

Cross Talk

Cardinal Rigali dedicates new wing of Saint Helena Education Center

On September 22, 2008, the Saint Helena community was once again honored by the presence of His Eminence, Cardinal Justin Rigali, on the occasion of the dedication of the new wing of the Education Center. Just six months earlier, he was in our midst to confirm our 6th graders, and to many of us older parishioners, it seemed hard to believe that four years had already passed since Cardinal Rigali presided over the dedication of our beautiful church.

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Principal Sr. Cathe Shoulberg, Cardinal Justin Rigali and Pastor Fr. Joseph Nicolo stand in the new wing with a student.

Meet Father Szparagowski

This past June, the members of St. Helena Parish were pleased to welcome Reverend George J. Szparagowski as our new Parochial Vicar. During his first two weekends at St. Helena, Fr. Szparagowski introduced himself to our parishioners at the Masses, giving a concise but complete history of his life and



Reverend George J. Szparagowski

priestly preparation. Fr. Szparagowski was born and raised in Nativity BVM Parish in the Port Richmond neighborhood in Philadelphia at a time when Port Richmond was inhabited by Polish and Irish Catholics. Youngsters in Port Richmond at that

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Emergency responders honored with Blue Mass



The Saint Helena Council Knights of Columbus held their second annual Blue Mass to honor emergency responders on September 11, 2008, in the church. It was a beautiful and fitting celebration with Father Joseph Nicolo as the principal celebrant, Father George Szparagowski, the homilist and Deacon Donald Kretsch assisting. The Adult Choir added their own great Amen with their uplifting musical renditions.

The honorees in attendance included area police departments, fire companies and paramedics representing Whip-pain, Upper Gwynedd, East Norriton, Upper Providence and Worcester townships as well as the Pennsylvania State Police, Second Alarmers of Willow Grove and Montgomery County Detectives. The added presence of state, county and local digni-

taries, St. Helena School students, Brownies, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts was a heartfelt reminder of the broad-based appreciation and support for those so dedicated to serving our community.

Attendees were awestruck by the gigantic American flag hoisted from the Centre Square Fire Company ladder truck which framed the church upon entrance. Fr. Szparagowski's powerful homily was bolstered by his own childhood experience growing up with a father who was a fire-





fighter. Fr. Nicolo spoke of the commitment, dedication and sacrifice of emergency responders and his personal remembrances of national emergencies as a youth. Pennsylvania Attorney General Thomas W. Corbett, Jr. commended the honorees as being most deserving of the honor and recognition they were receiving. Centre Square Fire Chief Lee Miller and Whitpain Police Chief Mark A. Smith said the emergency responders have a deep appreciation for the outpouring of support from the community. Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz's office presented the Knights with *Commemorative Joint Meeting of the Congress of the United States, In*

Remembrance of the Victims and Heroes of September 11, 2001, a book which has been placed in our school library.

The beautiful Liturgy and tribute ended with a well-deserved standing ovation for all of the emergency responders and was topped off with refreshments in the Empress Room.

The Knights of Columbus were chartered in January, 2007, as St. Helena Council #13210. They meet on the second Thursday of each month in the School Library and welcome new members. For more information, please contact John Schmidt, 610-272-3498.

Police Sergeant Patrick McDonald

The St. Helena Parish family was touched in a very real and personal way when Police Sergeant Patrick McDonald was killed in the line of duty on September 23, 2008, in Philadelphia. He was the nephew and Godson of Mr. George Gillin, the Technology teacher at St. Helena School. Cardinal Justin Rigali was celebrant and homilist as thousands bid farewell at Sgt. McDonald's Funeral Mass in the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul. Mayor Nutter, Police Commissioner Ramsey and Mr. Gillin all paid tribute to the fallen hero. Mr. Gillin asks for our continued prayers for the family of Sgt. McDonald.

Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults guides catechumens

After Pentecost, the norm for the Church was to bring believers into the Christian family as adults. The many believers added to the Church after St. Peter's speech at Pentecost, the converts brought to the Church through the efforts of Phillip in Samaria, the Ethiopian official converted by Phillip on the desert road, the gentile Cornelius converted by Peter and the thousands added through the ministry of Paul as recounted in Acts were mostly adults. In the early years of the Church, candidates for baptism were called Catechumens and were carefully nurtured in the truths of the faith before they became full members of the Christian family in Baptism.

