



Front the Heart

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

Our Parish Council

Each year our awareness of the Parish Council is raised with the election of new members. The process gets much attention: candidates are screened, voting takes place, and winners are announced. For most parishioners, their dealings with the Parish Council are over. The elections are over: now what? Is anyone curious about this body of believers and doers? What is it that they do? I asked this question at a staff meeting of *From the Heart* and was assigned to write an article answering these questions. (I know silence is golden—and that the route to gold will never be mine.)

Formation of parish councils dates from Vatican II, specifically the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, promulgated November 18, 1965. It stated, in part, that "the laity too, share in the priestly, prophetic and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own role to play in the mission of the whole People of God in the Church and the world." Working in the Apostolate on the community level is the parish, and assisting the parish priest in his apostolic and missionary undertaking is the Parish Council.

Sacred Heart's Parish Council consists of 12 parishioners serving three-year terms, with one third of the council replaced yearly. The council members are a dedicated group, people of God who use their talents to participate in the saving work of the Church. To reinforce that aspect of their work, they start the year with a retreat.

The Council functions in an advisory capacity to the pastor, and meets with him monthly. It concentrates on establishing goals and objectives for the parish and implementing those goals while developing a praying, unified Christian

community. All members except for officers are also assigned as observers to one of the special ministries in the parish. They are expected to attend the meetings of these groups as well as Parish Council meetings and report activity and planning to the Council. By this bracelet of links, the Council and the Pastor receive monthly updates on Church activities. In addition to all this work, the group hosts a sensational brunch in February. Mark your social calendar!

Incoming Chairperson Ed Sheeran sums it up when he says, "Hopefully, we are a council that is supportive of Father Flynn and our many parish ministries, and responsive to the needs of the entire parish family so that each of us can continue to grow in faith."

Sheila MacDonald

Parish Council Members for 1998-99 (seated left to right): Gail Mikolsky, Secretary; Ed Sheeran, Chairman; Gino Albertario, Vice Chairman; (standing left to right): Ernie Swanberg, Gerry Wilson, Marge Griffin, Maryjane Bouchard, Jean Harder, Lynn Hill, Agnes Blum and Gary Napoli. Absent from photo are Al Savard, Lynn Tydgwell and Jim Grady.



Taking for Granted



The gloom had settled within the confines of our Spring Lake summer house. The atmosphere was dark and everyone's mood was just plain lousy, for lack of a better word.

We were walking on the boardwalk in the direction of The Times, a local ice cream shop. "Be grateful," I said, annoyed by the silent and sullen faces of my three sons. "For heaven's sake, you're only going back to school," I added.

God had given us so much: our family's good health, a successful law practice, a modicum of intelligence for each, and summers in Spring Lake. And thankfully, we were a family of faith. However, I knew that none of these arguments were going to effect any mood change among this group.

Suddenly, I saw my oldest daughter Lauren running toward us. It must

be important, I thought: Lauren never runs.

"Mrs. O'Mara," Lauren said, looking at me and then at Sean. "She had a bad stroke," she added, still looking at Sean. Timmy O'Mara and Sean were practically inseparable.

Good grief, I thought. Katy is only 32 years old.

No one spoke. What could anyone say? Lauren had been a mother's helper to Katy for the past four years and our family socialized regularly with the O'Maras.

"How bad is she?" I asked Lauren. "Mr. O'Mara says she'll live. It's a congenital heart, whatever that means," replied Lauren.

"What's that mean, Dad?" asked Sean.

"Simply put, it means Mrs. O'Mara was born with a problem with her heart and regretfully it is something she'll probably have to live with for

the rest of her life." I assumed from their silence that they understood.

Finally, Sean looked up at me and asked, "Do you have anything kongenical wrong with you?" He was now holding my hand.

Feeling everyone's gaze, I replied, "No. And perhaps we should all be a little more grateful for those little things in life." I wondered whether the kids would understand. Lauren slipped her arm around my waist as we walked back to the house. Suddenly, ice cream wasn't so important any more.

