

APRIL 2015



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ST. VINCENT FERRER PARISH

LIVING CHURCH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

"I Found Strength in Christ" **A Story of Conversion**

Where was this strength coming from?

Jodi Kastner's son, Joey, was born with bilateral paralyzed vocal cords, and a few hours after giving birth, Jodi rushed to his side in the intensive care unit. A few weeks later, Joey had a tracheotomy to breathe without assistance.

Jodi kept a positive outlook. She learned to do things she never thought she could. She learned how to place a tracheostomy tube so Joey could breathe and an NG tube so he could have nourishment.

And she never even asked God why this had happened.

Where was this strength coming from? Being Jewish had always been a large part of Jodi's life. She had prayed at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, and a rabbi had married Jodi and Kurt. But as Jodi sat by Joey's side, she felt a strength she had never experienced before.

"My strength was coming from somewhere, someone, I was not familiar with — it was coming from Jesus Christ," Jodi says. "I had never read the New Testament before, but now I was hungry to learn what my heart was telling me."

Jodi continued to read and to pray as she and Kurt fought for Joey's health. In spring of the following year, they decided on a surgery that would rebuild his airway, so he might have the chance to breathe without a tube

in his trachea. After the surgery, Joey was on a ventilator for seven days in a coma. On the eighth day, he took his first breath.

"The Lord got me through a very tough time," Jodi says. "I made a promise to God that I would open my heart. I would open my eyes. I would try to listen. I would try to follow. My husband, who had never asked me to convert, was thrilled."

Jodi, Kurt and their two sons, Sam and Joey, found themselves at Mass at St. Vincent Ferrer, the parish where Kurt was raised and went to school.

"The Mass moved me to tears," Jodi says. "Once again, I felt God was speaking to us. By spring we had made the decision to have both boys baptized. God had given me enough strength and courage to pursue learning about Christianity, and I went through the RCIA program."



Kurt and Jodi Kastner

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ANNUAL SVF SPAGHETTI DINNER

January 30, 2015





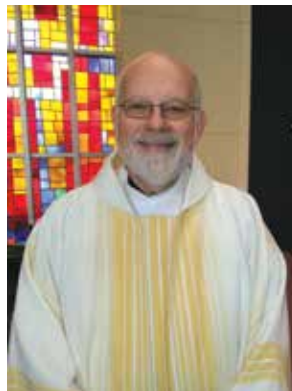
Celebrating the Joy of Christ's Resurrection

Dear Parishioners,

There are many aspects of the Easter celebration that bring joy to the Christian. Not only do we rejoice in Christ's resurrection, as He conquered death, but we also rejoice because of the eternal reward we gain through it. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (654) puts it, "The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life."

This new life that we speak of is a life of abundance and freedom found not only in our current existence, but also in our eternal life in heaven with God. In a beautiful mystery, Christ's resurrection is the source of our own future resurrection. In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul wrote: "For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection" (Rom 6:5).

When Christ overcame the grave, He opened the gates of heaven that had never been opened before. Through His resurrection, we have the opportunity to be united with God in eternal bliss and happiness. What greater grounds for thanksgiving can there be than this Easter hope? We should sing with joy about this promise from God!



But how can we best express that joy? How can we thank God for the greatest gift that we could ever be given? We can join in worship, praising God in our words and deeds, and share the Good News of His victory with our family, friends and neighbors. Most importantly, we respond to His graciousness with a gift of our own — a gift of our very self. When we give our time, talent and treasure to God and to others in service, we make a concrete gesture of thanksgiving in return to the One who is most deserving of our love.

This Easter season, let us live out Jesus' reassurance that "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (Jn 16:33). Despite the challenges of our daily lives and the struggles we may be going through, Christ has won for us eternal victory, giving us a hope for a better tomorrow and peace that will never end. That, my brothers and sisters, is reason to rejoice.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. George Kunkel

The Art and Environment Committee

Bringing the Beauty of Heaven to Earth



When you walk into our parish on the evening of the Easter Vigil, you are moved by the marvelous scenery. Gorgeous, fresh floral arrangements adorn the church, and vibrantly colored streamers hanging from the rafters keep the worship area glowing, reminding all of God's sacred presence. All of this is thanks to a generous group of people who serve as faithful stewards of their time, talent and treasure.