Over the years, the norm for entering the Christian Family changed and most join the Church through infant Baptism where the parents of the child make the decision to join the Church on the Child's behalf and assume, along with the Godparents, the obligation to instruct the child in the faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church calls that process a post-baptismal catechumenate.

The Second Vatican Council restored for the Latin Church the catechumenate for adults, consisting of several distinct steps, which are found in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

In the United States, research shows that the average Catholic parish has about 5,000 "unchurched" people within its boundaries. Some of this group have never been part of a

religious tradition, while others have been but no longer are. Of these 5,000 people, about 3,000 indicate that they would be open to considering a religious affiliation.

Call for evangelizers

Jesus calls all of us to be "evangelizers"; "go out and preach to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit". For many, though, the thought of evangelizing brings up thoughts of "hard sell" door to door experiences that we probably have had at some time in our lives.

In light of this research indicating openness to a religious affiliation, how do we move toward what we are called to become? A first step might be connecting with our RCIA process here at St. Helena Parish.

In the recent past, Christians of other traditions or non-Christians received their catechesis from our Parish Priests on an individual basis. While Reverend Joseph Vadino was pastor here, he asked his brother Raymond Vadino, a Permanent Deacon, to set up St. Helena's first formal RCIA process. Deacon Ken Belanger succeeded Deacon Vadino as the minister in charge of that process, and he has coordinated it for ten years.

Our team consists of several ministries, all concerned with implementing ways to help the "unchurched" rediscover the love relationship they have with God in Christ.

Inquiry team

These ministries include an Inquiry Team member. This ministry is primarily responsible for dialoging with someone who is inquiring about the possibility of beginning the conversion process. Attributes necessary for this ministry would be the capacity to listen to what God is already doing in that person's life and to feel comfortable sharing one's life with others.

Sponsor

Another ministry is that of Sponsor. An RCIA Sponsor's task is to accompany the Candidate or Catechumen through the process for as long as it takes. A Sponsor makes his or her self available to the Candidate or Catechumen to answer questions or to direct the individual to the source for the answer; to be a friend during the journey. An RCIA Sponsor is not required to be the Candidate or Catechumen's sponsor for Baptism or Confirmation.

Catechist

A separate ministry is that of Catechist who conducts the catechetical sessions on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings after the homily at the 9 AM Mass. Catechists have the critical role of imparting the teachings of the Catholic Church which are required for full initiation into the Church. A catechist must have the requisite knowledge of Church teaching. This, coupled with our teaching materials, affords the catechist a smooth resource for this important task.

From time to time, a candidate or catechumen might have an impediment to becoming

a full member of the Church. A non-canonical marriage is such an impediment. Our RCIA team works with our Parish Priests to guide such candidates through the Archdiocesan Tribunals to regularize their marriage situations and remove any impediment to full communion with the Church.

This approach is definitely "soft sell" in that this is less a question of loving and being loved than it is of simply being "in love" with the Lord. The scriptures show us that this is precisely how the Lord is with us. That is why God is so faithful to the covenant with a people such as we are. We do this by inviting our Candidates and Catechumens to join our small Christian community.

(Based on an article by Ken Belanger)

A sponsor's story

Dotty Rhoads, a Women's Health Practitioner who has been a member of our Parish for 20 years, shared her thoughts on participating in the RCIA program for the past four years.

This year, the team is working with three candidates (Christians from other denominations) and one catechumen (a non-baptized person). Dotty recalled that one night before Bible Study, Deacon Ken Belanger asked her if she would be interested in participating. "I was so surprised to think that he thought I would be worthy of such a responsibility. He gave me a booklet to read and asked me to consider it. We talked the next week and I agreed to give it a try," she said.

When asked about the orientation she received before becoming a sponsor, Dotty re-

plied, “Deacon Ken not only gives you reading information but explains what your role and responsibilities are. His wife, Jo-Ann, is there to assist and support you through your first experience.”

