

# St. Mary

PARISH  
NEWSLETTER

# Queen of the Universe

DECEMBER  
2011

## INSIDE

### PAGE 2

Begin the Journey  
Home for Christmas

### PAGE 3

A Steward's Response  
to the Ultimate  
Christmas Gift

### PAGE 4

Adult Altar Servers  
Enjoy Intimate Role  
During Daily Masses

### PAGE 5

Putting Catholic  
Education First:  
*Carl and Ruth Strecker*

### PAGE 6

Feast of the Holy  
Family  
*Christmas Doesn't End  
Dec. 25*

### PAGE 7

Stewards of Hope  
Council

### PAGE 8

Advent and Christmas  
Liturgy Schedule

## Discovering the Joy of Stewardship Through the Adopt-A-Family Ministry



One Christmas, a number of years ago, a man with several children needed help getting on his feet. He had hit a rock on the road of life, and he turned to God to help him through. In the end, he not only found help, but he discovered the tremendous joy of stewardship as well.

"We were glad to help him by signing him up for the Adopt-a-Family ministry," says Maribel Panuco, Program Director for Catholic Charities. "A few years later, I was so surprised to see him back in our office. This time, he had come back, not for assistance, but to adopt a family of his own to help. It says a lot about the effect of the ministry. I always keep this story close to my heart."

The Adopt-a-Family project is an outreach of Catholic Charities in Salina that serves to provide

gifts for families in need each Christmas season. Last year, the project was able to help 72 families meet their basic needs in life, as well as enjoy the holidays in a meaningful way. Each year, our parish adopts families who have signed up with the project.

First, Catholic Charities accepts referrals for families in need well before the Christmas season begins. Next, it assigns a number to each family to maintain strict confidentiality. Each family fills out an application, including information that can be used to purchase appropriate gifts, such as the ages and sizes of their children.

"The families usually just ask for the kinds of things that most of us take advantage of in our lives, such as toothpaste and coats," Maribel says.

*continued on page 2*

## Begin the Journey Home for Christmas

Christ was born the son of a poor carpenter. Accidental? Not a chance. His birth was the culmination of salvation history, as it profoundly revealed the glory of God. Infinite power and wisdom took the “form of a slave, coming in human likeness,” not as a warrior, but a poor and vulnerable babe. Nothing about God’s entrance into humanity was accidental.

Every aspect of Christ’s birth, from the three kings to the swaddling clothes, carries meaning. The proclamation of the angel, therefore, is also important: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” This message, meant to be for “all the people,” was announced to a group of shepherds in a field out in the middle of nowhere. Accidental? Not a chance.

The shepherds, who received a personal invitation to greet Christ at the manger, reveal that God’s love extends beyond boundaries of distance and transcends social classes. Unlike persons of this world, who yearn to gain recognition with those of influence, wealth, or beauty, Christ cries out to the lowly in society, to the shepherds in the distance. He reaches out in love, desiring a relationship with every single



person, no matter their status. This is the “good news of great joy for all people”; Christ was born for us all.

Christmas is the perfect time for distant shepherds to begin the journey home. The angel’s greeting extends to all those who feel estranged from the Church or numb to God’s love. Those who have fallen away from the Faith can be comforted by these words: “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.”

Be not afraid. The Christ child awaits your arrival. Begin the journey back to Christ by drawing near to His body: the Church. Through prayer and the sacraments, you will discover the great joy that accompanies a relationship with God. Take a moment to ask the Lord to bring peace to your heart and guide you in love towards Him. Please join our parish family for the final preparations of Advent, as well as the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses.

You have read this entire article and have received a personal invitation to begin the journey. Accidental? Not a chance.

## Adopt-A-Family Ministry *continued from front cover*

“Ninety-nine percent of the parents say that as long as their child gets something for Christmas, that will be good enough for them.”

Catholic Charities then assigns five or six families to St. Mary’s, and gives the parish the appropriate information. Tags, with Advent colors such as purple, are made up representing the various items that the families need. Parishioners choose the tags and purchase the gifts. Finally, the Family Life Committee wraps the gifts and delivers them to Catholic Charities.

“I can always count on St. Mary’s assistance with the Adopt-A-Family project,” Maribel says. “I don’t know what we would do without it. The people of St. Mary’s Parish are so generous. I like to assign the neediest families we have to St. Mary’s, because I know they will be very well taken care of.”

Truly, our parish family’s involvement with this project testifies to our desire to serve Christ and bring the stewardship vision to life.

