

January / February 2016



the

connecting the community of st. francis xavier parish

# Navigator

## Feast of St. Francis Xavier

**The Dec. 3 feast of our patron, St. Francis Xavier, was a two-day event that united our parish in prayer and thanksgiving for our 156-year history.**

The celebration began a day early so that our school children could spend time learning about the Spanish nobleman who gave up his wealth to join Ignatius of Loyola as a founding member of the Society of Jesus. On Dec. 2, the students attended morning Mass, where Fr. Chris talked with them about our patron saint, who is known as the Apostle of the Indies and is said to have converted more people than anyone since St. Paul.

After Mass, teachers took turns bringing students to the church throughout the day for prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. The evening included First Friday Mass and nocturnal adoration through the night.

The 5 p.m. Mass on Saturday, Dec. 3, ended with Fr. Tony and Deacon Paul blessing the new outdoor statue before a catered dinner attended by 400 parishioners in the church basement and Xavier Room. More than 600 attended a concert in the church that followed. Thanks to a generous donation, "The Winter Rose" concert included a 29-piece orchestra, 51 adult singers and our 28-member Youth Choir. Many thanks to all who contributed to this wonderful celebration!



**SATURDAY VIGIL:** 5 p.m. **SUNDAY:** 8 p.m., 10 a.m., 12 noon, 5:30 p.m.  
**WEEKDAYS:** 7:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday  
7 p.m. Monday, Thursday & First Friday of the month

## Student-led service is hallmark of Catholic education

By Jennifer Webb

Avery Sloan has played volleyball since the second-grade. By now, the seventh-grader has learned enough about the sport that she's eager to teach younger students some techniques to help them improve their skills.

But it may be what she's teaching them by example that has an even greater impact. The 13-year-old is one of several students in our school who has initiated service projects to help others in need.

Avery was attending her younger sister's game at Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Cuyahoga Falls last fall when she learned that one of that parish's young players had been diagnosed with leukemia. Moved by Eva's struggle and efforts underway to help her family, Avery wanted to help too.

With the help of her parents, Beth and Kevin Sloan, and members of her CYO volleyball team, Avery hastily organized a volleyball clinic at the St. Francis Xavier Parish gym to share her love of the sport and raise money for Eva's family.

The Oct. 16 clinic raised \$370 from fees younger players paid to attend. Even more was contributed by their families and friends, who made additional donations and a silent auction.

"We were able to present Eva's family with over \$1,000 in cash and gift cards," Beth says. At the clinic, the girls signed a large poster for Eva, promising their prayers for her. "Some of the girls wrote individual cards too."

The gifts were presented at a CYO volleyball tournament attended by Eva and her family. "It was a very powerful experience walking



over to her family and introducing ourselves," Beth says.

A St. Francis Xavier parent made T-shirts for Avery's team that read "We are Eva Strong," and, in typical volleyball fashion, the girls had made hair ties in the orange color that represents support for leukemia research.

"We walked through the door, and they started crying," Avery says.

The experience, she says, was overwhelming. "It just feels good to help somebody else," she explains. "I love to play volleyball and I love to teach and I love to help others."

Principal Bibiana Seislove says the actions by Avery and her teammates demonstrate the values instilled in them by Catholic schools, which we celebrate Jan. 29 to Feb. 4. The theme for Catholic Schools Week is "Catholic Schools: Communities of Faith, Knowledge and Service."

But they aren't the only ones moved to take action on behalf of others. In October, following the category 4 hurricane that devastated Haiti, in addition to parts of Florida and North and South Carolina, sixth-graders Madison Bergmann and Elizabeth Gilbert wanted to do something to help. They approached Mrs. Seislove, who helped them plan a dress-down day, where students donated money in exchange for the privilege of not having to wear their uniform on Nov. 10.

"We were watching stuff on the news, and we just really wanted to help them," says Elizabeth, the 11-year-old daughter of Stacy and John Gilbert.

Catholic Relief Services reported that 900 were killed and tens of thousands of homes



destroyed in Haiti alone.

"I saw a bunch of pictures of what happened. We felt so bad. I came up with the idea to help them, and I asked her if she would like to help me," says Madison, 11, the daughter of Kim and Mike Bergmann.

The activity raised \$400 – doubling their goal – for CRS, which began distributing hygiene kits, including soap, buckets and toothbrushes, as well as kitchen utensils and blankets, hours after the tragedy.

