



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

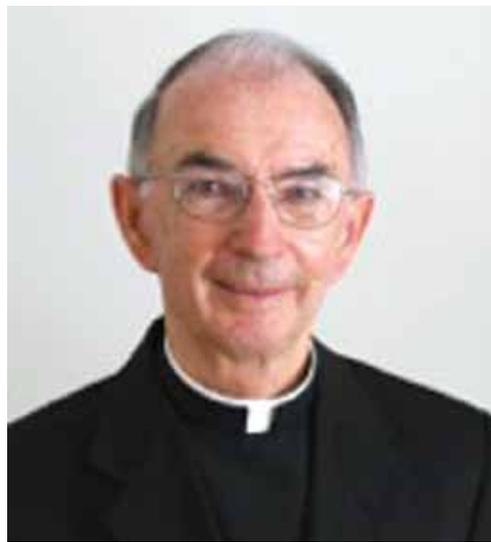
A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Have a Stewardship “Epiphany” this New Year

Dear Parishioners,

It is hard to believe that we are moving away from the Christmas season and beginning to think thoughts of how we will live and grow during 2013. Like the Wisemen who left Bethlehem and followed the star home, we too have many choices as to which “star” we will follow as the New Year door swings open before us. The fact that we are connected through “Faith in Action” is already a sign that we have a shared vision which comes from our faith. The star we follow is the child of Bethlehem, the Son, who is to lead us through the way of the cross to the glory of the resurrection.

As we follow His way we will have challenges as we do our best to remain in union with what He sets before us as our mission. Bonded together as His disciples, we in American Martyrs community have an interlocking life of service and love through our ministries. The gifts we share are important



expressions of our relationship with Our Lord and how we support one another. Like the Wisemen, each one of us brings a unique gift to serve the King. No one’s gift is of lesser importance than another’s; all are necessary to celebrate His daily presence in our lives.

I pray you have a joy-filled experience of the life giving connections we enjoy here at American Martyrs. We are a family who stand in faith, hope and love. We look to the New Year when we can grow the kingdom principles

in our daily lives.

As your pastor, I am blessed to be invited into many of your life’s experiences, such as birthdays, anniversaries and many other happy occasions. However, there are also those moments of sadness and crisis which are inevitable. I am so grateful when I see how faith and the connections we have through our church make such a difference. Let

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STEWARDSHIP OF TIME

Following the Example of St. Damien

Have you heard of St. Damien? This Belgian farm boy, shortly after being ordained a priest, volunteered to serve a colony of lepers on the isolated island of Molokai, Hawaii. From May 1873, until his death in 1889 at the age of 49, St. Damien worked to restore within the lepers a sense of personal worth and dignity.

Leprosy is a hideous disease. St. Damien wrote in his journal: "Many a time, in fulfilling my priestly duties at the lepers' homes, I have been obliged, not only to close my nostrils, but to remain outside to breathe fresh air." Their appearance was horrid, their smell putrid. Yet, St. Damien chose to remain.

Although St. Damien first took precautions to ensure that he did not contract leprosy, he knew that physical touch was necessary to communicate his love and concern. He embraced the lepers, dined with them, cared for them and anointed

them in the sacraments. Demonstrating great humility and sacrifice, St. Damien offered his own life in order to save the lives of others.

What was the source of his strength, and of his inspiration? "Were it not for the constant presence of our divine Master in our humble chapel, I would not have found it possible to persevere in sharing the lot of the lepers in Molokai," St. Damien wrote. "The Eucharist is the bread that gives strength ... It is at once the most eloquent proof of His love and the most powerful means of fostering His love in us. He gives Himself every day so that our hearts as burning coals may set afire the hearts of the faithful."

St. Damien found his strength in the Mass, the greatest prayer of the Church. Prayer was the impetus behind the generosity of this faithful servant of God, and is the fuel that ignites every heart to flame in love. If we are not dedicated to prayer, or the grace that flows from the sacraments, we are then incapable of leading lives of service and responding to God's call!

