

Transformed!

The Good News at St. Hilary Parish

December 2019/January 2020

Parishioners share *faith*, learn to *witness*

When Don Allen's wife Debbie, decided to join the Church through RCIA in 2012, he tagged along. "In short order, I discovered I needed to know more about my faith and also, I felt very insecure sharing." While RCIA helped him learn more about Catholicism, it was being part of the pilot of the Be My Witness program this year that enabled him to gain confidence in sharing his faith.

Don actually piloted the Be My Witness program twice—once with his bible study group during the summer of 2018 and again with a Christ Renews His Parish men's alumni group. While being part of the small groups fulfilled his need for belonging, Don said, "What I also needed was some structure to learn how to evangelize, to share my story with others, and to feel comfortable doing so.

"Fr. Steve mentioned the Be My Witness program. It provided the small group setting and also the means to learn how to evangelize. It taught me step-by-step how to share my faith," he said.

Small steps to evangelization

"Be My Witness provides a three-to-four-minute video of Catholics sharing their journey, their witness. Then you are invited to share your insights and feelings about the video. Finally, the book provides a dozen or so examples on how you can share your faith, such as learning through small steps. Taking small steps encourages you to evangelize and enables you to learn to share your story with others. It involves 12 meetings in a non-threatening environment. You can stop there or continue," said Don.

"The program gave me a road map to learn how to evangelize and examples to imitate so we could develop our own witness story," Don explained. "Being part of a small group teaches you how to establish rapport, helps you to develop your own personal story, and provides an environment to share that story. It also taught me to relax, listen, and encouraged me to tell my own story, which in turn gives me courage to evangelize as Jesus expects us to do," he added.

Jody Geary, Small Christian Communities Coordinator, also piloted the program in 2018. In addition to being part of a small group Jody appreciated the program materials. "There are catechism quotations, references and quotes from Pope Francis' encyclical, *Joy of the Gospel* in the book *Be My Witness*, in addition to a DVD that shows the witness stories from each session, that participants receive, so there's an educational aspect to the program that I found interesting," said Jody.

Evangelization matters

Pastor Steve Brunovsky explained how the Be My Witness program evolved at St. Hilary. "We were approached two years ago by the Evangelization Office of the diocese to be one of five parishes to pilot the Be My Witness process. We formed a team that attended several information meetings. Then I met with the team to plan the implementation of the Be My



(From left to right) Mike Coudriet, Paul Preston, Tom Pasadyn, Don Allen, and Jim Kilcoyne meet once a month with their Christ Renews His Parish men's alumni group.

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Mary and Joe Zbasnik

The love and support I feel from my group is truly inspiring.'

“We shared many of our personal stories, some through tears and some through much laughter,” Mary recalled. “As always, some of us talked more than others, but there was no pressure to talk at all and plenty of opportunities to listen to each other. Each session presented us with ideas of how to become stronger missionaries for Christ.

“Participating in this small faith group has introduced me to new friends and helped me reflect on how Christ works with us and through us every day. It has helped me to see how He is present in all of our struggles and our triumphs,” she said.

“Our discussions of topics such as encountering Christ, rediscovering joy, and making others feel welcome helped each of us recognize how living our faith affects all of our interactions with others, whether they follow our same faith tradition or not. The love and support I feel from my group is truly inspiring,” Mary said.

Six new Be My Witness small groups began forming in late October and early November, after membership was opened to the whole parish. “Since many of these groups are meeting once a month, there is room for new members,” said Jody.

Witness Surveys in five areas: Sunday Matters, Welcome Matters, Belonging Matters, Witness Matters, and Mission Matters. We then used the survey results to create a five-year pastoral plan, which was fortuitous, as we were coming to the end of our previous five-year pastoral plan,” Fr. Steve said.

“One of the goals of Be My Witness is to create a more vibrant parish through faith sharing, especially in small groups. In the summer of 2018, we invited over 100 people to an information meeting on small groups and the result was four pilot small groups; two women’s groups, one men’s group, and one couples group,” Fr. Steve continued.

“We asked them to evaluate the Be My Witness 12-week small group experience. All comments were positive. People really enjoyed the opportunity to share faith with other parishioners, and the materials were very user friendly. We then opened it up to the entire parish the first weekend of October. “The goal is to get parishioners more comfortable with sharing their faith journey with

others, and to build a culture where people can witness their faith, and become missionary disciples, meaning, parishioners who are taking their faith life seriously, growing in their relationship with the Lord, and then inviting others to do the same.”