In describing her duties as a sponsor, Dotty said, “A sponsor attends the weekly RCIA sessions with the candidate and attends Mass and teaching sessions which follow the Homily where the Scriptures of the day are discussed. It is a time where many questions and anxieties are addressed. You also attend with them their acceptance by the Cardinal at the Cathedral and also go to a retreat day with them as they approach the Easter Vigil.

“You don’t have to be an expert on the Catholic faith but you must value it,” she continued. “Your role is to share your faith and personal experience with them. To assist them in dealing with doubts and anxieties, you must be eager to learn yourself so it will benefit the candidate/catechumen. The candidate needs to see you regularly practice your faith. You are their friend and companion on this journey.”

Deeper faith

Dotty shares about two hours of her time per week with the candidate, and is available by phone or e-mail to address concerns. In describing the effects her participation in RCIA

had on her own faith life, Dotty replied, “It has deepened my own faith. You get back more than you give.

“I was so fortunate to have had parents that lived their faith,” she explained. “It is such a deep quiet place in me that is so related to the faith that they had that never faltered. I never realized what a great gift they gave me. Now I understand why no matter what

happened to me in my life I had a safe quiet place to be and this is what I offer my candidate/catechumen as I walk with each one of them on their journey to faith. I am grateful to Ken and Jo-Ann for seeing in me a place where I could give my ‘time and talent’.”

When asked if she could sense the development of her candidate/catechumen in his or her progress in learning the faith, she responded:

“Absolutely, there are so many precious moments as each candidate begins to understand our faith and accept Jesus more deeply as a way of life.”

Dotty also explained that her experience as a sponsor gave her a new appreciation of the Easter Vigil. “Easter Vigil Mass has a whole new meaning for me. The grace of God flowing through that church to the candidates and RCIA team members is an unbelievable source of renewal. We the body of the church are welcoming these people. Every one of us in that church at Easter Vigil is a part of their acceptance into the church. ”

-Matthew Rieder

No matter what happened to me in my life I had a safe quiet place to be and this is what I offer my candidate/catechumen as I walk with each one of them on their journey
-Dotty Rhoads

Youth serving, singing and speaking

Saint Helena Church provides a wealth of stewardship opportunities for all of its parishioners. Today we'll focus on the youngest members and their valuable contributions to our spiritual well-being through the Altar Server, Choir and Lector ministries.

Altar Servers

Parish youth between grades 6 and 12 assist at liturgical services as Altar Servers. Currently there are 57 elementary school Altar Servers. This past year, an effort has been made to reach out to graduates to continue to participate in this rewarding ministry. Altar Servers may begin their training in the 5th grade and shadow older children at Sunday Masses. Ideally, four servers assist at weekend Masses, with two on the "candle side" and two on the "Cross side". Adult volunteers coordinate scheduling, including weddings and funerals. In general, the less experienced are teamed with "veterans" to make sure everything goes smoothly.

Youth Choir

Over the years Saint Helena parish has been blessed with students who love to sing. Many of us have enjoyed their talent at school plays, arts festivals, dedications of campus buildings and liturgical events. The Saint Helena Youth Choir affords them the opportunity to raise their voices to heavenly heights. The Saint Helena Youth Choir consists of singers ranging from 8 years old to high school seniors. Major performances are the Christmas Concert and the Christmas Eve

Children's Liturgy. In 2009, the Youth Choir is planning to sing throughout the Easter season. In past years, the Youth Choir has also lifted the spirits of residents of several area nursing homes. The choir's repertoire is a nice blend of traditional and contemporary hymns.

Youth Lectors

Who among us is not impressed when our young people proclaim the Holy Scripture readings at Mass? Their poise and eloquence is evident, thanks, in part, to their parents, teachers and the Youth Lector Ministry.

The Youth Lector Ministry is composed of confirmed students in grades 6 through 12. At the time of this writing, there are three elementary and two high school students, and the Saint Helena community would be thrilled to have a few more. No one comes in "cold". Youth Lectors are trained on how to use a microphone, where to pause and where to place emphasis. They also receive a workbook that explains the readings and includes a pronunciation guide for Biblical names and places.

Youth lectors perform a valuable service for the entire Saint Helena community, and they themselves benefit by learning more about their Catholic faith. They also enhance their public speaking ability and confidence. Please consult the weekly bulletin for contact information for each of these ministries.

