



Our Faith in Action

American Martyrs Catholic Community

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

Generosity, Love and Grace Expressed as Mothering

Dear Parishioners,

May is a month of many events in our parish. Our innocence is renewed in a beautiful and tangible way as we witness the celebration of First Holy Communion with close to 300 of our children. If we look beneath the surface of this day we have to sing with gratitude. We are so grateful to all of the parents who have the desire to see their children come closer to the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. They want it to be a life resource for their children. Right behind these parents are Patti Williams and all of the dedicated teachers who give of their time each week or even each day to guide the children and give them specific training on the meaning and beauty of the Holy Eucharist, the gift of Himself given to us by Our Lord. We pray that their generosity will bring them the blessing of seeing these children grow in their love of the Blessed Sacrament.

Later in this month our parish celebrates the Sacrament of Confirmation with a hundred and eighty of our teens. These young men and women are renewing their choice for Christ and receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit in the completion of their Christian initiation. They have prepared for the Sacrament by gatherings, prayer, service

to others and retreats. They are a blessing to our parish and our Church. We thank Monica Leon and the many leaders who work with her.

Situated between these two great events is Mother's Day. We pause to remember the gift and blessings of all the Mothers in our parish. They provide us with an example of dedication



to their children and families. It seems out of place to have just one day each year when we give them tribute, but it is more than a greeting card gimmick, it is a day for us to reflect on how we cherish our Moms. If they are still with us, we are grateful and respectful. If they have finished their journey on earth, we pray that they are with the Lord enjoying

continued on back cover

THE BIBLE

The Textbook of Stewardship

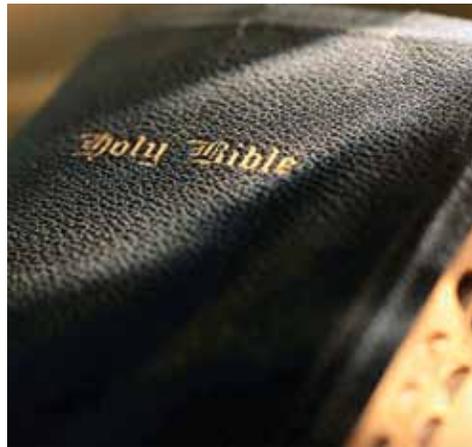
Have you ever wished that life came with an instruction manual? What a valuable resource that would be! Whenever you find yourself running in circles, this instruction manual would give you step-by-step instructions on how to fix the problem and reroute your course.

Well, here's some good news. For those living a Christian life, there is such a manual — the Bible.

Sometimes referred to as the "textbook of stewardship," the Bible is a bountiful resource for the present-day Christian. Written by anointed prophets and sages, this collection of divinely-inspired parables, poems and letters is full of testimonials that express the blessings that come from true discipleship, expressed through lives of stewardship.

Stewardship is not a new concept. The Bible gives proof to this claim through passages such as the 26th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. We read Moses' words, as he tells the Israelites to offer the choicest portions of their harvest to God: "When you have come into the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you as a heritage, and have occupied it and settled in it, you shall take some first fruits of the various products of the soil which you harvest from the land which the Lord, your God, gives you, and putting them in a basket, you shall go to the place which the Lord, your God, will choose for the dwelling place of

his name... 'Therefore, I have now brought you the first fruits of the products of the soil which you, O LORD, have given me.' And having set them before the LORD, your God, you shall bow down in his presence" (Dt 26: 1-2, 10).



St. Paul briefly touches on the essence of stewardship when he said, "In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

Again, in St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, we read about living a life of Christian stewardship: "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:6-7).

While this is well and good, what does it mean for

the present day Christian? Why should it matter that the Bible alludes to stewardship in various passages? It shows us that Christians and Jews have struggled with and benefitted from the concept of stewardship for thousands of years. It ties the message of stewardship to the role of a Christian disciple. It gives proof that stewardship and discipleship go hand-in-hand. It offers encouragement to us, that stewardship is in fact a foundational component of the Christian life, a way of life that one of the founding fathers of the Church – St. Paul – preached about and advocated.

