

**Dates of Interest**

*November 30-December 15*  
Advent Giving Tree

*December 2-3-4*  
EFF Advent Prayer Services  
4:30 PM and 6:30 PM

*Tuesday, December 17*  
Advent Penance Service with  
Individual Confessions  
7:00 PM

*Saturday, December 21*  
Christmas Confessions  
9:00-11:00 AM

*Tuesday, December 24*  
Christmas Eve  
Mass at 4:30 PM and 7:30 PM

*Wednesday, December 25*  
Christmas Day  
Mass at 8:00 AM, 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

*December 31-January 1*  
Holy Day - Mary, Mother of God  
Mass at 5:30 PM, 9:30 AM, 11:30 AM

*January 25-26*  
Blessing of Sacramental Candidates  
at Weekend Masses

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**Why Mass Attendance Continues to Slip**

Since 2006, the average weekend Mass attendance at Saint Elizabeth Parish has decreased from 2,634 parishioners to 2,106 this year, despite the fact that our total number of registered parishioners has risen by almost 2,000 people during the same time period. These numbers represent a significant, 10+ percent decline in Mass attendance over the last five years. If that sounds like a lot, well, that’s because it is!

However, this attendance drop is fairly typical. Only 21.8 percent of all registered Catholics in the 266 parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Philadelphia attended Mass this past October, a month chosen to take attendance counts because it is “typical” – there is little snow, few people are away on vacation and there is no major holiday to skew the figures.



Of course, this begs the question: Why? What has changed in our lives, our culture, our Church, our community that has caused people to forego Sunday Mass? The Saint Elizabeth Pastoral Council set out to find an answer to this provocative question with its recent survey (see sidebar for some details on the survey responses).

The survey was not conducted simply because of the change in Mass attendance, reported Angie Fiore, a Pastoral Council member who leads the subcommittee tasked with examining the results of the survey. “We want to increase participation in all parish activities, including Mass attendance,” she explained.

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# Casserole Program Benefits Homeless Men in Philadelphia

**F**our years ago, Saint Elizabeth Parish joined a network of 60 parishes that began donating casseroles to Saint John's Hospice in Philadelphia. At first glance, the word 'hospice' brings up thoughts of palliative or end-of-life care. But, Saint John's Hospice is called a 'hospice' in the sense of a place for short-term accommodation. The facility serves homeless men in downtown Philadelphia.

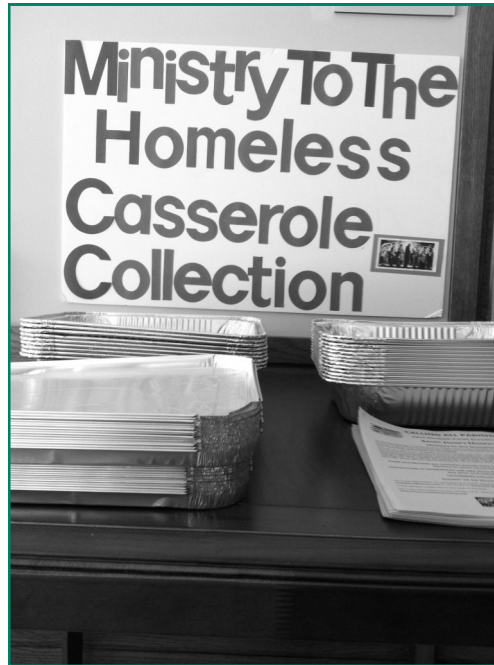
Msgr. Anthony J. O'Neill, pastor of Saint John the Evangelist Parish, initially established Saint John's Hospice to provide sandwiches and shelter to downtrodden men in Center City Philadelphia. As the news spread about these services, the small organization quickly became overwhelmed by the number of men in need. A building was purchased in 1962 on 1221 Race Street, and the Little Brothers of the Good Shepherd began running the hospice less than one year later.

During those early days, the hospice clientele were predominantly elderly men, many of them alcoholics or down on their luck. They embraced Saint John's because they were given respect and compassion along with their hot meals, clothing and shelter.

"A meal is a not a meal...a meal is dignity," explained Anthony Willoughby, Food Service

Manager at the hospice.

In 1986, the hospice became part of Catholic Social Services, and added lay staff, including many former residents. Nine years



later, a Good Shepherd Program was introduced to help medically needy homeless men, including those with HIV/AIDS. In addition, the organization started offering a drug-free residence with 40 shelter beds, donated clothing, personal hygiene products, a mailroom with 2,000 mailboxes, and case management services for the men.

