



Sacred Heart

Catholic Church

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A Letter From Our Pastor

Preparing for a Lent Well Spent!

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am thrilled that Lent begins late in February, because there is a chance that there won't be snow on the ground when we celebrate the Easter Vigil on April 11. Of course, here in New England, we can't guarantee anything! The other good news that comes with Lent beginning on Feb. 25 is that we have the whole month of February to prepare our hearts for this joyful season when we deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many of you may recall that during Advent, we heard the messages of both Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, and John the Baptist, the New Testament prophet, inviting us to repent, to prepare a straight path for the Lord to enter. Repentance requires us to look into our hearts and our lifestyles and not be afraid to look our greatest weakness in the eye, then to name that greatest weakness in order to ask God to transform it.

At the turn of a New Year, when we try to make resolutions to lose the extra pounds we gained over the holidays, quite smoking, get more exercise, stop drinking, or whatever it is we want to change, we often make the list long, and fail at all of them. Worse, we know that we have failed at past resolutions, throw up our hands and give up on making any effort at becoming healthier: mentally, physically and spiritually.

Fortunately for Catholics, the Church gives us a whole lifetime of Lents to simply ask God to transform one aspect of our spiritual selves at a time. Our mental, physical and spiritual health is all tied together. When we address one weakness, it helps all the areas of our lives. So, simply take one weakness one Lent at a time. Remember, God is not through with us yet, **thank God!** Our spiritual growth and intimacy with the Lord is a lifelong journey of faith.

So often we try to change ourselves, and give up on ourselves when we falter. Often times we are trying to change who we are, and forget that only God can transform us. When we try to do it on our own we eventually fall, give up, and get discouraged. Keep in mind the beautiful words of the song, "Change my heart oh God, make it ever true, change my heart oh God, may I be like You." It is God who does the transforming; we need to make ourselves available for God to

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Praying Through Lent *Spending Time With the Lord*

“Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples.”

Lk 11:1

What better way to carry our whole parish catechesis theme into Lent than to see our rich Catholic traditions at work?

“Beginning with the Baptism of the Lord and continuing through the five Sundays of Lent, our whole parish will focus on different prayer styles,” says Pam Chaplin, ministry coordinator.

Using our Soup and Stations tradition at Sacred Heart, we’ll incorporate a variety of reverent and meditative ways to pray.

Pam says that one week may focus on meditative prayer, while the next week may utilize music as the key element of contemplating the passion of Christ as depicted in the Stations of the Cross. Other weeks may bring new perspectives to the journey, as the Stations of the Cross are seen through the eyes of the Blessed Mother or the eyes of bystanders.

“Different groups within the parish will lead us through the Stations of the Cross, as well as host the simple meal of soup and salad,” says Pam.

In the past, the Women’s Group, Readers of the Word and the Morning Mass Group are among the ministries that have hosted the meal and devotion. Soup and Stations are offered each Wednesday during Lent, with the meal starting at 6:30 p.m. and Stations commencing at 7 p.m.

In addition, lay witnesses will speak about their personal



journeys through Lent during the Masses on Feb. 28 and Mar. 1. They will share how they follow the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “In prayer, we encounter and walk with God. During the Lenten season, we are encouraged to make opportunities for individual and common prayer.

By refraining from eating, we

signify our oneness with the Lord, acknowledge our need for conversion, and give witness to our solidarity with those less fortunate. The penitential practice of almsgiving entails giving money or other resources for the benefit of those in need. One possible source of this money is that which has been saved from fasting or other means of self-denial” (Penitential Practices for Today’s Catholics).

Sacred Heart’s Communal Reconciliation Service will be Wednesday of Holy Week, April 8, at 7:30 p.m. in conjunction with Tenebrae, the powerful service

of shadows where we hear the Passion of the Lord proclaimed by seven different voices.

“During Lent, we are asked to be introspective and look for opportunities for conversion as we prepare ourselves for Easter,” says Pam. “As Catholics, we perform services and look for ways to develop a personal relationship with Jesus.”

Praying Through Lent
Soup and Stations
Wednesdays, March 4, 11, 18, 25; April 1
Soup at 6:30 p.m., Stations at 7 p.m.
Lenten Journey Lay Witness
Saturday, Feb. 28 and Sunday, March 1
during Masses
Tenebrae and Communal Reconciliation
Wednesday, April 8 at 7:30 p.m.