"I really like being part of the Art and Environment Committee because it helps me to pray better and to realize that I am always 'in season' with God," says Mary Joseph, who coordinates the committee along with her husband, Martin. "It does my heart good to see people look at the different ways we have decorated the church. I believe it makes our parishioners more in tune with what their faith means. Every year, families take their picture in front of the Nativity scene we have arranged, and when our parish school children come over each week, they notice what we have changed in the church. That means a lot to me!"

The Art and Environment Committee is a group of about six artistically minded people who work together to bring glory to God by enhancing the aesthetic and liturgical value of our church at St. Vincent Ferrer.

"Our main purpose is to continually change the interior of our church in both subtle and dramatic ways to match the changing liturgical seasons," Mary says.

For example, on Ash Wednesday, committee members drape various items in purple and put up banners in honor of the somber Lenten season of waiting, as well as take away the greenery that was fitting for Ordinary Time. For Holy Thursday, they make an altar of repose for the Blessed Sacrament in an older tabernacle that represents the Agony in the Garden scene from the Gospels. After Mass, they strip the altar and



Heaven continued on next page

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make the church bare, helping all to enter into the silence of Good Friday.

On Easter, a powerful statement is made as they cover the crucifix with a handmade banner of the Risen Christ.

During Advent, Committee members fill the worship area with light purple colors of different shades, and set up a large wreath symbolizing the silent waiting for Christ. The lovely season of Christ's birth is brought to life with natural greenery and red and gold colors, as well as by a long-cherished, hand-carved creche made in Germany accented by a backdrop that was handmade by parishioners.

In addition, members like Mary really enjoy highlighting special occasions in our parish community, such as the opening school Mass, for which they arrange plants and change the color of the altar linens. In honor of Marian feast days, the Committee puts a back drop behind the Blessed Mother's statue to nurture devotion to her in a meaningful way.

"We have such awesome people on the committee!" Mary says. "We have great sewers and handy people. We are a small group, but very mighty!"

For Mary and Martin, deciding to join the Committee was an easy choice.

"When we started having children, we both knew we wanted to be active in some way or another in the school or the church," Mary says. "As a family, we 'heard the call,' and we see it as our commitment to stewardship."

Volunteers are always needed for this flexible and rewarding ministry. For more information, please call Mary Joseph at 513-561-2809.



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Beauty

Spreading Christ's Message: ST. MARK

The shortest and oldest of the four Gospels, Mark draws from oral tradition and a document named “Q,” which contains many of Christ’s sayings. Likely written 25 to 30 years after the Ascension, Mark’s Gospel serves as a source for those of Matthew and Luke. Setting this Gospel apart from the others, women play an integral role in Mark’s Gospel, often understanding with clarity aspects of Christ’s message that the apostles had difficulty comprehending.

Furthermore, Mark portrays Christ’s persecution as a result of His radical challenge to established orders of religion, economy and politics.

While the history of Mark’s Gospel is fairly accessible, many legends have arisen around him that cause difficulty when attempting to explore this saint’s historical persona. Some associate Mark with Simon Peter after the Ascension, and others identify Mark as the young man who ran naked from the Garden of Gethsemane when Christ was arrested. Despite attempts to place Mark in Christ’s physical proximity, the most significant depictions recall his activity as a disciple

in the early Church. Some scholars say that Mark was a companion of Peter’s and was the first Bishop of Alexandria — thus, the first pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. Mark is also said to be “John Mark” of the Acts of the Apostles, a cousin of Barnabas who accompanied Paul on his journeys. However, most do agree on Mark’s martyrdom. Tradition has it that he was dragged through the city streets due to his attempts to turn Alexandrians away from Egyptian gods.

Although Mark’s extraordinary achievements may not seem to align with the lives of the ordinary faithful, his story reminds all Christians of their responsibility to spread the Gospel message. Each believer is summoned to live a life of radical mission — one that, like Christ’s in Mark’s Gospel, defies the status quo in search of greater good and justice. By following Mark’s example, Catholics are empowered to continue their presence as a powerful political and social force, always attempting to mirror the kingdom of God on earth. We celebrate Mark’s feast day on April 25.



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LECTOR MINISTRY *Proclaims the Word of God With Devotion*

As early as a week before he is scheduled to proclaim the Word of God at Mass, Paul Rich begins reviewing his assigned Scriptural excerpt, reading the passage as many as three or four times before he steps up to the ambo. Even after nearly 40 years of serving as lector, Paul still takes each proclamation very seriously, and recognizes the need to understand the Scripture reading before proclaiming it.

