

THE *Spirit* OF
ST. FRANCIS

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church



Summer 2016



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Cover Photo: Fr. Larry preaches a homily during a Sunday Mass. Credit: Oscar McAnally

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The *Spirit* of St. Francis

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Comments? Questions? Creative ideas? Awesome! Talk to Charles. Email him at cramirez@sfasat.org



When a Pastor Says Farewell

By Rev. Larry Christian, Pastor

Each priest, when he is ordained, knows that he has been called and sent to serve the whole of the Church — whatever its needs and wherever that calling may take him. And so, with joyful enthusiasm, we embrace the charge of being obedient servants within the greater Church. However, Church doesn't really exist in the abstract. It exists among particular peoples who gather and form communities we call parishes. Church lives in the people's lives and in their homes, and gathers at a sacred place we call "the church" for worship and fellowship. The priest, sent to serve, becomes a part of that community. It shapes his soul. The relationships become a part of his heart. And so, humanly, moving on and saying "farewell" is always very hard. Each priest has gained much, but also left a piece of himself behind when he moves on.

I find myself in such a moment now. In my six years with you at St. Francis, I have celebrated your births and marriages, your successes and joys in life, and walked with you in your hopes and dreams. You have made me a better priest than when I came among you! I have also walked the road of mourning and loss at the times of death among your loved ones and neighbors, and felt with you the pain of family problems, the loss of relationships,

the anxiety at threats to health and finances. You gave me the keys to enter into some of the most delicate places in your lives. I hope and pray that I have crossed those sacred and personal thresholds with care and respect.

And so it is time to say farewell. Time for me to enter into the next corner of God's vineyard where I will give of myself, but also receive much from another community called "church," with all its virtues and all its needs. And time for the "church" that is called St. Francis to move on to its next moments as a community and another priest, Fr. Tony, who will give of himself but also receive from you! Treat him well. Remember his humanity. Pray for him. Encourage him. Don't expect the impossible from him. Pray for the whole pastoral team who will work with him in this fruitful section of God's vineyard.

I would ask of you to maintain your spirit of welcome, evangelization, and outreach to the poorest and neediest among us. These have been the true hallmarks of St. Francis as a parish. May they remain the hallmarks for many years to come! ■

Wish Fr. Larry Well

Send well wishes to Fr. Larry online.
Visit <http://sfasat.org/tribute>



Not *Just* for Kids

Adults Also Benefit from Vacation Bible School

Story and Photography by Charles T. Ramirez

“Children transform us,” said Amy King. “Through children, we are reminded that there is something greater than us here. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways.”

As a full-time teacher and a mother of three, Amy knows the power that children can inspire in adults. She served as a previous Director of Vacation Bible School (VBS) at St. Francis of Assisi and is excited to volunteer as a crew leader this year.

“Vacation Bible School is a beautiful way to teach children about Jesus,” said Amy. “I really enjoy how we are preaching God’s word in a different way and targeting kids who learn through music, through motion, and through crafts.”

Miriam Flores serves as the Coordinator of Elementary Faith Formation and loves to introduce new VBS themes to the children each summer. This year’s theme is *Cave Quest: Following Jesus the Light of the World*.

“The image of a cave is powerful,” said Miriam. “It symbolizes going through darkness with all the mystery of the unknown but following and trusting the light—Jesus, the light of the world!”

Amy says that the energy during VBS matches the intensity of the entire week.

“We start off with prayer, music, skits, and it’s definitely high energy from the beginning to the end,” said Amy.

“The entire week is spirit-filled and everyday our time is spent delivering a message in a different way. It’s positive, high, amazing energy!”

Miriam says that one of her favorite aspects of VBS is watching the wide range of age groups gather to learn about Jesus.

“I love how every age group comes together,” said Miriam. “We have four-year-olds who are the youngest to participate, all the way up to retired adults who volunteer their time to help out. I love that VBS supports catechesis for everyone.”

Miriam says that the adult volunteers get just as much out of VBS as the children.

“The adults tell me, ‘Oh I loved how they did the Bible story today. I love this part and I love that part,’” said Miriam. “Volunteers learn and have all the experience the kids do but they have the

benefit of watching the kids transform. Watching conversion moments is really powerful.”

The contagious spirit of VBS also reaches the adult parents who cannot volunteer.

“What’s really nice is when the kids go back home and share what they learned,” said Amy. “We’ve had a few parents over the years who didn’t usually come to church but they were touched by the spirit of their child and started attending. It’s transformational!”

Miriam agrees that VBS teaches and empowers the children to embrace their spirituality.