How much time do you dedicate to prayer each day? One hour? Fifteen minutes? None at all? When pondering the three Ts of stewardship – time, talent and treasure – the component of time holds the position of greatest importance. Time serves as the fertile ground from which the gifts of talent and treasure blossom. Only by spending time in prayer each day and receiving the sacraments, are we able to consistently and generously donate our talent and treasure to the Church.

Have you considered joining a parish ministry or volunteering your talents in service? Wonderful! But before you make a commitment, be sure that prayer is your foundation. Develop a manageable prayer schedule. This may entail arising 20 minutes early each day to offer your work to the Lord, or attending daily Mass once a week. Every prayer commitment is unique and personal. Yet, no matter what, the offering of our time and our dedication to prayer are the keys to serving the Lord with faithfulness, generosity and joy.



KNOWING GOD THROUGH HIS WORD

The Bible in One Year

The Bible is a great gift from God. It is the ultimate guide for living life as one of His children, and it is relevant at every stage of our lives.

“The Book is the Word of God,” says parishioner George Dvorsky. “It wasn’t written by one man — it’s a collection of writings from many many prophets and peoples. It’s the Word of God, and it’s got a lot of wisdom in it. Sure, some of the historical stuff has to do with the culture 2,000 years ago or more, but the significance is still the same. When you’re supposed to love your neighbor, you love your neighbor. That doesn’t change. And believing in one God — we still believe in one God, and that’s never going to change.”

For the past few months, George has been participating in a Bible study program at our parish called *The Bible in One Year*, with renowned Bible teacher Dr. Bill Creasy. As the title suggests, this program examines the entire Bible over the span of a year. The program began this past September, with sessions held every Sunday night at the church from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. It will continue until September 2013.

During the sessions, Dr. Creasy discusses a certain topic or book of the Bible. He generally speaks for an hour at a time, with a 10-minute break in between.

“He’s a very good speaker,” George says. “He makes it very entertaining. He doesn’t get very theological or anything like that. It’s easy to follow. There are no assignments other than to read your Bible, and that’s it.”

Through the study of and reflections on Sacred Scripture, this program fosters a deeper knowledge

and understanding of God and Catholicism, which then inspires a greater appreciation for Him.

“It’s good to know the history, the full relationship of God and man and how the Church came to be,” George says. “The Sunday readings don’t do enough justice. That’s just little snippets of the Bible. You have to read the whole Bible, and this is an opportunity to be led by the hand, so to speak, to understand what the Bible is all about. Dr. Creasy discusses the meaning, the importance, the historical backgrounds, the interpretations — whatever is appropriate.”

Study of Scripture is important for all of us, and it can even bring us closer as a community.

“I’m a practicing Catholic, so I go to church every Sunday, and I have read the Gospels and some of the books on my own,” George says. “But this gives you an opportunity to hear it with a group of individuals, and you can talk about it and you get someone else’s interpretation. It makes it more enjoyable. You’re not reading it by yourself — you’re part of a community.”

All are welcome to join the sessions on Sundays at 7 p.m. For more information, or to register for the *The Bible in One Year* program, please visit the website www.logosbiblestudy.org.



*Dr. Bill Creasy is presenting
The Bible in One Year program
at American Martyrs*

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— George Dvorsky

MAKING TIME FOR THE LORD: A Cornerstone of Our Faith

During the holiday season, we carve out time to spend with family and friends. As we approach the new year, we resolve to make more time for improving our health. And on our journey of faith, we are called to make time for Mass, for prayer, and to build a deep and lasting relationship with our Lord.

A spiritual retreat is a wonderful way to begin the new year and invest quality time with God. This February, the annual Cornerstone Retreats at American Martyrs will offer just such an opportunity.

“The Cornerstone Retreat is setting aside time to be with God — 26 hours to just be with Him,” says Vycki Smaldino, a member of the core team for the women’s retreat. “This is time to nourish and rekindle your relationship with Jesus.”