Materials enhance sharing

Mary Zbasnik was one of those parishioners specially invited to evaluate the Be My Witness program. After the initial presentation, she joined a group of seven women who met every other week over the course of a school year. “Each of our meetings started with a prayer and a short witness video of someone sharing their experiences to introduce and demonstrate the topic for that session,” she explained.

“The short sections of the book expanded on various ideas from the video and asked questions to help us think about similar experiences we’d had. How does this apply to me in my daily life? We read and discussed a short reading from Scripture and listened to a song inspired by the topic of the day,” said Mary.



If you are interested in joining a Be My Witness group, please contact Jody Geary at jody.geary@outlook.com or (330) 283-6294.



Students receive *Blessings in a Backpack*



Students from Helen Arnold Community Learning Center receive a bag of food each Friday from Blessings in a Backpack.

Beth Hudak was looking for a volunteer opportunity to share with her young children when she became involved with Blessings in a Backpack around the time that fellow parishioners Debbie Pianalto and Jill Eicher founded the Akron Chapter in 2010. Many organizations like St. Bernard's soup kitchen and Haven of Rest required volunteers to be older and at the time, Beth's children were too young to participate.

"There's a need to help others, and this program was so family oriented and allowed us to volunteer with our younger kids. I wanted there to be the practice of faith after you leave church. I wanted my kids to recognize that they have a lot and there are kids who don't," said Beth.

Part of a national organization, Blessings in a Backpack provides food items for all students grades kindergarten through fifth grade who attend Helen Arnold Community Learning Center, McEbright Community Learning Center, St. Mary School, as well as students in need from Crouse CLC, Schumacher CLC, David Hill CLC, Pfeiffer Elementary School, and Bridges Learning Center.

Weekly, 30 to 40 volunteers from St. Hilary School and Parish help pack over 1,040 bags filled with nine to ten food items including microwavable ravioli or macaroni and cheese, pudding, apple sauce, oatmeal, fruit snacks, pretzels, and

soup all in single serving containers so children can feed themselves. The cost is \$100 per child per year for 38 weekends of the school year.

The cost is covered by the group's annual ornament sale, donations from individuals, and grants from organizations like The Knights of Columbus, Witan, and companies such as Miller Transport and Smuckers. The extra nutrition results in better attendance, readiness for learning, and better grades.

Volunteers meet to pack the food bags on Thursdays at 6 p.m. at Helen Arnold Community Learning Center and McEbright Community Learning Center, working in teams of eight to ten. The work is done in one and a half to two hours each evening.

According to Dr. Patricia Nugent, principal of St. Mary School and St. Hilary parishioner, "It has been a wonderful gift to our students and their families to receive the food every Friday. The children are excited to receive them and grateful for the contents. We continually remind them of where the backpacks come from and let them know that our friends at St. Hilary Parish and School want to make sure we have enough nutritious food. We pray for them often."

Dr. Nugent added, "Every day we feed every student breakfast and lunch so they can be the best students they can be. The thought that they have a little something extra

to take home with them every week helps reassure them that things will be okay."

In addition to Chapter Director Beth Hudak, the Akron board includes St. Hilary parishioners Debbie Pianalto, finance; Julie Ellison, social media and marketing; Jenny Hummel and Melanie O'Neil, food coordinators; Mega Rankin, volunteer coordinator; and Karen Sears, coordinator of the Don Drumm ornament fundraiser.

The volunteer commitment is flexible and welcomes everyone regardless of age. It's also an ideal service opportunity for groups and high school students. "The nice thing is that it brings the community together," said Beth.



Every year Don Drumm designs a pewter ornament exclusively for Blessings in a Backpack. This year's ornament is shaped like a snowflake and will sell in two sizes—an ornament for \$30 and a wall hanging for \$50. The ornament sale is the group's largest fundraiser and will be held after Masses on December 7 and 8.

