



St. John BEFORE THE LATIN GATE

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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PARISHIONER JOEL ESSLINGER REFLECTS ON THE STEWARDSHIP WAY OF LIFE

Joel Esslinger has been a familiar face around our parish for over 20 years, serving as a sacristan, lector, greeter, money counter, altar server, Knights of Columbus member, and Eucharistic Minister. Joel's involvement in parish life has kept him both active and anchored in the faith during his retirement years, and he wouldn't have things any other way!

The Catholic Church has been a central aspect of life for Joel from his earliest years as he grew up in what was then known as the Panama Canal Zone. His father — one of the engineers responsible for keeping the canal running — met his mother while she was working as a nurse in the area. The couple raised their three children in the Catholic faith, attending a small church called St. Mary's Mission.

As Joel recalls, his mother was at the center of the family's faith life.

"The priests all came from St. Mary's to say Mass in the smaller towns," he says. "We went on Sundays and Holy Days, and my brother and I were altar boys. My mother made sure we went to church and confession. She was in the Altar and Rosary Society. She knew all the priests and nuns, so we pretty well had to go!"

When it was time to choose a college, Joel decided to come to his father's home state of Oklahoma and earned a degree at Oklahoma State. Upon graduation, he came to Bartlesville and ended up finding work in the petroleum industry. He is thankful to have landed in Bartlesville and at St. John Before the Latin Gate.



Today, Joel Esslinger considers himself greatly blessed. By participating in the Mass in various ways, he has remained rooted in the faith tradition of his family.

Formation TRANSFORMED THROUGH CHRIST

“Jesus not only calls people to him but also forms them and sends them out in his service.”

— Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response

This month, we are emphasizing the third pillar of parish stewardship — formation. Formation is the process of studying Christ’s teachings and incorporating them deeply into our lives. It is a lifelong effort by which we “put on Christ” (Rom 13:14) and are “transformed by the renewal of our minds” (Rom 12:2).

Above all, our formation should include studying Scripture and Church teaching. It should also include discussion with other Catholics and honest self-assessment. Its goal is to “discern the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Rom 12:2).

Because formation helps us understand God’s will, it therefore leads naturally to good stewardship. When our minds are transformed through Christ, we become like Him — as Christ gave His life for us, so we give our lives to others.

Formation is not just an individual task. Instead, it is a communal responsibility that, when applied, will further help St. John Before the Latin Gate to grow as a stewardship parish. Each one of us has an inherent need to give — to move from “selfishness to selflessness,” as the Diocese of Wichita’s document

The Pillars of Parish Stewardship aptly states. Formation is a process of spiritual growth, and it leads to a deeper understanding of loving others as God loves us.

Naturally, then, our Catholic formation should not end upon celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation, or turning 18 years old. Formation is a formidable task that we as Catholics should participate in for the duration of our lives. It involves “education of the mind and conversion of the heart” (*The Pillars of Parish Stewardship*), and helps us to lead the stewardship way of life rather than just understand it.

As we quickly approach the Advent season, why not make formation a part of your penitential renewal to Christ? Start off by reading 10 minutes of Sacred Scripture a day, or by studying a chapter of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on a daily basis. Read a biography of your favorite saint for an example of an individual who lived as a disciple of Christ, and use this person as a role model when tending to your daily tasks. Keep an eye on our weekly parish bulletin for faith formation opportunities at the parish. Before long, your commitment to formation will lead you to naturally live the Catholic faith and understand stewardship in ways that you never imagined before.



A Letter From Our Pastor

A MONTH FILLED WITH GRATITUDE

Dear Parishioners,

The month of November of course brings to mind thoughts of thanksgiving and remembrance. These aren’t just thoughts about Thanksgiving Day — although I look forward to it with happy anticipation — but thoughts regarding the many reasons we should be thankful.

We begin the month with a Holy Day of Obligation, the Solemnity of All Saints, on Nov. 1. It is a stewardship feast in so many ways, instituted to honor all saints, known and unknown. The communion of saints — the sharing of spiritual goods by those in heaven to us who are still on our pilgrimage — is a great cause for thanksgiving. We read about the lives of the saints to be encouraged and inspired by their examples. Plus, we are strengthened by their fellowship in the Body of Christ, and their prayers aid us.

