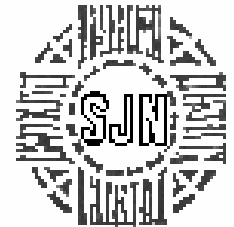




SJN Insights



SJN Insights

July , 2009

The Fairy Godmother Syndrome Or Why I Go To Appalachia.

By Laura Juran

A few years ago, my daughter lived in Nashville. Many friends and relatives, upon hearing this news, said that they had always wished to go there. I arranged for a little senior citizen tour and off we went. Everyone had a good time and on the way home, Aunt Lois said to me, "You're very good at this. You should be a tour guide."

I thought about what she had said and realized that the trip was successful because I loved these people and since I had been to Nashville, I was familiar enough to be able to show them a good time. However, what I really enjoyed was granting wishes. I always enjoyed finding the elusive toy that my child wanted for Christmas or the perfect pair of pants for my niece.

What better place to grant wishes than in Appalachia? The Summer Home Repair Program administered by Deacon Arnie allows people in Preston County, West Virginia to express their wishes which are then granted by groups like our Appalachian Workcampers.

The wishes granted this year included two bedrooms and a bathroom to turn a tiny little trailer into a four bedroom, two bath, home. AJ is no longer being threatened with action by Children's Protective Services to remove her 2 1/2 year old daughter. One of the two boys in foster care will be returning on August 18th and the hope is that the older boy will want to return soon after. There is a bunk bed waiting for him. Little Rosemary delighted in showing everyone her new room and toy box filled with toys. AJ got her wish.

Bryant and Eva got a new 8'x16' front porch with a roof. Porches with roofs are very important in West Virginia. Trailers are pretty hot in the summer and the mountain evenings are pleasant to sit out and enjoy. Goldie, her daughter Jean, and Jean's son James, are enjoying playing dominoes every evening on their porch with a new roof. Family is important and they take care of one another. Joshua thinks he has found a "new" trailer into which he can move his growing family. With a permanent set up, the electric company will finally hook up electricity and he will have running water and a septic system. I think that is a wish come true.

There were 49 of us in the group this year. Being a fairy godmother is my reason for going. I think there were probably 48 other reasons. No matter what the reason, if the Holy Spirit calls you to come with us next year, listen and make the journey. You won't be sorry.

Inside this issue:

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| GIFT OF LLAMA | 2 |
| GOOD SHEPHERD | 3 |
| LENTEN SOUP SUPPERS | 4 |
| SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS | 5 |
| FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK | 6 |
| A DEACON ASPIRANT | 7 |
| HEALTH AND WELLNESS MINISTRY | 8 |
| RCIA | 9 |
| YOUTH MINISTRY EVENTS | 10 |
| APPALACHIAN REFLECTIONS | 11 |

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KATRINA PROJECT VOLUNTEERS PLAN RETURN TO MISSISSIPPI GULF COAST

Building on four previous Hurricane Katrina recovery work trips between 2007 and 2008, St. John Neumann will again sponsor adult volunteers from Sunday, Nov. 8 - Saturday, Nov. 14 on the Gulf Coast. A mix of veterans and new people have already shown interest. All skill levels are welcome.

Each volunteer pays his/her round trip to the Biloxi/Gulfport, MS area. The group stays in Biloxi at the Blessed Francis Xavier Seelos parish and does home rebuilding through the Catholic Diocese of Biloxi. This parish was rebuilt by volunteers. The priests are Redemptorists as was St. John Neumann. Blessed Francis Seelos and St. John Neumann worked together in Pittsburgh's Strip District.

The recovery efforts for the 2005 Hurricane Katrina on the Mississippi Gulf Coast are expected to take 8-10 years. To learn more about the SJN Katrina Project and to be put on the interested list, call Sarah Schneider at 412-366-4927 or email her at saranjs1@aol.com. Paperwork will be forwarded to volunteers in August with **the only meeting scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 13 after the 9:30 AM Mass**. There will be a weekend collection Sept. 19/20 to pay for rental vans in Gulfport, gasoline and supplies.

St. John Neumann Annual Parish Picnic

Save the Date!!

August 30, 2009 Blueberry Hill Park 1:00-7:00

Help us celebrate the Parish's 30th anniversary.

\$20.00 a family in advance

\$16.00 a couple and \$8.00 for singles.

\$25.00 a family paying at the door.

Coach Dave will be there for the kids, we will have Bingo and games, door prizes and fun for all.

Sign-ups will be available after all masses August 16 & 23rd.



The Gift of LLAMA

by Barbara Stokes

Do you know how valuable a llama is? The Level III Good Shepherd sessions collected some money for the poor and thought the Heifer Project had one of the best ideas. Instead of just giving money, you give the gift of an animal to help someone learn how to live better in their own country.

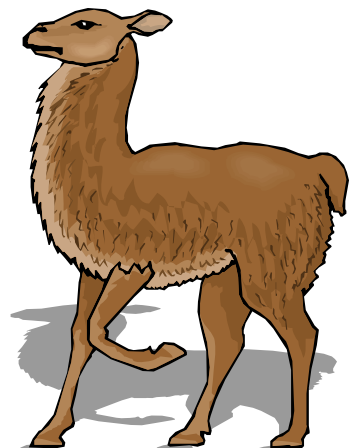
After much discussion, they decided a COW was the best choice but unfortunately our collection box didn't have enough money in it for a cow. So the LLAMA won its new home. At first we were disappointed -just a llama- but did you know the llama is a most wonderful gift?