They also began a coffee house, which caters to 25 chronically homeless men who typically avoid overnight shelters, to encourage them to come to Saint John's yard for the night. The coffee house provides these casual visitors with beverages, snacks, restrooms, and the

opportunity to interact with the staff. Caring volunteers delicately work with coffee house visitors to establish trust, in hopes that they will return and eventually get back up on their feet again.

In addition to the casseroles, Saint John's Hospice also accepts other food donations – some from corporate offices or bakeries, such as Pepperidge Farm. Geno's Steaks in South Philadelphia has helped the hospice for 35 years by donating extra bread and steak.

Several Saint Elizabeth parishioners introduced Saint John's Hospice to the Pastoral Outreach Committee a few years ago, according to Angie Fiore, Saint Elizabeth parishioner and co-chairperson of the program. "They reviewed the idea, and felt it would be a great opportunity for families to be involved in a stewardship opportunity to feed the hungry and homeless," Angie said.

The casseroles help provide a midday meal on weekdays for 6,500 to 7,500 men each month. The Hospice uses 45 to 55 casseroles per day to cater to this crowd. On average, Saint Elizabeth Parish provides an impressive 90 to 100 casseroles each month. These donations are collected at the social hall kitchen on the second weekend

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# School Spirits—Moving Forward, Creating Opportunities

This “School Spirits” section of our newsletter delivers updates and news from the parish school, keeping parishioners up to speed on the wonderful things happening right here on our parish campus.

Now that the school year is well underway at Saint Elizabeth Parish School, routines have been established, and learning is in full swing. Principal Diane Greco has had a busy few months in her role as the school's new leader, but slowed down for a moment to speak about her goals.

“The structural and organizational aspects of the school are already in place and work very well, but I am always looking for ways to improve upon things and create more opportunities for the students,” she notes. “I feel that for elementary-aged children, this is the perfect time to try new things. They are in a safe learning environment, where barriers are removed, so they are able to develop resilience.”

Dr. Greco aims to expand the fine arts programs at the school, specifically by opening up more opportunities in the performing arts such as music and drama. Changes have also been initiated within the student government, based in part on feedback from former student officers, who expressed a desire for more active leadership as members of the Student Council.

In terms of curriculum, Dr. Greco speaks of continuously

building upon the school's strong framework, in collaboration with the teachers. “Education is about change and growth. It is expected and anticipated with enthusiasm,” she explains. “As teachers, we are all lifetime learners. We consistently say, 'this is really good, but how can we make it better?’”

One of the biggest examples of improving upon the school's strong foundation is a stronger integration of STEM principles to the existing curriculum,



“Education is about change and growth,” says Saint Elizabeth School Principal Diane Greco. Above, Dr. Greco visits with parish school students during lunchtime.

providing hands-on learning experiences in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math. “Students have to *do* it to learn it,” Dr. Greco adds. “Problem solving and critical thinking are so important in this age of technology. We systematically look to provide

interactive experiences for the students, such as the Farm Explorers program and the Star Lab, and will continue in this direction.”

On the technology front, the faculty were excited to have classroom teacher's desktops replaced with laptops, allowing for more mobile learning experiences. In addition, cloud-based computing was recently established to eliminate the need and expense of some of

the onsite network servers. This year, the parish is also purchasing 20 new Apple iPad tablet devices for use by the current eighth-grade students.

“With the new hardware and software, everything is faster and information is much more accessible,” says Dr. Greco. “Real learning is interactive, which helps students both academically and

socially. Schools are dynamic, and we embrace positive change. We look forward to moving with the times, and keep building upon this wonderful parish school.”

~ Julie Krumenacker

## Family Spirits:

### The Mathis Family – In the Footsteps of Saint Joseph

John and Martha Mathis joined Saint Elizabeth Parish in 2000, right after a meeting at Bishop Shanahan High School to announce the new community.

They were very active at their previous parish – Saints Philip & James. Martha had a career in banking and also volunteered for many years, both at Camilla Hall in Immaculata and at Saint John Vianney Hospital in Downingtown.

John's list of stewardship service activities was, and remains, humbling. At his former parish, John taught CCD and was active in the RCIA Program for 20 years, guiding more than 400 people towards full initiation into the Catholic Church. He also spent eight years serving on the Liturgical Life Committee at Saints Philip & James Parish. Here at Saint Elizabeth, John has served as a sacristan, an adult altar server,

a lector and an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, as well as assisting with the orientation and training of new liturgical ministers and caring for homebound and hospitalized parishioners.

