

the OUTREACH

March/April 2016

The Outreach newsletter is published bi-monthly by St. Basil Parish. The editorial staff welcomes your comment, suggestions, and help. Contact any of the following Outreach members: GERALYN MONACELLI, JAY LANDRY, or SYLVIA VERDONK.



Can We Be a Church of Second Chances?

By Rosalie Plechaty

This was the underlying question we faced when we took the Prison Reform Module of *JustFaith* this past fall. Once again, *JustFaith* challenged the group to look deeper into a societal issue that affects us all, to open our eyes and our hearts to the imprisoned, the 'guilty', the condemned. How can we – as Christians – or even simple community members – show compassion and walk with individuals who have made bad choices – even heinous acts?

This was our challenge and what has led me to further work on being a 'church of second chances.' After the first session of *JustFaith*, I was intrigued to know more about the incarcerated and sure enough, an opportunity was presented to me! While taking the Prison Reform Module, I met young people who were struggling with being newly released felons while also being young parents. And I thought to myself, what's next? I felt I was being 'led' to keep going – to find other like-minded individuals who see this plight of the incarcerated – this scary, almost inevitable to be repeated, life path, and perhaps explore it more.

And that's what leads me to now. We have had two well-attended community dialogues on prison reform and prison re-entry. We have heard from the legal and system perspective; we have heard from the people and organizations that are doing great work right here in South Haven. We are looking at 'what's next' with this group. Are the needs greater in prevention? To try to intercede before a young person is convicted and sent to jail? Is it mentoring parolees? Is it giving comfort and hope to the prisoners? Is it advocacy in changing the legal system? Is it exploring restorative justice? Yikes!

We don't know! But we aren't giving up – especially in this year of mercy. We will continue to 'hear' God's call to action and be a church of second chances.

To find out more, contact Rosalie at [269-271-6307](tel:269-271-6307) or at plechatyrm@gmail.com

Nobody Wants Them

By Fr. Bob Flickinger

Jay Winik, in his book *1944 – FDR AND THE YEAR THAT CHANGED HISTORY*, tells the story of an incident that happened in 1939. He tells about an ocean liner, named the *Saint Louis* that on May 13, 1939 set sail for Cuba with 937 hopeful Jewish refugees. They were some of the last who were fortunate to escape from the worsening German restrictions on immigration. On arriving in Cuba, only 28 passengers were allowed to come on shore. Word was received from Germany and its propaganda machine, that the Cubans should not allow the Jews to disembark because they were criminals and a danger to Cuban security. As a result, permission to land was not granted. For seven horrible days they prayed and begged that Cuba would allow them to land. It was not to be.



On June 2, the *Saint Louis* sailed north to reach the Florida coast. The captain held out hope that the United States would welcome the refugees – of which there were four hundred women and children. He was wrong. For weeks the ship cruised off shore and the people aboard pleaded for mercy. They knew that if they had to return to Germany they would face death. Telegrams were sent from the ship to the president and others asking for compassion. It became evident that they would not be welcomed in the United States. The captain, miserable and depressed, knew he had no choice but to return to Germany. Their plea for asylum was not heard. Nobody wanted them. They returned to Germany and Europe. Within a year, at least 254 passengers, the majority on board the *Saint Louis*, perished in Nazi concentration camps.

There is much discussion today about immigration and controlling our borders. I do not deny that each nation has a right to defend its borders and control immigration. But I pray we will never be the place where needy, desperate, and deserving people will feel like, "Nobody wants me." I hope the world never forgets the experience of the *Saint Louis* and its Jewish passengers.

Save a Tree! (and postage)

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Catechists' Corner

by Sylvia Verdonk, Director of Youth Religious Education

How does one differentiate between a “friend” and an “acquaintance?” In my own experience, an acquaintance is someone who is in and out of my life; someone who I meet and greet occasionally in my day-to-day comings and goings. It is wonderful to see an acquaintance, “catch up” on happenings since the last meeting, smile, hug, and move on. A friend, on the other hand, is someone who is truly missed if too much time passes without “touching base.” A friend is someone who would do anything for me and for whom I would do anything. Friends are there to love, support, and help. They respond in an instant, whenever called. They celebrate with me and mourn with me. They are never too far away! I must admit that, when I was a child, Jesus was an acquaintance. My vision was too worldly and small to see Jesus as an approachable figure in my life. Jesus was someone I could acknowledge at Church and in prayers over meals or before going to sleep at night, but inviting Jesus to be a friend in my life turned out to be something that would take years of growth. Who would guide and foster that growth?