The Heifer Project says that you can "Light Up Life With A LLAMA." First, when resources are scarce, it is important that livestock don't use up land reserved for people. Since the llama is at home in rough mountainous areas of Latin America, they are a blessing to their family with limited pasture land because they eat the scrub vegetation that other domesticated animals won't eat.

Second, the women weave their fleece into warm clothing to wear or sell. Third, the llama is a great pack animal so they load them up with goods for market and trek with them across rugged slopes at high altitudes. Fourth, as they

travel, the padded feet of the llama won't damage the fragile terrain and their selective browsing doesn't destroy sparse vegetation.

So for all these reasons- transportation, income, wool for clothing, blankets, carpet and rope- our Good Shepherd students made a worthwhile contribution to a family in Latin America by giving a little bit of what they had. This gift transformed us from readers of the gospel to doers of the gospel and will help transform the entire community in another country far away. Who knows, maybe it will transform our SJN community too!!!



WHAT IS BEST FOR OUR PRESCHOOLERS?

by Barbara Matera

Maria Montessori identified early childhood (ages 3 – 6) as a “sensitive period” for spirituality, a time when children are naturally aware of and in relationship with God. While living in Barcelona, Spain, she created an atrium that looked like a church where young children could come to know God more intimately and prepare to participate at Mass.

Following Montessori’s lead, the founders of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd invited young children to an atrium with a variety of presentations and materials that spoke to their spiritual needs. The present-day beneficiaries are our children, in whom we observe delight as they learn a language of prayer – in words, gestures, song, and silence. They are overjoyed to learn that there is a Good Shepherd who takes care of them and knows their name.

Young children truly fall in love with God in the atrium; and their contentment is visible. Parents often comment that their children are at peace when they pick them up after their session, even if the child had been at odds on the way to the atrium. Children often ask if they can come back every day; and many convince their parents to set up a “prayer table” at home so they can have a special place to be with God.

Parents are always seeking out what is best for their child. There are so many possible activities, and each is good in its own way. Dance teaches balance, movement, and grace. Sports teach physical discipline, rules, and teamwork. Preschool teaches self-control and getting along with other children. Then there’s Baby Mozart. . . and Baby Einstein. . . and Gymboree. . . and Suzuki. . . and on and on. How can a parent decide what is best?

A recent report from the Alliance for Childhood found that Kindergarten children in America routinely work on academics, have homework assignments, and even take standardized tests. There is no evidence that this academic work has long-term favorable results for children – actually, much evidence runs counter. What do children really need?

The founders of Good Shepherd have spent the past 55 years tailoring the presentations and materials to meet the needs of the young child. They have a word they often use: “essentiality.” If it’s not essential to the child at that age, they leave it out. That’s why they leave in the Resurrection, and leave out Noah’s Ark. Children at that age like cute animals, but have no idea of the deeper meaning of the Old Testament account. On the contrary, they “get” that Christ died, but is risen; and that they received the life of the Risen Christ when they were baptized. The children know that this is truly good news.

St. John Neumann is one of only a handful of parishes in the Diocese of Pittsburgh that offers Good Shepherd. If you have a child who is preschool or Kindergarten age, please give some serious thought to registering your child in one of our weekly sessions that begins in September. For more information, call Barbara Matera, Good Shepherd Coordinator, at 412-366-5885 Ext. 18.

FROM THE INSIGHTS EDITOR

The next Insights will be the 2009 Fall Issue. The deadline for all articles is:

MONDAY, October 26th, 2009

Please email your articles to fjenkins@pitt.edu

OR

Place them in the “Insights” mailbox in the Education Building.

In Memory of.....

We wish to pause and remember the following parishioners who have gone ahead to be with our Lord Jesus Christ and for whom a mass was held at St John Neumann.

Nedra Devlin

Grace Grenzign

Louis Hohman

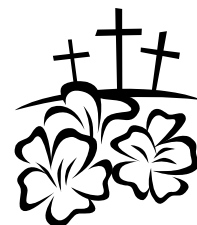
Thomas Huckestein

Cheryl Nelson

John O’Donnell

James Patsilevas Sr

Alma Richmond



Lenten Soup Suppers by Donna Brett

On two Wednesdays in Lent, the SJN community had a chance to get better acquainted with our new pastor and reacquainted with each other over a simple Lenten meal of bread and nourishing homemade soup contributed by parishioners. On March 11, about 120 were in attendance; after the meal Fr. Al spoke about his own and other missionaries' experiences in the parish of St. James' Society in Peru. SJN has always been proud of its tradition of outreach to the community, and Fr. Al's slides and presentation opened our eyes to the struggles of families to feed, clothe, and educate their children in poorer communities half a world away. Because Fr. Al had lived in Peru among the people for three years, his memories, insights, observations, and slides formed a bridge that evening between our parish and St. James, between our local community and the greater global community. Many parishioners offered up prayers and monetary contributions for those families in Peru we heard about that evening from Fr. Al.