John has had a passion for woodworking since his teenage years, and carries that talent into his life today – even crafting the couple's master bedroom furniture! His most visible contribution to our parish is found in the beautiful wood furniture he has made over the years. John

constructed the wooden stand for the tabernacle in the daily Mass chapel, the tables that hold the Offertory gifts for Mass both in the chapel and the church, the two poor boxes, the wooden wall boxes that hold the weekly parish bulletin and several other woodwork pieces. He is also happy to help with

repairs to church furniture whenever he is needed.

John and Martha have been married for 55 years and have raised five beautiful children: Michelle, Michael, Mark, Paul and Andrew. They have been blessed with ten grandchildren as well. The couple can be found in the front pew on Sundays to assure that John is easily available, if called to assist. John works humbly 'behind the scenes' and – in his words – "loves Catholicism because of the discipline." He continues to follow the example of Saint Joseph, and remains a stewardship model for all of us.

~ Lisa Sheronas

*Know a Saint Elizabeth family that should be featured in our Family Spirits column? Nominate them by emailing Sara Richardson at [sararichardson7272@gmail.com](mailto:sararichardson7272@gmail.com)!*



*John and Martha Mathis have been married for 55 years. John has made several beautiful wood furniture pieces for Saint Elizabeth Church.*

#### Dates of Interest

*(continued from cover)*

*January 26-31*  
Catholic Schools Week

*February 8 and 22*  
Confirmation Retreats  
8:30 AM

*Ash Wednesday, March 5*  
Mass at 7:30 AM and 7:00 PM  
Liturgy of the Word at  
11:30 AM and 4:30 PM

*Saturday, March 8*  
Confirmation Ceremonies  
10:00 AM and 2:00 PM

# Mass Attendance

## A GLIMPSE AT MASS ATTENDANCE SURVEY RESPONSES

Last May, a six-question **“Mass Attendance Survey”** was mailed to all parishioners and also made available online at the parish website. More than 500 parishioners responded, about half of them online.

In response to the question, *“Why do you think there has been a steady decline in Mass attendance among parishioners?”* 27 percent of the respondents identified the Catholic Church scandals as the top reason; another 17 percent cited busy family and work schedules. Disagreement with Church teachings, personal priorities that do not include Mass, and societal influences were also contributing factors mentioned for the decline.

When asked their opinion about *the top three obstacles that inhibit parishioners’ attendance at weekend Mass*, 30 percent of the respondents listed busy family and work schedules as the largest obstacle. Other significant factors cited less frequently by respondents include: a lack of personal commitment and a loss of faith; the ongoing Church scandals; and disagreement with Church teachings and policies.

*(continued from cover)*

“Our goal is to help make Saint Elizabeth a community where people want to belong and actively participate. Our ultimate goal is to bring us all closer to Christ,” she said.

Angie noted that there were very few real surprises in the survey results. “It really validated what we were hearing anecdotally, especially about the Church abuse scandal and the general busy-ness of people’s lives,” she said.

Indeed, the most frequently cited answers for declining Mass attendance were the Catholic Church scandals; busy family, youth sports and work schedules; and church teachings and policies that some consider to be out-of-touch with society.

Now that the responses are in, the committee will examine them and come up with practical strategies for increasing Mass attendance and participation in parish activities.

“The next step is to look at the suggestions and comments made about things we can address right here at Saint Elizabeth Parish – such as music, parish services, ministries and activities,” added Angie.



One practical suggestion that is being acted upon immediately is to include the full text of the scripture readings in the *Breaking Bread* hymnals, starting in Advent and throughout the coming year. The current weekend Mass schedule is also under review.

The Pastoral Council is also looking at differences in the responses from the 77% of survey respondents who are regular church goers versus the 13% who only attend Mass occasionally.

“Understanding the differences between these two groups will help give a focus to our efforts,” con-

cluded Angie.

The Pastoral Council’s ad-hoc team hopes to complete their analysis and make recommendations to the full council in the first quarter of 2014.

~ Sue Morgan

**“Our ultimate goal  
is to bring us all  
closer to Christ.”**  
~ Angie Fiore,  
Pastoral Council

## Casserole Program

of each month. Out of the network of parishes that participate in the program, Saint Elizabeth ranks third for casserole donations, Anthony said. "Saint Elizabeth parishioners have been tremendous," he said. "We really appreciate all they do for us by stocking the freezers, and we are so grateful."

However, the needs are so great, it's not enough.

"Summer is our lowest time for casserole totals, and September through December are usually slightly higher," Angie said. Anthony concurs. "In the summertime we tend to run low. There is always a need, more men come, and it never goes away."