We follow All Saints’ Day with All Souls Day on Nov. 2 so we can honor and commemorate all those others who may have been “saints” in our lives. It may have been a mother or father, sister or brother, son or daughter, next-door neighbor, good friend, grandparent, uncle or aunt, cousin, teacher, or student — the list is endless. We have been blessed in our lives with people who have shown us what it means to be a good Christian, what it means to be a good steward. During this month of November, we need to thank God for those

people in our lives. In fact, we need to thank God period, which is another important element of this month. We encourage parishioners to place photos of their deceased loved ones on the Sacred Heart altar for the entire month of November in remembrance and thanksgiving.

Also, our Hispanic parishioners will have a special Mass at 7 p.m. on Nov. 2 to kickoff their Day of the Dead celebration. After the Mass, there will be a celebration on the playground and in Fr. Lynch Hall to pray for and remember friends and family members who have died.

Toward the end of the month we celebrate what is mainly a secular holiday, Thanksgiving. But this national holiday is so grounded in our Christian tradition. This year is the 156th anniversary of the first official Thanksgiving in the U.S., as proclaimed by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, during the Civil War. In the beginning of that proclamation, President Lincoln stated, *“To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God.”* Lincoln takes great care to recognize God’s presence in all of the “thanks.”



Couldn’t we say those words of Lincoln about our lives, about the life of our parish this year? In fact, we could say it every month. Stewardship is the appreciation of our many, many blessings, both personally and as a faith family.

From the beginning of the month, when we thank God for the example of the saints and for the example of the “saints” in our lives, to the end of the month, when we thank God for basically everything we have and everything we are, November is a time to remember and to approach the Lord with a grateful heart. That is what stewardship really is — approaching God; approaching each day; approaching all those with whom we come in contact — with grateful and loving hearts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. John O’Neill
Pastor

The Grief Support Ministry

OFFERING SUPPORT AND FELLOWSHIP FOR THOSE GRIEVING

Only 17 days after learning that her husband's cancer had returned, parishioner Jerrilynn Nakvinda found herself bereft of her beloved husband, Eric. Now a young widow with four children, Jerrilynn struggled to find a way to cope — a way to resume life in the wake of such a devastating loss. And so she began searching for support, desperately seeking individuals who could truly understand and assist her in the grief journey. Thankfully, God led her to a core group here in our parish who would soon become her mainstay. Each having lost their husband in recent years, these five women would join together to form what has since become St. John Before the Latin Gate's Grief Support Ministry.

"We just all came together last April," Jerrilynn says. "Each of us had lost our husbands at varying times and we all needed something."

"My husband had died and I was having problems dealing with his loss," parishioner Rita



Members of the Grief Support Core Group — (front) Johanna Tayrien; (back, from left) Jerrilynn Nakvinda, Rita Lowry, Rose Medina, Lucinda Bray and Kurt Johnson.

Lowry adds. "I needed tools — I needed some sort of guide on how to get through this, I needed outside support. So Johanna Tayrien and I talked to Fr. John about getting something going,

saying that this was something our church really needed."

Under Fr. John O'Neill's guidance, the ladies began meeting weekly on Thursday evenings. Their goal was to find a program

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that would provide them with support and resources in their grief journey, while also helping to create fellowship among grieving parishioners so that they wouldn't feel alone or isolated in their time of suffering.

"I said I didn't want or need this to be a cry session," Jerrilynn says. "I just was looking for support because that was something I was going to need, especially without my husband. I wanted it to be a resource for all of us to help each other — to have a group of like-minded people."

Eventually, the group came across *Grieving with Great Hope*, a six-week Catholic-based series designed to walk individuals through a faith-based grieving process. This includes elements of education, fellowship, practical tools and prayer. Having completed the series themselves, the ladies — thanks to Fr. John's encouragement — began offering the series to others with planned sessions for the fall, winter and spring.

"Father said he wanted us to start a second group, opening it up to the parish at large," Jerrilynn says. "None of us knew if we were ready, but we decided that the five of us were strong enough to do it together. There were 25 people that came to that first session and 17 who stayed the whole time. There were some who had lost a spouse, others who had lost a child. There was even one lady whose brother was still living, but felt lost due to life's struggles, and she just didn't know how to help him."

What Jerrilynn, Rita, and the other core members learned through the series and what its attendees shared is that grief comes in all different shapes and forms — be it death, divorce, or emotional and/or physical separation. No matter the cause, it's essential that people find healthy outlets

to express and work through the grief process.