“VBS gives such a tangible experience of our faith in such an energetic way,” said Miriam. “It is so empowering for the kids that it’s something they can take with them for the rest of the year.” ■



Registration for volunteers and participants is open online:
www.sfasat.org/VBS2016

Photos: (from left to right) Children practice teamwork during outdoor games; a boy is amazed during a bubble experiment; girls pose together during snack break; children pose with their crew leader during a learning station; children pose after a bible story; Miriam conducts an experiment with dry ice as children look on.

Supplement Your Sunday

The Impact of Small Church Communities

By Sr. Rose Kruppa, CDP

Small Church Communities (SCCs) are groups of parishioners organized to grow in faith and service together. Groups can be organized as couples, singles, women only, men only, multi-generational, with children included. SCCs are a way of enabling a more intimate experience of Christian community, especially in a large parish like ours. In their essence, they are small. They are a form or an exercise of “domestic” church and they provide community, a sense of belonging.

An SCC typically meets together twice a month in a home to reflect on the upcoming Sunday Gospel. Many compare this gathering to a group preparation of a homily or reflection on the Sunday readings before they actually hear the preaching. Each small community has a facilitator, usually the host for the session, and follows a 1.5 hour format that allows for prayer, reflection, and group interaction.

At St. Francis there are approximately 40 active SCCs. One women’s group

named RENEW has been meeting consistently every Tuesday morning since SCCs were offered in the earliest years of parish life. These women are some of the best oral historians of activity in the parish, often serving generously as leaders of ministries and organizations over the years.

While most existing SCCs were formed after an ACTS retreat or from RCIA cohorts, in recent years many parishioners have indicated that they would like to grow in their adult faith, pray more often in the company of others, and would like to share their life experiences in a faith context. Others have intentionally formed around common interests. Most have combined faith sharing with service projects such as Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Habitat for Humanity, or building relationships with our Sister Parishes (St. Timothy and Immaculate Conception).

If you would like to become a member of an SCC, please contact Larry Perry in the parish office. ■



Photos were submitted by individual members of respective Small Church Communities.

Making Faith Personal

Teen Confirmation Sets Tone for Adulthood

By Charles T. Ramirez



“My confirmation helped me understand what people mean when they talk about making their faith their own,” said Margaret Stephens. “It made me feel like a member of the Church in my own right, not like a kid who is there because my parents brought me.”

Margaret received the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Francis of Assisi in May 2015 and says that the preparation process strengthened her faith.

“Confirmation class helped me think more deeply about faith on my own,” said Margaret. “I learned that faith is not just a few summer camp retreats or just something we do on the weekends. It’s a part of daily life.”

Monica Harness serves as Director of Youth Ministry and coordinates teen confirmations. She sees the importance of confirmation at a pivotal time in the lives of our youth.

“Teens at this age are getting ready to leave home for college and they are making important decisions in their lives,” said Monica. “Confirmation is a special time for them to take on their faith as their own and embrace it as something to continue once they go to college.”

To help teens embrace their faith, Monica emphasizes that confirmation marks only the start of their faith journey.

“We always tell the teens that this is the beginning of learning more about their faith, it’s not the end,” said Monica. “When they go to college, they might be invited and tempted to do different things, but confirmation gives them the foundation to stay rooted in the Church and with Christ.”

Margaret begins university studies in the fall and says that her confirmation patron—St. Mother Teresa of

Calcutta—has already helped her stay rooted to Christ during this transition.

“I chose Mother Teresa as my confirmation patron because of her incredible way of loving the people who are most overlooked in life,” said Margaret. “Her spirit reminds me that it’s important to reach out to people who you wouldn’t normally reach out to.”

Monica says that the time teens spend preparing for confirmation sets the tone for their faith-life as young adults.

“We’re not going to teach them everything about the entire faith in confirmation class,” said Monica, “but this is when they can really take it on and make it something very personal.” ■

Photo: Archbishop Gustavo Garcia-Siller confirms a young lady on May 22, 2016. Credit: Charles T. Ramirez



No Goodbyes Allowed

Fr. Larry Talks about Pastoral Transitions

Story and Photography by Charles T. Ramirez

“I’m not dying,” Fr. Larry said with a smile. “I’m just moving down the street—literally just down the interstate.”

I enjoyed a candid conversation with Fr. Larry about leaving St. Francis. He said that grief is normal during these type of pastoral transitions.

“There is a little bit of grieving that goes on,” said Fr. Larry, “because you establish relationships, you get accustomed to certain patterns, and you sort of attach your own hopes and dreams to what’s happening in the community.”

As a priest for over 30 years, Father Larry is no stranger to pastoral reassignments. He says that he manages the transition by focusing on his vocation as a servant of God.