Stewardship

The Four Pillars

You've heard about the three Ts of stewardship, but what about the four Ps?

The three Ts – time, talent and treasure – describe the personal gifts we offer to the Church. The four Ps are the “four pillars” of parish stewardship described by the renowned pastor Msgr. Thomas McGread. They are the hallmark of a stewardship parish: hospitality, prayer, formation, and service. Let's take a look at each of them to understand how we can improve in each area.

Hospitality Christian Kindness

“When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Mt 25:35). The Gospel teaches that whenever we welcome the least of our brothers or sisters, we welcome Christ Himself. That is why the first mark of a stewardship parish is hospitality. Being friendly is one of the first ways we can be Christ-like toward others.

Here at Sacred Heart we have three Masses, and because we settle into worshipping at the same Mass every weekend, we may not know one another. To create a sense of community, we need to reach out and greet each other at Mass and at other parish events or gatherings to get to know one another better. This is a great first step to becoming a welcoming community.

Prayer Heart-to-Heart with God

“Do not become so involved in the work of the Lord that you forget the Lord of the work,” a seminary professor once taught. In other words, don't get so caught up with parish projects and outreach efforts that you forget to spend time with God in prayer. Every great saint has taught that prayer is the most essential component in the life of the Christian. Through prayer, we nurture our most important relationship – the one that will last for all eternity.

A healthy prayer life should include communal prayer such as Mass, as well as personal prayer and family prayer.

The two biggest obstacles to prayer are lack of time and lack of understanding of how to pray. We need to schedule time for prayer just as we would for an important appointment. And we learn how to pray from other people. Many saints and spiritual writers have written books that describe different methods of prayer. Maybe you can read one or try out one of the prayer styles we will be focusing on during this Lenten season.

Formation Continuous Conversion

Pope John Paul II always emphasized ongoing conversion. From childhood through adulthood, our whole life should be a process of drawing closer to God. He never stops calling us forward to learn more and to examine ourselves more deeply.

Very often, there are spiritual enrichment courses, seminars or gatherings that draw us to conversion. They are offered online or at various churches or retreat facilities in our area. We should try to put some time aside for this each year.

Service Love in Action

“Amen I say to you, whatever you did to the least of my brothers, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). This scripture was one of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta's favorites. Each time she picked up a poor and hungry child, she knew she was ministering to Christ. While we may not view ourselves as saints, we too are called to such heroic service right within our own community. As Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta said, “To be a saint is not the privilege of a few, but the duty of everyone.”

We have many service opportunities right here within our own parish. If you have the willingness to serve and take the initiative to find where you are needed, you'll find that there is no end to the families and individuals who truly need help. How can you reach out to them in love?



Serving the Hungry

The Mustard Seed

For over 25 years, Sacred Heart Parish has been serving at the Mustard Seed. The Mustard Seed is a community that serves the poor through its soup kitchen, and each month, Sacred Heart parishioners deliver and serve a hot meal to those in need.

In the Mustard Seed Catholic Worker brochure, the Mustard Seed is described as “a Catholic worker hospitality house. It is a private community who serve the poor in obedience to Christ’s command, depending entirely on the charity of the faithful to meet their needs. The members practice voluntary poverty, receiving neither wage nor salary for their work. There is both a house of hospitality and a home where there is nourishment not only by food and love, but also by the grace of God.”

It takes many volunteers from the parish and community to be able to serve those in need. On average, between 150 and 200 people are served by the meal that Sacred Heart parishioners prepare for the Mustard Seed soup kitchen. There are no sign-up sheets for making a food donation, and anyone is welcome to contribute. Once all donations are gathered, a group of eight parishioners drives to Worcester to serve and deliver the food each month.

“We count on everyone’s meal contributions to be sure we have a decent amount of food to provide to those in need,” says Christina Schulpf, who organizes Sacred Heart’s food donation. “We are looking for more parishioners to contribute food items on a regular basis. On the day we go to serve, we say our prayers for enough food to be donated to serve those who count on the soup kitchen.”

A typical meal consists of a meat, starch, and vegetable on each plate. When available, a salad, fruit, bread and/or dessert is served along with these items.