"Everyone is going to experience grief in one way or another," Jerrilynn says. "And if you don't find a way to get through it, then you're just going to try and mask it somehow in a way that is going to be harmful. This ministry is giving people a positive and faith-driven way of getting through that dark time in their life."

Though the material itself is beneficial, both Rita and Jerrilynn agree that the biggest blessing of the Grief Support Ministry has been the relationships formed.

"It's such a gift to have people you can talk to who know what you are going through — know what you are feeling," Rita says. "It allows us to cry together and laugh together, to help each other through the situation."

"When you have something that hurts your heart, it's just hard to talk about," Jerrilynn adds. "But what you get out of it and the relationships that you make are just so incredible. When you can call someone in the middle of the night, that is huge. That relationship is just priceless."

The Grief Support Ministry's next Grieving with Great Hope session will begin Thursday, Jan. 9, at 6 p.m. Gatherings take place in Conference Room 2. Sessions are open to any parishioner suffering from grief, and past participants are welcome to attend again. Please look to the parish bulletin for more information or contact Stacey Tolsma at 918-336-4353.

"It's such a gift to have people you can talk to who know what you are going through — know what you are feeling. It allows us to cry together and laugh together, to help each other through the situation." — Rita Lowry

Celebrating the Feast of ST. LEO THE GREAT, POPE OF ROME, NOV. 10

Regarded as one of the best administrators of the ancient Church, St. Leo the Great displayed tireless dedication as pope. From securing true Christian beliefs and settling doctrinal controversies as a Doctor of the Church, to defending Rome against barbarian attack and his commitment to the spiritually centered pastoral care of his people, St. Leo the Great provides a wonderful — and historically significant — example of a Church administrator who used his skills to reinforce the essential connections between spirit and structure. This resolute upholding of the faith earned him the title of “the Great.” Indeed, Leo himself held that everything he did as pope was to represent St. Peter, in whose place he acted, and to represent Christ, the head of the Mystical Body.

A native of Tuscany, Leo was believed to have been born around the year 400. The earliest known information about Leo is that he was a deacon under Pope Celestine I and Pope Sixtus III. During his time as a deacon, he was already recognized for his skills in mediation when the emperor designated him with the task of settling a dispute between the two highest officials in Gaul.

In the year 440, upon the death of Pope Sixtus III, Leo was unanimously elected by the people as the pope’s successor. Just weeks later, he would enter upon a pontificate lasting 21 years. This timespan would prove to be a crucial era for the centralization of the government in the Roman Church.

Importantly, Leo’s recorded papal letters and sermons have survived through the centuries, thus providing key historical sources regarding his career and personality. In fact, his particular



prose style — *cursus leonicus* — would have a lasting impact on ecclesiastical language.

A major priority during Leo’s papacy was to sustain the unity of the Church — he was devoted to combating the heresies that threatened this unity. He was also a tireless champion of almsgiving, fasting and prayer, while clearly and concisely expounding Catholic doctrine. Leo put much of what he said and wrote into action as well, as he invited and encouraged bishops to meet and consult with him in person. These committed efforts took place largely in the shadow of the Western Empires approaching

collapse, and Leo would serve as a steadfast representative of lawful authority during this turbulent era.

Indeed, a crucial point of Leo’s papacy occurred during the invasion of Italy in 452. As Attila and his forces made their way to Rome, having already overrun several cities, the ruler of the Huns demanded a dowry from the reigning emperor. As a result, three envoys were sent to negotiate with Attila — one of which was Pope Leo I. While the exact nature of the envoys’ negotiations with Attila are not known, historians often credit Leo with compelling Attila to withdraw from invading Rome. And while the Vandals would sack the city of Rome just three years later, it is believed that Leo’s assertiveness and influence also helped to repress murder and bloodshed during this invasion.

Even as he maintained courage in the face of such challenges, Leo continually worked to address the everyday needs, concerns and interests of his people. He died in the year 461, most probably on Nov. 10 — which is celebrated in the Catholic Church as the feast day of St. Leo the Great.

Comfort Provided During a Time of Loss: OUR PARISH FUNERAL DINNERS

“I hope they’re comforted by someone willing to help, and they feel a sense of friendship from our parish.” — Lisa Hughes

The time surrounding the passing of a loved one can be filled with the strangest combination of feelings — sadness and overwhelming grief, concern for the details of the funeral arrangements, and hopefully, at least a few moments of gratitude, recalling happy memories of the person you hold dear.