-John Maloney

CYO: More than sports

In past articles, many of you have read of the Saint Helena CYO Program in terms of its three seasons, the participants, our volunteers, the Memorial Basketball Tournament and so on. But each time we utter the familiar 'CYO' acronym, let us not lose sight of the importance of the first letter, 'C,' for *Catholic*. The CYO Mission Statement says it best:

"CYO Sports is one component of a parish's comprehensive youth ministry program which enables the partnership of parents, coaches, priests, religious, teachers, and adult leaders to manage and support a sports program that allows youth to grow in their relationship with God and come to better understand themselves and the Catholic Faith. Such a program:

- employs healthy and enjoyable competition to promote the sharing of Gospel values among athletes, parents and coaches.
- assists parish leadership in nourishing the emotional, spiritual, social and physical needs of young people.
- encourages young people to appreciate the gifts that they possess and challenges them to share these gifts with their community.
- allows youth to witness the life of Christian Discipleship in their coaches and adult leaders
- encourages youth to become responsible members of their faith community."

CYO Community Service Corps

At Saint Helena, the Community Service Corps (CSC) is the CYO component that focuses on the service aspect of our faith.

www.sainthelena-centersquare.net

CSC is open to all students in our parish in grades 5-8. As members of CSC, students participate in monthly service activities that benefit the parish and nearby communities. Service events are typically held on one Sunday a month and are usually 1.5 to 3 hours long. CSC members are notified via email of each event, its goals and how they can contribute. Member contributions include time and talent as well as donations of items used in the activity. The CSC page on the Saint Helena School web site provides a guide to all service activities, which can fulfill the requirement for Confirmation candidates.

From September through April, one can find our young people eagerly engaged in a variety of activities such as making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the Patrician Society, raking leaves for our senior parishioners, making Halloween candy bags for the less fortunate, baking Christmas cookies for the children at Girard College, holding a Pasta Bake for the Missionary Sisters of Charity and serving as ambassadors at the Saint Helena Memorial Basketball Tournament.

One very touching occasion is the Spaghetti Dinner at the Montgomery County Assisted Living Center at which our children serve dinner and host a lively game of bingo. The interaction between the residents and the kids is, to borrow a word from a popular television commercial, truly "priceless".

Visit www.sainthelenaschool.org CYO link and peruse the *Saint Helena 2008-2009 CYO Sports Handbook* for details.

-John Maloney
Winter 2009

Szparagowski

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time could very well believe that the whole world was Catholic, because everyone they would meet in their neighborhood was a member of the Church. He is one of three children born to George Szparagowski, a Philadelphia firefighter now retired, and his wife Eileen, who is involved in the education of special needs children.

Reflecting the neighborhood, George Sr. is of Polish and German heritage, and his wife Eileen is of Irish stock. Fr. Szparagowski has a brother named Ed, and a sister named Eileen, who with her husband Walt, are the parents of Father's niece Alexis and nephews Walter and Benjamin. Father enjoys his time with his niece and nephews, who he takes fishing and to the movies. Father's parents were the foundation of his faith, instilling in him a devotion to the Blessed Mother and the Holy Eucharist.

Father's education began at Nativity BVM School and continued at North Catholic High School. In high school, he was a varsity wrestler, and throughout his school years, he played soccer on a club level. After high school, Father attended De Sales University for one year, and found it too small, being a fraction of the size of his high school. He had an ambition to be a research biologist, and enrolled in an articulation program with Community College of Philadelphia and Temple University to study biology.

During this period Father considered a vocation to the priesthood. His decision to pursue Holy Orders did not come in a flash as St.

Paul experienced on the road to Damascus. Instead, his decision was a result of prayerful reflection, and discussions with family and friends who were priests. He prayed for guidance to the Blessed Virgin, St. Faustina, St. Padre Pio and St. Theresa, the Little Flower. After more than a year of reflection, he made his decision to enter St. Charles Seminary.

Superior seminary

Father found St. Charles to be a place of rigorous scholarship as well as prayerful formation. St. Charles was, and still is, one of the leading seminaries in the country. After his ordination, through interaction with other young priests from other areas of the country, Father found that his preparation was superior compared to graduates from other seminaries.

