



Front the Heart

A Newsletter ♦ Published by Sacred Heart Parish ♦ Main Street South, P.O. Box 686 ♦ Southbury, CT 06488

A New Beginning

On May 30, 1998 at 11:30 a.m. in St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford, deacon Philip Sharkey will embark on a new beginning when he is ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, becoming the first Sacred Heart parishioner to do so in the parish's 114-year history.

Phil's ordination will complete a quest that began when he was a child. Growing up in the Derby/Ansonia area, Phil always knew that he wanted to become a priest. However, he didn't pursue that goal initially, and opted for a more conventional life: meeting a wonderful girl, getting married, and raising two boys. Phil and his late wife, Jan, were the first couple married in the then-brand-new St. Margaret Mary Church in Shelton, and he and his family moved to Southbury in 1974. Phil did well in his job at Stop & Shop, opening the first Connecticut store in Shelton and then managing the Newtown store. But when he won a trip to Rome in a store contest in 1975, Phil's yearnings for the priesthood were rekindled.

On New Year's Day in St. Peter's Square, as Pope Paul VI declared 1975 a Holy Year and blessed the medal Phil was wearing, Phil felt a special calling to the diaconate. When he and Jan returned home, he began evening studies at St. Thomas Seminary in Bloomfield while raising his family and advancing at

work. Phil was ordained as a permanent deacon in 1978 after the requisite three years of study, and was granted the power to preach, baptize, marry and perform funeral committals. Phil and Jan were veritable cornerstones of Sacred Heart Parish as it grew in size and faith, and some of us remember fondly Phil's "from the heart" homilies. With the arrival of Father Flynn, the Sharkeys were instrumental assistants in the spiritual growth of the parish and later on in the development of our new church facility.

Unfortunately, tragedy struck. Jan became terminally ill, and Phil remained con-

stantly at her side. She told him, as she planned for her funeral, that she knew he would become a priest. After her death in September 1992, Phil felt a "spark" and approached the vocation director of the archdiocese. He advised Phil to wait a year to think it over. He took courses at Holy Apostles Seminary in Cromwell, and then met one-on-one with

Father Philip J. Sharkey

Archbishop Daniel Cronin. They agreed that Phil should pursue his vocation. He entered the Second or Delayed Vocational Seminary in Weston, Mass., created in 1964 by the late Cardinal Cushing. Phil will complete his studies on May 4, receiving his Masters of Divinity.

Phil has served as a weekend assistant in parishes in Massachusetts and Connecticut throughout his studies, and served in local parishes during the summer, most recently at St. John of the Cross in Middlebury under Father Jack Regan. He is eagerly looking forward to becoming a parish priest, as he "loves being with and bringing Christ to people."

Phil will be assigned to his new parish on the day of his ordination, and will report there on June 15. Regardless of where he is assigned, he'll retain his residence in Southbury, which he will always call home.

Phil feels that the encouragement of Sacred Heart parishioners, especially Father Flynn, and the support of the Knights of Columbus have

(continued on page 2)

A Vision of Mary

“. . . a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Based on this description from Revelation 12:1, which does not identify the woman but which Biblical scholars have long regarded as a reference to Mary, artists have put face and form to the young maiden who gave birth to our Savior. The sculptor who fashioned Sacred Heart’s statue of the Blessed Mother, however, presented us with a different vision of Mary.

In 1986, when plans for the church’s expansion were being made, Father Richard Vosko, a liturgical-design consultant, was hired to assist and educate us in this process. One of his tasks was to advise the Liturgical Arts Committee in selecting furnishings and provide a listing of various artisans. Father Flynn met with several sculptors to discuss a rendering of the Blessed Mother. Each was asked to create an artistic rendering followed by a clay model. The one requirement he set forth was that the model of Mary for possible commissioning be represented as pregnant.

