



Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil:

5:00 p.m.,

7:00 p.m. (Spanish)

Sunday:

7:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m.,

11:30 a.m.,

4:00 p.m. (Lifeteen)

Daily Mass:

Mon, Tue, Thu, Fri, 7:30 a.m.;

Wed, 12 p.m. (noon)

Adoration:

Mon, Tue, 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.;

Wed, 8:00 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.;

Fri, 8:00 - 11:30 a.m.

Confessions:

Sat, 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Prison Ministry Is Opportunity to Evangelize and Reach Out to Those in Need

Most of us are aware that Pope Francis has a great devotion to the poor and to the concept of mercy. He announced and proclaimed a Jubilee Holy Year of Mercy just a couple years ago, and he speaks and writes often about how we as Catholics can live out and emphasize mercy as part of our lives.

During the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis emphasized in particular the importance of carrying out the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy — to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

Much of what we do at St. Mark follows and fulfills those Corporal Works of Mercy, but one ministry in particular carries out one of these works — visiting the imprisoned. Our parish is proud to have a Prison Ministry which is involved with all of the jails in Denton County.

“Our involvement and experiences in Prison Ministry are very inspiring for us personally,” says Deacon Jim Galbraith,



who serves as coordinator for the Prison Ministry. “We so much appreciate being able to give of ourselves in this way, and the inmates with whom we come in contact appreciate it even more. This is really a way to evangelize and to reach out to those in need, as Christ and our pope have asked us to do.”

As Deacon Jim notes, the ministry members go to the County Jail every Friday.

“There are three of us — myself, a retired police chief and a retired teacher,” he says. “Basically we have one hour. There are what they call pods at the jail, each of which has 48 men. They rotate us through the pods, so we only see the men in a



Hospitality: The Cornerstone of Stewardship

The dictionary defines “hospitality” as “the quality or disposition of receiving and treating guests and strangers in a warm, friendly, generous way.”

A Christian worldview can refer to hospitality as “Christian kindness.”

We see the effects of hospitality – or the lack thereof – time and time again throughout the Bible. Christ speaks of hospitality in Matthew’s Gospel when He says, “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me” (Matthew 25:35). The Old Testament told of the Israelites, as they wandered the desert for 40 years in search of hospitable environs. Even the Holy Family spent ample time searching for shelter before the birth of Our Lord.

It is safe to say that hospitality is, and most likely has always been, of great importance to people everywhere. Modern hotels and hostels often use the image of a pineapple to advertise their special brand of hospitality. There is no doubt that in ancient times, the distant lights of an inn or tavern struck a chord of hope within weary travelers’ hearts.

Indeed, hospitality’s meaning has not diminished at all over the years, decades and millennia.

Christians view the presence of hospitality as meaning the difference between calling others “guests” and “strangers.” Guests are welcomed with open arms and warm smiles, but strangers aren’t. Guests feel the genuine love

present in a hearty welcome, but strangers don’t. Guests often return for second or third visits, while strangers don’t.

As a parish, do we find ourselves surrounded by guests, or burdened by strangers?

Hospitality is, in many respects, a mindset. The same person may be treated as guest at the church just down the road, but as a stranger here.

Matthew’s Gospel tells of Christ as He reveals a profound truth about hospitality: “When I was a stranger, you welcomed me.” That is, “I used to be a stranger, but you fixed that when you welcomed me.” It’s a classic example of before-and-after. All it took was a change of heart.

Stewardship holds hospitality as an immensely important concept. Remember the “three Ts” of stewardship – Time, Talent, and Treasure? Well, there are also “four Ps,” the Four Pillars of Stewardship – Hospitality, Prayer, Formation, and Service. Hospitality is mentioned first. Why? If not for hospitality, none of the other pillars will ever take hold. Hospitality is the cornerstone of stewardship, because it opens the door to a person’s heart and allows them to receive joy, grace, and love.

Hospitality must become second nature, if stewardship is to truly take hold within a parish. So, when a stranger visits our parish, welcome them as a guest. Perhaps one day, they’ll pay us a second visit.

