Looking for More

By Stephen Paesani and Christine Szczepanowski

This is a difficult time for the Catholic Church. The sex-abuse scandal, confusing and conflicting leadership, financial woes and decline in numbers of priests and religious, among other things, make for a bleak picture. Some blame the present circumstances in the Church on self-inflicted wounds, stemming from an arrogance and lack of transparency. Others see the Church as losing sight of its ultimate mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus and becoming overly concerned with protecting the institution. Still others are just happy to see the Church devolve into a state of irrelevance.

Despite the very real problems, recent experience has shown that it is premature to write off the Church as a relic of the past with no bearing on contemporary life. The Catholic Church is still the single largest Christian denomination in the United States. Every year, especially during the Easter season, thousands of adults enter the Church either through Baptism or reception from another Christian communion. Women and men across the country (and the world) are making a conscious, voluntary choice to join this Church, this community that has experienced, and still is experiencing, some very dark and trying times. In 2019, approximately 37,000 adults joined the Catholic Church in the United States during the Easter season. (Due to the pandemic, numbers for 2020 have not been fully tallied). One might reasonably ask why any adult would want to join a group whose sins and failings are continually in the public eye. What is it that is drawing all these folks to become members of the Catholic Church?

Of course, there are as many reasons as there are people entering the Church. While all the reasons, at their roots, are a response to a call to deepen one’s relationship to Christ and the Christian life, they run the gamut from the more pragmatic (marrying a Catholic person) to the intensely personal and spiritual (fulfilling a lifelong quest), and everything in-between.

At Old St. Joseph’s, we are blessed to have eight young people (ages 26–34) seeking to enter our community through baptism or reception or to complete their initiation into the Catholic Church. Andrea Walker and Victor Wang are asking to be baptized. Kelsey Lazicki, Daniel Honig, and Maxim Kind, all previously baptized in another Christian community, will be received into the Church. Rebecca DeSimone, Kyle Forte and Alex Palma, who have already been baptized in the Catholic Church, will complete their formal initiation.

All are intelligent, well-informed and well-educated. They work in a variety of professions—medicine, technology, finance, business and the National Park Service. As members of OSJ’s Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program, they have been meeting as a group every Sunday since September.

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These meetings involve reading, praying, studying, and most of all, discussing and sharing. Listening to them talk about their lives, the faith and the situation of the world, one thing becomes clear: the Holy Spirit is very much alive within them, leading them to seek and strive for that “something more”!

What is drawing this particular group of talented young adults to enter the Catholic Church at this time? For some, the immediate impetus is an upcoming marriage to a Catholic partner. But for all of them, there is a very real search for sense, order, meaning and community in their lives. They find the Catholic Church to be a place where they can live their lives with more meaning and authenticity. It is within the community of the Church that they grow in their relationship with Jesus. Our catechumens and candidates freely share their insights, their understandings, and their questions. They listen to the Gospel message and the teachings of the Church and they work to integrate these into their daily and professional lives.

In true Catholic fashion, they come to the Church from different perspectives. As one member of the group put it, the Church is “a series of forces in conversation with itself” (sort of describes the Trinity, doesn’t it?). Another member is moved by the work of the Spirit in the people, “even in a chaotically disorganized” way. Some are attracted to the Church’s discipline, intellectual and spiritual. The examples of “Catholic heroes” have drawn others—women and men such as Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Mother Katherine Drexel. And some have been longing for a deeper union with God, Jesus and the Church.

St. Paul reminds us that the Spirit is one but provides many different gifts for the good of the entire Body of Christ, the Church. In these eight men and women, we have a treasure of talent, enthusiasm and generosity that are great gifts for our community. We are blessed and grateful that they are willing to join us on our journey in Jesus, as we continue to work for the building of the Kingdom of God. Whether they remain at Old St. Joseph’s for years or move on to other communities, their formation in our midst has enhanced our parish. They have brought fresh eyes and ears and diverse experiences through which to understand our faith. Particularly heartening for old-timers is their desire to live lives of integrity and purpose. In our conversations, they have expressed their eagerness to live out what they’ve learned in their homes, at work and in their communities.

This essay began by citing the darkness and sin that engulfs our Church. There is so much for which we as a Church must atone. There is a deep need for reform and transformation in our community. Yet we can take hope in the gift of these new members. They can help us in our reformation. They provide a new source of grace that can help us move forward. Their presence among us is a sure sign that the Lord’s promise is being fulfilled: “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Victor, Andrea, Kelsey, Daniel, Maxim, Rebecca, Kyle and Alex were welcomed into the community at Old St. Joseph’s on Sunday, June 21. We all look forward to when they, and we, can worship together as a community.

Front page image: photo by Miguel Orós on Unsplash
Please remember our sick and homebound brothers and sisters, our ministry at Pennsylvania Hospital and all those who have asked for our prayers.

George Bernato, Debbie Brooks, Ann Crowther, Jane Crowther, Mary Kay Crowther, Barbara Epting, Allan May, Jerry McAndrews SJ, Owen Petzelka, Philip Press, Matthew Smith, Sara Smith, Sharon Winge and Pat Yusko.