Candace Knapp of Milford, Connecticut, was among the sculptors whom Father Flynn interviewed. After fashioning a small version of her statue and showing it to Father Flynn along with a piece of South American rosewood that she thought would be the perfect medium for her creation, Candace was given the go-ahead to sculpt the statue of Mary that now stands in the back of our church, adjacent to the first station of the cross—for without Mary’s unconditional “yes,” the cross would never represent salvation.

Obviously, since Candace was working in wood, she could not fashion Mary as conventionally clad in blue or white garments, nor could she make her skin alabaster white, as most individuals tend to picture her. Since no details about Mary’s physical person are given in the New Testament, you might say she is shrouded in mystery, which is what Candace achieved by carving her in wood. Moreover, Mary came from a part of the world where people had darker complexions than the conventional statues portray, and she probably wore dark-colored clothes—perhaps gray or brown—that weren’t easily soiled by the desert sands. To us, Mary is sweetness, kindness, softness. How appropriate then that the statue is fashioned out of rosewood, which has a wonderful silky texture. Go up to the Marian shrine sometime, and run your hand over the statue. You’ll realize that Candace chose an excellent medium to capture Mary’s spirit.

Without Jesus, Mary would have no place in scripture, so it is most fitting that Father Flynn requested a pregnant Mary. And, if you read beyond Revelation 12:1 to the next verse, you’ll find the words, “She was with child. . . .” In essence, then, Candace has completed the biblical picture for us with her unique rendering of Mary, at whose feet a votive candle burns.

Geraldine C. Fox

Phil Sharkey

(continued from cover)

contributed to his spiritual quest. But he—and all of us who knew Jan—know that she has guided him each step of the way.

Phil’s children, grandchildren, family members, friends, former co-workers and parishioners will all gather in Hartford on May 30 to celebrate his achievement, and Phil will celebrate his first Mass at Sacred Heart Church on May 31 at 2:00

p.m. But I’m certain that it will be Jan’s presence that will be most felt by Phil and all who knew her and love them both.

Rich Stephens



A New Beginning in Faith

Also embarking on a new beginning this month are the participants in Sacred Heart's Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). Six RCIA candidates—Ann Antone, Barbara Artuso, Michael Brown, Cindy Harris, George Pavlonnis and Nicol Walters—were welcomed into the Catholic faith at the Easter Vigil. I had a chance to talk with most of the RCIA candidates at a recent meeting and got an insider's perspective on the program.

The revamped RCIA was instituted in Sacred Heart 14 years ago. The lay members of the RCIA team, under the guidance of Father Flynn, are responsible for implementing the teaching process. Candidates and their sponsors have been meeting weekly since October. Considering the extensive preparations, it's no surprise that most of the RCIA candidates thought the program was very thorough, even those who were brought up in the faith and had a basic knowledge of Catholic teachings. Even the "old-time Catholics" who participated as sponsors for the RCIA candidates took much away from the process.

The weekly meetings included much discussion time, and the candidates noted that the wide-ranging discussions answered all questions. Not one area of instruction was glossed over, the candidates reported, noting that just about any question was discussed, even when it had little bearing on the lesson at hand.

Undaunted by the scope of the program, a few of the more serious students in the group said that they

were game for even more material, and most of the candidates expressed interest in continuing in their education as Catholics. The idea of following up the RCIA program with a "post-grad" course appealed to most of the candidates.

Palma and Mary Ellen McQuail.

The group even managed to turn the perhaps uncomfortable public aspects of the process into a learning experience. RCIA candidates are dismissed from Mass after the Prayer of the Faithful, and are re-

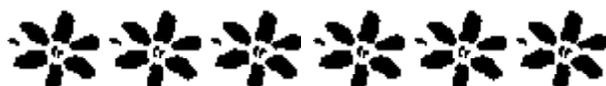
RCIA candidates welcomed into the Sacred Heart faith community at the Easter Vigil (from left): George Pavlonnis, Cindy Harris, Nicol Walters, Barbara Artuso, Michael Brown, and Ann Antone.