"I just really hope it goes to help the families who have lost homes and family members," Madison says.

Like the nation's 8,000 Catholic schools, St. Francis Xavier School encourages service out of a belief that, as disciples of Jesus Christ, our faith compels us to help those less fortunate.

At St. Francis Xavier School, students are encouraged to develop a heart for service. They collect items for Birthcare, to care for low-income families, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, to feed the hungry, among other projects. But when students initiate service projects, the teachers and staff are happy to help them succeed.

Each Christmas, for example, a group of four girls asks each student to create a "Merry Message" to be added to the more than 350 bags of food distributed to seniors by

*Continued on next page.*

Feeding Medina County. For three years, Alex and Anna Stankard, Annie Rose and Lizzie Russo have led the effort to offer a sentimental touch to the otherwise standard bags of groceries for the holidays.

"It gives you a good feeling knowing you are doing something good," says Lizzie, 12, the daughter of Julie and Philip Russo.

Mrs. Seislove says she is pleased that, at St. Francis Xavier, students are educated about Catholic social teaching in addition to science, math, reading, social studies, art, music and other classes.

"We are extremely proud of these students who have organized these activities, and all of our students who support these initiatives," she says. "This is a true testament to our school's commitment to the Catholic social teachings of the Church."

Madison says she and Elizabeth look forward to more service opportunities.

"Even though we're kids, we can still make a big difference," Madison says.



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a quality Catholic education for  
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**Catholic  
Schools Week:  
January 29 to  
February 4**

### Save the Dates!

**We will be hosting a St. Francis Xavier School Open House on Tuesday, Jan. 24, from 7 to 8 p.m. for prospective families.**

Kindly tell your friends and neighbors to come see the great things happening at St. Francis Xavier School!

**All St. Francis Xavier families are invited to visit the school during our Catholic Schools Week Open House on Jan. 29.**

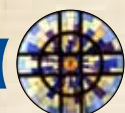
The weeklong Catholic Schools Week celebration will begin at the 12 noon liturgy with our students participating in the different ministries. Then, come over to the school and see what makes St. Francis Xavier School so special.

Open House will be held immediately following Mass from 1 to 2:30 p.m. Members of our student body and our Parent-Teacher Committee will provide tours.

thankful *and* grateful

We raised  
\$18,320 to  
update our  
school  
building!!

#weGIVECATHOLIC  
with the Catholic Community Foundation on #GIVINGTUESDAY



## Why attend Men's Renewal?

by Mark Mullen

Many years ago, while going through a particularly difficult period in my life, I turned to a young priest named Father Ken, a parochial vicar at our parish, for some spiritual guidance. I explained that I feel so close to God and His Son Jesus Christ at some times while, at other times, I feel so distant and apart from him. He assured me that, although it was good for me to recognize this, I shouldn't be too concerned, as many of us experience this on our faith journey.

He went on to share an interesting metaphor to try and put me at ease. He explained, "Many times our relationship with God can be like that of a grand old oak tree and a twisted vine growing alongside it. As we go through life, there are times we are clinging so tightly to Him that it seems nothing can separate us; then, at other times, we fall away from him, yet we remain attached to the tree. Although we feel distant from the Father, He never changes and is always there waiting for us to return and cling tightly once again. This is why our prayer life, participation in the sacraments and sharing our faith as community are so important. These actions help keep us close to Him regardless of what is happening in our lives and how we feel at the time."

Around this time last year, I received an invitation from a friend at St. Francis Xavier to attend the Men's Renewal weekend in March. At that time I was feeling like that twisted vine, still connected to God, but feeling somewhat apart from Him. I longed for a closer relationship with Jesus and thought this might help, so I decided to attend. It was a great decision!

**There are many aspects of the weekend that helped make it one of the best decisions I could have made. Here are a few highlights:**

### Recognizing We Are Not Alone on Our Faith Journey

Through the witness of those men who had attended the renewal before me and the relationships built with other participants, it became clear we are all on this journey with Christ together even though our experiences are unique. Like the first disciples, it's a chance to "hang out" with Jesus, coming to an understanding of who He is and how He wants to be our friend and Savior.

### Quiet Time for Self-Reflection

The retreat provided me a quiet place and time to escape the incessant noise and distractions of the world outside, a place to simply relax and reflect on what's most important. Most of all, it was a time to listen to God and hear what He has to say.

