

A Closer Look at a Core Parish Value

In formulating Saint Elizabeth Parish’s 2017-2020 Pastoral Plan, the Pastoral Council, with input from attendees at two large, town hall styled gatherings, compiled a list of six core values that characterize us as a parish community. The first of these values is: “Nourishing a Welcoming and Inviting Parish.”

Several parishioners were invited to share their thoughts and comment on how our community expresses this value and how we practice it in daily life. Their responses spanned a wide spectrum and contained thoughts about issues that affect how parishioners see themselves as members of the Universal Church as well as members of Saint Elizabeth Parish. All of those interviewed agreed that the parish as a whole is a welcoming and inviting place; however, the respondents also noted that people’s experience of welcome and belonging often depends upon their regular participation in parish liturgies and their willingness to look into and then involve themselves in a smaller group of fellow parishioners or in one or another of the many parish ministries available at Saint Elizabeth.



*Core Parish Value:
Nourishing a Welcoming and
Inviting Parish*

Regular participation in parish activities facilitates meeting other parishioners who have similar interests and inspires the forming of close relationships – which is fundamental to any healthy community. Our community is simply not complete so long as many of our parishioners remain largely uninvolved in parish life. Interviewed parishioners also agreed that many people in the parish do not avail themselves of the multitude of opportunities for ministry and might complain about feeling “left out.” Ed Peabody, a frequent daily and Sunday Mass attendee, said “It is easy to feel the vibrant nature of our parish community very quickly,” but quoted Bishop Sheen’s comment on those who feel left out, when he said, “However, you get out of Mass and the parish community what you put into it.”

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Dates of Interest

Graduation Mass
Saint Elizabeth Parish School
Wednesday, June 14, 7:00 PM

*Memorial Mass for
Deceased Fathers*
Saturday, June 17, 8:30 AM

Independence Day Holiday
Tuesday, July 4
Mass at 9:00 AM

*Solemnity of the
Assumption of Mary*
Tuesday, August 15
Mass at 7:30 AM, 12:00 PM &
7:00 PM in the Church

Labor Day Holiday
Monday, September 4
Mass at 9:00 AM

*Saint Elizabeth Parish School
Opening Day for Grades 1-8*
Tuesday, September 5

*Elementary Faith Formation
Weekly Sessions Begin*
September 11-12-13

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Educating Our Children

In the last issue of *The Spirit*, we highlighted the benefits of Catholic schools in providing a high-quality education rooted in faith, exemplified in our own Saint Elizabeth Parish School. At the same time, our parishioners have many different choices when it comes to finding the elementary school best suited to their school-aged children.

Did you know there are 66 different public elementary schools in Chester County that serve about 40,000 students? Just as striking, there are 97 area private elementary schools that serve 13,913 students – about half of these schools are religiously affiliated.

That's a lot of choices, which can be overwhelming when trying to decide what's best. Here are a few perspectives from fellow Saint Elizabeth parishioners to help whittle down the list.

On Catholic elementary school...

"Our decision to choose a Catholic school over others (public or private school) was fairly easy, although questioned by some because we live in such a great school district," explained Kerry and Bob Ferraro, whose children attend Saint Elizabeth Parish School. "We appreciate and value the small group setting that Catholic school typically provides, and absolutely love the sense of community. There is just something 'extra' that you get in Catholic school even if you can't put your finger on it exactly. We believe that it really provides our children with a strong foundation to grow up leading faith-filled lives."

Bob and Kerry appreciate the advantages, both academically and spiritually, offered in Catholic elementary school and noted that they plan to send their children to Catholic high school as well.

On public elementary school...

"We choose to educate our children in the Downingtown Area public school system because of its excellent reputation. It provides its students with wonderful learning environments, fantastic educators, challenging curriculum, great support services, many extracurricular activities and family-minded school events," said parishioner Kristen Lebresco, whose children attend Uwchlan Hills Elementary School and the Marsh Creek Sixth Grade Center. "I went to Catholic elementary school and had a very positive experience. But, for our family it boiled down to taking advantage of all that DASD has to offer. When you are lucky enough to be within the confines of a public school district that performs as well as DASD, why not take advantage of it?"

On private elementary schools...

