

The Joy of Serving as a Catechist

What does it mean to be a catechist? Teaching young children about faith and helping them establish a personal relationship with God means stepping into a role as a personal representative of Jesus – quite a meaningful task! Each week, over 100 volunteers come together at Saint Elizabeth Parish to make the Elementary Faith Formation (EFF) program happen for parish children in kindergarten through sixth grade, along with the Encounter program, designed for seventh and eighth graders.

Forty-five catechists serve as teachers, while many others contribute as assistants, teen aides, babysitters, office helpers, and car line attendants. Those who decide to become catechists have answered a call to share their faith with parish children and foster the next generation of Catholics. “So many amazing people are involved in this program,” noted Director of Religious Education, Beth Riordan. “Each week I am inspired by the creativity, preparation and patience of our catechists. Motivated by a desire to bring children into a living relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church, they are people of prayer and service.”

Many catechists attend a summer training session and are encouraged to pursue the Archdiocesan catechetical certification. Each weekly lesson is based on a book series, with content provided by the publisher. Yet at the heart of every class is the personal expression of faith and inspiration brought to the students by their dedicated teachers. “It is evident that they spend time praying over their lessons and how to present them to the children,” added Beth. “They research so many creative ways to engage their students in both the presentation of the weekly Gospel and their specific lesson. It is an honor to work with these devoted and faith-filled volunteers.”



JoAnna Benton and Donna Benik, fourth grade EFF catechists, are two of many EFF stewards, who bring a message of faith to children.

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Dates of Interest

December 2-17

Advent Giving Tree

Tuesday-Wednesday, December 5-6

Monday, December 11

EFF Advent Prayer Services
Monday, Wednesday at 5:00 PM
Tuesday at 6:30 PM

Friday, December 8

Immaculate Conception
Mass at 7:30 AM, 12:00 PM and
7:00 PM

Tuesday, December 19

Advent Penance Service with
Individual Confessions 7:00 PM

Saturday, December 23

Christmas Confessions
9:00-11:00 AM

Sunday, December 24

Christmas Eve Mass
4:30 PM and 7:30 PM

Monday, December 25

Christmas Day Mass
8:00 AM, 9:30 AM and 11:30 AM

Monday, January 1

Mary, Mother of God
Mass at 10:00 AM

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Calm Down, It's Advent

We have all seen the T-shirts and bumper stickers advising us to, "Keep Calm, and..."

In Advent, that is excellent advice. The time of preparation for Christmas in our Church is counter-cultural. As everyone seems to be in a frenzy of shopping, wrapping, writing cards and planning family gatherings, the Church sets aside this time for quiet, introspective prayer to contemplate not only the coming of the Christ Child in Bethlehem, but also the second coming of Jesus. It's a time meant for Catholics to prepare for both blessed events.

Advent, the beginning of the Church's liturgical year, starts on Sunday, December 3 and brings many opportunities for us to calm down and nourish our spirit. For starters, the students of our EFF program and their families have already begun a "Prayer of the Month" program, concentrating on a particular prayer for an entire month. The December prayer asks "Help us to live in (God's) love together as a family this Advent." Also this Advent, the parish staff will be praying for all parishioners and will celebrate an afternoon of Recollection on Tuesday, December 19.

Other activities include:

December 2— *Advent Giving Tree*, offers us the opportunity to share some Christmas generosity with the less fortunate. Ornament tags identify the kind of gift, the age of the recipient, and the drop-off date.

December 6— *Advent by Candlelight*, a special evening of reflection for women.

December 19— *Communal Penance Service*, with individual confessions.

December 21— *School Prayer Service*, where all are welcome to the Saint Elizabeth Parish School prayer service in the church. Students will have Advent activities and prayers in each classroom, as well.

For more details on all of these and other events, be sure to check the bulletin and the website.

We are blessed to have so many ways to prepare the way of the Lord, all of which lead us to a deeper, more meaningful joy, both at Christmas and throughout the coming year. So, this Advent...let us all "keep calm, and pray on!"

~ Elisa Sheronas

Advent Prayer

Heavenly Father, your son, Jesus, is your greatest gift to us, a great sign of your love. Help us to live in that love together as a family this Advent.

Prepare our hearts for Christmas. Bring us closer to each other and to your son. Give us the grace and strength we need every day. Help us to always trust in you.