### How you can help

Most of the casseroles donated from the network of parishes follow the recipes and guidelines posted on their website at [www.saintjohnshospice.org](http://www.saintjohnshospice.org).

"The hot dog and beans casserole is probably our most popular, but sometimes we get Chicken Marsala, tuna casseroles, and even some meals with added lobster tails. There is no wrong way to make a casserole," Anthony smiled.

Angie got involved with the casserole program after she saw an ad in the bulletin looking for

*(continued from page 2)*

cooks. "I enjoy cooking and casseroles, so without knowing what the opportunity was about, I went to the first meeting. After hearing about Saint John's Hospice, and the ministry they do, I was very excited to support them," she said.

Jen Bauhaus, Angie's neighbor and co-chairperson, also got involved thanks to her love of cooking. "I was looking for a way to share that love, and this was the perfect opportunity."

The casseroles provide a unique stewardship opportunity because

*Saint John's Hospice  
seeks to be a  
community grounded  
in faith and service  
where homeless  
persons find dignity,  
respect, nourishment,  
and opportunities  
for new beginnings.*

the whole family, including kids, can get involved. "My kids help me mix ingredients together, and all the while, we are talking about why we are making the casseroles and whom they are for," Angie said.

Jen agrees. "My kids love making the hot dog casserole. They can do it themselves, because it involves no cooking. And they absolutely love collecting the casseroles with me. It's a great

way to get the whole family involved, and to remember how lucky we are. I can't tell you how many conversations and nighttime prayers have involved the hospice and the food we collect."



*Parishioner Connie Bliss is one of the volunteers who collect casseroles prior to Mass.*

If you are interested in making a casserole, pans and lids are available at any time in the church narthex. If you can't make it to Mass on the second weekend of the month, you can also drop the casseroles off at the parish office on the Friday before between 8:30 am and 4:00 pm, or on the following Monday between 8:30 am and 9:30 am. The group is also looking for volunteers to help collect the casseroles.

For more information, please contact Angie at [angiefiore@verizon.net](mailto:angiefiore@verizon.net) or Jen at [jbretz2001@yahoo.com](mailto:jbretz2001@yahoo.com).

*~ Sara Richardson*

# Saint Elizabeth Holds First Blessing of the Animals



*Deacon Jim McAvoy blesses dogs with their owners as part of the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi.*

On Saturday, October 5, Saint Elizabeth celebrated the Blessing of the Animals, a custom rooted in the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi. That day, Deacon Jim McAvoy led a prayer service provided in the *Book of Blessings*; approximately 70 pet owners with their dogs and cats joined in the service.

Choir member, Barbara Batt, started the prayer service with a hymn and was joined by the assembled pet owners. To the gathering's astonishment, this immediately quieted the barking and sniffing of the animals!

Parishioner Denise Ligget read a passage from the *Book of Genesis*, after which Deacon Jim delivered a brief homily. The highlight of the service was the blessing and sprinkling with holy water of both pets and their owners. The service ended with another hymn; then those who wished came forward to have their pets blessed individually.

Note that next year's Blessing of the Animals is scheduled to take place on October 4, 2014, the feast day of Saint Francis.

~ Kathy Link

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## Parish School Welcomes New Teacher

Mrs. Marion Binder joined the Saint Elizabeth Parish School faculty as an honors math teacher for grades 6 and 8 this year. She also teaches math for grades 5 and 7, and religion for grade 6.

Prior to working at Saint Elizabeth Parish School, Mrs. Binder was an elementary school mathematics teacher. She also brings experience as a respected adjunct professor of Developmental Algebra at Neumann University. Mrs. Binder said, "I really enjoy teaching math and I am



*Mrs. Marion Binder*

delighted to share my experience with the students of Saint Elizabeth."

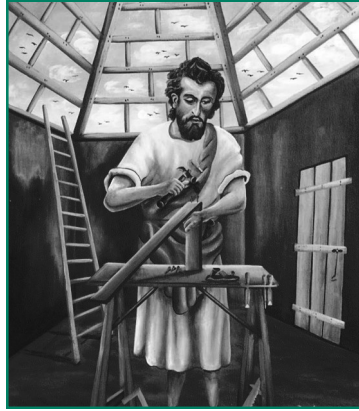
Welcome Mrs. Binder!

~ Karen Hofmann

# Inside, We're Talking About ...



Why did two- and four-legged friends gather behind the parish school?



Which parishioner embodies the spirit and skill of Saint Joseph?



Why has Mass attendance dropped at Saint Elizabeth?

## Read on to find out these answers and more!

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