

THE MUSTARD SEED

A NEWSLETTER FROM ST. THOMAS AQUINAS PARISH

May 2022

Synod 2021-2023

Parishioners convene to discuss growing the Church in faith and love

by Richard Sherlock

Our parish has just started the listening process for the parishes in our Diocese, a process happening worldwide, leading up to the Synod of bishops in Rome in 2023. At St. Thomas Aquinas, there have been three synod meetings – two at St. Thomas Aquinas, and one at the Newman Center. Since the writing of this article, there may be another meeting at St. Thomas Aquinas.

These meetings mark the beginning of a process of listening to Catholic people worldwide. According to the preparatory document from the Vatican, participants are to reflect on how the Church can “live communion, achieve participation, and open up to the mission” of our faith. Both parish listening sessions yielded some questions to consider. For example, how does each one of us understand what happens when we celebrate the Sacrament of the Eucharist? How does each one of us pursue ongoing adult catechesis?

The process in our Diocese began on October 17 with mass in the Cathedral celebrated by Bishop Oscar Solis. In his homily at the mass Bishop Solis reminded us that these parish listening sessions have no agenda and they are not “planning” meetings. The synod sessions

“The Synod sessions are truly a gathering where ordinary Catholics ... are listening to each other, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit...”



are truly a gathering where ordinary Catholics, not priests or nuns or experts are listening to each other, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit to express our concerns and give our inspired advice for how the Church can grow in faith and love and fulfill its mission in the third millennium of its founding.

Of course, the Church is not a democracy. We do not elect our priests, bishops, cardinals or the pope. But just as this process exemplifies, good leaders listen to the concerns, problems and issues faced by those they lead. This is an enormously important process that is just beginning.

From the parish meetings a report will be sent to the Diocese. Then, all dioceses throughout America will send their reports to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops which will report to the Vatican.

The groundwork for this process was laid, I believe, in the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. This document describes first the “mystery” of the Church with Christ at its head. But then, before discussing the hierarchy, it has a large section discussing the Church as the people of God. Then, the episcopal organization is discussed.

This focus on the Church as the people of God is a restatement of a beautiful encyclical from Pope Pius XII in 1943 *Mystici Corporis Christi* in which he says, “Just as in the human body all parts must work together for the health of the body. So too must all parts of the “body of Christ” work together.

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We Celebrate!

Caitlin & Matthew Radovan

by Amy Gomez

The genius of the design of the human family and village: where humans begin to blossom to their full potential, where parents are our first teachers – we remember these things when we celebrate the milestones of our beautiful children. Over this spring and summer, the Tran-Radovan family and our community have some milestones to celebrate! For this interview, son Matthew was away at Stanford and dad Michael was on a business trip in Costa Rica, but I was able to interview mother Caroline and daughter Caitlin about their truly extraordinary achievements.

“Caitlin’s placement in the top 1% of the nation opens many options for college. Caitlin plans to eventually attend medical school and become a neurosurgeon.”

Caitlin, now sixteen and a junior at Ridgeline High School in Millville, recently received a PSAT score that places her in the top 1% of the nation for which she is recognized as a National Merit Scholarship Semi-finalist. Caitlin will be applying to become a National Merit Finalist, which will be announced in the spring of 2023.

The National Merit Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that began in 1955. Approximately 1.5 million high school students enter the program each year. Caitlin’s placement in the top 1% of the nation opens many options for college. Caitlin plans to eventually attend medical school and become a neurosurgeon.

Not only is Caitlin, like her brother, globally recognized as a member of the Johns Hopkin study of exceptional talent (SET), Caitlin at the age of fifteen received a USU Presidential Scholarship for \$32,000.00. Caitlin’s mom Caroline says, “We didn’t want Caitlin to miss her high school experience, so Caitlin spends time in the morning taking Calculus II & Principles of Chemistry II at USU, and then in the afternoon she attends Ridgeline High School where she is a junior.

Caitlin’s mom Caroline says, “I am so happy about both Caitlin’s and her older brother Matthew’s academic success, but more importantly, I am really proud that in elementary, middle and high school at parent/teacher conferences, at least one teacher would comment how they were very smart, but also very humble and kind, and always willing to help other students - really, just normal kids.”



Matthew and Caitlin Tran-Radovan mark milestones in truly extraordinary academic achievement and work experience.

