately felt welcome. In fact, Father Raftery seized on them at the first Mass they attended to participate in the Agape committee, and they happily agreed.

Since that first committee, Chris has been an active member of the Divine Mercy Parish Community, assuming several leadership positions, participating with the stewardship and finance committees, as well as the family retreat, religious education, men's spirituality group, and scripture study. He strives to attend Mass daily and says it helps ground him in his faith. When asked about his faith and how he continues

## A Parishioner You Should Know

to have hope, Chris responded, "God is everywhere and in everyone."

In addition to his work in the parish, Chris meets regularly with veterans. He is involved at James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center in several volunteer capacities. Every week, he is part of a group of 80-100 vets that gather in Niles to share in community and fellowship. During these meetings, they focus on building relationships and helping one another. Chris is committed to helping vets out of difficult situations, particularly with financial advice. He wants them to feel proud of their efforts and tries to help if he can. He receives texts and calls on a daily basis from vets looking for his guidance, and much of his work is dedicated to individualized outreach for those who are struggling.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your word." This is Chris's slight variation on the prayer of St. Francis Assisi. "I like the idea that the strength is derived from Him and I'm empowered by that strength." Faith, family, health, work, self-improvement, country and giving back - these pillars are his foundation, and Chris attributes focus on all of these factors to his positive mindset and outlook on life. When he isn't with vets, at Mass or at a spirituality or bible study group, Chris can be found exercising, serving as condo board treasurer, or spending quality time with his family, which includes his wife, Pat, their three grown daughters, and seven grandchildren (6 boys, and a girl), ranging in ages from 11 months to 12 years. Chris continues to put his faith into action and has no plans to slow down because, in his words, there is "So much to be done."

## Connected Through Alpha

Many of our parishioners have connected with one another through their participation in Alpha. Participants obviously get to know Jesus better through Alpha, but they also connect with others in their group, and ultimately others in the parish (and beyond) who have participated in Alpha. Below is an example of how Alpha impacted the lives of two of our parishioners!

\* \* \*

Meet Lisa Lesniak and her husband, Tom, and in her own words..."We've been married for 29 years, we live in Glencoe where we raised our three children and have been members of Sacred Heart for 20 years. We would like to share our Alpha experience.

I was raised as a Lutheran and remained as one for 55 years. Over the years of attending Mass with Tom and our family, a feeling of warmth, of being lifted up grew in me. I felt such peace when I was at Mass - like a giant hug from God. I decided to become Catholic. Father Steve suggested I try Alpha to prepare.



**Lisa and Tom Lesniak (left), pictured at the Easter Vigil earlier this year.**

Tom and I decided to attend Alpha together. We met many lovely people. Alpha builds a greater community feeling, people we merely saw at Mass over the years became people we now know. We were able to ask questions and share our personal feelings about faith. Over the weeks of Alpha, I heard so many pearls of wisdom related to my relationship with God and everyone else in my life. One of my favorite passages from Alpha is:

The first to apologize is the bravest.  
The first to forgive is the strongest.  
The first to forget is the happiest.

Our Course ended just before Easter. I fully joined the Church at the Easter Vigil service where I was congratulated and joyfully welcomed into the Church by many of my new Alpha friends.

If you are curious, give Alpha a try. It provides much to think about, much to talk about, many perspectives and no judgments. I believe that you will come away with a greater sense of community with other members of Divine Mercy."

## Connections Through Service

### **VOLUNTEER AS A FAMILY THIS THANKSGIVING!**

Join us the day before Thanksgiving at St. Moses the Black. All parishioners are invited to volunteer at the St. Moses the Black food pantry on the day before Thanksgiving. In 2021, the food pantry gave away over 500 turkeys to struggling families. Divine Mercy volunteers joined others -- including Cardinal Cupich -- from around the Archdiocese of Chicago.

This year, volunteers are needed from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Wednesday, November 23. St. Moses the Black is located at 331 E. 71st Street in Chicago. Those

who cannot attend for the entire time are welcome to come for as long as they are able. "I take my boys to St. Moses every year the Wednesday before Thanksgiving with a group



**Cardinal Cupich**

of our family and friends from Sacred Heart School," says Sara Smylie. "It is one of the traditions we look forward to the most. My kids truly enjoy pitching in and taking on one of the many jobs at the event."

She added, "There are so many ways that kids of all ages can help in a small way, from packaging potatoes and vegetables, placing



## Connections Through Service (Continued)

canned and dry goods in bags, to handing out supplies. We enjoy chatting with our fellow parishioners at St. Moses and all of the people who visit the food pantry. It is just a really nice way to help others while meeting new people in our sister-parish community, and giving thanks with so many old and new friends."