“You have to begin an inner process of drawing back from attachment,” said Fr. Larry, “and there is something healthy about that because you realize that the strength of the place is not you, it’s the community—the many people who

create the spirit of this community.”

Fr. Larry says that his reassignment mirrors the state of the larger Church in the United States, which is also in a time of transition as priests are growing older and retiring faster than men are entering the seminary.

“I think this whole process of moving reflects a time for the next generation of priests to step up to these big leadership roles,” said Fr. Larry. “I have realized that I’m already on the other side of the curve regarding age and energy. Hopefully, I am still on the upside with wisdom.”

Fr. Larry affirms that moving to St. Ann parish will reduce his workload as pastor so that he can focus more on his responsibilities as Vicar General.

“Even though I will continue as Vicar General for probably a few more years, there still will be a time to start preparing somebody to step into that role after me,” Fr. Larry said. “There comes a point where you have to be honest with

yourself and how much you can do.”

Fr. Larry says that St. Francis of Assisi will always hold a special place in his heart. He says that this parish is a model for others.

“One of the reasons why St. Francis has been so successful is because it keeps a strong spirit of welcome,” Fr. Larry said. “And welcoming is more than just saying hello—it means we want you to participate, we want to hear your ideas, and we are always willing to examine ourselves and look at new possibilities. That’s a sign of a healthy, growing community and that’s what makes the difference here.” ■

Our Legacy of Pastors

Photo: At an Archdiocesan ordination Mass on May 21, 2016, we were able to get a rare photo of our former pastor, current pastor, and future pastor together at St. Francis of Assisi. We thank God for these men.

From RIGHT to LEFT:

Fr. Jim Henke | Pastor from 1991–2010

Fr. Larry Christian | Pastor from 2010–2016

Fr. Tony Vilano | Pastor beginning July 1, 2016

Fr. Larry, what will you *miss the most* about St. Francis of Assisi parish?

1. Our Community Outreach

“This is an energetic and beautiful community, one that has an incredible sense of outreach. Every parish has its strengths. For St. Francis, the outreach of the community is really outstanding and an example for other parishes to follow.”

2. Our Liturgies

“Our liturgies are beautiful and people are very active in our liturgies. Most people sing and participate in different ministries. The choir members and musicians work very hard to make sure our music and liturgies are beautiful.”

3. Our Spirit of Welcome

“There is always that spirit of welcome at the liturgies. I know when I talk to new parishioners, that’s the most common response they have told me that they felt welcome when they got here.”

What are you *most proud of* during your time as pastor?

1. Growing Evangelization Opportunities

“When the Archbishop challenged the whole Archdiocese about evangelization in 2014, all we had to do was enhance this already very welcoming community. When I arrived, the parish had around 45 organizations and ministries and now we are around 85. We’ve added new prayer groups, programs for women, and the Moms Ministry has grown tremendously. Other events have also started, like the summer dance, the ice cream party, and other community-based events. The parish festival is also about twice as big as it used to be. I am proud that we continue to get a lot of new parishioners through our evangelization efforts.”



2. Transitioning to the New Mass Translation

“Another thing I am proud of is having to go through the change of the liturgy in 2012. We had to educate ourselves first and then educate the community. We had to go through that process of change by learning about the new music and a lot of new things. I think that the community went through that really well because we planned it well.”



3. Reducing the Parish Debt

“We were faced with a rather substantial debt right around the time of the economic downturn in 2008, 2009, and 2010. Collections had declined a bit and parish debt had increased with the San Damiano Building. It would have been fine if we had not gone through the economic downturn but those circumstances affected many families’ lives and, thus, collections. We had to do some work to restructure and make a very concerted effort. I know not everyone agreed, however we were able to do it in a way that didn’t stop any ministries. I feel proud to be able to say that we tackled that debt monster and we got it down to a very reasonable amount today.”





Rev. Servando Guerrero

A Farewell Tribute

Fr. Servando Guerrero joined our community as parochial vicar on July 1, 2014, only two months after he was ordained a priest. As his first assignment, he embraced St. Francis of Assisi and our community fell in love with him. We will miss Fr. Servando and wish him great success on his next assignment as full-time faculty member at Assumption Seminary beginning on July 1, 2016. Below are excerpts from parishioners' well wishes to him. To send him your well wishes, visit www.sfasat.org/tribute.

"I am grateful for his introspection, for his gentle, easy manner, for wisdom, understanding and compassion beyond his years, and for his humility. He will be an exceptional pastor."

- Delia Bullock

"I have been truly engaged by your homilies. Your examples can be humorous but right on point. Glad to see a young man with so much potential. May the Lord continue to guide you in your life and career."