Separate retreats will be held for men and women. The men’s retreat will take place at American Martyrs Catholic Church on Friday, Feb. 1 and Saturday, Feb. 2. The women’s retreat is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 8 and Saturday, Feb. 9 at the same location. The Cornerstone Retreat can accommodate approximately 75 men and 75 women, and is fully booked every year.

“Over 500 men have gone through Cornerstone at our parish,” says Mike Wilk, director of the Men’s Cornerstone Retreat. “When you go through those 26 hours, you come out a different person. It has helped and healed relationships and marriages. I’ve been told several times that it has saved a life, saved a marriage, and so much more.”

February 2013 marks the eighth men’s and seventh women’s Cornerstone Retreats at American Martyrs. The program began at a church in New Jersey, and the multiple men and women who first attended that retreat then brought the program to American Martyrs. The core team for each retreat is composed of men and women who pray for attendees, provide mentorship, and maintain the mission

and integrity of the annual 26-hour experience. In addition, before each yearly retreat, a weekend team is selected from previous year’s attendees to lead the weekend.

“I am on the core team, because I think that Cornerstone is such a valuable gift to our faith community,” Vycki says. “I’ve just loved it, to be a part of this ministry. To see so many women grow in their spirituality and their relationship with God each year provides me with much more than I give.”

All are welcome to attend the Cornerstone Retreats, and attendees are diverse in age.

Many of the specific elements of this retreat are unknown due to its confidential nature. But participants may share their personal stories and journeys if they feel called to do so.

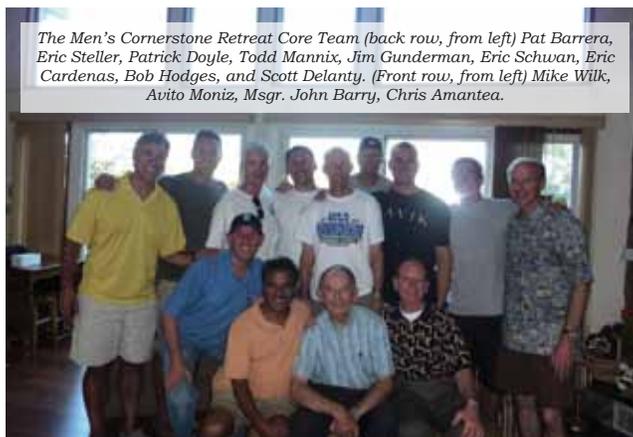
“It has been a really great gift to hear the men of our parish speak about their life story and how God is active in their life story,” Mike says. “It gives you a chance to acknowledge that and see that God is active in all our lives in different ways. It gives you a lot of strength to acknowledge that your life is okay

and we all have our own unique crosses to bear.”

If you would like additional information on the Women’s Cornerstone Retreat, please e-mail 2013womenscornerstone@gmail.com or call Kristin Scherlacher at 216-849-1470. For more information on the Men’s Cornerstone Retreat, please contact Tim Kidder at 310-720-2272 or tim.kidder@gmail.com, Byron Van Slovis at 310-738-1944 or bvanslovis@socal.rr.com, or Mike Wilk at 310-292-7774 or mikewilk@am-rem.com.

“For someone considering attending, I would say there is no greater gift that you can give God, yourself, or your loved ones than to set aside 26 hours of your busy life to nurture your relationship with God,” Vycki says.

The Men’s Cornerstone Retreat Core Team (back row, from left) Pat Barrera, Eric Steller, Patrick Doyle, Todd Mannix, Jim Gunderman, Eric Schwan, Eric Cardenas, Bob Hodges, and Scott Delanty. (Front row, from left) Mike Wilk, Avito Moniz, Msgr. John Barry, Chris Amantea.