The group was unanimous in its praise for the hands-on teaching of Father Flynn and the sincerity of their sponsors. In fact, most of the candidates were willing to continue to participate in the program as sponsors. The sponsor's role is a critical and time-consuming one. In addition to attending weekly meetings with candidates and accompanying them to Mass (as well as attending Mass on their own), sponsors provide instruction and constant support. Sacred Heart's RCIA lay team includes leader Linda Groves and sponsors Paul Donnelly, Sherry Rancourt, Sue

quired to stand in front of the congregation for the Scrutinies. While no one likes being the center of attention (politicians excepted), with time and God's help, the group felt more at ease with the attention.

It is a credit to the parish, and especially to Father Flynn, that RCIA continues to be well-received both by the candidates and their sponsors. All we can pray for is that more volunteers and our dedicated clergy will perpetuate the quality of the program. We as a congregation should seek out these new parishioners for a personal welcome.

Ernest E. Swanberg



C r o s s w i n d s

New Beginnings

I've always felt that there exist two very distinctive times in the year when the human spirit is almost forced to think about "new beginnings." Both are very obvious but in different ways.

As we begin a new year on January 1, most of us have made some resolutions after reflecting upon the events of the past 365 days. There's something exciting about starting over with a clean slate, and that new-found hopefulness gives us an almost powerful sense that the new year will be different and better.

Anyone who has ever felt the satisfaction of once again taking charge of his or her life will know exactly what I mean.

We resolve to once again take control of our lives and vow that we won't fall prey to old habits—habits and routines that we wind up regretting when we realize that we allowed ourselves to slide into them for yet another day. Unfortunately, for most of us our resolutions are short-lived: old habits die hard, and all too soon become distant memories rather than daily efforts at starting over.

The other specific time that clamors for our attention is Spring. It seems that the older we get, the more we long for the arrival of Spring, with its new life, the promise of rebirth, and the resurgence of hope that we associate with the light of the sun and longer days. Spring brings with it a warmth that greens what has been frozen and barren and reminds us of the almost miraculous ability of nature to resurrect itself from the dead of winter into a season that bursts and erupts everywhere we look.

Spring is the Easter of our lives, and it assaults our senses and our spirits in ways so different from New Year's Day. I see it as the spiritual reminder that sec-

ond, third or fourth chances at new beginnings are not only possible—they are capable of happening. The human spirit, like the spirit of nature, cannot be overcome by the forces that surround us. Is it any wonder that the Resurrection coincides with Spring? Even if the skeptic should doubt the power of God to bring the dead to life in the power of resurrection, that same individual cannot help but wonder what incredible force of nature brings new life out of dormant death.

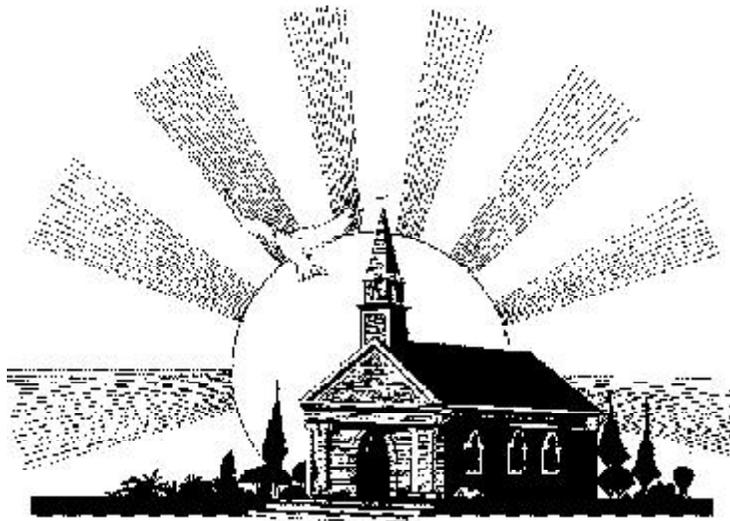
We marked another new beginning on March 21. And even if some unexpected act of nature might