- Ernest Perez

"Fr. Servando is a great listener, a very sincere man, a humble person, a wonderful testament to his parents' upbringing, and he has a great sense of humor."

- Rosie Almaguer

"I look forward to your unlimited accomplishments as you willingly and unselfishly share God's gifts with the world. You truly are making the world a better place by sharing yourself so lovingly."

- Maribeth Osgood

"We are most grateful for sharing your first years as a newly ordained priest. You have shown a commitment to grow and a willingness to share your most vulnerable self in your homilies. You will inspire the next generation of priests!"

- Bill and Jody Nash

"Fr. Servando: you came into the loving arms of our community and your gentle spirit soon brought out the best in so many. Your smile is endearing and I will always remember your hugs to lift my day. I am delighted that you will have influence on the formation of new priests!"

- Agnes Franklin

"I love Fr. Servando's gentle spirit. His homilies are straight from the heart. I wish him the best as he forms the lives of our future priests."

- Cindi Adcock

"We feel blessed to have had you here for the past two years. Thank you for being so approachable, so humble, so funny, and also for touching the lives of many parishioners."

- Carlos and Elvira Ortiz

"You have been a blessing. We have all grown with you to the point that we look forward to you presiding at Mass. I will miss your opening at each Mass: 'Can you hear me? Can you see me?' You will always stand tall in my memories!"

- George Harvey

"We have watched Fr. Servando grow into a most wonderful parish priest. We wish him the very best in his time as an instructor at Assumption Seminary."

- Pixie Koch

"I am grateful for Fr. Servando's wonderful joy and laughter, his ever-present spiritual commitment to the parish and willingness to embrace our parish as his new family. Que Dios bendigas y sostendre todo los dias de tu vida!"

- Valerie Arcement

"I am so grateful for the humble and prayerful way you have been my Shepherd. You are my inspiration to unceasingly go forward along the way, surrendering myself to the Father's will. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide you."

- Helene Deuely



Jesus Was a Young Adult

Committed to Leadership, Faith, Community, and Service

By Kenneth Caruthers

“When I found out St. Francis was starting a group for young adults, I quickly jumped at the opportunity to be a part of it,” said Michael Veliz. “It was important for me to find a ministry that focused specifically on my age group and surrounded me with like-minded peers.”

Who is a young adult? The definition varies depending on whom you ask but it’s safe to say that a young adult falls somewhere between their early 20s and late 30s. This means that Jesus was a young adult! The impact of young adults in the Church today cannot be underestimated.

Some young adults are in college, some have graduated, some are single, and some are married with children. This makes young adults key players in the future of the Church.

The St. Francis Young Adult Ministry seeks to create, maintain, and nurture a place in the parish community where young adults will enter together more deeply into the life of Jesus Christ and the Church.

Like many young adults who find themselves transitioning into a new job and moving to a new city, Heather Mauri recently moved to San Antonio from Washington, D.C.

“We live in a fairly secular world, and it’s easy to get caught up in our daily routines and lose sight of God and His will,” Heather said. “This Young Adult Ministry is important because it provides a place to re-center ourselves and refocus on what matters most.”

Zach Taylor agrees with Heather on the importance of the Young Adult Ministry.

“There are so many distractions today,” Zach said. “From technology’s and social media’s imposition on all of our lives to our own preoccupation of growing into our newly established careers, I think we young adults need space to be rejuvenated by each other’s spirit and reflection in the Word in order to make a more positive impact for Christ in the larger community.”

So far, the Young Adult Ministry has met for regular faith sharing and discussion, brunch after Sunday Mass, and the welcome luncheon for new parishioners. In the coming months, the group plans for more social outings such as tubing, exploring different volunteer opportunities in and around San Antonio, and expanding topics for faith sharing discussions.

The group is open for all young adults in their early twenties to late thirties. Keep up to date with everything going on in the group by joining the Facebook page at facebook.com/groups/sfyoungadult or email Larry Perry at lperry@sfasat.org.

“I hear people say that teens and young adults are the future of our Church,” Michael said. “The Young Adult Ministry is one way that we can grow together and become leaders of the parish.” ■

Photo: The Young Adult Ministry stand together after one of their first faith sharing meetings. Not all were present for this photo. Credit: Larry Perry.

The Ministry of Encounter

RCIA Welcomes the Journey of Families

By Sr. Rose Kruppa, CDP

For over 20 years now, St. Francis of Assisi has enjoyed the benefits of a very robust RCIA process. Many would say RCIA and ACTS retreats facilitate conversion experiences that form intentional disciples of Jesus and mold our active, participative community.