“Casseroles which contain the meat, starch and vegetable, such as a Sheppard’s Pie, are always a safe choice for dona-

tions,” explains Christina. “All of the food that is served comes from parishioners on the very same day.

It is easy for Sacred Heart parishioners to get involved in helping Mustard Seed! Just mark your calendar for the third Tuesday of each month, excluding November. On this day, deliver a hot meal or other food item to Sacred Heart Parish. It is best if hot meals are delivered as close to 5 p.m. as possible, so they remain warm to serve. All donations should be in disposable containers. Soups and other saucy items, such as baked beans, are not accepted.



“It is too difficult to travel to Worcester with them and too difficult to serve to a large group,” explains Christina.

The Mustard Seed volunteers also accept surplus food from large events. These dishes can be left in the church freezer in containers ready to go directly in the oven if heating is necessary. Everything should be marked “Mustard Seed,” with the contents clearly labeled.

Christina has been a parishioner at Sacred Heart for 12 years, and she has volunteered her time and talent at the Mustard Seed soup kitchen for seven years.

“Attending the soup kitchen with my daughters grounds us each month,” says Christina. “It reminds us to focus on what is important in life, to count our own blessings and say a prayer for those who have less. We benefit just as much as those who receive the meal, because giving of yourself and your time feels good.” says Christina.

Christina also says that one of her favorite parts of serving at the soup kitchen is the smiles of thanks and appreciation for the warm meal served.

Food donations are always needed, especially in January, February and the summer months. For more information, please contact Christina Schulpf at 508-478-9417..



Lenten Practices

Penance and Abstinence

To many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our Faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say goodbye to meat on Fridays and hello to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hardwired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing Catholics are good at, it's abiding to the laws of tradition, and the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the Faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the United States Council of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence:

1. All humans are sinners
2. Penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God
3. The Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance
4. Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church. The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ, not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on, and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord's experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday (which falls on Feb. 25 this year) and

Good Friday (April 10). And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent.

Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become "one with the Father," and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.



But Lent isn't just about what we aren't "allowed" to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others – just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind – "by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own."

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and Ash Wednesday, try to find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time (prayer), talent (actions) and treasure (monetary offerings). The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. We should all seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.



Parishioner Profile

Stephen John Rajcula

As a parish community, we strive to nourish our youth with faith-filled activities, sacramental preparation, youth group opportunities, and more. The inspiring result is that, in the end, these opportunities usually help to shape the lives of our young parishioners for years to come. The efforts of our parish staff, families and other parishioners raise up Catholic adults of sound character that we can be proud of.



One such individual is Stephen John Rajcula, a lifetime parishioner of Sacred Heart. Stephen is currently a senior at the University of Massachusetts, majoring in Accounting. He is the President of U-LEAD, or the Undergraduate Leadership Council, within the university's Eisenberg School of Management. This club focuses on the importance of leadership in the business world, professional development, keeping a balanced lifestyle in college, and networking. Stephen has also been a supervisor at the university's Housing Assignment Office for two years, and is known for his great attitude and effective way of communicating with those whom he serves. On his monthly visits home, Stephen loves to attend Mass at our parish, and we are very glad to see him as well.

Growing up, Stephen was active in our parish youth programs, which included workshops and retreats. He served at the altar and volunteered for many activities, such as our annual chicken barbecue dinner. He attributes much of his faith forma-

tion to his parents, as well as to our parish environment.

"My mother and father, Stephen and Donna, have been very influential in my development my whole life, in terms of getting me to Mass and encouraging me to be involved in parish activities," says Stephen. "If it weren't for their support, I don't think I would be where I am today. My mother is very involved in the parish and always has a smile on her face, and both of my parents have served as some of the best role models that I could ask for. That is really how they helped me with my spiritual life."

Stephen is also grateful for his brother, Jonathan, 11, and sister, Lauren, 19, who also attends the University of Massachusetts with him and is a member of U-LEAD.

Although a daunting number of young people cease practicing their Catholic Faith when they attend college, Stephen has not followed in this path. When asked about what keeps him going, he has a profound response.



"It all amounts to foundation," he says. "For the first part of my life, I built a great foundation of faith and learning with the help of my parents and other parishioners, so I am not really rattled by anything. That is how I have been able to hold on to my faith, no matter what is going on around me. I have a road-map in my head of where I need to go."