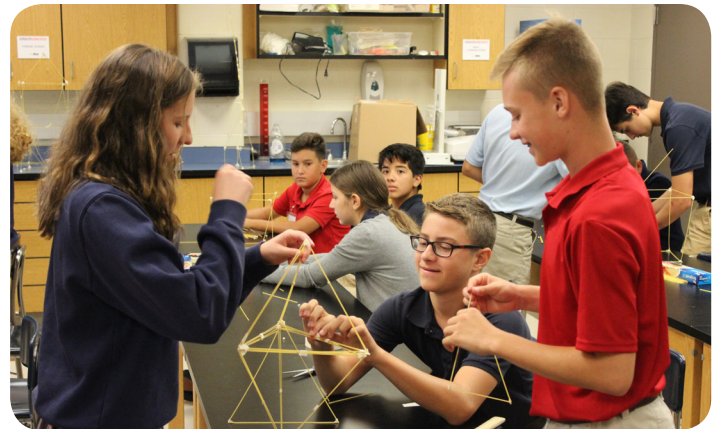


St. Hilary School: A Solid Partner for Parents

Children growing up in today's world face a different set of challenges and opportunities than those of previous generations. The forceful pull of popular culture, coupled with the exponential growth of new, previously unheard of career fields, bring uncharted waters for parents trying to guide their children safely to adulthood. In these times, it is essential that families have a school setting that not only shares, but fosters and furthers their beliefs. In a world of uncertainty, St. Hilary School provides a solid partner for parents seeking to raise their children with a strong moral compass and an eye toward developing sound academic skills, as well as leadership, character, and wholeness of person. Grounded in the tenets of the Catholic faith, respected for nearly 60 years of excellence in Catholic education, and a leader in cutting edge technology and programs, St. Hilary School provides a setting that blends tradition and innovation to give students the best possible learning experience for their kindergarten through eighth grade years.



A second grader works on math skills using a Promethean Board. Interactive boards are in use in every classroom in the school.



Junior high students prepare to design and build bridges by first testing their skills with a basic building lesson in the science lab.

A Complete Package

Today's parents need a stable educational institution on which they can rely to assist in developing their children as productive, principled citizens of our world. The faculty and staff at St. Hilary School are dedicated to ensuring that each child becomes the best person he or she can be. The commonality of values among teachers, staff, parents, and students makes it effortless to reinforce at school what is taught at home. Guided by a school-wide theme each year, the school community learns about and lives out qualities that are not only faith-based, but are in line with the shared morals that are key to the school

culture. Weekly school Masses and other special services help students to grow as faith-filled individuals. Students are provided with opportunities to hone their leadership skills and character as members of the Student Council, participants at Masses and other services, buddies to younger students, contributors to service projects, and more. Wholeness of person is developed through activities such as these, as well as a variety of clubs and sports that supplement the school's academic and faith formation for all students.

Sound Academic Skills

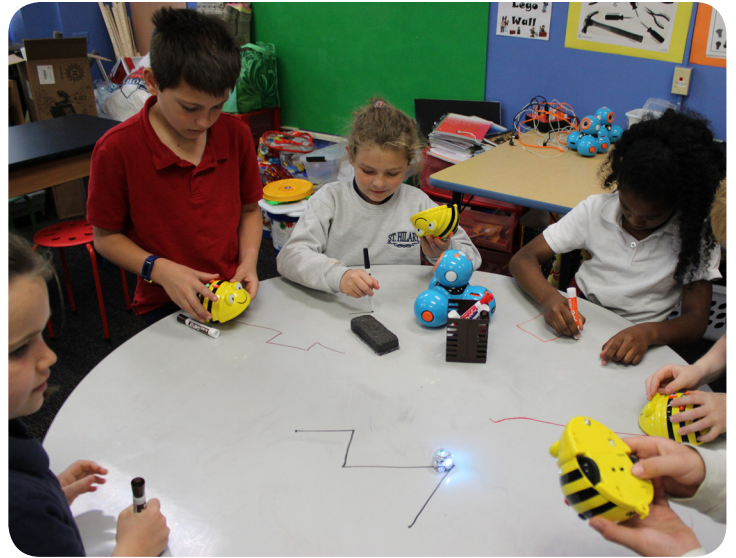
A two-time recipient of the U.S. Department of Education's Blue Ribbon award for excellence in education, St. Hilary School has a well-established reputation for academic distinction. St. Hilary School sets the bar high and encourages students to challenge themselves to reach new levels of academic accomplishment. The school's consistent top-tier standardized test scores speak for themselves, and the strong student performance behind them is just the beginning of years of academic success St. Hilary

students achieve. Annually, 98% of graduating eighth graders continue their education at one of the area's Catholic high schools. Students who are alumni of St. Hilary School are frequently student leaders, class valedictorians and salutatorians, National Merit Scholarship semi-finalists and commended scholars, and scholar athletes in high school. Beyond high school, St. Hilary School graduates do exceptionally well in college and in their careers.