"Education is very important to us, as is ensuring our children grow up knowledgeable and faithful Catholics," said Marybeth Brehany, who, along with her husband John, moved to Downingtown to take advantage of the quality educational opportunities. The Brehany's chose to send all of their school-age children to Regina Luminis Academy, a Pre-K thru 12th-grade private, Catholic school now located

in West Norriton. "We appreciate RLA's Catholic and classic curriculum along with its Catholic and family-based culture. RLA has provided our children with an excellent Catholic foundation, a wonderful learning experience that is not based on the Common Core curriculum and lifelong friends. The fact that RLA has grades Pre-K to 12 on one campus is a special joy, allowing students of all ages to interact together – something that benefits the entire student body."

On homeschooling – trending upwards...

More recently, there also has been a steady growth in homeschooled children – particularly in Pennsylvania. In fact, the number of children between the ages of 5 and 17 that are homeschooled in the United States has skyrocketed over the years, rising more than 62% since 2005 to an estimated 1.8 million students, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education.

Saint Elizabeth parishioners, Mike and Susan Buzin, have been homeschooling their three children since the 2014/15 academic year. Their children – Kate, 17 and a junior in high school, Sarah, now a freshman in high school, and Jacob age 12 and in sixth grade – each attended schools in the Downingtown Area School District (DASD) prior to their homeschooling.

"Everyone makes the decision to homeschool for different reasons," explained Susan. "In many cases, the reasons stem from lack of flexibility in a formal school environ-

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Your Poor Box Generosity Goes a Long Way

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Saint Elizabeth Parish poor box program. Over that ten-year period parishioners and visitors have contributed over \$175,000; these monies have been distributed to eight different social service agencies. Contributions have increased over the years and now exceed \$23,000 per year!

When the poor box program was first established, the organizing committee created the following guidelines for choosing which of the many worthwhile agencies to support:

1. Primarily local agencies, preferably in Chester County
2. Relatively small, so that our contributions would have a meaningful impact on their programs
3. Mission and programs consistent with Catholic beliefs and values

Saint Elizabeth's parish poor box program now supports the following organizations:

- Misión Santa Maria in Kennett Square
- Safe Harbor of West Chester
- The Lord's Pantry of Downingtown
- Saint Agnes Day Room of West Chester
- Saint Mary's Franciscan Shelter of Phoenixville
- Birthright of West Chester and Coatesville
- The Aquinas Center in South Philadelphia – new in 2017, it focuses on refugee assistance

- Burkina Faso Emergency Food Relief – the only non-local agency

All of these agencies make dramatic differences in the lives of their clients, including the following featured recipients:

The Saint Agnes Day Room is located in the basement of the rectory of Saint Agnes Church in West Chester. It provides a wide range of services locally, beginning with the basic need of shelter between the hours of 9:00 AM and 3:00 PM every weekday. The Day Room serves a hot lunch five days a week, dishing out more than 18,000 hot lunches last year. It also manages a food pantry, distributes clothing, provides nursing services, and runs an educational support program for young children of immigrant families, all done with dignity



Christina and Stephanie Janowicz make a donation to the poor box.

and respect for their clients. Barbara Kirby, who started the Day Room 25 years ago and still man-

ages it, is very grateful for the support provided by Saint Elizabeth parishioners, not only through the poor box but also through the Advent Giving Tree Program and the "Sharing our Bounty" food drives.

St Mary's Franciscan Shelter

was originally a school and convent for Saint Mary's Parish. The building currently has space to provide temporary, eight-week-long housing for five homeless families. Food is provided daily, with dinners prepared and served by members of local Christian churches. During their stay at Saint Mary's, clients are provided counseling, training, and other support to set them on the path of becoming more independent. Specific goals include: assisting families in arranging day care for their children, finding an apartment, finding a job and learning how to manage their funds. Saint Mary's is in the process of converting four of the old parish school classrooms into small apartments that will provide transitional housing for up to 18 months, giving families additional time to establish more stable lives.

Next time, you or your family drop some loose change – or more – into the parish poor box, pause and think about the major impact of this small token. Contributors are touching, even forever changing, the lives of those who are in most need. It's true: even a little, can go a long way.

~ Al Brady

Education *(cont'd)*

ment. I wanted to tailor my kids' education to meet their learning needs while also enabling them to have the freedom to learn about certain subjects that are not offered in a traditional, brick-and-mortar school. I also wanted to be free to incorporate Catholic teaching wherever possible."

Interestingly, Buzin added that learning in a home school environment doesn't have to be limited to the hours between 8 am and 3 pm or Monday thru Friday; it can happen more organically and in unexpected ways. "Not conditioned by a bell ringing, students can spend more time digging into a new subject or pondering a spiritual dilemma," said Buzin.