“I feel like I’m doing a service to the rest of the congregation, trying to impart the Word of God to them in a way that’s more understandable,” he says. “I go back and read what happened both before and after my reading so I know exactly what it is I’m talking about, and how it applied at the historical time. A lot of the readings are hard to understand, and you have to find out what the purpose of that reading is. I think an effective proclamation makes the Mass more meaningful to the people.”

Paul is just one of about 35 lectors at St. Vincent Ferrer who are dedicated and devoted to the effective proclamation of the Word of God. We are called to live by the Word of God, and a captivating proclamation helps everyone present connect to the Word and live accordingly.

“Anyone can read publicly out of a book, but this is very different,” says Lector

Coordinator Susan Aloisio. “In order to proclaim the Word of God, I think you have to believe what you’re saying. My palms sweat every time I’m walking up to the altar, and sometimes my heart races, because it’s a powerful thing that I’m doing. You’re proclaiming the Word of God. I think it should change you. I want people to look up and listen to the Word of God. Something very special is happening in the Mass right then, and people should know it. There’s a big difference between reading something and proclaiming something.”

If you are interested in becoming a lector or would like to learn more, please contact Susan Aloisio at 513-205-6784, or by email at smaloisio@fuse.net. Lectors are trained on an as-needed basis by Paul Rich. Effective lectors enable all those present — reader and listeners alike — to enter into a deeper participation of the Mass.

“You can read these things as just a bunch of words, but if you put your own interest and your own devotion into the reading, it becomes more meaningful to you and to those that are hearing it, and that’s what’s important to me,” Paul says. “When you have a purpose for it, which in this case is to meaningfully proclaim the Word of God, you are more involved, and you and your fellow parishioners get more out of the Mass.”



Grace DeGregorio places the Book of Gospels on the altar at the beginning of Mass



Lector Mary Foster prayerfully proclaims the Word of God from the ambo

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MASSES

SATURDAY VIGIL: 5:00 P.M.

SUNDAY: 9:00 A.M. AND 11:00 A.M.

CHAPEL (PARISH CENTER):

MON-FRI: 8:30 A.M.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION:

SATURDAY: 3:30-4:30 P.M.

Strength in Christ *continued from front cover*

Sam and Joey began attending St. Vincent Ferrer School. In the spring of 2005, Kurt and Jodi were remarried in the Church, and Jodi joined the Church at Easter.

"The Eucharist is the greatest gift we can receive, and I feel that it is such a gift that I was chosen to receive the Blood and Body of Christ," Jodi says. "They had great leaders in RCIA who were receptive to me asking tough questions. I learned more depth to things like the sacraments and the Creed."

Though Jodi knows that she and her family still have much to learn, as all of us do, she feels a clear call to serve and to be active doing the work of Christ.

"Before my conversion, I didn't put myself forward, but I found strength in Christ and the ability to not be scared to use my gifts," Jodi says. "Who we are is because of what we have been given. The least that I can do is to give all that I can of my time, talent and treasure!"

In addition to working full-time professionally, Jodi serves as the Vice Chair of the SVF Parish Council and Parish Festival. She has also served on the Parish Education Committee and the PTO. Kurt supports Jodi in all of her work as "her arms and legs," and he also serves as an usher.

As a family, the Kastners have rung the bell for the Salvation Army and worked on Habitat for Humanity. They participate in Operation Christmas Child to fill shoeboxes with gifts for children in need.

"Sam and Joey, now 14 and 12, are in Catholic schools, which we think of as a gift of treasure," Jodi says. "Sam is an altar server. They are both champions for Children's Hospital Medical Center, where I sit on the Parent Advisory Board for the NICU, and they have raised money for Children's for approximately 12 years."

During this Easter season, let us remember to lift up in prayer those in RCIA. Like Jodi, they are in the midst of a conversion to the Church — like all of us, they are striving to open their hearts to God, who gives us the strength to serve in His name.

"God speaks to us all and if we are willing to listen, to open up our hearts and our minds, the possibilities that Christ will bring you in His name are without limits," Jodi says. "If I could say anything to our candidates and catechumens, I would point to Proverbs 3:5-6, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him and He shall make your paths straight.'"