

THE VOICE

Saint Thomas the Apostle Church • Bloomfield, NJ

About this Newsletter..

Welcome, St. Thomas the Apostle parishioners, to the second issue of our new parish newsletter, *The Voice*. We hope you enjoyed reading the first issue as much as we enjoyed bringing it to you.

The goal of this newsletter is to keep you informed of parish events and activities as well as to help strengthen your understanding and knowledge of our Catholic faith. The newsletter is published three times a year, covering a broad spectrum of topics on the liturgical seasons, the sacraments, parish ministries, and other areas of interest to our parish and faith community.

We welcome your ideas and suggestions for future issues and encourage you to send them to us in any of the following ways:

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We look forward to hearing from you.

*The Communications Committee,
St. Thomas Apostle Parish*

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The Lessons of Advent: Reflections of Sr. Arleen Crimmins



▲ Sr. Arleen Crimmins, O.P.

***The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...for nothing will be impossible for God.*— Luke 1:35 & 1:37**

It is especially during the season of Advent that Sister Arleen Crimmins, O.P., the Pastoral Associate for Parish Ministry at St. Thomas Apostle, truly ponders the great lessons she has learned from Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and her own mother many years ago. Sr. Arleen's mother was her dear friend who taught her to find great faith and love in life. "I have had great models of women around me," she reflects, "but it is at this time of year I can't help but remember the strength, joy, encouragement, and triumph demonstrated by my mother. Unbeknownst to many of us, she gave constantly to those who had less, despite the fact that she did not have a lot herself. What she did possess humbly was a spirit of giving and trust in Jesus that could only be an example to me."

During Advent Sr. Arleen often contemplates a revelation that she believes influ-

enced the way her mother lead her life. The revelation is that Mary was a woman for all women. Mary was the first role model for all great women to follow and Sr. Arleen believes it is through Mary that we journey towards Christ. Mary was shocked and overwhelmed when the angel told her she would give birth to the Son of God (Luke 1:26-34). However, Sr. Arleen notes that it was Mary's trust in God, her obedience and cooperation with God's plans that are a great example for us to follow.

"Allow God to work in you as He wants to, and know that all His plans for you are for your good. When unexpected things happen, just as it did to Mary, keep trusting Him!" Mary felt the same confusion, pain, joy, and sorrow that all of us experience. It was how she held onto her faith that shows us there is nothing that should leave us feeling abandoned, especially in the pure knowledge of God's abiding love for us. Sr. Arleen's path toward this certainty of her faith was indeed inspired by the women who served as her role models of strength. Forty-seven years ago, in the earliest days of her vocation, other Dominican Sisters in their teaching ministry moved her. "They always seemed happy with great spirit. With all of these great women in my life, I felt I knew where the Lord wanted me."

After seven years, Sr. Arleen made her final vows with the Dominican religious order. Like all of us, in the beginning of her vocation she faced her choice with periodic doubt and dismay. Today, however, she has no regrets. In the past four decades she has worked with youth ministry, Meals on Wheels, an AIDS education and treatment program, Baptismal preparation, and a ministry for the sick and elderly.

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Teens Embrace Faith through Confirmation

This Fall, St. Thomas the Apostle (STA) Church has facilitated the spiritual growth and development of a new group of teens that have been blessed with the sacrament of Confirmation. According to Tim Dennin, STA's Youth Director, "It's the best of times and the worst of times.... The timing of the sacrament in our parish has very significant pros and cons."

On the plus side, Dennin believes this is a great time to reach teens. At the start of 6th grade, young people begin the transition from being completely dependent upon adults to starting to take actions and making some decisions for themselves. Many boys sign up for Little League but don't go on to senior baseball and many girls decide they just don't like dance. "Poof! It happens," Dennin says, "they now have a say in what they are to become. By the end of middle school or 8th grade at STA, young people have become extremely vocal and involved in every aspect of decisions that affect their future, including that moment when they are asked to enter an incredible world of embracing their faith."

What better time is there in a young person's life than freshman year of high school to begin the real process of developing a personal faith journey? It is a great moment to ask a teenager: "Hey, what about your faith? Has it become a central part of your life?"