Learning for the Future

St. Hilary School earned the Governor's Thomas Edison Award for Excellence in STEM Education and Student Research through offerings that engage and challenge students of all ages and abilities and prepare them for the careers of the future. The school's science lab and Paxton-Patterson labs give students in grades 7 and 8 the opportunity to explore a slate of STEM-related careers before they begin high school. Topics such as biomedical engineering, emergency medicine, veterinary medicine, nursing, dentistry, sports medicine, therapeutic services, forensics, digital manufacturing, virtual architecture, electricity, alternative energy, environment and ecology, and audio communications come to life in these labs, where students learn through hands-on study. Additionally, courses in video editing, entrepreneurship and financial literacy, future Catholic teachers, home economics, graphic design, robotics and coding, health and fitness, photography, and global perspectives are available for seventh and eighth graders.

A Maker Space in the St. Hilary School media center provides a host of age-appropriate experiences that foster learning, creating and thinking outside the box for all students from kindergarten through eighth grade. A collaboration table in the media center enables groups of students to work jointly to solve problems, create new things, and learn together. STEM learning has been taking place in classrooms throughout the school for many years, and these dedicated areas help to expand upon that. Teachers receive ongoing training on the latest in STEM education in order to provide innovative lessons for students in all grades. All St. Hilary students have access to technology, including iPads and Chromebooks in their classrooms, and since 2012, the school has provided 1:1 devices for students in grades 6-8 to use at school and home. New at the school this year are Promethean Boards, which enable teachers and students to take interactive digital learning to the next level.



Third graders work with robots in the school's Maker Space. Students as young as kindergarten learn to code and program robots.



Faith is the foundation upon which the school stands. Weekly Masses and other services help foster students' faith formation.

Explore the School

If you would like your child and your family to experience the benefits of a St. Hilary School education, now is the ideal time to begin exploring all that the school has to offer. The school will host its popular **Kindergarten Kaleidoscope program** for prospective 2020-2021 kindergarteners and their parents on January 9, 2020 from 9-11 a.m. RSVP by December 26, 2019 to attend. An Open House on January 26, 2020 from 12-2 p.m. is open to all. Stop by to tour the school, visit classrooms and meet teachers. New Student Registration for 2020-2021 will be offered February 3, 4 and 5, 2020 from 8 a.m.–3 p.m. at the school office.

For more information, to RSVP for Kindergarten Kaleidoscope, or to schedule a personal tour or shadow day, please contact Debbie Sinopoli, Director of Marketing & Admissions, at 330-867-8720, ext. 343 or dsinopoli@st-hilary.org. Visit the school online at www.st-hilaryschool.org.



Journey from tragedy to faith

For believers, God can make good come out of the most tragic circumstances in our lives. Debby Kirkpatrick is living proof of that. In the last year, Debby became engaged, became a full member of the Catholic Church through RCIA, lost her mother, attended a Christ Renews His Parish Retreat, and is now married to Dan Kirkpatrick. The events of the past year, however, are rooted in grief.

In 2016, Debby lost her daughter Megan to a drug overdose. She was just 26 years old and seven months pregnant at the time, doubling Debby's sorrow. Following her funeral, Debby received an invitation to participate in St. Hilary's grief support group, Companions on a Journey.

Bereavement support

"My circumstances were not conventional. My daughter was a heroin addict and died at the height of the opioid epidemic in 2016 when not a lot of resources were available. I was afraid to go to this group

because people were already judging me and stereotyping our family. But I knew I had to do something or I was not going to make it," she said.

"I came to St. Hilary because I lost my daughter. I was struggling in every area of my life and was ready to give up when I received a letter from St. Hilary to join their grief support group. I had missed the first session they had and I was angry I missed it. I asked Beth Rado, the pastoral minister, and she said I could still attend.

"When I got there, all I did was cry. They were so kind and understanding. One member there said I had the saddest eyes he'd ever seen. That first night was so draining," Debby recalled. But she continued to attend the grief support group.

"As weeks went on something was pulling me back to the support group. I kept going for a little over a year. It was such a wonderful support group. We started sharing meals and outings

together. To this day, we still meet. That's where I met my husband, Dan Kirkpatrick. For a year he sat across the table and saw me cry. I was so distraught." Dan joined Companions on a Journey following the death of his wife. Together they shared the emotional journey and healing process that is grief.