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What Is the Real Purpose of Our Lives?

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Do you ever think about your purpose in life? Even as a priest, I certainly do. There are days and times of frustration when I think, “What am I really supposed to do? What does God want me to do? Why am I here?” For eons, philosophers have considered these very questions and written about them.

But the truth is that we, as Catholics, already know the answers.

When we consider the many facets of life in our parish community, there are numerous activities and endeavors that go beyond attending Mass. From fundraising efforts, to social outreach/service, childcare and more, there are many ways in which we serve our community.

Yet, as we undertake these important pursuits — both within and outside of the parish — we must always remember that our ultimate goal is salvation. After all, the only reason we exist, the only reason our Church exists, is the same as the reason Jesus joined us and became a part of us here on earth — He came to save humanity.

We use the term the “body of Christ” to describe the Church with Christ as the head. We are all parts of that body, and the parts of the body must move in the same direction as the body itself — it simply won’t function if the parts are moving in different directions. We are all in this together.



When our lives are complete, we do not base our success or failure on how much money we have, or whether or not we are famous. Nor does our success or failure depend upon the difference between health and sickness, or pleasure and pain, or even being nice or nasty. Rather, it is the difference between being saved and not being saved.

I often think of my family members who have already crossed the bridge of salvation, and as a priest, I deal with that issue with others on a very regular basis. Sometimes, I wonder if they ever fully realized that salvation was the answer

to so many of our questions in life.

I am surrounded by memories of those who have gone before, as are almost all of you. We are apt to use the term “the communion of saints” in many ways in our Church. Someday, we will know more about the “communion of saints” and how it all works. In the meantime, we pray for everyone who has gone before us, hoping they have made it home.

Pray for me as I pray for you!

In Christ,

Fr. George
Pastor

Immaculate Conception Embracing Call to Be Holy



One of the ongoing projects has been the construction of the school's own greenhouse. Here, students complete part of the work.



Our students learn the skills of gardening, as well as the benefits of caring for our environment as part of their curriculum.

Whether it's in academics or community service, our Immaculate Conception Catholic School shines brightly and will continue to shine this school year as students and staff embrace the theme, "Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality, or joy." These words will be prominently featured on the official school spirit shirts that will usher in the new year.

The theme follows Pope Francis' new exhortation that we are all called to be holy. Our new year will open with classes beginning on the Feast of the Assumption, Aug. 15. There currently are 240 students.

"We are just so blessed to be able to be in a school that is a living community of faith," says Principal Elaine Schad. "Whether it's on the ballfield, in the classroom or on the stage, we are called every single minute to integrate our faith into all facets of our lives."

Mrs. Schad, who is beginning her 19th year at Immaculate Conception Catholic School, will be welcoming all the staff members back for another faith-filled year.

There are a number of new events and activities that will welcome our students as they return to school. Generous donors through the school's Fund-A-Project and donations through the annual North Texas Giving Day mean that the middle school students will have updated laptops. There also will be additional swings on the playground and enhanced security throughout the building.

Our students have been involved for more than a decade with recycling, weeding, composting, seeding and providing produce to those in need through Our Lady's Garden. This program will be enhanced this year with the completion of a greenhouse.

"The students have used architectural design and curriculum skills to develop the schemata for an eighth-grade memorial statue of Our Lady, laid tiles for an outdoor learning center, and are placing panels for the latest project, the greenhouse," says Special Project Coordinator and Master Gardener Tina Jezek. "The students are learning lifelong skills that are critical to their future."

In recognition of this work, Keep Texas Beautiful named Immaculate Conception Catholic School as the First Place winner in the Sadie Ray Graff Educators and Educational Institution Awards. The Sadie Ray Graff Awards recognize the efforts of educators and educational institutions who encourage youth involvement and promote the Keep Texas Beautiful mission through environmental education.

The students also have a full line of service opportunities lined up with Catholic Charities of Fort Worth. The students in sixth through eighth grades participate in simulations, focusing on families, immigrants and the homeless.

"This helps them understand and play a small part in assisting with the hundreds of people that Catholic Charities serves each year," Mrs. Schad says.