### An Opportunity to Reconnect with God

Several times throughout the weekend I had the opportunity to reconnect with God in a way I never experienced before. In doing so, I once again found myself, like that old twisted vine, making my way back to cling more closely to Him.

Each member of the weekend I attended with had his own story, his own reason for attending but, every one of us was called there by our God. Why?? Because He loves us and wants to have a vibrant, alive relationship with each person. What were some of those reasons?

- Some felt they were just "going through the motions" in their faith life; attending Mass but really not being engaged in it. They heard a call that "there must be something more."
- Some had fallen away from the church completely, not even attending Mass. They were being called, too – called to renew their faith, renew their relationship with God, His Son and the church community.
- Some were a little bit of both. They had a wife and children and were being called to be a better example for their family.
- And, some others attended to deepen their already strong faith and relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever the reason, however they were called, they said "Yes" to that small voice calling to them... "return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful." (Joel 2:13)

**This is your chance to return to Him; Your chance to renew your relationship with God and His son Jesus Christ. Listen for his voice...Is He calling you?...Say YES!!**

**For more information or to register, email [SfxMensRenewal2017@gmail.com](mailto:SfxMensRenewal2017@gmail.com). Visit [Facebook.com/SfxMensRenewal2017](https://www.facebook.com/SfxMensRenewal2017)**



## Parishioners help St. Vincent de Paul Society care for Medina's poor

By Mary Lou Cavanaugh, St. Vincent de Paul Society

Through the generosity of St. Francis Xavier parishioners, many families were blessed during this Thanksgiving and Christmas season.

- Approximately 350 bags of groceries were donated and were part of our Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets, and for use in the food pantry.
- Over 700 stuffed animals were donated by PetSmart and distributed by the St. Vincent de Paul Society to other local charities (but not limited to): the Veterans Administration, Community Action, Community Services, Birthcare, Catholic Charities, the Head Start program, and others. St. Vincent de Paul also used the stuffed animals in the gift baskets for age-appropriate children.
- The Giving Tree supplied gifts for St. Vincent de Paul clients' families, Birthcare and St. Patrick Church on Bridge Avenue in Cleveland. (We have had a long history of supporting this parish with gifts at Christmas.)
- Community Services partnered with the St. Vincent de Paul Society to interview families who received our food baskets and gifts.
- The Parish School of Religion had a Reverse Advent Calendar, in which children were encouraged to give back an item daily to count down the days until Christmas. The items listed each day were placed in a box at home and brought to the church on Jan. 7 and 8. Parishioners were invited to participate.
- Our parish Boy Scout Troop 506, the Knights of Columbus, the Men's Renewal Team and a Women's Bible Study group either helped with the food drive or gave toys and other items to children receiving gifts through SVDP.
- The Meadows Family Turkey Bowl: a football game played on Thanksgiving Day that, over the years, has raised over \$1 million for charity. This fundraiser is a significant portion of our yearly budget for the SVDP Society.
- St. Francis Xavier School had each class donate specific food items, collected at Mass on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving for use in our food pantry.
- The entire parish staff have supported the St. Vincent de Paul mission. We use the conference rooms in the church office twice a week and our food pantry is in the same area. We stage our Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets in the Randel House, and use the facility during the year when needed.

- The SVDP donation boxes at the entrances to the church support our mission financially.

You've probably heard the expression "it takes a village." For St. Francis Xavier Church, it takes a parish to give all the families who need help the resources that the SVDP Society requires.

***"It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving." – St. Mother Teresa***

A sincere thank you to everyone who helped during this holiday season. Our parish is truly blessed with caring and compassionate people.



## Podcasts give priest new way to reach people

By Jennifer Webb

On a quiet evening in the rectory, seated behind a large wood desk in his office, Father Chris is deep in thought.

But unlike other priests who might use such a time for quiet reflection, Father Chris isn't just praying – his ears are covered by bright blue-padded headphones, and he's recording those musings for his weekly podcast, "The Burning Strength Show."

One of the youngest priests in the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, 29-year-old Father Chris isn't afraid of the digital age. In fact, he's embraced it as a new way to reach adults of the parish who don't have time to attend an adult education class on the St. Francis Xavier Parish campus.