Postscript: This event happened twelve years ago this August. God took Katy home last summer. My family, now spread across three states, met at Spring Lake's St. Catherine's Church to attend Katy's funeral mass—we still remain a family of faith.

Dermis J. McLaughlin

Spotlight on Youth

Scouts Receive Ad Altare Dei Awards

On May 3, after a year of study, four members of Boy Scout Troop 60 received their Ad Altare Dei awards at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hartford. Ad altare dei means "toward the altar of God."

The course, taught by counselors David Rohlifing and Janice Cohen, helps Scouts grow spiritually, and includes a study of the sacraments as well as various service projects.

Congratulations to Tyler Cohen, Jon Hughes, August Rohlifing and Jon Vallee for this prestigious award!

Jean Brickley

Recipients of the Ad Altare Dei award (left to right): Jon Hughes, Jon Vallee, August Rohlifing and Tyler Cohen with Scoutmaster David Rohlifing and teacher Janice Cohen.

Fear, Surprises and Faith

As we reported in the last issue of From the Heart, Phil Sharkey was ordained to the priesthood on May 30, the first parishioner to become a priest in Sacred Heart's history. Father Sharkey celebrated his first Mass at Sacred Heart on May 31. For those who were unable to attend, we're providing excerpts from Father Flynn's homily from that Mass.

When the day of Pentecost came, the Book of Acts tells us it found the brethren gathered in one place, locked behind closed doors and isolated out of fear, shut away from outside forces. Fear immobilized them, for outside they would be recognizable as having been associated with Jesus. What should they do? Should they, could they, return to the lives they had lived before they heard those inviting words, "Come, follow me"? Fear kept telling them that they could never hope to carry out all that the Master had instructed them in or expected of them. Would life ever be the same? Their fears consumed them. The risk of the ministry was too overwhelming.

The Acts of the Apostles goes on to tell us of the phenomenon, the second wave of fear that followed—a strong driving wind accompanied by fire in the shape of tongues alighting above their heads—and how their fear was eradicated and surprise filled them when even more incredible things took place. The promised gift, the Holy Spirit, had come, empowering and liberating them from their fears, and miracles happened.

That was then. Pentecost Sunday comes for us again today almost two millennia later and finds a different set of brethren gathered in this place. But we have not locked

ourselves away nor are we sequestered in fear. We have gathered openly and joyfully for what the Holy Spirit continues to do in our time through the elements of fear and surprise and laughter: to empower simple, flawed, insecure people to do extraordinary things—to say

"yes" to the invitation to serve and share, to minister to the needs of others and to extend the Kingdom of God in this time in history.

Today, our focus is seemingly directed toward one individual, Philip Sharkey, one of us who we now see as different from us. Years ago, the invitation was extended to him: Come, follow me. It was relatively easy to respond to that call, to say yes to faith. Saying yes then involved very little fear or intimidation, for living as a Christian wasn't threatening or humiliating. But life offers many opportunities, choices, and invitations, whatever we care to name them, and even those choices involve a certain degree of fear and trepidation—of making mistakes, of not being up to the task, of doing something less demanding and more pleasing or fulfilling.

In 1962, the Holy Spirit was surely at work, even then, back in the tumultuous 60's, bestowing gifts on Phil Sharkey. Janice Taylor came into his life and in 1963 she became an instrumental part of his life. And the gifts kept coming. First Raymond and then Phil, the gifts of children and parenthood to a uniquely faith-filled couple. The part-time job

begun in Shelton in 1959 at Stop and Shop became a career. And still, the Holy Spirit kept prompting for more.

In 1978, after three years of preparation—and, no doubt, a goodly amount of soul-searching, questioning, and studying—Phil was ordained to the permanent diaconate. The childhood pull toward a religious vocation that was averted in adolescent years was suddenly a close second. A wonderful wife, two sons, a great job, and the next best thing to priesthood.