On March 18, about 80 parishioners gathered again for an evening of soup, lively conversation, and a talk by Fr. Al; the topic this time was the "Life of St. Paul". This was particularly timely for those of us in Renew groups because Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was our Lenten topic for reflection. Fr. Al began by saying that St. Paul's writings had not made much sense to him until he became a missionary himself and began to understand that Paul's letters emanated from his missionary experience. Fr. Al compared Paul's lifelong commitment to spreading the gospel to the untiring dedication of the missionaries he had worked with in Peru. He suggested that if we read Paul's letters nowadays from the perspective of his missionary work then we can better understand that it is his concern for the communal and spiritual welfare of his converts, as well as his desire to encourage and nurture the small Christian communities he had begun, that is Paul's driving inspiration. In this light too, even the admonitions found in Paul's writings can be understood as springing from his anxiety that the little Christian communities he had begun with such loving care not slip into dissension. We went away that night with a much better understanding of Paul the missionary and his writings.

Waiting for the Spirit by Barbara Stokes

Summer brings many young people around SJN. Many of them are Confirmation Candidates who are waiting for the strength of the Spirit that is promised in Confirmation. They use these summer days to prepare for Confirmation this fall. We are blessed each year as we accompany them on this journey because we come to know more and more the role of the Holy Spirit in all of our lives. Through formal classes and days at Holy Family Institute, these young people have taken the words of the gospel and given them meaning. They are on their way to full initiation into our church and their waiting involves all of us. Take a look at the covenant book in the narthex and get to know these young people. Maybe even hold them in prayer or send a note to one in your neighborhood. They need us to help them see the power of initiation.



Initiation is not just a word. It is the very difference of our lives. Initiation -through Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist- joins our life completely to the life of Christ. Saint Therese of Lisieux asks in prayer that "Jesus draw me into the flames of His love, to unite me so closely to Him that He live and act in me." We pray with her that all of us can be created anew by the power of the Holy Spirit. In sharing this life of Christ we believe we become members of his Body, the Church. Let these young people see the Body of Christ in us. Let these young people be a vibrant part of this Body. Encourage their energy and enthusiasm so that "we too can walk in newness of life". Waiting for the Spirit can strengthen us all!!!

PLEASE NOTIFY THE RECTORY...

If you have a family member who becomes seriously ill or home bound and would want us to know.

If there has been a death in your immediate family and you wish to have the person mentioned in the Prayer of the Faithful on Sunday.

GOD IS ALL AROUND US: A Spiritual Reflection

by Michele Vora

I went to Target on a quest for a special Birthday present for my mom. I went to the book section and found the book *90 Minutes in Heaven*. I randomly opened the book and started reading. At the check-out counter, the lady called to me several times before I even acknowledged her. She said, "That book must be pretty good, you were so engrossed in it." Was she right! I was so wrapped up in this man's story. It was such a powerful book that I could not put it down.

The book is about a man who died in a car crash. Oh, but there is much, much more. After he died, he went to heaven for 90 minutes. In the book, he shares all his beautiful experiences in heaven to the best of his ability, knowing that there are not even words here on earth to describe the awe and beauty he had taken in. He mentions colors that were more vibrant than he had ever seen before. He met his friends and relatives who had gone before him, all ailments and disease lifted from them. He also heard the most beautiful music he had ever heard. I was also struck that everyone knew his name, and they were so overjoyed to see him.

After reading the book and hearing one of Father Al's heartfelt and meaningful homilies, I went home, got in bed, closed my eyes, and said my prayers. I felt so close to God at that moment that I saw a vivid image of Jesus surrounded by brilliant light. People may say I'm crazy, but I saw Him, and how it comforted me!

Another experience I had involved my Nana, who passed away two and a half years ago on All Saints Day. I love and miss her very much. My Nana loved animals – birds were her favorite. She used to sit outside and watch the birds and listen to their calls and then sing a sweet tune back to them.

Our family was taking a road trip to Florida back in February. I'm usually a nervous wreck when it comes to taking

long trips in the car. This car ride was different. We began our long two day trip on Friday the 13th early in the morning. I said a prayer that we would make it safely to Florida, and then we were off. I looked up in the sky and saw a beautiful hawk. This was the theme for the whole trip to Florida. Through each of the seven states we drove through, we saw between one and three hawks up in the sky. I believe that Jesus sent these birds to let me know that He and Nana were watching over us and not to fear. We had a wonderful vacation with my mom and dad, enjoying family, fun, sun, and of course the beach. After a tearful goodbye, we jumped into the car to head back home.

Just as we set out, my husband Sunil looked up in the sky and saw three hawks and said "there are the birds again watching over us". On the way home, the hawks decreased in number, traveling with us through the seven states. When we reached Pittsburgh, there was one beautiful hawk up in the sky. I never felt so at peace on our car ride. How awesome God is! We only have to open our eyes to see Him. The reason I decided to bring these two events to print was to reflect and see that our loved ones are not that far away and God is certainly here with us right now. Now I'm beginning to understand the verses from the Bible: "The Kingdom of God is at hand," and "The Kingdom of God is in you and me."

Since I have returned home I have been seeing hawks up in the sky when facing challenges and choices I need to make in my life. One time, as I was driving down the road with my friend, we were talking about an issue that was concerning us. I said it was going to be okay, and there on the side of the road was a beautiful hawk letting me know it would be all right. My friend said, "There is your hawk." These experiences have been so powerful to me and make me feel so close to God. I'm thrilled He is so close and interested in me!