I am so thankful to my parents for giving me a firm foundation in my faith and fostering my relationship with Jesus. I learned about Jesus in Church and in religious edu-

cation classes. As a pre-teen and teenager, I remember doing some bad things. The disappointment was evident on my parents' faces, but their forgiveness was total and their love unconditional. They were my first examples of Jesus in my life: guiding, loving, forgiving, approachable, and, in leaving home and making my own life, a true friend. The Church was there to support my family in all things, good and bad. The Church was a guide in my youth, and strength for my parents as they guided and supported me at home.

As with any friendship, turning to Jesus as a friend took time to develop. My relationship with Jesus and my faith in Him continue to grow to this day. I still do things that hurt that relationship, but I know that Jesus is always near. He forgives me, He loves me, and He will always be my friend. I know that I have the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist to restore the relationship I have with Jesus. I also know that there is absolutely nothing that I cannot ask of or tell Jesus. Prayer is my “direct line” to Him; no cell phone required! I know He hears me and He will answer me. Jesus says to all of us, “There is no greater love than this – that a man should lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) I celebrate the fact that Jesus and I are friends enough that He even died for me!

Jesus also has a message for all parents today, and I believe it is the same message my parents heeded so many years ago. He said, “You must let little children come to me, and you must never stop them. The kingdom of Heaven belongs to little children like these!” (Matthew 19: 14) Parents, you are the first teachers of your children. Introduce them to their very special friend, Jesus Christ. Pray with them so that they learn that they can talk to their friend Jesus anytime. Nurture this relationship in your children always. Allow the Church to support you in all of your efforts. In the end, let Jesus shine through you as you help your children grow in faith and foster the relationship between them and Jesus, someone who can be their very best friend forever!



Miss Rose's First Communion Sunday religious education class reenacts the Last Supper.

Crossing Borders - JustFaith Program on Immigration

By Jay Landry

Immigration, like prison reform, is a complex issue that is reshaping the cultural, economic and political landscape of the planet. The JustFaith “Crossing Borders: Migration, Theology, and the Human Journey” program offers prayer, reading and reflection, as well as discussion and discovery related to this critical and controversial issue of our day. This 8 session group process provides participants a chance to find common ground and to discover more about themselves, their values, our God, and the millions of people who are on the move in every part of the world. This program invites participants to an expanded vision of migration.

Thirteen people from three South Haven churches just participated in the 8 week Prison Reform module at St. Basil this past fall. It was a challenging, eye-opening experience to learn that 2 out of 3 inmates eventually go back to prison for a second felony conviction. Sadly, our incarceration rate is the highest in the world. We learned various ways that we might make our criminal justice system more restorative.

If this type of short-term, intensive experience interests you, the immigration group will meet on Monday evenings at St. Basil starting on April 18 going through June 6. Participants are expected to attend all the sessions. The deadline for signup is Friday, April 8. If you are interested, it is important to speak with a facilitator to learn expectations, details, and cost. For more information, please contact Jay Freel Landry at jayfreelandry@gmail.com or 269-637-2404 x116, Bobbie Otto at bobbie@rottocpa.com or 269-313-1761, or GERALYN Monacelli at geralynmonacelli@yahoo.com or 269-214-7786.

St. Basil's Youth Choir: A Reflection

By Emily Verdonk

I can still remember how angry I was when my Mom called me inside from the playground. It was a beautiful Fall evening, the night of a Spaghetti Dinner and Open House at St. Basil Catholic School. I was in 2nd grade at the time, many of my friends were at the school that evening, and the one goal I had just then was to run around and get my crisp, white uniform shirt as dirty as possible.

"You have to go over to the church," Mom said.

"But why!?" I protested.

"Because Cecilia Wondergem is starting a youth choir, and you're going to be in it."

"But I don't want to be in a choir!"

Famous last words.

I wouldn't know it until years later, but that first night of St. Basil's Youth Choir shaped the formative years of my life. I walked into the church to see a gaggle of about a dozen girls in 2nd through 8th grades sitting around the steps of the altar. Some I knew, some I didn't. We were all nervous and unsure about this new experience, and Cecilia must have been unsure too, but somehow we would attempt to sing together and make a choir. At the time, I didn't really think too much about it. Growing up in my house, it was a well-known fact that on Sunday morning, you went to Mass, no exceptions. And church choir just gave me another thing to do. I quickly learned that singing with the choir up in the loft was way better than sitting in a pew downstairs, and that hearing the organ blasting in my right ear was much more effective at keeping me awake than if I were further removed from it. But in all seriousness, that little choir was where I got my start. The first choral piece I ever learned was "Siyahamba: We Are Marching In The Light Of God" followed closely by "This Little Light Of Mine." To this day I remember those songs word-for-word and note-for-note and could still perform them with all the joy of a child's heart.