The two great elements of the Holy Spirit's activity continued to be at work: fear and surprise. Fear and surprise that now became centered around that awful word, "cancer," and the effect that it would

have on this family. It would invade their lives with fear but never crush their faith or hope or spirit.

Anyone who knew Jan Sharkey understood what it was like to be touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. When the winds of tragedy blew



in her direction, she rebuffed them only to radiate a quiet peace and joy from the center of her life: her soul. When any other couple would have retreated into their personal problems and locked themselves away in fear, Phil and Jan seemed to open themselves up even more to activities in ministry, reaching

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Fear, Surprises and Faith

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out to those with what they considered "real" problems. Jan died on September 4, 1992 and was buried on the Feast of the Birth of Mary. Some may have wondered how her family would survive without this heavenly presence, this instrument of God, this gift of the Spirit, but for those of us who knew Phil and Jan, we understood that the Spirit was still at work and it would be only a matter of time before fear and surprise would again unfold.

I think I had known for a long time what direction Phil's life would take but I honestly knew that he had the makings of a priest the day I went to Stop and Shop and was invited to the upper room, the manager's sanctuary. There he sat with his feet up on his desk, drinking coffee, and puffing on his pipe, calmly chatting while chaos swirled below. I remember when we first talked about the possibility of the priesthood, four short years ago. I'm sure looking back now, Phil can remember the surprise associated with the decision—that at his age, time and place, would he, could he, do something different, be something different? He had been hiding in his upper room, his sanctuary. He was like the apostles, hiding when the risen Christ surprised him. He called him to a second vocation. Phil said yes.

For the apostles, for the newly ordained Father Philip Sharkey and for most of us, the surprise of the Spirit is likely to be more gentle and unfolding. The key is to be open to it. Today's scripture remains steady and comforting through the ages and we, who are here today celebrating not simply a festive Pentecost but this first Mass, must remember the real cause for our joy. With God, today's celebration tells us the book is never finished, the door is never closed. Slam it in God's face, if you will; lock God out by your sins and addictions to worldly pursuits and pleasures, hide from God as you wish. Pentecost says that Jesus will break all the barriers down and breathe a mighty spirit upon us, the spirit who forgives, the spirit who invites, the spirit who can make a difference.

Let us greatly rejoice today as family and friends of Phil, as children of God and as a faith community 114 years young in Southbury which today realizes its very first vocation. Let us be grateful: God has indeed visited his people and raised up from among them a shepherd to calm the fears and inaugurate new spirit-filled surprises. We rejoice with Father Sharkey today but we are especially grateful for this gift of priesthood, a gift especially in coming from the Holy Spirit. †

Tickets Available for K of C Raffle

The Knights of Columbus was founded in 1882, in part to help men remain united in their faith and to encourage strong fraternal bonds. Our local council, the Msgr. William J. Collins Council, was chartered in 1960. Today it has nearly tripled its membership from the original number of 72, and charter members are still active in council activities.

Our council is responsible for its own funds, and takes no funds from the church. Although independent, we faithfully and wholeheartedly support the Church and our pastor in any way we can. In addition to



parish events such as the the Good Friday Faith Walk and the Parish Picnic, we also assist with the Christmas tree lighting, the bike-a-thon for the Southbury Fuel Bank and other activities in the community.

We take particular pride in our scholarship program. Every year we award two \$1,000 scholarships to high-school seniors who will be continuing their education and \$1,000 to a seminarian preparing for a vocation as a priest.

All of our donations come from a budget funded by a raffle held every three years. Several years ago, council members decided to offer a new Chevrolet Corvette as a prize while keeping the ticket cost

affordable and the number of tickets sold to a reasonable number. This formula has successfully supported three raffles, and ticket sales for the fourth, to be held October 31, are now underway. This year's prize is a 1999 Corvette valued at \$40,000, and we are offering 3,500 tickets at \$20 each. Tickets are available from our members and at local businesses.