While this 'outside-the-lines' style may be ideal for some students, a more systematic approach may prove better for others. So, whether at home or in a traditional classroom, in a public or private school environment, religious-based or not...there is a quality elementary education option in Chester County for everyone.

"I do not think education is a matter of what is better – public vs. parochial, private, even in-home. It's about choosing the school environment that is best suited for your children and family," concluded Kristen. "Our children are fortunate to have the choice of so many fantastic school options right in our own backyard."

~ Lisa Barbadora

Core Value *(cont'd)*

"Once you start getting to know people, the church feels like home and the parishioners like family," added Gilda Cellini, leader of the Legion of Mary.

Several interviewees offered praise for the parish Liturgical Greeters, who try to make everyone who enters feel welcome at weekend Mass and send them off with a smile and a copy of the parish bulletin. Parishioner Chris Cambria suggested, "Being present to others and seeking out new people is a wonderful gift to others and ourselves as well, as we slow down enough to observe God's gifts all around us and express gratefulness."

"Looking through the eyes, mind, and heart of Jesus at our parish family makes us welcoming as well as grateful," added Chris.

All of those interviewed mentioned that it is important for us to continue to make an effort to introduce ourselves to others we encounter at church and in the larger community, with a special sensitivity toward those who may be struggling with their faith or a pressing personal concern. How often one's life can be made a little easier if someone else takes the time to listen with attention and care! Sometimes a sympathetic listener is the best invitation or welcome we can offer to another.

All also agreed that Saint Elizabeth has been consistent in promoting a stewardship way of life among parishioners, and that parishioners' generosity in sharing

their talents and treasure is very impressive, if not contagious. At the same time, added Gilda, "We need to encourage everyone to give just a tiny bit more of their time so that all of our ministries can be fully staffed – in other words: many hands make light work!" Committees are always looking for new faces to join in activities and lend a helping hand.

To learn more about how you can become a more active member of the Saint Elizabeth community, go to the parish website at www.stelizabethparish.org and explore the many activities held throughout the year.

~ Elisa Sheronas

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Family Spirits: Meet the Barr Family – Filled with Love

The Barrs have been parishioners at Saint Elizabeth since the church's founding in 2000.

Both Cheryl and Jeff are originally from the Harrisburg area. They attended the same high school, although they did not know each other at the time. Both of their fathers worked for the same company. Jeff completed a bachelor's degree

on New Year's Eve. "Celebrating our first date is a great way to start each year," Jeff said, and Cheryl laughed, "I guess you can say that we were an arranged marriage."

Jeff started his career in Downingtown in 1990 and drove back to Harrisburg every weekend to be with Cheryl. They were married in June, 1994. They have been married for 23 years and have three children: Jeremy (19), Kayla (17) and Lexi (13). Right after Kayla was born, Saint Elizabeth Church was just being formed and the Barr family joined our parish. "A little unsure at first, it didn't take long for us to experience the wonderful community we have here at Saint Elizabeth," Cheryl remembered. Jeff was from a Protestant tradition and after attending Mass in the Lionville Middle School gym and holy day Masses at Bishop Shanahan High School, he felt a call to explore the Catholic Faith. He began attend-

where he works full time. Kayla will be a senior in high school in the fall. "We are visiting several colleges as we speak," Jeff quipped.

In November, 2008, the whole family traveled to China where AnFuLi became Lexi AnFuLi Barr and joined this loving family. Lexi was baptized by Father Mullin on her fifth birthday. This Easter season she was confirmed by Bishop Senior together with 166 of her classmates and friends. She currently attends the Marsh Creek Sixth Grade Center and loves life. "Although Lexi remembers receiving each of her sacraments so far, she will say her Baptism was her favorite because Father Mullin let her blow out the big candle on her birthday," Cheryl added.

The love found in the Barr family truly reaches into our community – from hosting Elementary Faith Formation classes in their home, to sharing their special family and parenting experiences with new moms and dads during Pre-Jordan Baptism preparation classes, to being a family of greeters at Sunday Mass...the love of Christ shines through them for all of us.

We're happy their dads thought a blind date was a good idea!

~ Deacon Barry Midwood



*The Barr Family:
Jeff, Lexi, Kayla, Jeremy and Cheryl*

at Millersville University and a graduate degree at West Chester University, while Cheryl completed her undergraduate work at Kutztown University and her graduate work at Shippensburg University. After they finished schooling, their dads set them up on a blind date. Cheryl cancelled the first meeting, but Jeff was persistent and they had their first date

ing RCIA classes and then was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil in 2001.