Come, Lord Jesus, lead all people closer to you. Come and dispel the darkness of our world with the light of your love. Amen.

Freeplay Nights are Back



Parents...get out your calendar and pick a date! Saint Elizabeth's Parish Youth

Ministry is hosting Freeplay Nights on various Saturdays through the year. Children in kindergarten through fifth grade get a chance to play a sport, hone a skill, make a craft, or do anything in between, all under the watchful eyes of our youth ministry team.

The cost is \$5 per child and includes a pizza dinner. "Last year, these events were a big success," says Ryan Schwalm, Parish Youth Ministry Coordinator. "We hope these nights give parents a chance to unwind for a couple hours while their children experience the parish in a fun, relaxed atmosphere."

To register, visit the website at www.stelizabethparish.org and follow the youth ministry link on the home page. If you do not register online, you will need to fill out a waiver when dropping off your child.

Remaining Freeplay Nights:

December 16

January 20

February 10

March 10

May 12

June 9

Seminarians Remind Us to Pray for All Vocations

The Saint Elizabeth Parish Vocations Committee is working to promote vocations to the diocesan priesthood. The Church has always needed priests to serve her people and celebrate the Sacraments, and the need has never been greater. The simple fact that the average age of men in the priesthood is rising at the same time that fewer men are entering seminaries and being ordained as priests, tells a big story. More priests are needed to fulfill the ever-growing needs of parishes in our archdiocese. The parish Vocations Committee provides opportunities for young men to discern a possible vocation to the priesthood. The committee plans and hosts events where high school and college-age students can learn more about the priesthood, pray together, gain insight into God's will for their lives, and meet priests and community members to help with their personal discernment.

This year, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary invited Saint Elizabeth Parish to host two seminarians during their field education program. Each Thursday between September 14, 2017 and April 26, 2018, Michael Quillen from the Raleigh, N.C. diocese and John Paul Heisler from the Arlington, Va. diocese are travelling from the seminary in Philadelphia to our community to gain some hands-on experience in parish life and pastoral care. They are also spending time each week with students in the parish school. "We met the new seminarians in religion class. They help us review the material before tests," said sixth grade student Trevor Barbadora. He

added, "It's also pretty cool to talk with them about what they are doing to prepare to become priests."

John Paul is the second oldest of nine children, and his sister is a Carmelite nun. He was home-schooled, but later attended Catholic college, spending one semester in France. "In my freshman year at Christendom College I heard God calling me to the seminary," said John Paul. "I believe a young person enters the seminary because he feels God placing desires for the religious life in their heart." His advice to young men who may be considering the priesthood is, 'Pray often and pray from the heart,' adding, "Peace will come through prayer, so a daily prayer life is essential."

Michael is the middle child of seven, which contributed to his strong sense of family. "Being in formation at Saint Charles is teaching me how to be a Father – in the true sense of the word," Michael explained. He was raised in the Baptist tradition and was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church at age 14. "I always had a 'tug' to do more than just altar serve," he recalled. For Michael, being called into formation is a call to a deeper relationship with Jesus. A great benefit of this bond with Christ is the development of "stronger and deeper" relationships with his family and friends.

Father John Stokely, who guides our Vocations Committee, commented, "We are fortunate to



Seminarians Michael Quillen and John Paul Heisler visit our parish every Thursday through the end of April 2018, as part of their field education program.

have Michael and John Paul serving us at Saint Elizabeth Parish this year."

There are so many great vocations and professions for young people to think about: priesthood, permanent diaconate, religious life, marriage, single life, really a multitude of possibilities. These two young men have responded to God's call with confidence and clarity, which is not easy in today's complex society.

"It's not unusual for young people to feel lost or uncertain about what the future holds," said Father John. "I hope that our parish Vocations Committee evolves into a team dedicated to helping all young men and women seek God's will for their lives, enable them to hear His voice more clearly, and have the confidence to say 'Yes' to whatever call that might be."

~ Jonathan Hess

School Spirits: New Teachers, Newly Designed Website...Oh My!

The start of the 2017-18 school year at Saint Elizabeth Parish School not only brought 40 new students, but also two new teachers and one newly designed website:

www.stelizabethparishschool.org.