We are always looking for new members who are interested in belonging to an organization that is devoted to its faith, embraces charitable works, supports fraternal bonds among its membership, and encourages patriotic love of country.

Thomas Kowalski
Past Grand Knight

C r o s s w i n d s

The Games People Play

From the beginning of time, man has had a propensity for "game playing." I do not use this phrase to refer to tennis, golf, basketball, or any other athletic pursuit. Rather, my reference is based more upon attitudinal responses—saying one thing while acting in a completely opposite way.

Adam and Eve began the process in the Garden of Eden. The Israelites continued the process in the desert; politicians have played it out through the ages; and we continue to do it even to this day. We play games in our relationships with other people when we tell them what we think they want to hear rather than the truth. We play games with our children when we demand certain behaviors but dismiss or discount our own failures. We play games when we compromise our values or deny what we know is right so as not to be distinguished as different. We play games with God, expecting that if we do something for Him, He is obliged to reciprocate. We call ourselves "good" rather than "faithful."

There isn't a week that goes by that I am not placed in the adversarial position of game-playing: "I've come to register in the parish, and by the way, I need to get my baby baptized. No, I didn't just move here, we've been in town for three years!" "I'm going to be a godmother for my sister's baby and I need to get one of those things from you." When the conversation continues, the game-playing

becomes obvious. "I received my sacraments here and I go to Church when I can. What do you mean you don't know me?" "I'd prefer not to receive envelopes. I don't believe in them." It's not unlike the couple that

comes to plan for their marriage. They admit that they don't go to Mass and have been living together for two years and they expect that the Church will jump for joy at the prospect of their lavish wedding. Not so! Sorry!

The trouble with game-playing and the society in which we live is that it feels it can make up its own rules as it goes along and everyone should meet the demands or at least the expectations of contemporary thinking. Unfortunately, the Church does not bend to popular consensus or convenience. The Church perceives the practice of one's faith as a commitment to be met regardless of work constraints or busy schedules.

According to Canon Law, certain requirements must be met by Catholics seeking sacramental approval. For instance, any individual who has been asked to be a sponsor for confirmation or a godparent for baptism must fulfill certain prerequisites. He or she must be baptized and confirmed, known to their pastor, and regularly attending Mass and receiving the sacraments. If any of these requirements is lacking, the Pastor is obligated to deny the individual the privilege of being a sponsor or godparent.



Games are continuously being played. Couples who rarely attend Church are having their children baptized, but for what reason? Parents who never attend Mass enroll their children in religious

education programs and expect them to receive sacraments. Couples come to a church they're not registered in and hope to be married there because the reception will be nearby and the church's location would be convenient for guests. And when the person who is responsible for upholding the sanctity of the sacraments tells them this isn't possible, they become indignant. Parents will lie for their children to get what they want. They will leave the parish and blame the priest for all their problems—another excuse to stay away from God. Why? Why do we keep on playing games with fidelity? Why do we use, abuse and ignore the responsibility of our baptismal commitment and expect to get what we want, when we want it?

I cannot begin to understand what makes people think that a God/Church relationship is something you move into and out of based on momentary need. I do know, however, that in any game-playing situation, someone is the loser—it's just hard to pinpoint who. Only God knows the final result.

Fr. Mark Flynn

The Gifts of Faith and Eucharist

It never ceases to amaze me how a Scripture reading can affect my life. The recent Feast of the Ascension is an example, as is Pentecost. Look at how rich are the gifts God offers us in the Easter season: Eucharist, life-giving food for the soul; Holy spirit, living within us; grace to choose wisely. Do we take these gifts for granted? Do we reject them or ignore them? Probably, at least sometimes.

