

From the PA's Desk

PARISHIONERS NEEDED to decorate for Christmas: Thursday, December 22 @ anytime during the day or evening- Trees, lights, wreaths, naivety set-up, liturgical colors and greenery. If you can help, even for an hour, let me know. As the new person here, I'll need your help, please.

Post-Cards of Welcome and Invitation:

At the doors of our church you will notice a bunch of post cards inviting people to come back and worship with us on Sundays. There are two different kinds, and one is an option for you to mail to people you know (simply write their addresses on the card and mail them), and another option is for you to give directly to people you know. It's a wonderful way to evangelize without having to say too much. The postcard simple reads: "If you been away from the church, or have drifted away from it; if you've been hurt by the church or are confused or angry because of your Catholic experience, please consider this invitation to come and join us for Mass."

Youth Ministry:

Last week the Youth Ministry Team met to plan our activities for January. The Director for the Office of Youth Ministry for the Diocese, Mark Graveline, suggested that we try to plan two activities a month in which we can bring faith to the ordinary events of our teen's life. Rather than us scheduling one more event for kids to work into their busy lives, we will simple go to where they and their families are at already. Beginning in January, we will visit some of their sporting events and attend their upcoming theatrical play. In order for us to stand out (since we can't wear clerical collars), we will wear T-Shirts that read "Believe" with the name of our parish on it. We will also have tons of rubber bracelets that read "Believe" to hand out to whoever wants one. If you'd like to join our Youth Ministry Team, please see me, or Mary Moomey, Kaylie Willoughby, Shavonne Shanteau, Geri Clark, or Bev Kilmar.

ALPHA:

The Evangelization Team has been meeting over the past few months, and we are excited about a widely popular DVD and discussion program intended to get people involved in faith and parish life. Alpha is a tool for outreach that is being used by thousands of Catholic parishes in over 70 countries around the world. Alpha introduces people to the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. This has led to more than 24 million people around the world experiencing Alpha. In particular, it is attracting many young people who are asking the question, 'Is there more to life than this?'

The Evangelization Team has decided that we will run our ten week program beginning in Lent and finishing around Pentecost. Each season begins with a full meal followed by a DVD faith presentation and concluding with small group discussion. As part of the weekly Alpha gatherings, there will also be an opportunity for a day retreat and reflection. We will be spending the next few months visiting each group that meets at the parish to introduce Alpha and get as many people involved as possible. About a month prior to the actually beginning in Lent, we will be talking about Alpha at all the Masses and even have people present in church to sign as many people up as possible. The various topics of Alpha are as follows, but they can be condensed into ten seasons:

Is there more to life than this? Who is Jesus? Why did Jesus die? How can I have faith? Why and how should I pray? Why and how should I read the Bible? How does God guide us? Who is the Holy

Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do? How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit? How can I make the most of the rest of my life? How can I resist evil? Why and how should I tell others? Does God heal today? What about the church?

We are excited about the possibilities for what Alpha can do for us, and here is what one pastor has said about it: "I have been running Alpha in all my parishes since 2001, and I have seen all my parishes transformed by placing Alpha at the center of our evangelistic efforts. At my parish, we are clear that Alpha is not just one of many programs we use, but that it is foundational to our identity as a missional and evangelizing Church. All these courses are run by our parishioners, many of whom have experienced conversion and transformation through their own experience of Alpha. We have a veritable army of evangelizers successfully using this program to create a profound sense of belonging so that guests may hear and receive the Good News of Jesus Christ."

RCIA:

This Sunday five people from our community of faith have asked for our prayers as they continue on in their journey toward becoming new Catholics, and we placed them entirely under the Cross of Christ as we celebrated the Rite of Acceptance and Welcome. Next Lent they will celebrate the Rite of Election with Bishop Cistone. As you see them at church, please remember to encourage and support them. Aaron, Sydney, and Natalie Lloyd, Alan Larson, and Terry Catrell.

Advent Season:

A few weeks ago I mentioned the question of why God would want to take on human flesh in the first place? Why would an infinite power want to limit himself within the confines of history and a human body? Why incarnation? There is a marvelous story in the book *The Holy Longing*, which tells about a four-year-old child who awoke one night frightened, convinced that in the darkness around her there were all kinds of spooks and monsters. Alone, she ran to her parents' bedroom. Her mother calmed her down and, taking her by the hand, led her back to her own room, where she put on a light and reassured the child with these words: "You needn't be afraid, you are not alone here. God is in the room with you." The child replied: "I know God is here, but I need someone in this room who has some skin!"

In essence, that story gives us the reason for the incarnation. God takes on flesh because, like the young girl, we all need someone with us who has some skin. A God who is everywhere is just as easily nowhere. We believe in what we can touch, see, hear, smell, and taste, and I often remind people that the Church's sacraments are things that "put flesh on God."

We have five senses and we are present to the world through those senses. We communicate through them, are open to each other and the world only through them. And God, having created our nature, respects how it operates. In the incarnation (a word which takes its root from the Latin word *carnus*, meaning physical flesh), God became physical because we are creatures of the senses who, at one point need a God with some skin. Unlike other believers in God, we Christians believe in a God who is also physically present on this earth inside of human beings, especially Jesus. The Christian god isn't just transcendent (in heaven) but can be seen, heard, and touched. The Christian God has some skin.

For me personally, Jesus is the life of God lived out in the human arena. It is the kind of life that removes the barriers that impede others and calls them to abundant living. This divine and human life in Jesus had but one ultimate purpose, namely, to invite you and me into the fullness of our own lives. As we journey beyond the halfway point of our Advent season, let us pray that God will live within our humanity more and more each day.