"It is always so wonderful to see so many Divine Mercy parishioners and their families include St. Moses in their Thanksgiving holiday plans," said Kathleen Clarke, Divine Mercy Senior Leadership Team member. "It is impossible to not enjoy working alongside our dear friends at St. Moses to make the Thanksgiving holiday better for so



many people that they so beautifully serve. What a blessing it is for both Divine Mercy and St. Moses to have this special morning together!"

This year, we encourage Divine Mercy volunteers to sign up in advance. Volunteers will receive materials for a prayer before they arrive and a reflection conversation that they can have during

the car ride home. The signup can be found on our website Outreach page: [www.divinemercynorthshore.org/outreach.html](https://www.divinemercynorthshore.org/outreach.html)

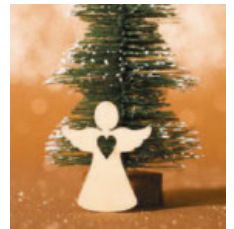
## Connections for Christmas

### GET INVOLVED IN CHRISTMAS SHARING!

Our sharing parishes, St. Moses the Black and St. Benedict the African, are the focus of Divine Mercy's Christmas sharing during the "Great Gift Card Challenge." For more information, visit the Christmas Sharing page on our website: <https://www.divinemercynorthshore.org/christmas-sharing.html>

All gift cards and receipts are due to the Parish Offices no later than December 5.

Get connected with Christmas Sharing!  
Thank you!



## Connecting Parishioners

### PARTY IN THE PARK CONNECTS PARISHIONERS!

"To paraphrase the line from Field of Dreams, 'Plan it and they will come.' Clarkson Park was our field of dreams on October 1," said Susan Seeberg, chairperson of the 2022 Party in the Park. "Twice the number of people we expected came to the party and we were thrilled with the turnout!" Seeberg added that she was also so happy to watch everyone catching up with old friends and meeting new friends. "Our hope was that this event would connect all our parishioners with our parish community, and it worked," said Seeberg. "As we look at the goals in our new strategic plan, establishing trust and community are a huge first step in evangelization -- and I think we proved that that Divine Mercy sure can throw a great, fun party!"

On the evening of October 1, Divine Mercy parishioners gathered at Clarkson Park in Northfield to enjoy a beautiful fall evening. The cornhole tournament was a big hit, and even Fr. Steve took part. As the band, "Steely Dad," played, everyone enjoyed the bar and the special whiskey and cigar bar organized by the group of men the planning committee dubbed the "Booze Brothers."



**Fr. Steve with Susan Seeberg, Chair of Party in the Park this year.**

School dads Rob Levoy and Matt Schachman acted as auctioneers during the live auction and paddle raise. The highlights included Christmas Eve pews and parking spots going for as much as \$700, and dinner with Fr. Steve was sold three times, for \$2,300 per dinner! The proceeds will go toward the purchase of new signage for both parish campuses.

"The event was such a success that we have already started planning for next year!" said Seeberg. The date for next year's Party in the Park is tentatively set for Saturday, September 30, 2023.

A huge thank you to the many volunteers who helped make this event a success, to those who contributed to the fundraising, and to all who came and enjoyed sharing the evening with Divine Mercy Parish. Photos from the event can be found on our website at <https://www.divinemercynorthshore.org/partyinthepark.html>



# Engaging Children's Hearts

## CONFIRMATION CANDIDATES JOIN THOUSANDS OF OTHER TEENS AT HOLY FIRE

A group of Children's Ministry 8<sup>th</sup> graders (pictured on the cover this month) met bright and early one Saturday morning last month to travel downtown to the Credit 1 Arena at the University of Illinois-Chicago where they connected with thousands of other 6<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> graders throughout the Archdiocese for the bi-annual Holy Fire Retreat.

What is Holy Fire? According to the Office of Parish Vitality and Mission, Holy Fire is a powerful moment of encounter, worship and fun for young people in grades 6 through 9. It also offers our youth preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation an engaging and significant experience of the broader Church to which they and their parish or school belong.

It really is fun. Often described as a rock concert with a World Youth Day vibe, it's inspiring to see children from all over the Archdiocese pour into the pavilion. The Arch estimates they had 6,000-8,000 attend this year over two days (Friday is primarily for Catholic school children and Saturday for the Children's Ministry/Religious Ed children).



With music pumping throughout the arena, the children are invited to jump out of their seats and dance, following the moves on the large Jumbotron screens (think Wii Dance!). YMCA was the perennial favorite and the children no longer looked like they could barely keep their eyes open.