The Bible is indeed the textbook of stewardship. It lays out the steps we must take to become true disciples of Christ. Reading and meditating upon God's Word is always a fruitful exercise. Those who regularly delve into Scripture often develop a deeper understanding of who God is, how and why He loves us, and how we can show Him our love in return — all most certainly important topics of discussion for any steward-in-the-making.

As you strive to become a grateful steward and live the life of Christian discipleship, develop a love for Sacred Scripture. Allow God's Word to nourish your soul regularly, and watch as stewardship changes from a foreign concept to an integral component of your daily life.

MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN MINISTRY PROVIDES ESSENTIAL INFORMATION AND SERVICE

Motherhood is not for the faint of heart. And in today's fast paced world, in the midst of a society that does not seem to respect the values necessary for raising healthy children, moms need all the support they can get!

Fortunately, that support, as well as some great friendship opportunities, are available right here at American Martyrs through the Mothers of Young Children Ministry. Christy Barner, Joy Hryniewicz and Lori Nolting serve as cochairs for this vibrant group of women.

"This ministry is a great gateway to get more involved in parish life, and to get to know other families and moms in the parish," Christy says.

The group meets every other Wednesday from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. in the St. Kateri Room. Babysitting is provided on site by My Gym, a local company that offers supervised exercise and fun for children. Additional babysitters are available for infants, as well.

The meetings begin with prayer, and feature a new topic for each session, as led by a

guest speaker from the parish or community. There are usually 20 to 30 women at each meeting. Some recent speakers have included a pediatrician speaking on wellness and toxins in the home, a preschool teacher, a brain development expert, a yoga instructor and even a professional organizer.

Christy, a mother of two boys, is thankful for the information provided through the ministry.

"I've learned so much through the speakers we've had," Christy says. "I always collect bits and pieces of wisdom as a mom to bring to my family."

However, the group provides much more than just information.

"After I had my first baby, I felt a need to get more involved," Christy says. "I found this group and I have met so many nice friends. It has changed my life so dramatically. I was raised Catholic, but in college my faith was not the priority in my life. Through this group, I feel so much closer to God. I love going to church now; I love my friends. I feel so strongly that I want to raise my children in the Catholic faith. I



feel lucky to be raising my children among families with similar values, morals and worries."

The Mothers of Young Children Ministry is also very involved in reaching out to others within the community. Throughout the year, the group provides lunches for a downtown women's shelter, sponsors food drives, provides meals for new moms, and participates in the parish Family to Family Christmas project. These wise women make time for fun together, as well, with holiday parties for the little ones and occasional evening gatherings for the moms in the group.

If you are a mother looking for encouragement, friendship and a way to get involved in the parish, please call Christy Barner at (310) 376-1286. New members are always welcome!

A special thank you to all women in the parish who 'mother'. Through your mentoring, teaching, support, love and nurturing, you bring the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary into our lives.

In future issues we will profile other ministries involving mothers:

Legion of Mary – By imitating the virtues of the Blessed Mother through apostolic works and visiting the sick and elderly, members of this ministry strive for holiness and bring people to Jesus. For more info, contact Jenny Roderick at legionofmary@americanmartyrs.org

Mothers' Outreach Ministry (MOM) – A supportive network providing friendship and spiritual growth through involvement in outreach projects. For more info, email Colleen McCarthy at mothersoutreach@americanmartyrs.org

HOLY WEEK CELEBRATIONS

Each year, the celebrations of Holy Week are some of the most important and meaningful events for all Catholics, and this year was no different.