After his ordination on May 18, 2002, he served five years at St. Bernard Parish in the Mayfair neighborhood in Philadelphia, and one year at St. Cornelius Parish in Chadds Ford. Here at St. Helena, he assists Fr. Nicolo wherever he needs help, such as liturgy, hospital coverage, and working with the school.

Fr. Szparagowski tries to involve himself in as many aspects of administration as he can, and he tries to learn all that Fr. Nicolo can teach him. Father Szparagowski's enthusiasm for his assignment here at St. Helena is matched by our gratitude to Cardinal Rigali for assigning such a young, energetic and personable priest to our Parish.

-Matthew Rieder

Dedication

(Continued from pg. 1)

The new addition is situated at the entrance of the “old” church and provides an additional 5,600 square feet of lab, library, classroom, reception, meeting and office space.

Festivities began with a liturgy of the Word, as celebrants, Altar Servers and school children processed in while the strains of “Come to the Waters”, courtesy of the school chorus, filled our church. Many dignitaries were present to celebrate with us, including Saint Helena Pastor Emeritus Father Coates; the recently retired but always welcome Father Duffy; Gwynedd Mercy Academy High School Principal Sister Kathleen Boyce; La Salle College High School Principal Brother Richard Kestler; Sister Ann O’Connell of



Mercy Suburban Hospital; Sister Anne Crampsie, Principal, Gwynedd Mercy Academy, Elementary Division; Sister Patricia Smith, Principal, and Sisters Eileen Trinity and Kathleen Anne McKee of Waldron Mercy Academy; Sister Corinne Ritchie, Principal of

St. Margaret School, Narberth; Sister Kathleen Kelly of Merion Mercy Academy and Sister Melanie Weyand, Sisters of Mercy Merion. The liturgy was enhanced by the participation of PREP and Saint Helena School students as Altar Servers and lectors.

God’s grace

After Deacon Ken’s Gospel reading, Cardinal Rigali stepped to the pulpit and delivered an eloquent homily, noting that the new addition represents the accomplishment of God’s grace working in the community. Amplifying this theme, he drew from Matthew’s Gospel, citing well-known passages such as “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matthew 19:14) and “For

where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

The final words were given by Father Nicolo, who reflected on how it all began with a study seven years ago and resulted in today’s integrated campus. He expressed sincere gratitude for the generosity of the Saint Helena family.

As the school band played, the congregation processed from the church to the entrance of the new wing, where Cardinal Rigali blessed crucifixes and statues and subsequently blessed each room of the addition. All were welcome to take an informal tour. Afterward, a reception was held at the Social and Recreation Center, where His Eminence graciously posed for pictures.

-John Maloney

A campus of Catholicism completed



The dedication of the new wing completes the Saint Helena Parish campus: 1. Church; 2. Empress Room; 3. St. Theresa Chapel; 4. Rectory; 5. Saint Helena Education Center; 6. Social and Recreation Center; 7. Preschool and Convent (picture provided by architects The Knabb Partnership)

Empress Room happenings.....

Once again, the Empress Room has been host to another successful Parish affair. The first ever Beef & Beer Trivia Night was held on October 18. As the guests arrived, they were put into the Fall mood by the lovely table centerpieces consisting of pumpkins and gourds that had been graciously donated by O & F Farms. Everyone there really got into the trivia and a lot of good-natured competition ensued. The Fund Raising Committee gave away 20 prizes for the trivia contests and then drew the winners of the Church raffle with two of the winners donating their winnings back to the Church. The event and raffle netted more than \$17,000 for the parish.

When the Empress Room was being constructed, Father Nicolo envisioned a place where the Parish could come together and celebrate. In the past, many events were held off-site. Having the events at Saint Helena, it seems that more and more parishioners are attending.

This room is also open to the parishioners for private use. Already there have been several Christening luncheons, anniversary parties, funeral luncheons, retirement parties and weddings held there. It has even been used for business meetings and luncheons.

—Barbara Neff

Saint Helena Parish
Empress Room
Events

Valentines Day

**ST. PADDY'S
DAY**

Watch your Bulletin for party de-
tails....

**CROSS TALK NEWSLETTER
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