Nashville-based musician PJ Anderson and his band also got the children not only out of their seats, but running down to dance with one another in a "mosh pit" in front of the stage. Anderson, called a worship artist, has a great voice and way with the children. His most recent studio album, *Mercy*, debuted at #7 on iTunes and received glowing reviews. He's a pro, having led thousands in worship at events worldwide, including World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland, and the Mass for Life in Washington, D.C.

Magician and illusionist Giancarlo Bernini from Dallas, Texas, performed some amazing tricks while also weaving in a nice

faith message: Just because you can't see it, doesn't mean it isn't real.

A series of witness talks were interwoven throughout the morning. They were strong and powerful testimonies to the challenges young people face and the fact that the healing presence of Jesus can make a tremendous difference in young lives.

After a brief lunch break, lights dimmed and Adoration began with a full candlelit procession throughout the entire arena. The monstrance was then carried up to an altar in the middle of the arena, allowing everyone to view this powerful moment of encounter. The backdrop of worship music kept the children fully engaged.

Mass was then celebrated by Cardinal Cupich with readings and Universal Prayers read by children in English, Spanish and Polish, a strong message of the universality of the church right here in downtown Chicago. More than 30 Eucharistic Ministers fanned out throughout the pavilion so that everyone could receive the Eucharist as the day drew to a close.

The event this year coincided with a four-day weekend for our local schools so we made it a strictly voluntary option to attend, sweetened by offering the children service hours toward Confirmation. Our children are busy, but it was great to see this group connect with one another and the broader church for a day of prayer, witness and joy.

As one mom said, "Thank you so much for taking them! My son said it was a great experience and he wore his cross necklace that he bought to school today."





# The Viking Wire

## SMALL HEROES. GIANT IMPACT.

For Will and Alison Small, the summer of 2017 was like any other. Their three energetic boys, Carter, then age four, Hunter, then two, and Noah, then one, were having a ball the way all kids do when in the throes of summer vacation. Their days were spent playing, swimming, and romping around their local playgrounds.

But that all changed one day when their middle son Hunter had an accident. In the hospital, they received some jarring news. "We were told that he had unexplained elevated liver enzymes," says Alison. "Upon further evaluation with a

specialist, we received the diagnosis, Duchenne muscular dystrophy." Duchenne is a progressive and incurable disease of the muscle. And while it was horrible news, it was about to get worse. "While we were shocked by the diagnosis," says Will, "we learned that it was a genetic disorder, and our youngest son Noah also had Duchenne. Carter had been spared."

From left-to-right, Noah, Carter, and Hunter Small

It's almost impossible for any parent to imagine what they would do in such a situation. Alison and Will went to work.

"While our hearts were broken, we researched and learned as much as we could about the Duchenne," says Alison. "We learned there is so much hope in the community that treatments for this disorder are near that can change our boys' lives."

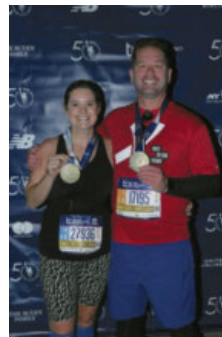
Six months after their sons were diagnosed, Will and Alison started the Small Heroes Foundation to raise money for Duchenne research and to spread awareness of the disease. It didn't take long for them to feel the love of the Sacred Heart Family. "Since starting our foundation, we have been blown away by the love and support we have been given by Sacred Heart School and the entire Winnetka community," says Alison.

Numerous Sacred Heart parents, teachers, and faculty have run anywhere from 5K races to full marathons to help the



Small Heroes cause. Others in the Sacred Heart community have participated in health challenges and tailgated in the name of Duchenne research. The Doucas family has hosted two car-wash fundraisers in the Divine Mercy parking lot, with students and parents volunteering their time and energy.

For the Small family, the love and support have had a profound effect. "In the early days of the diagnosis, we never thought we could continue to live in this area as we have no family here," says Will. "Sacred Heart became our family."



Alison and Will Small, post-race and proud.

And it shows in the faces of Hunter, Noah, and Carter. It shows when they are in school having fun with their friends and taking part in their daily classroom activities. "We could never properly thank everyone for the level of support they have given us," says Alison. "We were not only able to stay in this community, but our boys are thriving due to the care they are shown daily."

We like to say that Sacred Heart is the Heart of the Community. The Small family is living proof - vibrant, faith-fueling proof - that our heartbeat is strong.



The Sacred Heart School Family at the Small Heroes car wash

## DIVINE MERCY PARISH

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## 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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