That little youth choir grew and changed as the years went on. Some of the original girls left the group, but many more joined until we weren't so little anymore! We must have had near thirty kids packed into that choir loft at one point. And man, was it fun! Not only did we sing at Mass almost weekly, we went to choir camp at Camp Geneva in Holland, we sang the National Anthem at White Caps baseball games, and even cut a youth choir CD at one point! At Christmas time, we joined with the adult choir for concerts, caroled at nursing homes, and actually landed gigs singing for people's fancy Christmas parties. These experiences were my introduction to the pure joy that is performing, the importance of music in praise and worship, and the happiness that music could bring to all those who heard us sing.

One day seven years later, I stood in the choir loft as a high school freshman, and Cecilia Wondergem said to me, "You need to join choir at the high school." The thought alone was enough to send me running for the hills! My only singing experience had been with the St. Basil Youth Choir. How was I supposed to be a good enough singer to join the



choirs at South Haven High School? This mentality continued until my junior year when a combination of Cecilia's urging and my heart being fit to burst at the desire to sing more finally brought me to approach the high school director, Cole Tyrrell, about joining his choirs.

I won't go into great detail about what happened next, but suffice it to say I had found my niche. Singing in choirs was officially the best thing ever. And I *was* good enough. St. Basil's had prepared me well. Cecilia had taught me everything I needed to know to be successful in music. It was an easy and obvious career choice to pursue vocal music at Western Michigan University

after I graduated from South Haven High School in 2006, and like the two fabulous directors I had sung under up until that point, I knew I wanted to teach. I wanted to be the person to facilitate meaningful experiences in music for my own students, just as Cecilia and Cole had done for me, and it is this passion that drives me to this day.

Now twenty-seven-years-old, I live my dream of being a choir teacher. I have four established choirs at Allendale High School, and I relish every moment of our daily rehearsals and regular performances. I myself have continued to perform with the Grand Rapids Symphony Chorus, and foster my Catholic faith by singing in three choirs at the Cathedral of St. Andrew: Diocesan Schola, Cathedral Choir, and Mystical Voices. My days and nights are filled with singing, whether in rehearsal or performance. But of those four choirs, the most meaningful to me remains the Cathedral Choir, because it is the one group that sings only at weekly Masses, to give praise and enhance worship for the congregation. It feels like home, and I never take for granted a moment of singing in that beautiful, sacred place.

I have written back to Cecilia on occasion to thank her for all that she has done for me, and while she would never openly own it, we both know the truth in our hearts. None of what I do today would have been possible without her efforts, my formative years spent under her direction at St. Basil's Catholic Church, and a little gaggle of kids that one day became a choir.



The original St. Basil Youth Choir, with Emily in the front row, second from the left.

Youth Group Enjoys Presence Retreat

By Cathy Kimbler

Where do fun activities, fellowship, and a desire to grow in your faith come together? At the Diocesan Presence Retreat for high school students. This year's retreat was held Feb. 26-28 at Hackett Catholic Prep High School in Kalamazoo. Six students from the St Basil Youth Group, along with Ana Villegas and Cathy Kimbler as chaperones, attended this year's retreat. Our students, along with other youth from across the diocese, participated in small breakout sessions, whole group presentations, and listening to keynote speaker Father David Mary. He gave dynamic presentations and inspired the youth to really grow in their love of God. One of our youth, Daniel, said, "I really liked his talks."



Each morning began with students participating in the living rosary, which was recited in English, Spanish, and Burmese. From there they went to breakout sessions to learn more about our faith.

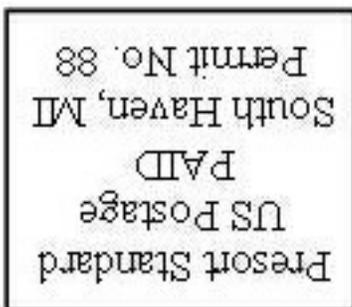
On Saturday evening Fr David had a powerful re-enactment of the Passion that completely captivated his audience, while for over two hours he passionately described every detail involved in Jesus's last supper with his disciples to his ultimate death on the cross. "I like how they put emotion into the Passion," Noemi remarked.

After the Passion we participated in Eucharistic Adoration, which many of our youth experienced for the first time. When Karmyn and Karina were asked which part of the retreat they enjoyed most, they said, "I enjoyed Adoration the most." Adoration went through the night, so those wishing to experience it could return if they wished.

Bishop Bradley celebrated mass Sunday morning to conclude the weekend. He encouraged the young people to continue to live Jesus' Presence in our daily lives and to bring the peace of Jesus to those we encounter every day at school, in our communities, and in our families.

"It was an intense new experience," remarked Anahi.

Next year we hope to get even more high school youth to attend so they too can bring Jesus' peace to others.



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