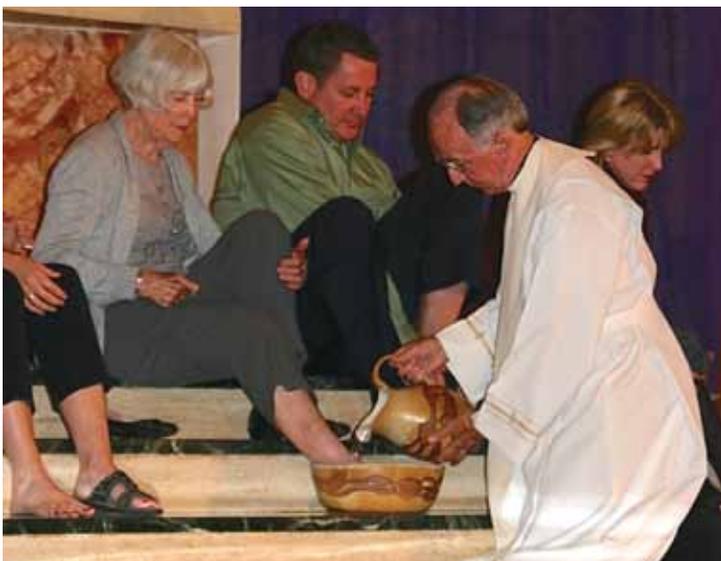
Holy Week began with Palm Sunday, when we commemorated and recreated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem with a procession into the church before each weekend Mass. For most of the Masses, the procession started on the steps of the church. But for the 9:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. Masses, the procession started at O'Donnell Hall and featured music played by students from the school.

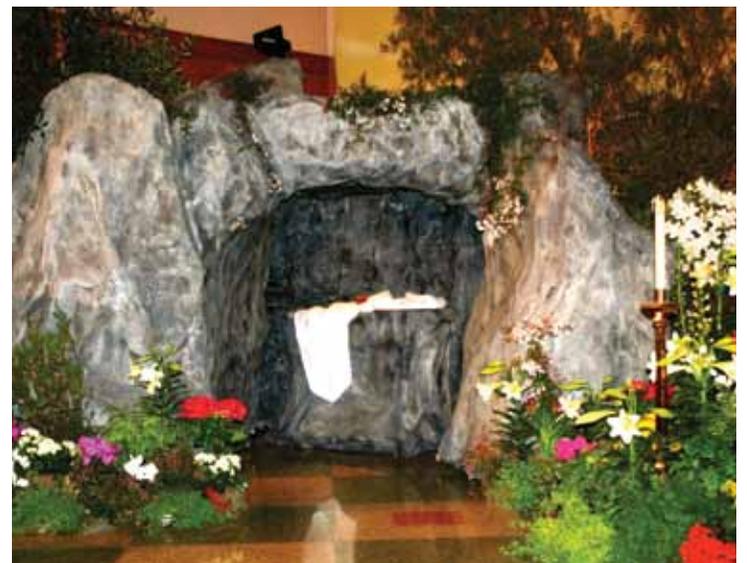
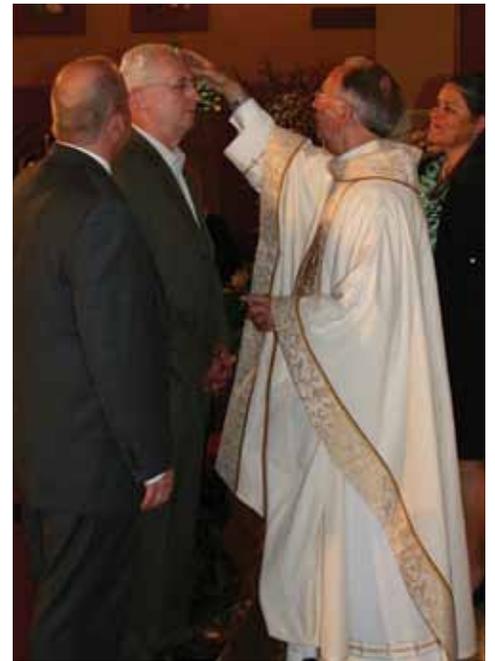
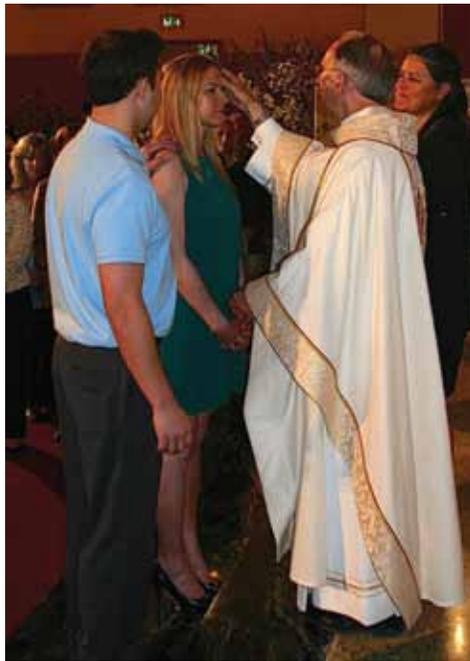
The celebrations continued with Holy Thursday, when we commemorated the Lord's last supper with his friends before his crucifixion and resurrection, where Jesus gave us the gift of the Holy Eucharist. The liturgy ended with a beautiful procession as we transported the Blessed Sacrament from the church to another location of repose.