RCIA is available for individuals who have expressed interest in learning more about the Christian faith. This process is open to those who have been baptized Catholic but are uncatechized, individuals who have been baptized in another denomination, or those who are unbaptized.

This process helps them respond more deeply to God's gracious initiative in their lives and prepares participants for union with the Catholic community. It is also meant to form participants into the fullness of the Christian life and to become disciples of Jesus, their teacher. This includes learning the teachings, beliefs, and practices, including liturgical rites of Catholics.

At Easter this year, we welcomed 47 adults and 12 children into full membership in our parish family. Among those were three adults who were completing their sacraments along with their previously unbaptized children ages 7-9. This family journey was particularly joyful for our entire community. Our church was packed for the Easter Vigil.

We are especially grateful to the RCIA team, the sponsors for our candidates and the seminarians who experienced RCIA in a parish setting and witnessed the entire assembly actively involved in the incorporation of new members. ■

Photos (Clockwise): Michelle and Karissa pose outside; the Aguillon Family pose together after the Easter Vigil 2016; Archbishop Garcia-Siller blesses Karissa at the Rite of Election in Feb. 2016. Credit: Eric Bowden.

**Find out more information
about our RCIA Program**

Contact Sr. Rose at rkruppa@sfasat.org



“

Though my husband is a cradle Catholic, I was not when we met and our nine year old daughter never received baptism. However, our family has been part of a small church community (also known as an SCC) within St. Francis for several years. The involvement and excitement of our members really piqued my interest. After attending my first ACTS retreat, I realized that the community at St. Francis was much different than any other church I had attended. That sense of community really inspired me

to want to be a part of the church and, soon after, I started RCIA and our daughter started baptism preparation classes.

Doing this as a family was an amazing experience. I learned so much in class but I also learned a lot from my child who was very eager to return every Sunday. At the Easter Vigil, our daughter was baptized and I converted. It was a very special day for our family and we feel very blessed to be part of St. Francis!

”



Meet Raymond, Michelle, and Karissa Aguillon. Michelle and Karissa were both received into the Church this past Easter. Above, Michelle recalls her family's journey.

A Community Gift

First Holy Communions

By Charles T. Ramirez

“The Eucharist is the most amazing gift that anyone can ever receive,” said Miriam Flores, Coordinator of Elementary Faith Formation, “and I think that often, as adult Catholics, we tend to take it for granted.”

This past April, many children received Holy Communion for the first time in front of the parish community at various weekend Masses.

“I tell the kids that our first birthday was the day we were born,” said Miriam, “and everything changed on that day. The same is true with our first communion—something changes in our lives.”

The parish purposefully celebrates first communions during weekend Masses so that the community can reawaken their fervor for the Eucharist.

“People look at our children and see their reverence and piety and they are reminded of the beauty of the sacrament,” said Miriam. “There is a lot of power in witnessing first communions and nothing is better than giving this experience, this gift, to all the parish.”

Small groups of children at each Mass allow first communions to be spread out across multiple weekends.

“We do it at several Masses because otherwise we would fill the church with so many children, their families, godparents, and friends,” said Miriam. “We would need a separate Mass just for first communions and the rest of the community would miss out.”

Children prepare for this joyous occasion in sacramental formation for two years. The process requires that parents serve as primary catechists at home with regular group meetings with Miriam at the parish.

“The formation for first communion is special and unique to their family,” said Miriam. “It gives the family a new opportunity to live the faith as catechists to their children.”

Children in preparation attend a first communion workshop with their families.

“We invite younger and older siblings to attend the workshop so that the whole family is having this faith experience,” said Miriam. “We focus on the themes of prayer, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and the domestic church.” ■

Go Online

Do you want more information about preparing your child for their first Holy Communion? To read more, please visit www.sfasat.org/FaithFormation

Photo: A young disciple prepares to receive his First Holy Communion in 2015. Credit: Charles T. Ramirez





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Missionaries Come in All Ages

These ten teen missionaries will travel to Eagle Pass, TX in June to repair dilapidated homes in the local community and conduct Bible Studies for the local children. They posed here before their Confirmation on May 22, 2016. We are so proud of them!

Photo credit: Charles T. Ramirez

Mass Celebrations

Sat 5:00 pm

Sun 8:30 am | 11:15 am | 5:00 pm

Mon, Tue, & Thur | 8:30 am

Wed | 6:00 pm

Fri | 6:30 am

Reconciliation

Saturday | 3:30 pm – 5:00 pm

Tuesday | 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Liturgy of the Word & Communion Service

Monday - Thursday | 6:30 am