NCYC Update

by Grace Ghirardi

Our NCYC (National Catholic Youth Conference) group of 21 has worked hard to raise the money needed to fund our trip to Kansas City. What happens at a Catholic Conference? It is like a retreat with 25,000 people. It is amazing and I cannot wait, especially for our new NCYC people, to go. There are awesome speakers, great musicians, and moving Prayer services. There are teens everywhere you go and some of us "older" people too. It is inspiring and invigorating and it helps our young people to see the Church at its finest.

Why I tell you this is so you can have a sense of why we sell hoagies, Avon, jewelry, pancakes, soup, and other miscellaneous items. It is so worth it! We thank you and pray for you to be blessed as you bless us each time you make a purchase.

Our trip is November 19-22nd. We ask for your continued prayers and if possible, you're continued financial support. Yes, there will be more hoagies, soup, and to me the most important event is our 2nd showing of the comedy, **JO-NAH**...with a new cast, and some repeats. We have a very special guest this year. I cannot say who, you have to come to see yourself. We will have food, baskets to raffle and a wonderful production for all ages. No tickets necessary just come and give what you can.

Jonah is on October 4th at 4:30pm. Please check the bulletin for further information. God bless you for your generous support of our teens and adults,

From the Pastor's Desk

by Fr. Albin McGinnis

On June 14, 2009 we held a Parish Town Hall meeting with about 150 parishioners in attendance. As the pastor I facilitated the meeting and began with a picture of the parish that has been developing over the past six months. My introduction was largely a response to a question that had been put to me about what I saw as the parish's greatest strength and greatest weakness. Over the past year the parish has suffered greatly (you know this better than I) and the result has been a growing lack of trust. It has affected our sense of community and mission. In the past, St. John Neumann has been able to claim both of these strong traits as defining parts of the parish. With the difficulties we have experienced, they can also be seen as our weaknesses.

The community building is necessary to reinvigorate our sense of mission. We are the People of God who have been sent on mission to make Christ believable in the world by what we say and do. That mission can only be accomplished when we have a strong sense of community. We can recapture these defining elements and work to regain the trust that has been lost. A symptom of the lack of trust is seen in the failure to bring any candidates forward to enter the Church through the RCIA program during this past year. It is a first for me in my 32 years of priesthood. How open we are to inviting others in and welcoming them speaks of how we see ourselves and how we present ourselves to others. I questioned the welcome I received and wondered if it was as hard for new people in the parish to feel a part of this community as I have felt. If so, we are not doing the best we can. Welcome and invitation are important for the life of our parish.

The financial picture was not one I looked forward to dealing with. We are not going further into debt; currently we are just able to pay the ordinary expenses of the parish and the interest on our \$1.6 million dollar debt. The parish as a whole must have a heightened awareness of the financial needs of the parish, and contribute with a sense of sacrificial giving. The bishop has graciously extended our exemption from the PSP assessment on all monies that are given to reduce this debt for the next two years. The likelihood of this being extended again is slim. This is the time to really look at what is being given and ask people to give more if they are able.

We are currently involved in a process to establish a Parish Pastoral Council, this may take some time. It is not something that can be rushed or entered into without much thought, prayer and discernment by those interested and by the parish. We will publish the names of those interested in the future. A Parish Finance Council has been in place for the past year, and with a few additions, I will publish the names of those who have helped the parish look at key financial situations within the parish.

In this year of our 30th anniversary, we as a parish have a lot to celebrate and a lot to be thankful for. We can continue to work together to become more than we ever were, but we need to work together, with the guidance of the Spirit of God that guarantees our success. Part of our thirtieth celebration will include the Parish Picnic the last weekend in August.

There were questions then from the floor. They were respectful, honest and for the most part positive. The comments and questions concerned hit on three key areas: I have been asked if I was happy here? I feel much happier than when I came, but we have work to do with welcome and invitation. We even began talking strategies that were under way.

Issue of communication and promotion of who we are. Some spoke on the importance of communication in and about the parish. We talked about a Ministry Fair planned for the fall - parishioners will see what we have to offer and how they can get involved. There was concern about our connecting with the youth in the Parish. They need something – how do we attract them? Youth are the concern of most parishes and finding ways to engage them in parish life is never easy. We continue to try with teens getting together at the Rectory, and a changing Youth Ministry Program.

Music issue. The music issue continues to stir a lot of emotion with people expressing their dissatisfaction with the music chosen and how it has turned the youth of the parish off, as well as many of our parishioners. It was one of our strong points. Over the past year people have not been happy with the music selection. People's taste in music is varied, meeting the expectations of everyone is impossible. One of the present choir members invited old choir members back to join the current choir. They would be thrilled to have them back. It would raise the level of music from where we are now to a new level.

Healed and healing. Many seemed to feel that we are well on the way to healing and have gotten past many of the problems. Change is a part of life. Now is the time to move forward. Learn to be grateful for what we have.

Let's look to the future and work together as a community. God Bless.

Staying Young - Adult Education !!