Unexpected blessings

"When I joined the grieving group, I wasn't looking to meet anyone. I figured I would still be single to the day I died. After being friends for a year, we dated for a year, and he asked me to marry him. God tells us we will have sorrow, but good will come of it. It gives us a renewed sense of joy. Dan lost his wife, which brought him to the grief group.

"This whole time, he would go to his church and I would go to mine—Faith Family in Canton, a nondenominational church which geared its services toward people with addiction. That's where I had

Pictured to the left: Fr. Steve anoints Debby with Chrism as he confirms her.

been taking my daughter. The Easter before she passed, she had given her life to Christ there,” Debby said.

Their engagement caused Debby to reconsider the Catholic Church. “I wanted to become Catholic to practice the faith together as a family. Before he asked me to marry him, it was something I had been contemplating,” she recalled. “That’s how I got reconnected with the Church,” she said. Originally, Debby was baptized at St. Andrew Church in Norton. From time to time the family attended Mass at St. Hilary, but eventually they stopped going to church. She was never confirmed.

Reconnecting with the Church

“RCIA was a blessing this year. I had so much support.” Debby took Roberta as her confirmation name in honor of her mother who was also named Roberta and her father who was named Robert.

“I know that everything that has happened, happened the way it was supposed to. When I told my mother about Dan, she was so excited she asked if she could attend Mass with me. We kept thinking we would get her well and home.” While battling colon cancer, Debby’s mother was in a rehab facility so she could regain her strength.

“The night she died my brother and sister had left the hospital and I stayed. My mother looked at me and said, ‘Don’t leave me.’ She did not make it through the night,” Debby remembers.

“After surgery, she was on life support, which kept me there. They kept her going till everyone got there. It was a Wednesday and I missed RCIA that night. Randy Malick told Fr. Matt and Fr. Steve. Fr. Matt asked to do her funeral. That was one of the last gifts I could give her.”

“Between the grief group and RCIA, it was such an awesome experience.

Not having a firm foundation of faith can make RCIA intimidating. But to have Randy fully explain things, it helped me understand the faith better. It’s been amazing. I had never gone through Holy Week, so I cleared my work calendar, and it surprised me that every service got better and better. It just wowed me. Easter Vigil was incredible.

In the middle of the RCIA process, Debby and Dan planned their wedding. In June, the two celebrated the Sacrament of Matrimony, united not only by their commitment to each other, but also in their faith as Catholics. It was a small ceremony, with just 25 family members and friends, including Debby’s son, Dylan, who lives in Telluride, Colorado.

But that’s not the end of Debby’s story. For some, working full time and starting married life would be enough. Still, Debby finds time to serve others, particularly in ministries that help recovering addicts. For example, she became involved with Hope United, which is a recovery center being built on the site of the old Edwin Shaw rehabilitation center. “I’ve done several events with them. I like to keep busy. It gives me something to focus on.” She also plans to assist with activities at the St. John the Baptist Recovery

Center, recently dedicated by Bishop Nelson Perez. “I interviewed with Andy Davis to volunteer there, working with some of the programming to keep people busy, assisting with art therapy, music therapy and yoga.”

Sharing faith through service

Not only does she share her time, but she is committed to sharing her faith. While Debby was still part of the RCIA process, she participated in the last women’s Christ Renews His Parish retreat. She will be sharing her faith as a member of the next women’s Christ Renews His Parish retreat team.

While dealing with grief has been a long healing process for Debby Kirkpatrick, it has been filled with blessings: a new husband, renewed life in Christ as a Catholic and opportunities to serve and to share that faith with others.

If you know of an individual or family who would like to learn more about the Catholic faith or grief support, please contact Randy Malick, Director of Faith Formation for Adults at rmalick@sthilarychurch.org or Beth Rado, Pastoral Minister at brado@sthilarychurch.org.



Debby and Dan Kirkpatrick on their wedding day.



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Advent & Christmas

Advent Evening Prayer

Wednesdays, December 4, 11,
and 18 at 7 p.m. in the church

Communal Reconciliation

Tuesday, December 10 from 7-8:30 p.m.
at Guardian Angels Church

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Masses at the following times:
Monday, December 9 at 7 & 9:30 a.m.

Gaudete Sunday Concert

Sunday, December 15 at 7 p.m. in the church

Christmas Eve Masses

Tuesday, December 24
4 p.m. (also at Faith Lutheran), 6 p.m., and
10 p.m. (music begins at 9:30 p.m.)

Christmas Day Masses

Wednesday, December 25
9 a.m. and 11 a.m.