The new site provides students, parents, staff and parishioners with a streamlined portal for communications and digital interaction. Its design reflects today's focus on highlighting the content so that it is easy to read and find.

"Our goal for the new design was to show a different perspective – not just the bright, happy faces of our students, but also all that our school offers," explained Sara Richardson, Saint Elizabeth Parish's new Communications Coordinator. Sara has been working closely with parish volunteer Angela Colasanti to reengineer the site since August. "For instance, we wanted to highlight our facility, the extra-curricular programs, Peacemaker award program, and the Second Step Initiative," she said.

The website features bold images at the top with simple one- or two-word clickable buttons. Parents have their own portal, where Principal Dr. Diane Greco posts her weekly letter and the student portal includes links to every teacher's page so students can check homework assignments or request extra help. One other important upgrade is that the website is now mobile-friendly.

"The website is very interactive. Parents can use the CalendarWiz program to download the events they want to be reminded about right onto their phone's calendar,"



Saint Elizabeth Parish School has its own dedicated website at www.stelizabethparishschool.org.

continued Sara. "We are also building our presence on social media, including an updated Facebook page. Teachers help keep the content fresh and the contemporary communication channels give us more ways to stay in touch with parents and celebrate all the great things we have going on at school with the parish at large."

Sara has been a parishioner for eight years and she is an active steward. She and her husband, Mike, are the parents of Saint Elizabeth kindergarten student Michaela. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from Saint Bonaventure University and has built her career in print journalism over the last 15 years, now bringing her expertise to Saint Elizabeth. "We have big plans, but for now we are just working to refine the site and keep the content fresh," she concluded.

Welcome Ms. Emily Benner!

Meet Ms. Emily Benner, Saint Elizabeth Parish School's new

kindergarten teacher. Emily is a West Chester native and recently graduated from Penn State University with a degree in Early Childhood Education. She served as student teacher at a Catholic elementary school in Middletown, Pa. before coming to Saint Elizabeth in September. In her spare time, Emily volunteers at a therapeutic riding barn at a school for children and adults with disabilities in Berwyn. An avid equine lover, Emily owns a horse and has been riding since she was five years old.



Ms. Emily Benner is making learning fun for kindergartners this year.

"The family feeling at Saint Elizabeth is overwhelming between both the student body and the faculty, which makes for a wonderful teaching environment," Emily enthused. "The students have respect for the adults and the adults have respect for each student. My top goals for teaching the students this year are to help them have fun learning and to make good memories of kindergarten."

Who's the New Guy Upstairs?

Mr. Andrew Shirker, a Saint Elizabeth parishioner, is the newest addition to the upper floor of Saint Elizabeth Parish School. He comes with a strong pedigree in Catholic school education with 20 years'

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Understanding the Meaning Behind the Words: Prayer of the Month

This year, as part of Saint Elizabeth's Elementary Faith Formation (EFF) program, parents are invited to actively pray with their children. Each month, they focus on a different prayer that has special meaning to the season.

"The idea of this initiative is to get parents and children to pray together," explained Director of Religious Education, Beth Riordan. "Uniting in prayer is what holds families together and helps our children through many life experiences. Each month, our goal is to break down the meaning behind the prayer and offer ideas as to how to pray it as a family. In the classroom, we are reflecting upon what we are saying and what it means to each of us."

And that brings us to a really poignant consideration: What are we saying when we pray?

School Spirits

(Continued from page 4)

experience. Andrew taught seven years as a fifth grade teacher in the Cocalico School District, four years at Saint Norbert (fifth grade-seventh grade), five years at Saint Basil (fifth grade-eighth grade) and two years at Saint Mary Magdalen (seventh and eighth grades). He graduated from York College and now has three boys – Aaron, a freshman at Bucknell University; Alex, a freshman at Bishop Shanahan High School; and Adam, a seventh grade student at Saint Elizabeth.

Andrew teaches fifth grade ELA (English Language Arts), sixth grade religion, and eighth grade math and social studies here at Saint Elizabeth, and is very happy to be part of our

As Catholics, we know the words to many prayers because we were brought up reciting them repeatedly. But, when we routinely pray the Sign of the Cross, the Our Father and the Hail Mary, do we stop and consider the significance of these words, which are infused with meaning?