“We get such an awesome response from our parishioners,” Pastoral Assistant Nancy Sherffius says. “We are so thankful to our parishioners for their generous response. It is really an example of living out the pillar of service, and looking beyond our personal economic woes.”

Those who would like to volunteer at Catholic Charities in any way are invited to contact Maribel Panuco at 785-825-0208.



*A Letter from Our Pastor*

## A Steward's Response to the Ultimate Christmas Gift

Dear Parishioners,

Christmas is America's favorite holiday. The amount of effort we put into decorating our homes and churches – the money we spend to buy presents for family members, friends, and coworkers – the hours we devote to addressing Christmas cards and attending seasonal get-togethers – all taken together stagger the imagination. Whatever's next, Valentine's or Halloween or Thanksgiving, can't hold a candle to our investment in Christmas.

Don't get me wrong. I love Christmas, too. But I'm afraid that many of us somehow miss the main reason for our Christmas celebrations.

I've sometimes heard people say things like, "Getting everything ready for Christmas becomes so hectic, I don't want to do it every year. But, you know, Christmas is really for the children." And occasionally I've heard or read in a letter to the editor that Christmas is about the hope that a newborn baby brings to the world. Even in the early winter, when the days are short, we can celebrate babyhood, a new human life.

Both those sentiments are wrong because they're too limited. Christmas is really for adults! Of course, it's true that many of our Christmas customs are for the children. We might not get to hang our stockings to be filled by Santa Claus otherwise. And it's true that the birth of a baby, any baby, brings joy and hope to all those around. Yes, many of our Christmas celebrations are centered on the children, and the birth of a child offers a promise for the future.

But I'll still maintain that Christmas is for adults. Because, at Christmas, we celebrate not just any baby, but a particular baby. And we celebrate his birth not because it's cute to see a baby in a manger filled with hay and surrounded



by farm animals, in itself enough to send any medical professional into shock. Instead, we celebrate this birth because of who this baby is and what he did as an adult, and only those with an adult faith can fully appreciate the significance of this birth.

A human baby is certainly a wonderful creation, made in the image of God. But Jesus is more than that, not less, for he is God the Son who took on human nature in order to redeem us from the results of the sin into which we had fallen. He didn't stay a baby.

He grew up and taught and preached and healed. Finally he was put to death "for our sake" as the Creed affirms and rose from the dead. That's why we celebrate his birth more than two thousand years later. That's why normal routines are suspended for a few joyful days each year.

Yes, Christmas is for adults. Of course, it's for children as well, for people of all ages benefited from this birth. And in response to the gift the Father gave us with the birth of his Son, we joyfully exchange gifts with each other and share with the poor and offer our gifts of time, talent, and treasure to the Church. God gives to us; as stewards, we do our best to faithfully use those gifts.

On behalf of myself and our parish staff, a joyful and blessed Christmas to all of you, whatever age you are!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Kerry Ninemire



# Adult Altar Servers Enjoy Intimate Role During Daily Masses

**W**hen we stop and realize what happens at the Mass — the proclamation of the Word of God and the presentation of Christ’s perfect sacrifice on the cross in the Holy Eucharist — being an altar server is a profound honor.

We generally think of altar servers as children, not adults, but for a group of eight daily Mass attendees at our parish, serving during Mass is a routine duty and privilege.

“It’s a way of using your time and abilities to serve the church in stewardship,” says Austin Allen, who has been serving at daily Masses and funerals for about eight years. “I always feel like Mass is just a little more special and I’m a little bit more focused when I’m serving and assisting the priest. You could say that I was recruited, but I was more than willing. For me, being so intimately involved in the Mass is a very rewarding way of serving God.”

Austin is not alone in being humbled by the experience.

“I am very honored to serve in this capacity at Mass and I thank God every time I get to do this,” says Lee Hartman.

The experience of a fuller and more active participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is an enormous draw for all of the adult servers.

“While serving at daily Masses I get a sense of being more included and somehow closer to the Mass,” says Paul Marak.

“The people attending daily Mass also make me feel appreciated, which is humbling and gratifying.”

“Being a server makes me feel more connected to the Mass and to the gathered assembly,” adds Gib Urban. “I get more out of the Mass this way.”

Unlike some parishes where adult servers come forward to serve during the Liturgy of the Eucharist, at St. Mary they serve the entire Mass. Accordingly, each new altar server is given thorough training before being assigned to his or her first Mass.

Each of the active adult servers is assigned approximately once every seven weeks, but those that serve at funerals, like Austin, serve more often.

For those involved, altar serving is an unrivaled privilege not to be taken lightly.