Do you ever read those articles about staying young? They propose that we eat blueberries, curry and honey, exercise and try some special pills or creams. Recently someone told me that the best way to stay young is to learn something new. Exercise your mind and nourish your body!

Knowing that we are never too old to learn, let's work together to provide some quality adult education at SJN and help each other stay young! We'll begin with a dynamic young woman professor from Duquesne who will lead us into a powerful reflection on JUSTICE in our secular world. So mark your calendars for Sunday, September 20 at 1pm in Bovard Hall. Let your mind grow and stay young as we discover more and more about social justice and us.

Then let's aim for once a month, taking some time out of our busy old schedules to learn something NEW and stay young!!!

Our first speaker, Dr. Anna Scheid, is a theology professor at Duquesne. Anna is a dynamic speaker and discussion leader, whose passion comes from a genuinely Catholic Christian view of the world. She will be speaking to us just a few days before the G-20 comes to Pittsburgh, a meeting that she believes affords us a good opportunity to observe and reflect theologically on globalization. Anna will also address Pope Benedict's most recent encyclical on economic justice. Mark your calendar for this talk on Sunday, September 20 at 1:00 p.m.

Deacon Aspirant or a Really Old Altar Server? A journey in discernment, patience, and prayer

by Rick Caruso

By way of introduction, my name is Rick Caruso. I have been a member of St. John Neumann parish since 1993. I have been married to Carol for 21 years. We have two daughters, Anne, who will be a sophomore at Pitt and Gina who will be starting her freshman year at NAI, both in the fall.

You may have seen me dressed like an altar server these past few months and be wondering what exactly I'm doing up there. Well, I am a Deacon Aspirant in the Class of 2013 for the Diocese of Pittsburgh. This means that I have not been formally accepted as a candidate to become a Deacon. That's scheduled to happen this September. However, what it does mean is that the Diocese believes that I would be a good person to serve in this role, that I still believe that I am being called to serve as a Deacon in the Catholic Church of Pittsburgh, and that I have the support of my family in pursuing this call.

The process to get to this point has taken almost two years. In 2007, Bishop Paul Bradley called for a new class of Deacons for our diocese. After some very serious discussion with Carol and with my family, along with a great deal of prayer and personal discernment, as well as talking with friends and current Deacons, I made the official application December 31st, 2007. The application process was comprehensive and ranged from submission of my birth and baptismal certificates to criminal and child abuse clearances. In addition, I was interviewed on two separate occasions by members of the Deacon Formation Board, an official body of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. I was very happy that I was invited to move forward with 28 other men, to a period of more serious discernment about this calling. I began attending classes at St. Paul's seminary and had additional evaluations by Diocesan officials on my state of readiness to move forward. My family was also asked about their readiness to support me during my formation and throughout my ministry. Following this period of discernment I was overjoyed when I received the news that I was permitted to begin a very rigorous, comprehensive formation program, to eventually be ordained as a Deacon in the Diocese of Pittsburgh, in the year 2013. That's right .. That's a full five year journey from submitting the application to the day of ordination.

And so, fast forward to today. During this summer, I am assigned here at SJN for my Pastoral Assignment. In short, this means that I need to become aware of the wide variety of activities that occur on a day-to-day basis here at SJN. Those activities which are very common responsibilities for the Deacon, range from participation at mass to sacramental preparation to serving the poor to recording a Baptism in the official church register. I have been treated so very generously by the entire SJN staff beginning with Fr. Al who is serving as my supervisor during my summer experience. I look forward to the wide variety of opportunities that I will have to serve the people of SJN and those who we serve in our various outreach programs.

In future Insights, I plan on writing about the role of the Deacon in the church my own personal formation experience. For now, I would ask you to please pray for me, for my family, and for all of the members of my class and the Class of 2011 which has 49 men who are Candidates for ordination. I am richly blessed to be called to this vocation and am truly grateful to many of you who know me and have supported me and encouraged me already, during my journey.

Peace, Rick Caruso

Heart to Heart-The Health and Wellness Ministry

Touching lives one person at a time



It is the mission of the Health and Wellness Ministry of St. John Neumann Parish, a dedicated Christ-centered faith community to enrich, fulfill and promote health, healing and wellness of the whole person – body, mind and spirit – by educating, serving and caring for each other through all stages of life.

The St. John Neumann Health and Wellness Ministry consists of a dedicated volunteer committee of SJN members. Some of whom are certified Health Ministers, and Parish Nurses. Our aim is to prevent illness, promote health and wellness, and encourage spirituality.

We accomplish this by:

A monthly Blood Pressure screening program

CPR, AED(emergency defibrillation), and first aid training

Various health, educational programs and seminars(as identified by the parish needs assessment)

Grief and disease support groups

Personal fitness and mental well being

The Health and Wellness Ministry will address any of your needs through all stages of life. We work in conjunction with other caring and support ministries here at St. John Neumann. If you have a desire to join the Health and Wellness Ministry, we would be happy to welcome you into this fulfilling program.

*Please let us know your needs by either personal contact or our ministry telephone line

*Fran Lehman RN (412) 366-3520; *Iris McClenahan RN (412) 369-7114; *Ministry line (412) 366-2020

Reflections on Good Shepherd

by Linda Fetzer

When I was a kid, I'd look at "CHURCH LADIES" and assume it must be pretty easy for them to be "GOOD"--- whatever that meant! Now that I'm a "CHUCH LADY" myself, I find it's not as easy as it looks. To tell you the truth, I need all the spiritual help I can get. Mass, MOMS II, Centering Prayer, Renew ---I need it all. But the place where I hear God the best is in the Good Shepherd Atrium.