Consider the event of the Ascension. Jesus' followers must have been terrified when they learned that He would be leaving them. The apostles shared prayers, meals and journeys with Jesus, and had witnessed His healing touch and

miracles of faith. "Your faith has saved you," Jesus said—not love, that would come with faith. Christ knew what His followers could not yet fathom: that being human and in the flesh limits us. So, He assured the disciples that He must go to the Father so the Holy Spirit could come and live in them (us). Afterwards He gave Eucharist. Did they understand? Do we? Only after Pentecost, with its gift of Holy Spirit, and as they grew in faith, did they realize that they were the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

The gifts of faith and Eucharist are so simple yet so profound we must tell our children at every Mass to focus their eyes and hearts on the

miracle taking place at the consecration. If Jesus were standing before us, we would not be able to take our eyes from Him. Mother Teresa, who was such a faith-filled role model for us and our children, said that without Eucharist she could not do what she did with her life. Nurturing the gift of faith, she had the courage to stand up to monarchs and presidents and speak the truth.

A Hollywood figure recently declared that organized religion is dying. In some form or

other we hear this in every generation. But is it true? Roughly 70,000 adults in the U.S. were welcomed into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil. They came because they believe in and desire the Living Bread and because Jesus said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it." That's why I came.

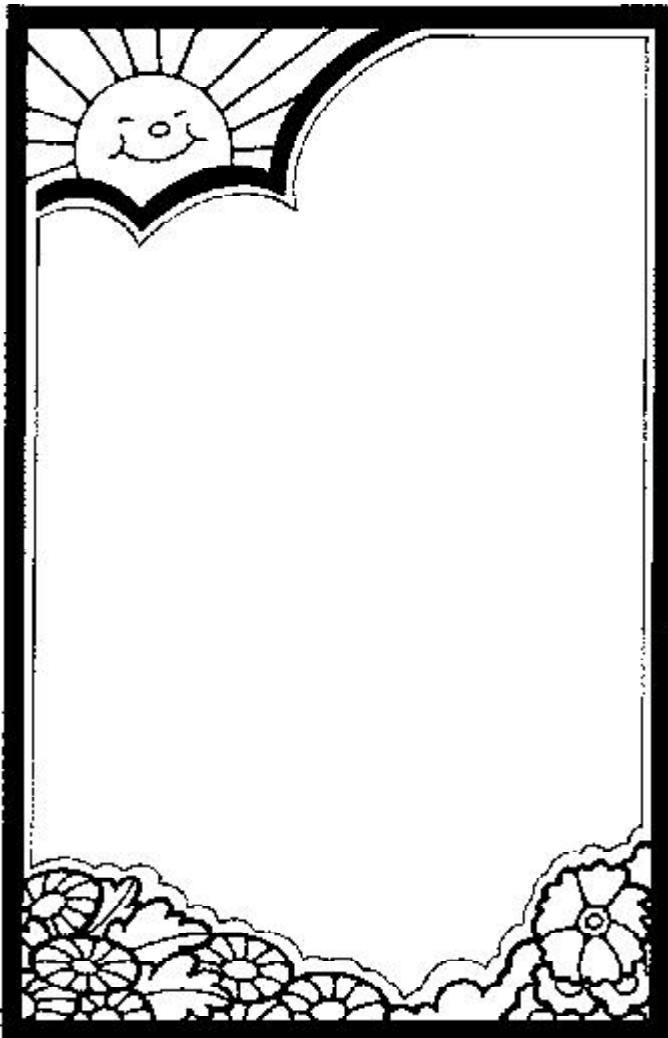
Faith and Eucharist. Both are mysteries, intangibles. And society relies on intangibles. Billions of dollars are spent each year on diets, cosmetics, surgery, health foods and vitamins. In and of themselves, these things are not wrong. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we should respect and care for them. Things get out of balance when we neglect to feed and nourish our soul as well: Eucharist! Pride is the great deceiver that leads us to believe we know better than our Creator what is best for us. Our young people have worldly goods galore, food aplenty, brilliant minds and strong bodies. Yet they may be left with empty spirits, malnourished and yearning for they know not what—Eucharist and faith.

It seems to me that we must intensify our prayers for these gifts to become a value in the lives of our families and communities, our country and the world.