Matthew, now twenty-one, also attended Ridgeline High School in Millville while attending USU, and will be graduating from Stanford University this June as a Terman Scholar with a Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science with an Artificial Intelligence track. This spring, Matthew was invited by his Stanford professor to continue doing research with the professor to get his PhD at Stanford. However, Matthew, for now, will pursue his Masters degree in Computer Science with an AI Track at Stanford.

The Frederick E. Terman award is for Scholastic Achievement in Engineering, and is presented to the top 30 students of each year’s undergraduate senior engineering class. For the Terman award ceremony, Matthew has chosen two teachers for special recognition: His AP Calculus and AP Statistics teacher from Ridgeline High School, Mrs. Laura Peterson, and Stanford Professor of Radiology from Stanford School of Medicine, Dr. Brian Rutt who Matthew is working with on an Artificial Intelligence project in medicine and imaging.

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With tremendous community pride, we celebrate with the Tran-Radovan family who will all be with Matthew at his graduation at Stanford University in California this summer. A quote from the New York Times best-selling author and Catholic, Matthew Kelly comes to mind – “As Catholics, the one thing we do more than anything else is celebrate! We celebrate life, love and virtue... we celebrate the genius of the Catholic family... our common journey and our own individual journeys. We celebrate truth, beauty and goodness wherever they are to be found and honor them in our everyday lives.”



Radiate Christ Through Our Lives: A Lenten Retreat for Women

by Linda Bradak

Glad to come together as a Christian community to celebrate Lent together, more than 40 women of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish attended a Lenten Retreat whose theme was *“Radiate Christ Through Our Lives.”* After two years of pandemic-imposed separation, Nicole Held, Kathy Serafini, Lisa Thompson, Cindy Hill, and Linda Bradak offered the retreat as a response to our need for a spiritual “feast” of community, reflection and prayer.



(l-r) Presenters
Lisa Thompson and
Kathy Serafini

After breakfast, we began with prayer, followed by song. Next, Fr. Joseph Minuth spoke on aspects of the significance and meaning of Lent. He spoke of early Saints of the Church including St. Francis, whose task was the restoration first of a physical church building fallen into disrepair and then, the rebuilding of the Christian community as we are indeed the Body of Christ. Fr. Joseph challenged us to cleanse ourselves through fasting,

prayer, and alms-giving, in preparation for God’s supreme gift of the Resurrection of His Son which we celebrate at Lent’s conclusion. Then, we all read a retreat prayer together.

“ We were reminded that each of us is a child of God; Christ is our light; our light lets us see one another; we can share our light with someone else, and this makes more light to find our way in the darkness.”

I presented next with a message about sharing our light; that light is stronger than darkness; and to try fasting from negativity. We were all invited to participate with one small candle in the darkness. Participants then lit one another’s candles until the whole room was ablaze! We were reminded that each of us is a child of God, that Christ is our Light, our light let us see one another, we could give someone our light and find our way in the darkness. The message about fasting was that it can mean more than refraining from chocolate. For example, “fasting” from negativity and judgment allows us to feel closer to Jesus. When we live more like Him, our entire life becomes our prayer, our gift back to God, who gave us the gift of our life and life eternal with his Resurrection.



After reading another prayer together, Maggie Miller spoke about sin, which distances us from God. She discussed different levels of sin, and reminded us that God never leaves us. But, when we choose to sin, we are turning away from Him, because sin can lead to more of the same, shame and unworthiness, and we withdraw from His light. The Sacrament of Reconciliation that comes with our confession and penance allows us to begin again in God’s grace and to rejoin fully the community of Christians. Maggie reminded us of the importance of praying for humanity: ourselves, the world and the souls in purgatory.

Following each speaker’s presentation, participants were asked to reflect on what they had heard. A representative from each table stood and spoke about insights drawn by the group.



Among them were these ideas:

- I need to take more time to go deeper, turning off electronic devices and social media.
- I realize I need the support and prayers of others in times of trouble, and I shall ask for them.
- I can fast from distractions. It is my choice.
- God wants me to come closer to Him and will help me to balance the worldly and the spiritual when I ask for His help and share myself and my time with other like-minded souls.
- The Sacraments are the way. Reconciliation is always available to us for renewal.