Saint Elizabeth Parish invites us all to reflect upon the meaning of common Catholic prayers by examining the Prayer of the Month along with our EFF families:

December: Advent Prayer

January: Our Father

February: Dear Jesus Prayer

March: Act of Contrition

April: Stewardship Prayer

May: The Rosary

~ Julie Krumenacker

community. "This community has been very welcoming to me. The parents are all interested and involved, wanting only the best for their children and the school, which is refreshing," said Andrew. "I'm also very impressed that the school itself seems to be constantly trying to improve and build on an already successful model. I want to be an active part of that growth and help the students find enjoyment out of the learning process."

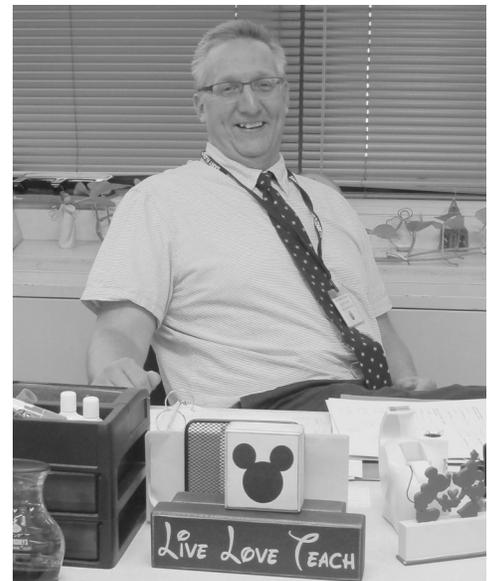
Welcome one and all!

~ Lisa Barbadora



EFF students used rosaries and prayer cards to help pray the Hail Mary in October.

Keep up with our 'Prayer of the Month' online at www.stelizabethparish.org and on our Facebook page!



Mr. Andrew Shirker, another new face at the parish school, teaches various subjects to fifth, sixth and eighth graders.

Catechist: Joy of Service

(Continued from cover)

Fourth grade EFF teacher Donna Benik explained, "My experience as a volunteer in the EFF program began 10 years ago when my family moved into the area and my son was starting kindergarten. I initially volunteered as an aide, and soon after that, answered the call to become a catechist. With the help and support of experienced catechists and the EFF staff, the transition came

naturally. I knew this was where I needed to be on Monday afternoons. Praying together and reading the Gospel are part of our weekly routine. We also incorporate internet media, music, and movement. This year, I have invited parents and family members to participate in our sessions. Freely sharing our faith together is a great feeling!"

"My EFF journey began six years ago when my son was in first grade," added Lisa Kelly, kindergarten teacher. "His teacher was so energetic and passionate, which inspired me. When she first asked if I would teach, I was dumbfounded. I didn't think I was holy enough! But I agreed to do it, and it has become one of the most enriching and rewarding experiences of my life. Along with the children, I have deepened my faith, and feel much more intimately part of our church community. I have met so many wonderful parents, children, and catechists who have taught me about my faith and myself."

"I believe we are at our best when we support each other as part of a



Lisa Kelly (center) says that being an EFF teacher is one of the most rewarding experiences of her life.

community," noted Bill Kelso, a second grade EFF teacher. "After attending a retreat a few years ago, I felt empowered to use my talents to help others in our parish. I feel we have an obligation to help guide the next generation, not in place of parents, but along with them. Everyone in our EFF program is welcoming, supportive, and helpful. We are blessed in our parish and it shows in our children, who are smart, polite, and attentive. This is the real strength of our community. As a catechist, I have received far more than I have given. Guiding students through their First Holy Communion, and watching them hug their parents after their First Reconciliation, are memories that will last forever."

"Being a catechist has certainly brought me joy and enriched my life," added Donna. "I have met so many amazing parents and children. I have watched them receive sacraments for the first time and witnessed their faith grow and develop. My own relationship with God has

become more vibrant and meaningful. I have made friends that share the values and faith that I hold so dear. And although I am the one teaching, I am also the one who has learned from the children of our parish. I have learned to keep my heart open and to have more of that childhood enthusiasm at life's endless possibilities for joy."

Many catechists here at Saint Elizabeth agree, the experience has deepened their faith and allowed them to receive so much more than they are able to give. To learn how to volunteer with the EFF program, contact Beth Riordan at briordan@stelizabethparish.org.