“Besides starting my day by attending Mass, there is no more awesome feeling than serving at the altar of God,” Gerry Giroux says. “The connection between God, priest, and parishio-

ners cannot be described. I carry that uplifting inner feeling with me the whole day.”

New adult altar servers are always welcome to join the ministry. Those interested can simply contact the parish office. Please consider serving God in this uniquely beautiful ministry!



**“While serving at daily Masses I get a sense of being more included and somehow closer to the Mass. The people attending daily Mass also make me feel appreciated, which is humbling and gratifying.”**

**-Paul Marak**



## Putting Catholic Education First: *Carl and Ruth Strecker*

If you've been to a football or basketball game at Sacred Heart Junior-Senior High School at any point over the past four decades, you've probably recognized a familiar voice announcing the starting lineups, penalties, and down and distance. The voice belongs to Carl Strecker, a longtime St. Mary's parishioner who has been the public address announcer for Sacred Heart Athletics since 1965.

For Carl, who also coached football, baseball and basketball at St. Mary's Grade School for 20 years, getting involved in school athletics is just one of the many ways that he and his wife, Ruth, have given of their talents in service to our parish family and the greater Salina community for nearly half a century.

"In coaching, having kids or parents come back years later and thank me for something where I helped them in a certain situation, things like that just really make it worthwhile," Carl says. "It makes you feel good to be able to help the kids and feel like you've really accomplishing something."

Catholic education has always been an important priority in the lives of the Streckers. Both Carl and Ruth attended Catholic schools through high school, and all four of their children went through the Salina Catholic school system, graduating from Sacred Heart High School. In thanksgiving for the spiritual growth that Catholic schools have afforded them and their children, Carl and Ruth have given back to both St. Mary's Grade School and Sacred Heart over the years. Carl was a member of the Salina Catholic School Board for eight years, and he was a charter member of the committees that were responsible for starting both the high school endowment and the annual high school charity auction. For her part, Ruth served on the Home and School Association, was a room mother, and was active in the school lunch program. To this day, she helps out with mailings and administrative work at the high school developmental office.

"Catholic education has just always been very important to us," Carl says. "Our second boy, Greg, is a teacher at Trinity High School in Hutchinson, and his wife teaches at Holy Cross Grade School, so we are passing down Catholic education. I think it's treated our kids well, and my wife and



I have been married for 53 years now, so it's obviously treated us well, too!"

Carl and Ruth also share a deep devotion to the Mass. Carl has served as an usher for many years, and he also proclaimed God's Word as a lector at our liturgical celebrations.

"I was raised enjoying the Mass, I took a course in college on the Mass, and to me, the Mass is the greatest prayer in the world," Carl says. "My wife has attended daily Mass since she retired, and we attend together whenever we can. We just enjoy the Mass, and it's been very important to us."

For Carl and Ruth, giving back to the parish community is an enjoyable experience, and a way to give thanks in return for the many blessings they've received as parishioners of St. Mary's.

"We want to help out," Carl says. "We are pretty staunch in our religion, and we appreciate what we have received from our religion. It's been very adventurous and enjoyable life at the parish."

## Feast of the Holy Family *Christmas Doesn't End Dec. 25*

It's Dec. 26, and we've celebrated Christmas, opened all of our gifts and practiced all of our Christmas traditions.

What do we do now?

The Christmas season is far from over. In fact, the octave of Christmas has just begun, and the Holy Solemnity of the Nativity of our Lord on Christmas Day, is directly followed by the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth on Dec. 30.

After giving birth in a stable, Mary and Joseph were now charged with a great responsibility. Their home would be the place where our Lord grew up! Do you ever stop and think about what it must have been like for Mary and Joseph to raise the Savior of the Universe? They changed His diapers, fed Him His meals, and helped Him learn to walk. No doubt, Joseph taught Jesus how to safely work a saw, and Mary probably helped Him mend His clothes. This puts all of our parenting duties into perspective. Can you imagine caring for Our Lord as He was a vulnerable and helpless child? In fact, contemplating the Holy Family in this way gives us a new-found appreciation for family life — with all of its trials and triumphs.

Though little is known about Jesus' early years, we know He grew up just like any human child, and Mary and Joseph were chosen to parent Him. The Lord chose the family as the place for His birth and His growth, thereby sanctifying the fundamental institution of society. From then on, the Family was much more than just a group of

people living together. With the Holy Family as our example, all Christian families are called to be small domestic churches. As was the humble home of Nazareth, the family is an authentic school of the Gospel, wherein we live our faith on a daily basis. John Paul II explains that "recollection and prayer, mutual understanding and respect, personal discipline and community asceticism and a spirit of sacrifice, work and solidarity are typical features that make the family of Nazareth a model for every home."