interrupt what we have come to associate with the advent of Spring, we know that it will happen. But there is a flip side to all of this: "new beginnings" don't simply revolve around distinct times of the year like New Year's Day or the first day of Spring. New beginnings happen every day, and new opportunities exist for self-actualization and renewed personal em-

powerment. With the dawn of each new day we share in the power of resurrection and the hope that it offers to each of us who need only see each day for what it is: a new beginning to be what we have yet to become, to do what we have been afraid to attempt, to change what we might have resigned ourselves into thinking impossible—to become what the power of God's love enables us to be: a new creation.

Despite being subjected to the deadly forces of routine and apathy, the human spirit is charged by hope that enables us to resurrect ourselves time and time again, so as to experience innumerable new beginnings.

Fr. Mark Flynn



Are You Socially Concerned?

One of the many ways in which Sacred Heart reaches out to the larger community is through the Social Concerns Committee. The purpose of the committee is three-fold: to share with the parish the social teachings of the Church; to provide opportunities for parishioners to respond to the needs of the community; and to advocate for public policies and laws that reflect Christian values and protect human life and dignity.

The U.S. Conference of Bishops recently addressed the need for groups like the Social Concerns Committee: "We need to build local communities of faith where our social teaching is central, not fringe; where social ministry is integral, not optional; where it is the work of every believer, not just the mission of a few committed people and committees."

Here are a few examples of how the group has helped the Southbury community:

- Our calendar begins in September with a bike-a-thon to benefit the town's Fuel Bank. This activity, planned with the Southbury Interfaith Social Concerns Committee, raised more than \$8,000 and attracted more than 100 riders last year.
- The Mass of the Anointing of the Sick and Elderly is held in the fall, and is followed by a luncheon. Roughly 250 people attended the Mass last year, and most stayed for the luncheon.
- Holiday food collections are held at Thanksgiving and Easter to benefit Southbury Food Aid. We've collected more than 400 bags of food, and will hold an-

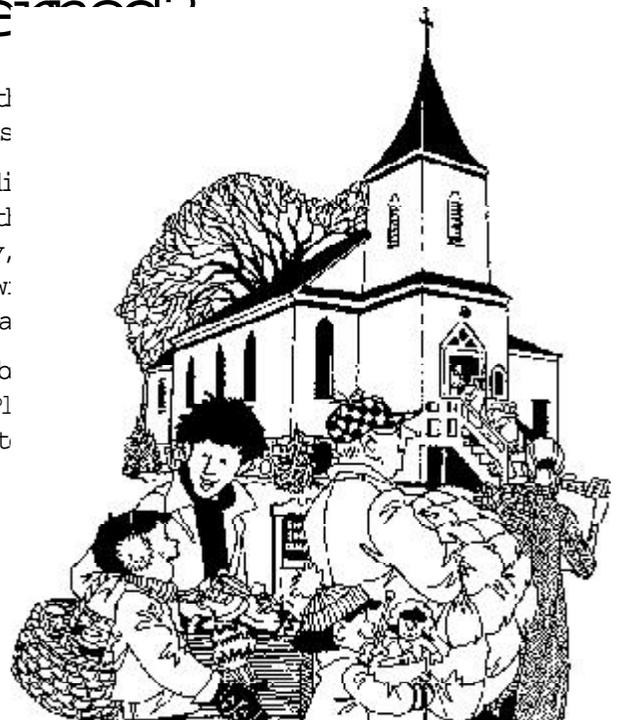
other collection over the summer if the need arises.

- A Thanksgiving Day dinner, planned with all the churches in Southbury, provided 125 people with a delicious holiday meal.
- In January, we held a baby shower for Carolyn's Pl, a crisis pregnancy center in Waterbury.
- Also in January, we organized a postcard campaign to ask Senators Dodd and Lieberman to vote for a ban on partial birth abortion.