The Women’s Cornerstone Retreat Weekend Team (from left) Pat Holt, Suzanne Vancura, Kristin Scherlacher, Linda Dakin-Grimm, Solly Comer, Mayra Fornos, Arryn Waterman, Monique Owen, Kim Venetz, Melissa Fernandez, Harriet Rapista, Kathy McQuiggan, and Teresa Komick. Not present is team member Rosie McNamara.



HELP DURING CAREER TRANSITION

Career BridgeBuilders

It is no secret that over the last few years, our country has faced numerous hardships regarding employment. Indeed, many people within our own community have had to deal with sudden layoffs and difficult transitions while looking for another job.

Several years ago, a group of parishioners formed a new ministry called Career BridgeBuilders, with the goal of reaching out to those within our community in need of employment.

“It’s really helping to connect those in career transitions to other professionals and business leaders, and create workshops designed to help build job skills,” says Andrea Krych, who leads this ministry. “And we hope that, at some point, we work ourselves out of the ministry, because we hope that the economy turns and people are all back to work.”

Career BridgeBuilders is made up of a core team of about five people, including Andrea. However, the ministry also draws upon the skills and knowledge of a number of parishioners and members of the community in order to best help those who are looking for employment.

“We’re really looking for those people out there that have a network, and the most important thing about finding a job is your network,” Andrea says. “It’s important for those of us who are not in transition to share our networks with those that are.”

The ministry offers various workshops and educational opportunities that focus on things like building a personal plan, résumé development, and negotiating and evaluating



Andrea Krych leads the Career Bridgebuilders Ministry

job offers. One workshop is aimed at educating people on how to use the social networking site LinkedIn as a professional resource.

Another workshop, called Putting Your Life into Focus, is targeted at helping people recenter the priorities in their lives, and it is open to both people in transition and those who are employed.

These workshops are one component of Career BridgeBuilders’ ministry. The other key component is support.

Through a self-managed weekly support group called Monday Morning Starters, people in need of employment can share their experience with others in the same position.

“It’s really focused on networking support and sharing of best practices,” Andrea says. “It allows the members to self manage and talk about what they learned last week, and so forth. It’s a great way for people to come together and gain support in their transition efforts.”

The volunteers who help with Career BridgeBuilders also gain a lot from their roles in the ministry.

“It’s hard to express it,” Andrea says. “It’s not about being paid, because we don’t get paid for it. It’s about truly using the strengths you have as a person that God gave you to make a difference. It’s really been a lot of fun. When you see someone take something away from one of our workshops and it really makes a difference for them or their family, it’s very rewarding.”

For more information about Career BridgeBuilders, please visit americanmartyrs.org and search Career Bridge Builders.

GOT TALENT? BRING IT TO THE SPOTLIGHT!

The word “talent” often conjures up images of stage performers in the spotlight, captivating awestruck audiences with their impeccable musical or thespian skills.

While these talented performers are certainly deserving of applause, the majority of the population sits hidden in the shadows, staring on in amazement while feeling overlooked — and perhaps wishing to possess such talents themselves. But even when we feel overlooked and untalented, God knows better. As Christians, we are all called to dig deep and trust that we are specially blessed with valuable talents and abilities, even if our talents aren’t so obvious or don’t garner applause and accolades.

Along with “time” and “treasure,” “talent” is one of the “three Ts” of stewardship. Exploring our natural inclinations and preferences, especially when guided by the intricacies of our unique personalities, can unearth God-given talents.

“There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same spirit,” writes St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians, “there are different forms of service, but the same Lord.”

Some people have the gift of working peacefully with children. Equipped with patience and gentleness, they are able to guide young souls to the Lord. Yet, others shudder at the thought of a classroom full of 5-year-olds, and



instead seek the quiet solace of behind-the-scenes tasks — cleaning the church, sewing altar cloths or stuffing envelopes.

Our interests and abilities are varied, and our volunteer options are endless, as we are called to give our talents back to God in loving service. Examine your heart and prayerfully discern your gifts, then direct those gifts towards serving the people of God.