~ Julie Krumenacker

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Family Spirits: Meet the Dharmaraj Family

The Dharmaraj family has been part of Saint Elizabeth Parish since 2012. Despite living thousands of miles from where they were born, our community is now their home.

Dharma and Priya were raised in Tamil Nadu, a southern state of India. They went to college in India and earned degrees in Electronics and Electrical Engineering. Dharma received a graduate degree in Computer Science at Colorado State University after moving to the United States. Priya and Dharma met at their first job and, in 2002, were married at Saint Joseph Parish in Dharma's native city of Madurai.

Growing up, Dharma and his family attended daily Mass at the early hour of 5:30 AM each day. "My parents never missed a day and wouldn't allow their children to miss a day either," Dharma recalled. Priya, however, was not raised Catholic and only became interested in Christianity after meeting Dharma. A few years into their relationship, Priya was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

When their first son, Kevin, was six months old, the family moved to the U.S. for Dharma's work. They had planned to go back to India, but "loved everything here about America." While they missed their family in India, they loved it so much in America that they decided to stay.

Initially, the transition was difficult. "In India, we were used

to having family and friends nearby at all times, and Mass, prayers, and the bible were in our native language, Tamil," Dharma explained. The family eventually became more comfortable on American soil, but only with the help of close-knit Catholic communities. While living in Delaware, the family joined Christ Our King Parish. A few years

later in 2012, while looking for a new home, the family attended Mass here at Saint Elizabeth.

"We wanted our new home to be in a strong Catholic community and after we left church that day we knew this was the place where we were going to settle down," Priya remembered.

Today, Kevin is in eighth grade at Lionville Middle School. He enjoys math, science, "building anything," and participating in robotics competitions. He was baptized in India, attended Saint Elizabeth's Elementary Faith Formation program, and was confirmed in 2016. "EFF was so helpful in rooting our son in his faith. We are still amazed at the teachers and their stewardship commitment," Priya added. The newest family member, Ethan, was born last year and baptized



*The Dharmaraj Family:
Dharma, Ethan, Kevin and Priya*

at Saint Elizabeth Parish in January 2017.

Dharma recently attended the *Christ Renews His Parish* renewal program and participated on the formation team. "CRHP was the boost I needed," he said, "I recommend it to everyone. You will benefit wherever you are in your faith journey." He noted that praying and working with the other men on the formation team was one of the most rewarding experiences of his life.

"The Saint Elizabeth community is very warm and open," Dharma concluded. "From the very first day we arrived, so many folks have welcomed us, offered their friendship, and put a smile on our faces. As first-generation immigrants, we can't thank everyone enough."

~ David Guthrie

Congrats to Saint Elizabeth Academic Achievers!



This fall, 11 alumni of Saint Elizabeth Parish School were inducted into the prestigious Bishop Shanahan High School Monsignor Schuyler Chapter of the National Honor Society. They are: Justin Amrein, Riley Brady, Robert Duncheskie, Kevin Gatti, Jessica Holowsko, Brian Ibarguen, Brittany Jones, Keenan Kirk,

James Kolimago, Mira Messere and Sophia Swiatek. In addition, Michael Gingrich from Saint Elizabeth's Class of 2014 was inducted as a senior.

Recipients earn this special honor based on four pillars: **Character, Scholarship, Leadership and Service**. Students were nominated based on scholarship (grades), but also had to submit a resume showing evidence of the other three areas in order to be accepted.

In addition, two current students from our parish school were inducted into the Bishop Shanahan Junior Honor Society: Qinny Irwin and Michael McGonagle.

Amazing accomplishments – congrats to all!

Dates of Interest

Sunday, January 7
Blessing of Sacramental
Candidates at Mass
9:30 AM and 11:30 AM

January 28-February 2
Catholic Schools Week; Open
House: Sunday, 12:30-2:00 PM

Saturday, February 3
The Feast of Saint Blaise
Blessing of Throats at Mass,
8:30 AM

Ash Wednesday, February 14
Mass at 7:30 AM and 7:00 PM
Liturgy of the Word and Ashes
at 11:00 AM and 4:30 PM

Lenten Fridays, 7:00 PM
Stations of the Cross and
Benediction

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