• With assistance from the Knights of Columbus, adoration of the Eucharist and a prayer service for Respect for Life was held in October and January, and earlier this month.

- We are working with the Education Committee to offer a program on the encyclical "Evangelium Vitae" (the Gospel of Life) to be held this month.

The group also organizes year-round projects. Among them is Covenant-to-Care, which provides Christmas and birthday gifts as well as Easter baskets to the children of our "adopted" social worker. We meet the needs of the social worker's clients throughout the year, providing items such as beds, baby supplies, new clothes and camp scholarships. Twice a month, sandwiches are made for the St. Vincent de Paul Shelter in Waterbury. The Committee also directs Neighbors Helping Neighbors, which provides a variety of outreach services. Meals



have been provided to several families during a crisis, those in need have been transported to medical appointments and to church, and yard work has been completed.

Pope Paul VI has called all members of the Church to social action: "It is not enough to recall principles, state denunciations; for these words will lack real weight unless they are accompanied for each individual by a livelier awareness of personal responsibility and by effective action."

The Social Concerns Committee invites you to participate in any or all of our activities. Our meetings are held on the second Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m., and anyone who would like to learn more about what we do is welcome to join us. For more information, contact Bernie McGarry, the committee's chairman, at 264-9028.

Participate. Be Active. Share your faith.

Bernadette McGarry

Spotlight on Youth

Life After Confirmation

After my confirmation last May, Sacred Heart Church made clear that the responsibility to continue living my Catholic faith was mine and mine alone. In theory (though not yet always in actuality), my parents no longer control my religious activities. I have chosen on my own to continue practicing my faith.

Since my confirmation, I have begun reading at Mass and am continuing as an altar server. I do these things of my own will. Why, do you ask? Well, among other reasons, I feel it is my re-

sponsibility, not my parents', to make sure that I come to church and actively participate in the Mass. God, through the Church, now feels that I am fully capable of making important decisions as an adult, so I am trying not to disappoint Him. Simply put, coming to church is the right thing for me to do.

I became a reader for two reasons. First, public speaking is definitely a career skill that I will need later on in life. Therefore, it makes sense for me to start early and get used to speaking in front of large crowds. A second factor is

that being a reader gives me the feeling that I am coming closer to the teachings of the Church. Being behind the lectern and reading for my parish instills in me a feeling of importance and honor. It has also helped me learn more about my religion, one of the most important responsibilities I have acquired from my confirmation.

Joseph Ackley



Is Limbo Out?

"Limbo is out," stated my oldest son, Tommy, one evening before dinner. Fresh from a senior retreat supervised by the Jesuits, Tommy was filled with the Holy Spirit (for how long, only God knew).

The hour before dinner was the best time for family gatherings, and our apartment was blessed with a huge working fireplace that was always lit. It was not unusual for the family to assemble, freely exchange ideas and, of course, ask me for money.

"Limbo is out?" inquired Paul innocently, relying on his father to act as imprimatur. I had to say something. Where was a priest when you needed one?

"What do you know about Limbo?" I asked Tommy.

Answering my own question I continued, "Limbo is a place where unbaptized infants will find peace for eternity but without entering the kingdom of heaven. The Church has long maintained the practice of infant

baptism, or giving grace to a child, so that the child would be able to be in the presence of God." (I remember thanking the good nuns for making me memorize the Baltimore Catechism.)

Continuing, I said, "You know now that we need baptism for our

salvation, and that immersion in water, the forgiveness of our sins, and the subsequent new birth in the Holy Spirit all are essential in the rite."

"You guys remember your baptisms, right?" I asked sarcastically.

"No," they replied in unison.

"Well, I do, and frankly, they were wonderful," I replied. "Limbo is not out. I don't really know if it was ever 'in,' but I do have a personal faith in the hope that God will show His mercy to those children who die without baptism. However, I decided I'd rather not test my faith, and that is why you were baptized within weeks of your births."