Following our singing and prayers, the group proceeded in silence to the Sanctuary to sit for a time with Jesus Himself, the Sanctified Host, followed by a benediction before departure. Participants left the retreat with feelings of solemnity and joy. We felt emptied of busyness and loneliness, filled with peace and gratitude for the extraordinary gift which is Christian community. We reflected the words of a beloved hymn, “This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad.”



Such a Waste of Time

by Wallace Pride



It was in February and March of 2021 that my wife and I received our COVID vaccinations. Then on August 19th, we learned that a great-grandchild, who visits quite often, was ill with COVID. We decided we should be tested because my wife wasn't feeling well, and I had a bad cough. We were tested on August 21 and had the results before the next of the day – we both tested positive and we were to isolate for 10 days.

My wife felt ill for about 3 days and then took care of me. She was worried about me and called our regular physician, who prescribed some pills and cough syrup. After a week, she called again and I was prescribed two antibiotics which I was to take for the next 5 days. There was no improvement, in fact the night fevers, which soaked my pillow and sheets and the cough continued for the next 5 nights. After a really fitful night, my wife decided I needed to go to the Emergency Department.

So from the end of August to the 2nd week in October, I suffered COVID-induced pneumonia. For the last week of September and the 1st week of October, I stayed in bed with fevers and such. Then I began spending time in my recliner when not in bed. I did some walking. During the first part of the second walk, I managed to kick something which landed between the 2nd and 3rd toes of my right foot. I do think I might have broken something. It still bothers me.

At one point, I stood up from my recliner and started a

"If I hadn't gotten those shots in February and March, COVID might have taken me in September."

short walk. I have no idea how, but I managed to trip. I fell forward, landing on my hands and knees while knocking over a potted plant in a 2-3 gallon pot. The dirt spilled across the rug and the furnace duct vent. My wife could not lift me and had to call her son for help to get me back on

my feet and into my recliner. Using either a walker or cane, I did manage to walk a short distance which extended in length over the next few weeks.

I kept improving along with losing about 20 pounds of weight, and in the last weeks of my "confinement", I wanted to either draw a picture or write something. In the past, I have often gotten a good idea for a story from what I have drawn and a good idea for a picture from something I have written.

Most of the last 2 weeks, I say in my recliner looking out the sliding glass door leading the deck and backyard, watching rain fall and the wind moving the leaves, which turned from green to yellow before falling to the long, long unmowed lawn. However, every day of those weeks, both a sketch pad and a writing pad were at the ready. Both were just a big waste of time.

I've heard COVID often affects a person's taste. It did mine for a time. I'm not sure but I don't think I'm hearing as well as I did in August and I think the sight in my right eye has made a small change. I'm now wondering if COVID has affected my imagination.

I returned to the doctor on October 11th. After some general discussion, he took a blood sample. A day or two later he called with the results. He was amazed. I had a count of 50,000 COVID antibodies in my system. He said, "I've never seen that high a count." The pharmacist said with a smile on his face, "You're impervious to anything."

So I may have suffered for a month, and perhaps lost my imagination, but I am well protected from COVID. If I hadn't gotten those shots in February and March, COVID might have taken me in September.

I will always think of those shots like I think of that heavy, awkward piece of clothing I was required to wear when I was in the army – my helmet.

The situation reminds me of the two combat capable soldiers. One wore his helmet; the other wouldn't if an officer wasn't present. The two were in a foxhole, shooting at an unseen enemy. The one, as usual, wore his helmet. The other, since no officer was present, didn't. Two rounds came flying toward them. One hit the helmet, leaving the wearer a life-long ringing in his ears. The other just left his brains splattered on the side of the foxhole.

The moral to this story – if you are a capable soldier, wear your helmet of those first vaccinations in the battle with our unseen enemy – COVID.



Join the Interfaith Choir Tour to Italy This Summer!

In June, Randy and Darlene Jensen are going to Italy with an Interfaith Choir Tour to sing in cathedrals and villages all over Italy. Many friends and spouses (who don't sing) are also tagging along to tour the many holy places they will visit, enjoy the food and wine, art and architecture, and the many other attractions across Italy. If you are interested in reserving a spot with the Interfaith Choir Tour to Italy, you will be in the best of company!

Contact Randy Jensen to join the tour!



“The idea for the Interfaith Choir Tour to Italy came during COVID when we all needed something to look forward to...”
-Randy Jensen



A Letter From Our Clergy

by Father Robin Cruz

Pope Francis in his message to the city and to the world also known as **Urbi Et Orbi** Easter message 2022 he says, “let us allow peace to enter into our lives, our homes, our countries...”