Immaculate Conception Catholic School

Holy in New School Year

For example, the seventh grade focused on the homeless issue. Catholic Charities representatives came to the school and had the students go through seven “stations,” or situations encountered by the homeless. They learned about finding shelter, and how to get identification cards so they could obtain food, among other lessons. The eighth grade focused on immigration, learning about people fleeing African countries.

“These stories are devastating,” Mrs. Schad says. “But for all the students, they are learning the call to social justice.”

The kindergarten students took part in the Pounder Project. After learning about needy families, they learned from their parents how much they weighed at birth. They then set out to create a bundle of food near to their own birth weights.

“They put together a package with a two-pound bag of rice and a bag of beans, all wrapped in a blanket with a cut-out drawing of a baby’s head to look like a baby wrapped in a blanket,” Mrs. Schad says. “This was a way for them to know they were doing something, with that high-impact visual of when they were babies. We did this at Christmas, so it was tied to the Nativity, and that Jesus didn’t have a home.”

The preschool and kindergarten have passed the \$30,000 mark in raising money for St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital over the years with their annual Trike-a-thon. Another new project this year was the Boxes of Joy project that send Christmas gifts to children in the Caribbean who have never had a Christmas.

The rigorous curriculum in the classroom at Immaculate Conception Catholic School has historically produced 50 percent of the seventh-grade class being recognized as Duke Scholars.

And in addition to being perennial academic champions in two leagues, our school achieved another first with winning the Area 2 One Act Play competition and advancing to state.

“New this year will be the addition of a Dinner Theater to the school’s drama repertoire,” Mrs. Schad says.

Through all of the new at our school, the mission of faith remains the focal point.

“‘To Teach as Jesus Taught’ is the centerpiece as the school community comes together through the school year

to celebrate the Eucharist as they build a solid faith foundation for a future generation,” Mrs. Schad says. “Catholic schools are unique and remain unique as we are centered in our mission of being totally dedicated to forming children so they can go to heaven and make a difference in the world. That makes Catholic schools unique, and we never get off that. Each thing we do we come back to that. We’re not just another school.

“Immaculate Conception Catholic School is always looking for dedicated volunteers, teachers and substitute staff to help make a difference in the lives of these young people,” she says.



Students from Immaculate Conception Catholic School held a fundraiser to benefit the missions.



The kindergarten class collection of non-perishable food for Catholic Charities through the Pounder Program. The students bundled beans and rice in a blanket to mimic their own birth weights.

For more information, or to register, please call the school office at 940-381-1155.

Preparing for Forever: *Our*

When it comes to being ready for the covenant of marriage, says Deacon Joe Standridge, the commitment requires focused preparation — much as the men and women of our military prepare when they enter our Armed Forces.

“What does the military do to prepare people to survive in a war and win a war?” Deacon Joe says. “They have basic training. In my mind, that’s why we do marriage prep — it’s like basic training. We’re sending couples into a war of consumerism, individuality and pleasure that will try to draw them away from each other. To try to prepare them for that, we say, ‘Here are the weapons you’ve got.’ You will be attacked, it’s coming. The Church is here to help in that, to help you get back on course to fend off the things that will try to tear you apart so you can win the war of getting yourself and your family to heaven.”

Deacon Joe, who was ordained in 2003 serves as our Director of RCIA and Marriage Preparation, with 47 years of experience, as a husband, father and grandfather.

For engaged couples, meeting with Deacon Joe is the first step of the marriage preparation process, so he can get to know them, pray with them, complete paperwork, answer questions and more. Following the initial intake process, couples will be assigned a sponsor couple who will work with them as part of our Fully Engaged program. As part of the program, engaged couples will meet several times with their sponsor couple to discuss various topics as they relate to marriage, in preparation for life together.

“It gives them a couple who has experience and there’s trust that comes from that,” Deacon Joe says. “We’re trying to facilitate communication, trying to get these things out in the open now, before the wedding, instead of after, so it doesn’t become a bone of contention. These are the conversations you need to have before.”