"Making us members of the church," added Paul.

"With all the responsibilities," said Tommy, "but that's not so bad, when you consider the alternative to salvation."

It was nice to hear that Tommy was so positively affected by his newly acquired Jesuit wisdom, although I knew in my heart that Holy Orders was one sacrament that he would never receive.

In the end, I was very pleased with the way that I answered Paul's question—but even more delighted that no one asked me for money.

Dennis McLaughlin



Heavenly Humor

Between moments of dispensing wisdom, early religious leaders also learned software programming. One day, a great contest was held to test their skills. After five days of fierce competition, only two leaders remained for the last day's event: Jesus and Mohammed.

The judge described the software application both were required to create for the final test and gave the signal to start writing code. The two contestants feverishly typed away at their keyboards. Routines, classes, applets and applications flew by on their screens at incredible speeds. Windows, dialog boxes and other

intricate graphics began taking shape on their monitors. The clock showed that the contest would soon be finished.

Suddenly, a bolt of lightning flashed and the power went out for a moment. As the power returned, the clock showed the competition was over. The judge asked the two contestants to reveal their finished products. Mohammed angrily said



“I’d lost all of his work in power outage. The judge pointed to the other competitor. Jesus smiled, clicked his mouse and a dazzling application appeared on the screen. After just a few moments, the judge was clearly impressed and declared Jesus the winner. When asked to comment on his decision, the judge pointed out the unique characteristic that set the winner apart from all the others: *Jesus saves!*”

*Contributed by
John Denisevich*

Ask Father Flynn

Q *Does the Church still perform exorcisms?*

A I was surprised, indeed astounded, that this question would be asked in this day and age. That surprise probably is due in part to my belief that as a culture and as individuals, most of us have misplaced our sense of personal sin, and therefore have dismissed the fact that the presence of evil and the personification of the devil exist today. Sadly, evil exists and is thriving—in fact, sin permeates our lives and culture more than ever before. Individuals have simply turned their backs to sin and rationalized their actions so as to feel guilt-free. Their mantra seems to be “Everybody is doing it. So why can’t I?” Simply read the headlines in any daily newspaper to know that evil continues and the devil is on the prowl for any vessel willing to welcome his presence.

The manifestation of evil demonstrated by demonic possession is rarely publicized. How-

ever, there continue to be situations into which the Church is called to perform an exorcism, a term that refers to the practice and ritual in which demons or evil spirits are expelled from persons or things. Exorcism rites are performed by the Archdiocesan Exorcist, a priest who has been appointed and approved by the Archbishop for this distinct purpose (Canon 1172). An exorcism is never taken lightly, and is performed only after a thorough investigation and documentation identify the situation as one involving authentic demonic possession.

There have indeed been documented cases within Connecticut that required exorcisms and which later found their way into the public forum. However, for the most part, demonic possessions and rites of exorcism have primarily remained unreported and are confined to what we would call a “sealed and private” arena.

If you have a question about your faith, send it to the Communications Committee in care of the rectory and watch for the answer in a future newsletter.

Another New Beginning

Since the December 1993 issue of *From the Heart*, Geraldine C. Fox has done an excellent job as our editor. Beginning with this issue, Geraldine will embark upon her own "new beginning:" a new home in Naples, Florida, where she and her husband Jack have relocated. One of

Geraldine Fox

Geraldine's last acts as editor was to find us a fine replacement for herself.

Beginning with this issue, we welcome Sue Follett as our editor. Sue is a Sacred Heart parishioner, and she and her family live in Newtown. She has been an editor for seven years, at publishing companies in Washington, D.C. and Redding.

On behalf of the staff of *From the Heart* and the parish, I want to wish Geraldine God's blessings in her new home, and thank her for her selfless service to our committee.

Katherine Pavone, Managing Editor

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