H. Jackson Brown Jr., author of *Life’s Little Instruction Book*, once said, “Talent without discipline is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if it is going to be forwards, backwards, or sideways.”

If our gifts of talent are not guided by the discipline of prayer, just like an octopus on roller skates, we will get nowhere fast! Yet, if we keep our eyes on the goal of heaven and serve the Lord with joyfulness, our efforts will produce a bountiful harvest. In the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will reap bountifully.”

The next time you sit quietly in the shadow of a glaring stage spotlight, rest assured that your talents are no less impressive in the eyes of God, and will always be “applauded” when directed to the service of His people.

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BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION IS A LESSON IN GIVING FOR YOUNG SON

When their son, Landon, turned 2 this past July, Rick and Kara Siebert decided to do something a little different.

“When it was time to plan Landon’s birthday, I kind of got anxious because he really doesn’t need anything,” Kara says. “He loves the books he has, he loves to play outside. Yes, he has toys and he loves the toys he has, but I had some anxiety about what I would do with all the toys he would get. I thought, ‘What’s the more constructive thing to do?’ He loves to read, and that made me think. There’s less fortunate children that don’t have any books, and I thought his birthday could benefit them.”

And so the Sieberts held Landon’s birthday party at the Santa Monica Pier Carousel on July 14, where guests enjoyed unlimited rides, lunch and cake. In lieu of traditional birthday gifts, attendees were asked to bring two or three new or gently used children’s books to donate to BookEnds, a Southern California-based nonprofit organization that works to provide books to children in need.

“I’m friends with the president of BookEnds, and she thought it was a great idea,” Kara says. “She was telling me about some of the children her organization helps. These children may not be able to have a parent waiting for them at home, but with these donations they could then go home to a book.”

Through Landon’s birthday party, 72 books were collected and donated to the organization. When the Siebert family brought the donated books to BookEnds, Robin Keefe, the organization’s president, offered Landon a book as a birthday gift — but he asked her to give it to the other kids instead.

“Even at a basic level, I definitely felt that he understood that those books weren’t for him, they were for other kids,” Kara says.

Using a birthday to give to others instead of receiving for ourselves is a simple concept,



Landon Siebert celebrates his birthday

but it is pretty radical in our society, where so much emphasis is placed on material possessions. Landon’s parents gave him a different sort of gift for his birthday — a lesson in what is truly important.

“Especially in Southern California, we live in the land of excess,” Kara says. “I wanted to teach him that a birthday and a party is about being with friends and family and having fun, and not about what you receive. I thought if I started at age 2, he would come to associate that with birthdays.”

Kara plans to continue the tradition that they started this year for Landon’s future birthdays. Although it may not always be focused on books, his birthday will be an opportunity for their family to practice stewardship and use what they are given to help others.

“I’m hoping that he comes up with an idea for it himself about what he should do with his birthdays,” Kara says. “As his interests and passions change, then I’m hoping that he will want to give and share those passions with other children.”

For more information about BookEnds, please visit the organization’s website at www.bookends.org.

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www.americanmartyrs.org

Have a Stewardship “Epiphany” this New Year continued from cover

us keep the gift growing and inviting as our New Year’s resolution. If I can be closer to the God who loves me always, I will be happier; if I can bring another to that experience, I will not be able to measure the difference this will make in another’s life and how it will spread to make our world a better place in our time. God bless you as you embrace the possibilities of the New Year.

In Christ,



Rev. Msgr. John F. Barry, P.A.
Pastor

We are a family who stand in faith, hope and love. We look to the New Year when we can grow the kingdom principles in our daily lives.

LITURGY SCHEDULE

Saturday, 5:00 p.m. | **Sunday**, 7:00 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.
Monday/Wednesday/Friday, 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m.
Tuesday/Thursday, 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m.
Holy Day, 5:00 p.m. (Vigil), 6:30 a.m., 8:00 a.m., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m., 7:30 p.m.