Engaged couples will also participate in a day-long Pre Cana retreat, along with a Natural Family Planning class.

Couples preparing to be married at St. Mark go through marriage preparation, coordinated by Deacon Joe Standridge.



Marriage Preparation Program

“It’s just another tool they receive to help make their marriage stronger,” Deacon Joe says.

“Another benefit is that, for going through Pre Cana, they get a discount on their marriage license,” he adds, with a smile.

As the wedding approaches, the couple will also meet with the parish wedding planner and Director of Music to plan and go over the details of the big day. During this stage of preparation, they will also meet with our Pastor, Fr. George.

Deacon Joe hopes that the marriage preparation process will help couples realize the value and beauty of the Sacrament of Marriage, and that it will prepare them to live it out together.

“It’s a complex world and you’re going to get hit on all sides,” Deacon Joe says. “The world is going to try to tear you apart, but if you stay close to God, pray together, receive the Sacraments, stay involved in your Church and communicate, you can weather the storm and survive the battles and win the war. The grace that we get from the sacrament, it’s the glue that holds the marriage together. And if you receive those graces and believe in it, there’s nothing you can’t do.”

In addition to preparing couples for marriage, Deacon Joe also works to serve Catholic couples who were married outside of the Church, in going through the senation or convalidation process. He encourages couples in this position to consider coming to talk to him about their situation and options.

“If you’ve been married by the Justice of the Peace and you’re a practicing Catholic, let’s talk about options so we can get you back in the fold,” Deacon Joe says. “If there’s something that’s upset you about the Church, come talk to me. This is something we want to help you with. We want to help you get the graces that you deserve to get by having your marriage recognized by Christ’s Church. Come ask questions, we’re here to help.”

For the couples who have been married or are preparing to be married at St. Mark’s, Deacon Joe hopes

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— Deacon Joe Standridge

that the preparation process will be a valuable part of their journey together, setting them up for a lifetime of happiness and holiness.

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“The overall goal is that you live to a ripe old age, together, loving each other and that you can happily leave this life and go to your eternal reward,” he adds. “You’ve won the war when you reach that point. Life is all about getting to heaven and that’s what we should be focusing for our spouses. That’s my hope — I pray these couples can handle the battles that come up and stay together and finally win that war.”

If you are interested in getting married at St. Mark’s and would like more info about our marriage preparation process, or if you were married outside of the Church and would like to learn more about the process of having your marriage convalidated, please contact Deacon Joe Standridge 940-220-7160 or jstandridge@stmarkdenton.org. Engaged couples are encouraged to contact the parish nine to 12 months before their intended wedding date. Weddings at St. Mark’s are celebrated on Saturday afternoons at 1 p.m.

Saint Mark

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Prison Ministry continued from front cover

particular pod once every three or four months since there are 15 pods at the jail. We invite the men to spend an hour with the Lord. We are there right after lunch, around 12:30 p.m., and we are normally gone by 2 p.m. We conduct a Communion service which consists of an opening prayer, the readings for that particular weekend, a short sermon, discussion, and then we distribute communion to the Catholics.”

Deacon Jim was ordained to the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Phoenix in 2007, and has been involved in Prison Ministry throughout his time as a deacon.

“We must have at least three men from a pod who wish to participate, and our facilities are limited so we can really only accommodate up to 12 men,” he says. “There are two kinds of prisoners in a pod — those who have been

sentenced and those who are in what is a pre-sentencing situation. Each of us who is there representing the Church and St. Mark must be approved and certified prior to being let into the jail. We offer the service to all men, regardless of whether they are Catholic, but we only distribute Communion to those who are Catholic.”

Because it is a county jail rather than a state or federal prison, most of the men are normally incarcerated for only a year or less.

“For many of them, it serves as a way to bring them back to the Church,” Deacon Jim says of the ministry. “For me, the key is being able to show to those incarcerated that you care a little bit. When we are there with them, they thank us constantly.”

Anyone who might be interested in becoming involved with the Prison Ministry or who would like more information may contact Deacon Jim Galbraith at 940-262-0600 or jisugalbrqaith@aol.com.

Saint Mark