First of all, we know

that for two years or more we have been suffering from the hard toils of the Pandemic. Secondly, there is an absence of peace in the whole world. Today we all know the on-going conflict and war in Ukraine against Russia. Thirdly, there are some parts of the world that suffer a lot because of divisiveness, selfishness and greed of some people. As a result, our poorest among the poor are the ones greatly affected by this kind of system happening globally. As we look around, we see people who are homeless and moreover struggle from famine. They are sad issues and problems that arise in our world today. These instances seemingly do not coincide with our Easter celebration. Brothers and sisters, we do not lose hope in this Easter season. The Latin words “**Christus vincit**” which means “**Christ conquers**” resonate in the whole world especially during this season. He conquered suffering, sin and death. We believe that one day Christ our Redeemer will bring about peace in our world. He will put an end to war and conflicts. Families will be reunited to one another. Love and peace will reign in the heart of all peoples. Christ is the Prince of Peace. He

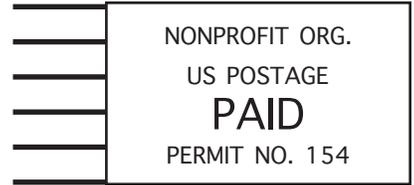
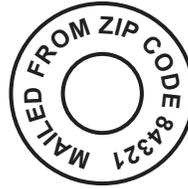
brings peace and love to all. The Church on her part is quick to respond to the needs of the people. Thanks to our generous benefactors and donors who shared their time, talent, and treasure to reach out to people who are in need through our Catholic charities. We are so grateful to them that during these times of crises we see bits of hope and love reverberating in our community. My personal take on what is happening around as a priest is to continue to pray for peace especially in Ukraine. Every day in the mass that I celebrate I pray for world peace. My devotion to Mama Mary, (**Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary**) I pray the rosary every day and I offer it for the people that they may have a conversion of heart. In Greek, it is called “**metanoia**” which literally means “**change of mind**” that people may seek the good in their everyday life. We can only achieve this if we adhere to the examples of Christ on how to love unconditionally. The Church has been constantly reminding us about the greatest commandment that is, to love God above all and to love your neighbor as yourself. All we need to do is to respond and abide by her teachings. Let us unite together in love as a family of God. Therefore, to achieve peace in our lives, in our homes, and in our countries is not far beyond reach. If we strive to live Christ’s teachings every day, for sure we will be able to achieve it. Let us continue to hope and pray that Christ may guide us in our journey. Let us ask Mama Mary to accompany us every day to protect us under her maternal care. We can bring about peace in our world today as the beautiful song reminds us, “let there be peace on earth. And let in begin with me.”

Easter Blessings to All!





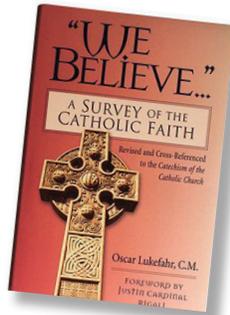
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We are the Easter People!

As our Christian challenge of Pentecost approaches in the wake of our resplendent Easter joy, and the many who received their Sacraments, we may find it difficult to describe or explain our joy and our Catholic beliefs to others. One Adult Confirmation student put it like this, “It’s like a religious experience.



There are no words, just an overwhelming urge to share the joy...” One great source for sharing the joy that is recommended by our RCIA team, and many teachers is a little paperback called, “We Believe”... *A Survey of the Catholic Faith*, by Oscar Lukefahr, CM. In his book, Lukefahr expresses Catholic belief using simple, beautiful language that makes it clear and memorable. Throughout this book that works like an easy-to-use guide, but that also tells a story, Lukefahr sheds light on what Peter and the Apostles understood: “that Jesus enters the lives of His followers through the Sacraments.” The reader is left with a clear and deep understanding of each part of our *Credo* and the mysteries, a profound gratitude for the Apostolic succession and tradition..., and, a simple, memorable way to share this with someone else! Each passage is loaded



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with a list of the Sacred Scripture and CCC passages it is based on. Archbishop of Philadelphia, Justin Cardinal Rigali also recommends this book “...to parents, teachers, catechists, to Catholics wishing to deepen their knowledge of faith, and to all earnest seekers of the truth.”