As Christian families, we must follow the example of the Holy Family, and be lights to shine the Truth in the midst of a sometimes dark world. Through their humble existence, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph remained united to one another and to the Father, working always to remain close to Him and to show His love to the world. So also must we do. As Christians, we are called to show the world "convincingly that it is possible to live marriage fully in keeping with God's plan and with the true good of the human person — of the spouses and of the children who are more fragile" (NMI 47). Then, amidst all of the spilled milk and temper tantrums, all of the birthdays, graduations, and marriages, we will serve as a sign of God Himself — three persons united in love!

May Jesus, Mary, and Joseph bless and protect all families so that they will extol the peace, joy, justice, and love that the newborn Christ has given us as a gift to all of humanity!



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## Stewards of Hope Council

**A**s part of Bishop Coakley's strategic plan for our diocese, Stewards of Hope Councils were established in parishes throughout the diocese last year to increase participation in the planning process and to implement the diocese's objectives at the parish level.

"I see it as a renewal, and looking at yourself and asking, 'Am I doing everything I need to be?'" says Co-chair of the Stewards of Hope Council Katrina Kaiser. "I see it as a wake up."

Our parish chose to have our Pastoral Council act as the Stewards of Hope Council, with different leadership under Katrina and her Co-chair Brenda O'Gorman. This council recently completed the first year of a five-year implementation schedule in our parish.

The first thing the council had to do was study.

"The bishop issued a letter with a study guide that gave us a lot of guidance on the issues that he wanted us to explore and study," Brenda says. "And that's what we did."

Early in the year, the council conducted five Lenten study groups and presentations. The main issues and objectives that were explored were holiness and stewardship.

"It revitalized and put increased awareness of our parishioners and our parish towards the pursuit of holiness and stewardship," Brenda says. "Also, another objective was evangelization, trying to promote the gospel in word and witness. It put more emphasis on educating ourselves so we had a better understanding of those, and built our faith. And I think it has made an impact on our parishioners and our parish to be involved in the process."

This process continued over the rest of the year in exploring these objectives and the ways that we can improve in these areas as a parish.

"We have committees within our parish already that I feel address a lot of issues with parish life," Brenda says. "But, through our council looking at all these issues we've discussed, we helped them put a new outlook on it so that

people became more aware. It shed a new light on it and made people more involved."

Since the Stewards of Hope Council was formed, we have looked at our parish and the ways that we can improve, and have been working to increase awareness of those areas and start the process of improvement.

"I do think that we've made an impact," Brenda says. "We had our parish picnic in September.

That's an annual thing we do to thank people for their time, talent and treasure, and also to get people together. The feedback that we got from this year said how meaningful it had been for our parish and how much they've grown in their faith."

Along with increasing awareness, parishioners are encouraged to get involved in the life of the parish and the process of renewal headed by the Stewards of Hope Council.

"I would love everyone to be familiar with the different committees and activities that are going on, not only so they can know about them but so they can be apart of them," Katrina says. "I want them to be a part of what's going on."

For more information on the Stewards of Hope Council, call Katrina Kaiser at 785-825-2723 or Brenda O'Gorman at 785-827-8304.





# St. Mary Queen of the Universe

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## Advent and Christmas Liturgy Schedule

### Communal Reconciliation Services:

Sunday, Dec. 18 at 3 p.m. at  
Sacred Heart Cathedral

Sunday, Dec. 18 at 7 p.m. at  
St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Monday, Dec. 19 at 7 p.m. at  
St. Mary Queen of the Universe

### Individual Confession:

Wed., Dec. 21 at 5:45 p.m. at  
St. Mary Queen of the Universe

### Christmas Masses:

Saturday, Dec. 24 at 4 p.m., 5:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.  
Sunday, Dec. 25 at 12 midnight, 8:30 a.m.,  
and 10 a.m.

### Vietnamese Confessions/Mass:

Confessions on Sunday, Dec. 25 at 2 p.m.  
Mass on Sunday, Dec. 25 at 4 p.m.

### New Year's Masses:

New Year's Eve at 5 and 6:30 p.m.  
New Year's Day at 7, 8:30, 10, and 11:30 a.m.

Daily Mass: 8:05 a.m. and 5:15 p.m. Monday through Friday Saturday: 5:00 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.  
Sunday: 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m. Confessions: Saturday 4:00 p.m. until done