I used to wait patiently, listening for God to say: "Thank you, Linda, for being such a gifted, creative and selfless catechist." I also thought perhaps I'd hear: "I could never build up my Kingdom without you, Linda." Well, that never happened. However, God does speak to me in the Atrium, through both the Catechesis itself, and of course, through the kids.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has changed my life. I tend to metaphorically roll my eyes when someone else uses that phrase, so I understand your skepticism. But, honest to God, after decades of obligatory (and reluctant) attendance at Mass, now I can hardly wait to join my brothers and sisters (i.e., YOU) at the Table. My understanding of the Mass has been radically altered by what I've learned as a Good Shepherd Catechist. I've also learned to ponder the parables and meditate on the Maxims. I'm one happy Sheep!

However, Christ has spoken to my heart most clearly through the children. At first, it wasn't too pretty. It was difficult for me to adjust from the traditional classroom model (I am the TEACHER) to the Montessori- based Atrium. I called my daughter, a teacher herself, for advice. Now Carolyn might not know Montessori, but she knows her Mom. "Here's what I suggest," she said. "The next time a child drives you crazy, sit down and look at their hands." So I did. Let me tell you, children have LITTLE hands. And they have lots of little scratches and bruises. Some even bite their little nails, probably because they have a lot on their little shoulders.

Needless to say, the children in the Atrium have become my teachers. They have eagerly assumed the responsibility of teaching me patience, compassion, acceptance, and more patience. They help me leave my ego at the door and walk in with them, just another branch on the Vine. For that, I am eternally grateful.

Seeking social justice as part of our faith....

We are seeking to form a Social Justice Committee at Saint John Neumann Church to build a faith community in which social justice and social action are an integral part of the parish. There are many ways that we might respond to the call -- direct service and outreach, formation and education, community organizing, advocacy, global solidarity and peace, prayer and worship.

Each November at the end of the liturgical year, we hear the beautiful Gospels of Matthew 5 and Matthew 25 (Whenever you did it for the least of my brothers, you did it for me". But what do they mean to us in our daily lives as Catholics? The Sermon on the Mount reminds us of God's everlasting love of the poor. Matthew 25 takes the importance of love for the poor a step further – This Gospel reminds us that we will all be judged by how we treat others, how the simple help that we give to someone is a clear example of our love for God. Anyone can do it. It simply requires that we turn our love of God into love of neighbor as ourselves.

In addition to the Gospels, the Catholic Church has a rich tradition of speaking out and taking action for social justice. Catholic Social Teaching is exemplified in the many papal encyclicals and pastoral letters dating back to *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. From the Scriptures and Church teaching we learn that the justice of a society is tested by the treatment of the poor.

We are called by our faith to answer this need for justice in our society. When we view justice through the lens of faith, it becomes the substance of our faith. The U.S. Bishops said in the statement ***Communities of Salt and Light*** in 1993, "The central message is simple; our faith is profoundly social. We cannot be called truly "Catholic" unless we hear and heed the Church's call to serve those in need and work for justice and peace. We cannot call ourselves followers of Jesus unless we take up his mission of bringing 'good news to the poor, liberty to captives, and new sight to the blind.'" (cf LK 4:18)

If you are interested in helping to form a Social Justice Committee in the parish, please contact Terry Hartnett at 412-301-0634 or tmhartnett@aol.com. A future meeting with Father Al will be planned; please watch the Parish Bulletin for a time and date!

Beginnings

by Barbara Stokes

How do you become a Catholic? This probably won't seem to be a very important question if you are already a Catholic. Many of us were baptized as infants so we think we don't need to have anything to do with the process called RCIA by which others come into our church. However the **RCIA** (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) impacts all of us. Through this process- a time of preparation- not only are new people invited to join our community but also the community looks at itself and prepares for new life. It's like getting ready for company. We need to clean up a bit. At home, we know it means to scrub and paint and make things look better. At the church, it might mean that each of us make this change inside so that the community doesn't just look better but it is better. It is changed! It is more like Christ than ever before. Sacraments help us do this after we have made the decision to change. Look to Reconciliation, Eucharist and prayer to move our SJN community to be wholesome and healthy enough for new life to enter and thrive here.

RCIA begins with a period of Inquiry- a time to ask questions and get to know each other. We began in June and will continue with these sessions on Sunday, August 23rd after the 9:30 Mass and again on Wednesday, Sept 16 at 7:30PM. All are welcome to "come and see" the treasure we hold in faith. Please extend the invitation to anyone you know who might be seeking the awesome life of liturgy and sacraments of the Catholic Church.

This beginning in Inquiry moves to another formal step called the catechumenate which means a time of instruction. Starting in October we journey toward this step and usually reach it in November. Following the church year we participate in the Rite of Election in Lent and begin a time of purification or spiritual retreat. Then at the Easter Vigil, April 3, 2010. we welcome and rejoice as "new life" comes into our community and enlivens us. Perhaps you or someone you know wants to begin this journey with us this year. Pray about it and then come and see!