Are you making your decisions based on the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ? Is your family praying together on a regular basis? Do you attend weekly Mass? Are your friends practicing their Catholic faith? Do you recognize St. Thomas as part of your extended family? Do you have gifts that you can share with the parish? Sadly sometimes we may even have to ask the question: Hey, will we ever see you again after Confirmation?"

"But it seems like the worst time too," continues Mr. Dennin. "No one is busier in our parish family than our teenagers! They are swamped, and there is such competition for their time and talents. First, they are all interconnected, not just with a few friends and their families, but



▲ On Confirmation Day at St. Thomas, a beaming Gregg T. Childers proudly holds his Confirmation certificate as he stands with Most Rev. Charles J. McDonnell and his uncle, Guy A. Orlando, who served as his sponsor.

hundreds of people. The Internet and cell phones have linked young people in real time across towns, states, and oceans. Through *MySpace*, *FaceBook*, *AIM*, and text messages, their lives are a continuous conversation with parents, friends, cousins, aunts and uncles, and friends from summer camp and preschool. While this conversation takes place, they are also multitasking their homework, updating their iPods, catching up on videogame time (sometimes online), eating, commuting, sleeping, and grooming. If the conversation stops, it's because they are in classes, on the sports field, involved in martial arts, Scouting, dancing, studying, volunteering, babysitting, or working. Free time is only available when prescheduled."

Confirmation time is a challenge. However, it is when adults can maximize the opportunity to reach our youth. We talk about Christ, and through ours and others' examples, we hope to be heard above all this competition going on in their lives. It's not easy to get teens excited about the Seven Gifts of the Spirit, the Beatitudes, and the Works of Mercy. The fact is, young people are interested in what other young people are doing. "The success of St. Thomas' Confirmation program comes from using

recently Confirmed young people as leaders and facilitators," Mr. Dennin explains. "Conversations, discussion, and faith sharing become increasingly important ways to learn as young people grow into their teen years. Teens remember better what they learn from each other—their peers."

The adults in these teens' lives can only help to facilitate this process and keep the teenagers on message, but it is their peers who will impact them most positively.

This year's Confirmation team was made up of over 30 recently confirmed teens ranging in age from 15-19. They serve as examples of young people who are trying to keep their Catholic faith and the Lord Jesus Christ as a central part of their lives while trying to figure out who they are going to become as individuals. For many on the Confirmation team, they share their experiences of being involved in the STA Youth Group, where they continue to share their time and talents with the parish family. The team coordinates two day-long retreats that involve faith sharing, discussion circles, dancing, singing, slideshows, team-building games, and a closing Mass. This year the students received a T-shirt that exhibited the themes of "Carrying the Cross of Christ" and not striving to be cool—"Notcool."

Having a program that focuses on the way teens communicate with each other, a flexible schedule that meets the challenges of an already demanding lifestyle, and a curriculum that embraces the Catholic faith is a recipe for a successful Confirmation Program. The Confirmation journey can be profound as it directs these youth towards completeness as a Christian Catholic. Inevitably, this type of program can be a life-changing experience for those who follow the divine presence of Christ in their lives.

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha has told many of STA's Confirmation students over the last few years, "It is the responsibility of the newly Confirmed to bring a re-energized faith and prayer life back into the home and into their own lives, and to make sure the family prays together at mealtime and that they serve others as Jesus served us."

— Laurie Roemmele-Roberts, Ph.D.

Parish Ministries: Respect Life Committee

What aspect of our daily living experiences do human life issues not touch—be it concerning a parent, friend, relative, child, or ourselves? In the past few years, life issues, as exemplified in the starvation case of Terri Schiavo, and more recently, in the call for funding stem cell research and other stem cell-related matters, have dominated the news. Abortion continues to be prevalent within our society, a practice that not only takes the life of a precious human being, but damages the lives of all those involved in any way. Pope John Paul II called the attack on human life and dignity the “Culture of Death.” The Respect Life Committee at St. Thomas Apostle, with the help and support of the parish community, seeks to promote the Culture of Life through prayer, the collection and distribution of new and used baby supplies, special fundraisers to help the needy, and the dissemination of information pertaining to life issues. To help women and babies in need, the committee collects baby clothes and supplies. Parishioners who would like to help can leave these items in the Layette Baskets located at the entrances of the church. This ongoing collection has enabled the parish of St. Thomas to not only help local crisis pregnancy centers, but to reach out beyond the parish to assist needy children in Haiti, Honduras, Appalachia, and various Indian missions in the West.