On Good Friday, we had our "Living Stations of the Cross," produced by the eighth graders from American Martyrs School, as well as a special Good Friday liturgy. Next came the Easter Vigil celebration on Holy Saturday, when those who have asked to enter the Church, and who have been involved in preparation over the past year, were baptized.

"The Easter Vigil is simply the best Mass of the year," Deacon Derek says. "The music is spectacular, the sensory experience is overwhelming, and the joy that fills the church is palpable."

On Easter Sunday, our parish held 10 Masses throughout the day, all of which were full and most of which had standing room only. The Easter Sunday celebrations were concluded with the 5 p.m. Mass, when 13 men and women were fully initiated into the Catholic faith.





PARISH GIVING IN AN ONLINE AGE

We live in an age where nearly everything is accessible through the Internet. This is especially true when it comes to financial transactions, as we buy, sell and pay our bills online. With the Faith Direct program, members of American Martyrs Parish can give to our parish offertory online, as well.

“It is easier,” says Dennis Labriola, chair of the Stewardship Commission. “You save writing a check, you save stuffing it in an envelope and dropping it off. We find that it’s just much easier for us.”

Our parish has been using Faith Direct for around two years. Parishioners can sign up for this program online at www.faithdirect.net. With Faith Direct, parishioners can choose the amount they wish to give, and the following month, the program will start debiting that amount from the parishioner's account of choice. Both checking and credit cards can be used

with Faith Direct.

Indeed, Faith Direct makes the entire process of giving to the offertory easier for parishioners.

“We don’t have to remember an envelope every Sunday or every holy day,” Dennis says. “When we travel, we don’t have to worry about making up the contributions we miss.”

When parishioners register with Faith Direct, it also eliminates the need for the envelopes to be distributed each month, many of which are never used and simply become extra waste. With Faith Direct, parishioners can take one of the offertory cards that are in the church to drop in the collection each week.

When Dennis suggested to his wife, Renay, that they should sign up with Faith Direct, she was somewhat reluctant.

“I like to control things,” Renay says. “I like to control how we contribute money and how we pay for things. Over the

years, Dennis and I have created several banking accounts for various reasons.”

After more than a little discussion, Dennis convinced her that Faith Direct was the right choice for them.

“I had to sit down and think about it for a while, think about how much we plan to give,” Renay says. “We sat down together and came to a decision. And I’m glad we did. It’s so much easier now. It’s an automatic thing. It’s very comfortable.”

With the Faith Direct program, control of monthly giving to our parish is put in the hands of the parishioners. It allows them to better plan their finances in the long run, since the selected amount is debited on the same day of each month.

For more information or to enroll in Faith Direct, please call their toll free number at 1-866-507-8757, or visit the website at www.faithdirect.net.

“It is easier, you save writing a check, you save stuffing it in an envelope and dropping it off. We find that it’s just much easier for us.”