Youth Ministry/Religious Education Events

Summer 2009

This summer is very busy at St. John Neumann with lots of great events for our teens and pre-teens. **Our Junior Bible School** participants this June in grades 5, 6, and 7 had their program in the afternoons. Some of the things that we did that week were: planting around the statue of St. John Neumann, and we weeded too! We went to World Vision and the young people did an amazing job in a short period of time. Back in Bovard Hall we learned more about how God works in our lives and acted out some of the Bible stories. On Thursday we went to Wall Park for pizza and games and of course water balloons.

Our first **Summer High School teen night** was on June 17th and we had 40 high school teens come and play basketball, volleyball, make jewelry, and lots more happenings...they loved the Rita's ice too. We are planning more events in August, like the trip on the 5th, to go kayaking and hopefully a Pirate game later in the month.

Confirmation Classes...Our first confirmation class on June 15 through 19 went very well. We had 33 of our candidates participate. Our next class will be on July 20-24th and our registrations continue to come in. Registration in these classes will roll over into the Fall **Youth Group**, for High School teens Program on Sunday evenings. More info will be coming on that soon. Please look for our posters of these events and of all our summer programs.

Summer Religious Ed Middle School Program...We have almost 100 6/7/ and 8th graders participating this year. This week, July 20-24th, will offer many opportunities for our young people including guest musicians, speakers, service projects and much more.

Middle School Gatherings – Following the summer week long Religious Education program we offer the Middle School Gatherings to our students who enroll in the summer program and also to any middle school students who would like to come. They are once a month from September till April on a Sunday afternoon. Please check the bulletin for more information.

With the amount of programs being offered this summer and fall, we need lots of help. Please consider volunteering your time and talent for our young people. I would love to hear from you! If you are interested in helping with any of the above or have any questions, please email or call Grace Ghirardi at: director-youth@stjohnneumannpgh.org or 412-366-5638, extension 16.

LEARNING ABOUT THE 9 – 12 YEAR OLD CHILD

by Barbara Matera

Children between the ages of nine and twelve are interested in everything in the world around them, and are searching to find their place in that world. They look for role models, people they can imitate as they prepare to transition from childhood to adolescence.

In the Level III atrium, these children study a very long wall chart that represents the "Plan of God." It includes important events since humans have been on this earth, from the discovery of fire and invention of the wheel to the rise and fall of civilizations. Along the way, there are scientific discoveries, wars, and exploration. There is one constant through it all – God and his loving presence in human history, most visibly in the person of Jesus Christ. The chart shows that God's presence continues today, especially in the sacraments of the Church. The timeline

of the Plan of God also has a section that is completely blank – representing the "blank page" on which each of us continues to write the history as we wait for Christ to come again, when God will be "all in all."

The children think and pray about what their place might be in God's Plan. They study Old Testament figures who had important roles: Noah, Abraham, Moses. They read the lives of the saints, and find favorites they look up to and try to emulate.

Starting on August 15, a group of Good Shepherd catechists from St. John Neumann and other parishes from around the country will come together to learn about the spiritual development of the 9-12 year old child and to see the presentations that are given in the Level III atrium. Two wonderful formation leaders are coming to SJN to lead this

course – Rebekah Rojcewicz, who spent two years studying in Rome with the founders of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and comes to us from Memphis, TN; and Suzanne Lewis, who has written and edited several books on children's catechesis and will travel from Steubenville, OH.

It takes much effort to organize a national Good Shepherd course, and many parents from the program will be helping by providing breakfast and lunch for course participants. We are thankful for their support, and assure them that they are the most important role models for their children in the life of faith. Parishioners at SJN and Sts. John & Paul have supported Good Shepherd in many ways – contributing items needed for the atrium; woodworking; sewing; making materials; and serving as catechists, aides, and hall monitors. We would not have this program without your help; and we and the children are grateful.

Appalachian Reflections

by Catie Kirsch

After months of fundraising and preparation, the SJN Appalachia Workgroup gathered on the morning of June 27th to begin their journey to Kingwood, Preston County, West Virginia. On a bright Saturday morning the 49 work campers weighed down by their duffle bags, tools, sleeping bags and snacks quickly got to work. Everyone seemed very anxious while we loaded up our vans and piled in our assigned cars. After an hour or so of driving we arrived at our usual meeting spot, Coopers Rock State Forest and assembled at Coopers Rock Overlook. For the rookies (including me) it was just a scenic overlook but for returning work campers it was a traditional meeting spot where everyone gathered to receive our first piece of mail and say a quick prayer before we continued to the Four H Camp.

As soon as we arrived at camp everyone scurried out of their vans to find a sleeping spot. The rookies all exchanged confused looks as we quickly realized that every second counted seeing that we would be sleeping on picnic tables for a week and finding a bed in the middle of the pavilion was critical. Electrical outlets for cell phone chargers were also a hot commodity. All the younger campers found a spot under the pavilion and headed up to the changing house to drop off their bags and claim a mattress. The young campers teamed up to carry their mattresses down to the picnic table beds. The changing house was used to store everyone's belong-

ings. While the teenagers settled in the pavilion the adult campers set up tent city. Tents ranged in size from the Taj Mahal to pup tents. Those adults were elected to bypass tent city settled in the bunkhouse. The adult bunk house was used for sleeping, a room full of bunk beds; left side for the men and right for the women.