Jeff currently owns and operates a computer consulting and training company, while Cheryl keeps the rest of the busy family schedule on track. Jeremy now lives in his own home in West Chester,

School Spirits: Big Goals Drive Parish School Advisory Council

Following the second election for the Saint Elizabeth Parish School Advisory Council (PSAC), new and existing members met this year to update the school's strategic plan. The PSAC is a group of elected and appointed members who offer their personal and professional talents, in collaboration with Principal Dr. Diane Greco and Father Tom Mullin, to the development and betterment of our parish school.

When the PSAC initially convened in 2014, it focused on achieving the new standards and requirements for Middle States accreditation. "The Strategic Plan was a natural next step," explained council member Jim McHugh. "As the school continues to expand its educational pro-

grams and address fluctuations in student enrollment year to year, it makes sense to revisit the plan and make adjustments to ensure the long-term stability of our parish school. Our over-arching goal is to increase the visibility of the parish school and to enhance engagement between the Church and school community."

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Parish Youth Council Ramps Up

Twelve Saint Elizabeth parishioners have taken on a great adventure...all without even leaving the parish grounds. Even so, the impact of this adventure will be felt throughout the parish for years to come.

These parishioners have joined Youth Ministry Coordinator, Ryan Schwalm, as members of the newly formed Parish Youth Council. The 12 council members come from a diverse array of parish ministries, which Ryan hopes will help attract a broad cross-section of our parish young people and increase the number of those who actively participate in Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry activities. This growth is very important. Since starting as Youth Ministry Coordinator in January of 2016, Ryan's mission has been to expand youth ministry programs and increase participation while continuing to nourish those already actively involved.

It's not easy, but the Parish Youth Council is up to the task. Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry programs currently host about 250 young people per month and the number of youth ministry events is still growing. Most recently, a High School Music Ministry group was formed. After a successful debut in March at the Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry's presentation of the Stations of the Cross, the group has directed its energy toward taking part in parish Masses. "This music group is set to become the focal point of the Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry vision," said Ryan. "Music has a way of grabbing people by the heart, and then drawing the heart closer toward Christ."



Members of the Parish Youth Council include (r to l) Pam McHugh, Jamie Gazda, Ryan Schwalm, Karen Patterson and Andrea Fiorillo. In all, 12 members are gearing up to expand youth ministry programs and increase participation.

The Parish Youth Council has already met as a group a few times and created a long and aspiring set of goals. To start, the Council is taking inventory of past events — what worked, what didn't — and then building from there. The next step is to solicit feedback from all participants to learn what *will* work. And then it's off to the races — planning and promoting the upcoming year's events.

Long term, Ryan is dreaming big for the program. "We want the Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry to become a brand — a cool brand that appeals to young people of different ages. We want merchandise that shares who we are, big events that attract people as well as intimate events that touch the soul. This is an amazing parish full of wonderful people. If there's going to be a parish on the cutting edge of youth ministry, it's this one," smiled Ryan. "If

Saint Elizabeth Parish doesn't reach our young people, who will? We are competing for the attention of school-age kids, teenagers, and young adults amidst a sea of distractions so this is very difficult but very important work."

It's clear that the Parish Youth Council has its hands full and we wish them the best of luck! If you would like to help in any way or would like your children to be involved in Saint Elizabeth Youth Ministry, contact Ryan Schwalm at 610-646-6534 or via email at rschwalm@stelizabethparish.org.

~ Deacon Barry Midwood

A Look at EITC



WSFS representatives presented a check to Saint Elizabeth Parish School under the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) grant program. For some insight into our parishioners' choices on elementary education, see the article on page 2 of this issue!

Did you know that you can support Catholic Education at Saint Elizabeth Parish School while receiving a credit on business or personal income tax?

The **Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC)** allows you to contribute to a Special Purpose Entity (SPE) managed by the Foundation for Catholic Education or Business Leaders Organized for Catholic Schools (BLOCS) and apply that contribution as a tax credit. Your donation can be designated to a Catholic school, specifically Saint Elizabeth Parish School, to help offset tuition for students who otherwise might not be able to attend.

Businesses can contribute up to \$750,000 a year to the program, and receive a 75% credit for a one-year commitment or 90% for two years. Individuals can receive a 90% tax credit for a two-year commitment.

For more information, contact the Foundation for Catholic Education, 610-793-8505 or jneeld@foundationforcatholiceducation.org, or BLOCS at 484-704-2300 or info@blocs.org.

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