“It is comforting to know,” says committee member, Sue Kohane, “that somewhere a mother worried about her child keeping warm on a chilly night will have a nice blanket thanks to the generosity of our parishioners.” We also encourage anyone in the parish who is aware of a family in need of baby clothes and supplies to contact the Respect Life Committee by calling the Parish Center at (973) 338-9190 to leave a message for our staff.

The committee is also very active in exploring ways to contribute to the education of needy children around the world. This past year we sponsored a very successful scholarship drive to help children in the Turks and Caicos Islands get a Catholic education. Parishioner response was so gen-

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erous that we are hoping to have another drive this year.

Striving to be not only a people of love but also a people of prayer, the Respect Life Committee sponsors a Holy Hour for Life every fourth Monday of the month. We pray before the Blessed Sacrament for an end to abortion and for the respect of human life in all its phases. In October, Respect Life Month, the parish reads a special Respect Life prayer during the course of the Mass. Our more activist-type activities may include joining other concerned groups in a prayerful presence at local abortion facilities.

In the hope of helping people to be aware of all aspects of the Church’s pro-life position and what options they might explore in supporting it, the Respect Life Committee reserves the top shelf of the bookrack (located in the lobby of the main church entrance) for a variety of materials concerning abuses against the unborn and the elderly and information on cloning, stem cell research, and chastity issues.

The committee also encourages parishio-

ners to contact their legislators, urging them to take a pro-life/pro-family stand on issues such as partial birth abortion, embryonic stem cell research, abstinence programs in schools, government funding of abortion promoters, health abuses at abortion facilities, and coercive UN abortion policies.

“It’s very difficult work, in a way,” says committee member, Lois Lang, “because the culture is against you.” In response, Rev. Philip Sanders, the committee’s moderator, offers encouraging counsel. “But you know, it’s a spiritual battle,” he says, “so you hang in there.” The Respect Life Committee meets on the second Tuesday of the month and welcomes new members at any time. Please consider supporting the Culture of Life by attending the Respect Life Holy Hour once a month and doing whatever you can to contribute to our committee’s various causes. For those of you who prefer more activist-type work, we invite you to join us when we pray the Rosary at local abortion facilities—where your presence and prayers could help save a life.

– Patt Hamilton.

Prayer to Respect Life

Lord, help us to show respect for all life. Help us to have compassion for the elderly, for unborn children and their mothers, for persons with disabilities, and for all those who are unable to protect themselves.

Remind us that all human beings are sacred to You and that You love each of us.

Give us the courage and the strength to protect those who cannot protect themselves and to support leaders who also value and respect all life.

Ever hopeful that our nation will be more caring towards those who cannot speak for themselves, let our light shine now to illuminate the darkness of ignorance and prejudice, so that in the future, we will be known as a nation which respects all life.

Amen.

The Lessons of Advent

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Most recently, during her time at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, Sr. Arleen has facilitated the Cornerstone for Women retreats and directed spirituality groups for women during Advent and Lent. She also facilitates the Children's Liturgy with the assistance of a great parish team and visits the sick and elderly of the parish.

"I have served people from the womb to the tomb. It is important, no matter where my life leads me, that I do my job well. And I make sure to tell people that in spite of who they are, God loves them. Be happy who you are. It is important to like who you are, no matter how much or little you think you have." Supporting that sentiment, Sr. Arleen likes to remember what Mary said. "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For He has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is His name." (*Luke 1:46-48*).

For Sr. Arleen, the lessons of Advent can still be new and fresh and lie in the belief that no matter who we are, there is potential for our lives and a guarantee of God's overwhelming love for us. "That is a life worth living," she counsels. "We are still in Jesus' heart in spite of the disappointments and challenges in life. I am at peace and very happy at that message, and it is especially relevant during this wonderful Advent season."

— Laurie Roemmele-Roberts, Ph.D.

Snapshots from St. Thomas' Picnic Carnival

It was a great time at the St. Thomas Picnic Carnival in September. About 600 people attended, and with the help of many parish volunteers, the annual event was a huge success. There were rides, games, and plenty of food. Check out the fun!



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