None of us is immune to the temptations around us. That must be why God in His great love and wisdom gave us the Holy Spirit—along with the gifts of faith and Eucharist—there for us to nurture or neglect.

We give thanks and praise for our loving God and His gifts of Eucharist and faith that nourish and save us. Come Holy Spirit, come.

Meg Walsh



Ask Father Flynn

Q *What is the Church doing in light of predictions that there'll be fewer priests in the coming years?*

A As we prepare ourselves to enter the next millennium, the universal Church is quickly being confronted with what will become a crisis situation: the shortage of priests. Within our own Archdiocese of Hartford and in other dioceses throughout the country, a shortage of priests and a decrease in vocations is being felt. A Presbyterial subcommittee is exploring what the future holds and developing contingency plans.

The Archdiocese of Hartford is comprised of 223 parishes staffed by 389 priests. Among those priests, 70 are assigned to specialized ministries within and outside the diocese (chaplains or teaching, for example). There are 79 priests over the age of 70 who will retire in the next five years. Mandatory retirement for priests is 75. It is estimated that by 2005—six short years from now—there will be 225 active priests, and by 2020 only 98 priests will still be involved in ministry. Five men were ordained to the priesthood for our archdiocese this year, and each year the number of applicants entering into or completing seminary training diminishes.

The future looks bleak! Within our archdiocese, we've already experienced the need for one priest to serve as pastor for two parishes. The "Twining" concept, as it has been called, enables a parish to remain open while offering fewer services. Additionally, within the past few years a number of archdiocesan parishes have been given over to religious orders (such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and LaSalette Fathers) because existing "priest-power" is not available to staff these parishes. The Midwest has seen the emergence of "priest-less" parishes, which are administered by a religious sister or brother or a lay person.



Our expectation has always been that when we need a priest or a Mass, or the administration of a sacrament, an ordained priest will be available. Unfortunately, that will no longer be the norm. The Catholic Church that we've known will not deviate in its theological, canonical and gospel directives. However, the Church of "convenience," which presumably offers a comfortable Mass schedule and the availability of clergy on demand, will necessarily be altered.

Amid these disturbing observations lies the incontestable fact that more people are practicing their faith and turning to Catholicism. Perhaps in the not-so-distant future, we'll see "regional Catholic parishes" that encompass a wider area—for example, one church that incorporates the "Bury's" (Southbury, Middlebury, Woodbury) or one Catholic Church in Waterbury rather than the existing 18 parishes.

While most people prefer to avoid facing painful issues that involve change, plans for the future must be made. One thing that we have on faith is that the Holy Spirit will always be actively with us. Does this mean that we will experience a resurgence of vocations? Not necessarily. We must pray for vocations and encourage young people to consider an alternative to what the world and even our families consider important: financial success, power, "the good life." Vocations are begun in the home, where faith is valued and respected.

If I were fortunate enough to be able to predict the future or provide a solution to this problem, I probably wouldn't be here to minister to this parish. Rather, I would no doubt be working full-time as a priest/consultant to every diocese in the country. All we can do is pray and remain open to the many changes which we must inevitably accept.

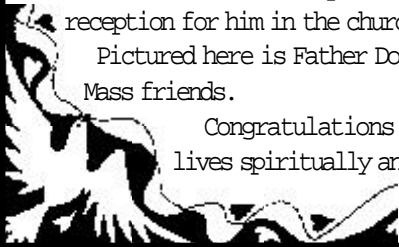
If you have a question about your faith, send it to the Communications Committee in care of the rectory and watch for the answer in a future newsletter.

Our Faithful Servant

On July 16, Fr. Brendan Donnelly celebrated 47 years in the priesthood. To honor him on this special occasion, his daily Mass friends had a reception for him in the church hall following the 8:30 a.m. liturgy.

Pictured here is Father Donnelly (center), surrounded by his daily Mass friends.

Congratulations Father! We thank you for enriching our lives spiritually and helping to bring us closer to the Lord.



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