Let us continue to pray for Stephen, that he would follow the path that God has marked out for him, and be richly blessed.



Valentine's Day

The Feast of a Christian Martyr

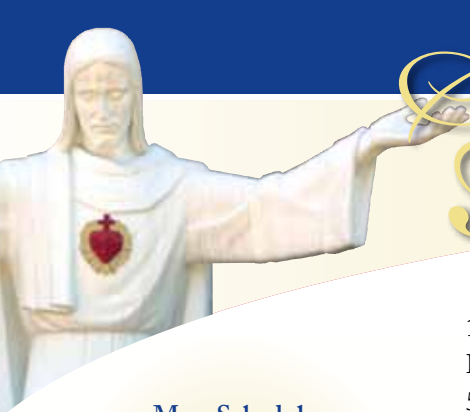
Candy, flowers, romantic dinners, and excuses for wooing are the common traditions we associate with the once pagan holiday, Valentine's Day. Dangling cupids, silly conversation hearts, and faux long-stemmed roses clutter every card store, waiting for last-minute purchase. The question is: how did this over-commercialized holiday really begin?

There are a few stories surrounding the history of Feb. 14 and St. Valentine himself, all dating back to the Roman Empire. The fourteenth day of February was a day set aside to honor the goddess Juno, queen of the Roman gods and goddesses. The following day, Feb. 15, began the feast of Lupercalia; the feast was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus. As part of the festival traditions, there was a name-drawing among the young people. The names of young Roman women were written on slips of paper and placed into a jar. Each young man would draw a young women's name from the jar, and the two would be partners for the duration of the festival. Sometimes, the pairing lasted an entire year, and often, the couple would fall in love and later marry.

At the time, Emperor Claudius II was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns, and he was having a difficult time recruiting soldiers to join his military leagues. Claudius believed that soldiers were reluctant to join because they did not want to leave their loves or families. With this in mind, Claudius decreed all marriages and engagements cancelled in Rome. During this time, St. Valentine was a priest in Rome, and he and St. Marius secretly married young couples. For this, St. Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who sentenced him to be beaten and clubbed to death, as well as to have his head cut off. He suffered this martyrdom on Feb. 14 around the year 270 AD. Before his death, it is said that St. Valentine left a note for the jailer's daughter, who had become his friend, and signed it "From Your Valentine." Although the truth behind the Valentine legend is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic, and, most importantly, romantic figure. It is no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

Over time, Feb. 14 became a time to exchange love messages, making St. Valentine the patron saint of lovers. The date was often commemorated with the sending of poems and simple gifts. During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that Feb. 14 was the beginning of birds' mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of February – Valentine's Day – should be a day for romance.





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Mass Schedule

Saturday

4 p.m. Reconciliation
5 p.m. Vigil Mass

Sunday

8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses
(September through May)
9:30 a.m. Mass ONLY
(Memorial Day through Labor Day)

Weekdays

9 a.m. Mass – Monday through Thursday
9 a.m. Communion Service – Friday

Holy Days

7:30 p.m. Vigil Mass (*Evening before Holy Day*)
9 a.m. Mass

First Friday

9 a.m. Communion
9 a.m.-Noon Exposition of the Blessed
Sacrament

Our Lenten Rule of Life *continued from front cover*

reshape us and remold us into the image of Jesus the Son.

On Ash Wednesday, the community begins our 40 days of communal fast and prayer. Again this year, we will be inviting everyone to pick up a token to remind you to “**Pray Always.**” I am proposing that we use this Lenten Season to raise each other up in prayer, asking God to transform that greatest weakness during these 40 days. Imagine what a wonderful celebration of Easter we will have personally and communally if we arrive at Easter spiritually fit, transformed by the hands of God, Who is eager to heal and make us whole. Then, we will be able to sing at the top of our lungs, “Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia; free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I am free at last!”

None of us has control over what the weather outside will be like on April 11, when we begin to celebrate the 50 days of Easter. (Remember, 40 days of Lent, 50 days to celebrate the Resurrection!) But Lent gives us an opportunity to shape the weather conditions of our souls!

Happy preparation for a Lent well spent!

Fr. Bill Konicki

Fr. Bill Konicki