After everyone was settled we all met in the dining hall to be assigned to our first site of the week. Each site is assigned five to six work campers except for the cargo work assignment which only needs two people (though their assignment is big this team is limited by seats and seatbelts). Almost every day we were assigned a new site unless the previous day's work wasn't complete. Cargo's job is to drive from the hardware store to all the different sites delivering wood and materials. This job may sound easy but I quickly learned that this job can be very stressful. Thankfully I had Jen Wickert (one of three members of the Wickert family to travel to Appalachia) as a driver to make it a really fun day. Cargo is driven by one veteran woman and usually a female rookie, after one day of cargo the rest of the week is filled with hammering, cutting, destroying and rebuilding.

A full week of physical labor is very tiring but it was one of the most rewarding weeks of my life. With every site or home comes a story, ranging from a past of destruction, a life of misery or people who have never had any-

thing better. All of these people whether a couple or a big family are in search of a hope, a miracle to keep them going and I like to think for a couple days we were that inspiration or hope that they spent their days praying for. During my experience in Appalachia I had the honor of meeting four different families, a widow who didn't have the money to hire professionals, another woman taking care of her grandchild and daughter who lived with her and Appalachia's grandma. The fourth family I got to meet was the Master's. The Master's were a young couple with one son, AJ who was five years old. As my group and I arrived at the site my stomach dropped. I had never seen a home like this, so deteriorated and decrepit that I could hardly believe a family with a little boy was living there. The yard was overflowing with trash while AJ ran throughout it with bare feet. This little boy was the cutest thing, while my team and I worked on their roof that was practically caving in AJ stood below us with his best friend Pokey, his dog, asking us questions upon questions and thanking us repeatedly for helping out his family. It's hard to put into words how deprived these people actually are. One lady hadn't had a sink in her house for thirty five years; she goes out to the water pump to fill her bath tub and get water to cook a meal for her family, luckily we could help her out and give her a sink, something that small that we take for granted.

Appalachian Reflections Continued

Not only do these families go through a lot of their lives without these simple conveniences but some also have to live with haunted pasts and experiences that will give them nightmares forever.

Every day after a long day at work we piled in our vans and headed to Dairy Queen to get a treat and talk with the other groups about their days. Once we got back to camp we gathered in the dining hall for group prayer then dispersed, forming a single file line to obtain dinner from the dinner crew. At the beginning of camp you are placed in a group for chores; serving dinner, cleaning the bathrooms, picking up the trash around the camp and organizing the activity for the night. The activity of the night usually consisted of either softball or dodge ball. After dinner and the nightly activity is the nightly meeting, what I always looked forward to. Benches and chairs are positioned to form a circle in the dining hall for the nightly meeting. Everyone gathers with snacks and drinks to tie them over for the meeting. The meeting opens up with a prayer and continues right into the site reports. One person from each site shares what they accomplished and information they learned from the family. Although the site overviews can be lengthy I

loved hearing about everyone experiences, the struggles and concerns that our “clients” faced every day. It never ceased to amaze me the severe hardships and struggles that they faced. After site reports, announcements and closing prayer followed.

On Friday, everyone returned to their sites to finish their projects and instead of a brown bag lunch we were treated with a trip to Grandma Marietta’s house for lunch and her eightieth birthday celebration. The entire SJN work camp group gathered in grandma’s small house, filled with the smell of homemade bread, pasta, salads, birthday cake and many other foods that she spent the last couple days preparing for us. Grandma has been very special to the SJN Appalachia Workcampers for many years. Grandma is one of the most influential, spiritual people I’ve ever met in my entire life. Despite her limited means, Grandma runs a food bank from her back porch. Over the years SJN has enclosed the food pantry, repaired the roof and purchased heavy duty freezers for the pantry. When Grandma talks to you about appreciating life and being thankful for what you have it sounds as if she is reading right out of the Bible, the way she phrases her inspiring and heartfelt

words, I can’t even describe. I felt goose bumps run up and down my back as I listened to her and how much God can really help us with anything we need. I consider myself very lucky for having met her.

On Saturday, our last day we ate breakfast as we normally did, cleaned the camp and gathered by the creek. The creek walk is for all rookies, who are encouraged to walk across and back as a rite of initiation. Sleeping on picnic tables and working every day in the sun isn’t easy but what you get back from this amazing experience is more than what these people receive from us. I walked away from this experience with a completely different outlook to my everyday life. I’ve learned to appreciate things that I would never think of not having. For example, most of the people who we touch don’t have neighbors for miles, or their kids are taken away from them because they can’t support them. In the end I was most appreciative of the family and friends I have. I recommend this experience to adults of all ages - it’s a great way to give back and it’s a ton of fun, I met a lot of really nice people and it’s definitely inspired me to give back more, I hope you all consider sharing this experience with us next year!

Habitat for Humanity

Let's renew a SJN time honored tradition -- Saturday work days with Habitat for Humanity. All interested adults and teens 16 years and older are invited! Watch the bulletin for our first scheduled work day in September. If you would be willing to help me organize this adventure, please contact Mark Fetzer at mfetzer@centria.com or call 412-367-7972. I'm looking forward to working with you this year.