— Dennis Labriola



MOTHERS SHARE HIGHS AND LOWS OF BEING WORKING MOMS

As a physician, Katrina Vlachos knows first hand about the challenges of being a wife and mother while working full time. After arriving at American Martyrs School with her two children two years ago, she jumped at the opportunity to fellowship with other mothers in similar situations.



"A friend invited me to come to a Working Moms Ministry meeting, and I'm so glad I did," Katrina says. "It's been so helpful to share my thoughts and challenges with other working moms who understand."

Since joining the Working Moms Ministry in 2011, Katrina (who now serves as the ministry coordinator) has benefited immensely from bonding with fellow work warriors over various topics, such as finding the best babysitters or picking worthwhile summer camps for her kids.

"Sharing practical tips with these women has been such a blessing," Katrina says. "And knowing that they are going through the same trials that I go through is a great outlet."

The ministry is extremely low key. There are no mandatory meetings to attend, and members are not required to pay any dues.

"The last thing I want is for these other mothers to feel is that they have another obligation," Katrina says. "I want them to want to attend and to genuinely benefit from being a part of our ministry."

In order to meet the needs of most working mothers, Katrina plans monthly meetings around a busy day of work, dinner with the kids, and bedtimes.

"We usually don't start our meetings until around 8 p.m. so all of us can be with our kids after work," Katrina says. "After all, the last thing we want after a day at work is to head straight to another meeting and not see our children."

The ministry's casual meetings begin with a prayer. Since members arrive at various times due to family needs, Katrina does not adhere to a specific meeting format. Thus, members have an opportunity to share stories over wine and dessert at one another's homes, or enjoy an occasional night out as a group.

In addition to the regular meetings where only the moms get together for some needed personal time with one another, Katrina plans outings that include the kids. Some of the past events have included park outings, cookie decorating parties, and pottery painting projects. Katrina hopes to continue these outings, while

including such fun activities as bowling.

"It can be a challenge to find activities that appeal to the different ages of the children in our group," Katrina says. "Children range in age from just a few months old to 11 or 12, and it's hard to find appropriate activities for all ages. But I'm trying hard to be creative, and am determined to make it work. We may even split up the outings based on the age of the children."

The Working Moms Ministry is not just a fellowship opportunity for bonding. The ministry recognizes that there are needs in the community, and are committed to finding ways to make contributions, even with their limited time. Members participate in the parish fundraisers and work closely with the Richstone Family Center by donating needed baby clothing and toys.

"It's important for us to reach out to those in need, and we are always looking for ways to help out," Katrina says.

The Working Moms Ministry has firm roots at the parish, having been active for over ten years. With approximately 20 regular current members participating in ministry activities, Katrina hopes that other working moms will consider joining the ministry; there is no pressure if one is unable to attend all of the meetings.

"All working moms are welcome to join," Katrina says. "That's what we are here for! Our goal is to help working moms connect with one another so they can share the challenges of balancing family and work."

Those interested who would like more information about the Working Moms Ministry, or would like to join, may contact Katrina Vlachos at workingmoms@americanmartyrs.org.

624 15th Street
Manhattan Beach, CA 90266
Phone: (310) 545-5651
www.americanmartyrs.org

Generosity, Love and Grace *continued from front cover*

the fruits of their service and love.

Holding all of these celebrations is Mary, Our Blessed Mother. The month of May is dedicated to her. “O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the angels and Queen of the May.” We place a crown of flowers on Mary (God rest you, Mary Pat Ahfeldt, who arranged this each year) as a sign of our affection and our prayer that she will always watch over all of her children, even when we wander, and bring us closer to her Divine Son.

May each of these celebrations help all of us to be more faithful. May those of our family who have moved away from the Holy Table hear our Lord’s

invitation, “Come to me all you who labor and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you.” If we have pain or hurt for whatever reason, Mary’s Son is there to hear us and renew our life in Him.

In Christ,



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

Our Faith in Action is provided by the American Martyrs Stewardship Commission.

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., 12:10 p.m., 5:00 p.m. | **Saturday**, 8:00 a.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.