Here at St. John Before the Latin Gate, a dedicated group of parishioners hope to help those who are grieving by giving them a place to gather together as a family to spend more time reminiscing and a little less time worrying about putting together a meal. Those who serve to host our parish funeral dinners give of their time, in hopes of bringing comfort to others, in a time of loss.

“I hope they’re comforted by someone willing to help, and they feel a sense of friendship from our parish,” says Lisa Hughes, who coordinates the funeral dinners. Lisa recently took over as funeral dinner coordinator from long-time parishioner, Barbara Eggers.

Being part of the team that provides funeral dinners is an easy and flexible way to be involved in the parish. Some members choose to be involved only in preparing a side or dessert to deliver to the church. Others would rather not cook, but come early to prepare the room and serve the meal, or come afterwards, to help with clean-up. Some people enjoy cooking and serving the day of the funeral.

Those who participate are placed on a team, and will receive a call asking if they can help when a funeral is scheduled. Some may serve on a more

regular basis, while others are only involved once or twice a year, depending on the number of funerals. Most funerals take place in the morning or early afternoon.

“It’s such a simple way to get involved, it’s not time consuming,” Lisa says. “If someone can’t work, there’s always another person who can.”

For the families and friends who attend the funeral dinners, it’s an opportunity to spend time together, recalling memories and sharing stories.

“We see people telling stories, and it’s almost like a family gathering,” Lisa says. “People are telling old stories, or they might think of something really funny that happened, or a special trip the person took, or something they were excited about.”

“It’s just really neat,” she adds. “There’s a sense of history.”

Lisa hopes that when people come through our parish’s doors for the funeral of a loved one, whether or not they are Catholic, they feel welcome and a sense of God’s love and care for them. For some, it may even be an invitation to our faith — or to return to the Church — as they encounter God’s presence through the service of the parish community.

“If they carry the love on to other people, than our mission is accomplished,” Lisa says.

Lisa encourages fellow parishioners to consider serving the parish in this way.

“It’s so rewarding,” she says. “It’s so nice to see we can do just a little thing to help someone in their time of need and try to give them a little bit of comfort.”

If you would like more information, or to become involved in serving at funeral dinners, please contact Lisa Hughes at 918-237-7977 or wldabtflrs@yahoo.com.

St. John

BEFORE THE LATIN GATE



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PARISHIONER JOEL ESSLINGER *continued from front cover*

Today, Joel considers himself greatly blessed. By participating in the Mass in various ways, he has remained rooted in the faith tradition of his family.

“It keeps you close to God and helps you understand the Church and the Mass and the theology behind everything,” Joel says. “It makes it easier for me to understand what it’s all about. I’m certainly blessed. With all the troubles people have, I feel very fortunate that God put me in such a good family, and that He brought me to such a good town and parish.”

Since retiring several years ago, Joel has become even more of a fixture at St. John, and our parish community is so blessed by all he does. Between serving as a sacristan, as a collection counter on Sundays, as a lector, and as a Eucharistic Minister, there is hardly a day when Joel is not at the church lending a hand. He also assists at every single funeral from start to finish — from opening the church and getting coffee ready for the family, to altar serving at

the funeral, as well as washing the dishes from the funeral dinner afterward. He also serves as altar server at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Dewey twice a week and at the hospital once a month.

This stewardship way of life has become second nature to Joel, and he enjoys it all greatly.

“I like being involved; it keeps me out of trouble!” Joel says with a chuckle. “It keeps me in contact with friends in the parish and with what is going on in the parish. I get to know the priests and deacons, and they — and all the people — are really nice.”

Knowing firsthand the many blessings that come with serving the parish, Joel would encourage parishioners at any age and stage of life to give it a try.

“If I can do it, anybody can do it,” he says. “You don’t have to do a whole lot. We all have talent that we can use to help the church, and you can do as little or as much as you want to do. There is always something there for everybody to do.”

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday: 5 p.m. | **Sunday:** 8 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. (*en Español*)

Tuesday: 7 a.m. (*chapel*) | **Wednesday:** 5:15 p.m. (*church*) | **Thursday:** 7 a.m. (*chapel*)

Friday: 8:15 a.m. (*church during school year/non-school days in chapel*)

Reconciliation: Saturday: 4-4:45 p.m. | Sunday: 12:30-1:15 p.m.