If you wish to have someone included on the parish prayer list, please call BJ Brown at 215-923-1733 or email bjbrown@oldstjoseph.org.

Announcements

Addressing Racism
Catholic leaders from across the country, including those with Catholic Relief Services, have shared messages about overcoming racism and injustice. You can search YouTube for "Overcoming racism and injustice—Catholic leaders in US speak out" to see some of them. Also see oldstjoseph.org’s home page for a link to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops’ recommendations for Practical Steps to Eradicate Racism.

Socks Galore!
Faith Food, and Friends received nine cartons of socks this week, a generous grant from the Bombas sock company. More than two thousand pairs of socks will soon make their way to the feet of our guests, for whom clean socks are a matter of both comfort and health. And to the many generous donors of personal care items, gloves, disposable masks and cleaning supplies, many thanks!

A Helping Hand for Our Neighbors
The Sisters of Saint Joseph Welcome Center, located in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, is collecting gift cards to local stores to distribute to immigrant families in need. These cards are used to help our friends and neighbors to meet their basic daily needs during these challenging times. The Welcome Center requests cards from ShopRite, RiteAid and Target. If you are able to contribute, please send cards to: SSJ Welcome Center, 728 E. Allegheny Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19134.

Honor Roll
St. Joseph’s Prep is proud to announce that three students from Old St. Joseph’s were listed on the Prep Honor Roll for the 2019-2020 academic year. Congratulations to James H. Agger, James C. King Jr. and Timothy P. McClure and their families!
INFORMATION

Pastor
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ (pastor@oldstjoseph.org)

Parochial Vicar
Fr. Francis Hannafey SJ (fhannafey@oldstjoseph.org)

In Residence
Br. Robert Carson SJ
Fr. Ed O’Donnell SJ (eodonnell@oldstjoseph.org)

Pastoral Associate
BJ Brown (bjbrown@oldstjoseph.org)

Business Manager
Eric German (germane@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Music
Mark Bani (music@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Offices
(parishoffice@oldstjoseph.org)

Religious Education (PREP) Coordinator
Christine Szczepanowski (prep@oldstjoseph.org)

Faith, Food & Friends Director
Deborah Hluchan (faithandfriends@oldstjoseph.org)

Director of Hospital Ministry
Tom Volkert (hospitalEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Rectory Office Hours
Monday through Friday: 9:30 AM to 4:30 PM

Mass Times
Sunday: 9:30 AM (livestreamed), 11:30 AM (public)

Medical Emergency
In a medical emergency when the need for a priest is urgent, please call the rectory.

Hearing Enhancements
Old St. Joseph’s is equipped with an audio hearing loop. Switch on the T-coil function of your device to use the loop. Booklets with the Sunday readings are available in the rear of the church.

Registration
Registration forms are available in the rectory office during normal office hours, on the bookcases in the back of the church and online at www.oldstjoseph.org. They can be returned to the parish office by mail or in person.

Sacrament of Reconciliation
Please contact the parish office to make arrangements for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Sacrament of Baptism
If you want to arrange a baptism, please contact Fr. Hannafey (fhannafey@oldstjoseph.org) at least two months before the desired date.

Eucharist for the Homebound
To arrange to receive Communion at home, please contact the parish offices.

The Sacrament of Anointing
Homebound or hospitalized persons wanting to receive the Sacrament of Anointing should call the parish office.

Sacrament of Matrimony
If you want to be married at Old St. Joseph’s, please visit our website, oldstjoseph.org and read the material under the heading Weddings. Please call the parish office at 215-923-1766 at least nine months before your desired wedding date.

Rite of Christian Initiation
If you are an adult wishing to be baptized, or to receive First Eucharist and Confirmation, or are a baptized non-Catholic seeking full communion with Catholic Church, please call the parish office or email rcia@oldstjoseph.org.

Mass of Christian Burial
To schedule a funeral or memorial Mass, ask your funeral director to call the parish office.

Parish Pastoral Council
(osjpc@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Finance Council
Paul Shay, chair

Historic Preservation Corporation Board
Fr. Walter Modrys SJ, president

Adult Education
Rita O’Brien and Jeanmarie Zippo (adulted@oldstjoseph.org)

Eldership
Pat Nelson (eldership@oldstjoseph.org)

Parish Life
Joe Casey (parishlife@oldstjoseph.org)

Ignatian Spirituality and Formation
Len Mancini (osjspirituality@oldstjoseph.org)

Women, Faith and Fellowship
Rana McNamara (wff@oldstjoseph.org)

Young Adult Community
(osjyac@gmail.com)

Altar Servers
Maria Ramirez (altarserver@oldstjoseph.org)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
Bill Stewart (EM@oldstjoseph.org)

Hospital Ministry
Luanne Balestrucci (hospitalEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Homebound Ministry
Neal Hébert (homeEM@oldstjoseph.org)

Lectors
Lou Anne Bulik (lectors@oldstjoseph.org)

Ushers
Nikola Sizgorich (ushers@oldstjoseph.org)

Children’s Liturgy of the Word
Peggy Connolly (clow@oldstjoseph.org)
God Bless America

Please Continue To Pray For
World Peace

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