"We live in such a transient age, people move around a lot, people have a hard time committing to things," he says. "This is a way to try to get the message of Christ, the Good News, into whatever they're doing. If they add me to their podcast app or iTunes, the hope is they'll listen to it and learn something about the faith, or learn something about how the church looks at events of the modern day."

Before he was ordained in 2014, Father Chris had studied broadcasting and journalism in college, and spent time learning new communications technology. Soon after he came to our parish as his first assignment, he prepared and presented a multimedia, Wednesday evening lecture series on angels, demons and the supernatural that was fairly well-attended. However, lots of people said they were disappointed that they couldn't come, so he began to explore other options.

*"Peace be with you, and welcome to another exciting episode of the Burning Strength show. I am your host, as always, Father Christopher Cox," he says brightly as he begins Episode 19 on Nov. 30.*

Each 29-minute episode includes three topics, which include commentary about something theological, a video game or movie release, and current events. He offers his opinions on each topic in a kind of one-sided conversation with listeners, who may have encountered these subjects in their daily lives and wonder what a Catholic priest might think.

*"I hope you're relaxing, I hope you are buckled up if you are in your car, and I hope you are ready for a brand-new episode of the Burning Strength show," he continues.*

It's kind of like a homily...but not. It's more like he's sitting at your kitchen table, musing about the latest news. Each show simply introduces a variety of subjects that pique his interest and gives him an opportunity to comment on them. There's jazzy background music between segments. In today's episode, he talks about his fondness for Advent and some of the décor changes we've made at our parish to celebrate the season, his initial reviews of a new video game, and his concern for pollution and industry affecting the Great Barrier Reef.

"I like to picture my audience when I'm doing a recording. They're with me. It's like we're all sitting in a room chatting, although it's me hogging the conversation," he says with a laugh. "I'll picture different parishioners or groups of friends."

He draws inspiration from fellow clergy, such as Bishop Robert Barron, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, who evangelizes through articulate YouTube videos, which have been viewed over 19 million times. Bishop Barron also hosts a radio podcast, "The Word on Fire Show," which has been downloaded more than 900,000 times this year.

Father Chris has not yet experienced that kind of success – he gets about 75 to over 100 listeners per episode – but it's a decent regular audience for now. Given the frequency of emergency calls to anoint the sick at Medina Hospital, Hospice of Medina County or the nine nursing homes within our parish boundaries, it's a struggle even for our three priests to have uninterrupted time for study or work.

"With my schedule, it makes it easier for me since I can record at my leisure," Father Chris explains. "It gives people the leisure of listening to it, because it might not be at 7 p.m. when I might do an adult ed series; it might be at 7:30 a.m. when they're doing the morning commute. Or in the middle of the morning when you're cleaning the house, or picking kids up from school. It gives you the freedom to listen to it when you're ready."

Parishioner Kathy Smith says she



downloaded a number of Fr. Chris's podcasts to keep her company while on a long car ride. "I like it, he's got some fresh nuggets in there, some wisdom and insights into whatever the topic of the day is," she says. "I just come away with something to chew on." Another parishioner, Liberty Wright, says she has listened to his podcasts while running. "I didn't have time to go to his class, or maybe I had missed it, but the subject interested me," she says. "It was completely easy (to download) and helps the time go by."

In addition to his Burning Strength Show, Father Chris records his weekly homilies as he prepares for weekend Masses, and posts them on his website, [www.burningstrength.com](http://www.burningstrength.com). He also posted his podcasts of that supernatural lecture series, along with TV reviews, reflections on saints and more. He says he hopes the format appeals to those who might not feel engaged by traditional Church communication vehicles, as well as those who are better connected.

"I think ministry is all about using new things to reach people," Father Chris says.

*"My brothers and sisters, thank you so much for tuning into this episode of the Burning Strength Show. I very much look forward to talking to you again hopefully soon, and continue to pray for your priests as I continue to pray for you. God bless you!"*

Father Chris's website is at [www.burningstrength.com](http://www.burningstrength.com). To hear his podcasts, go to the parish website at [www.sfxmedina.org/parish](http://www.sfxmedina.org/parish). From there, go to the "Fr. Chris" tab. You can play it straight from the website, or you can read the instructions on how to listen from your mobile device.

## Lenten Faith-Sharing Groups grow in wisdom, faith

For many years, St. Francis Xavier parishioners have taken advantage of the Lenten season to learn more about the Bible and the history and beauty of our faith.

About 175 parishioners sign up each year to gather in small groups of fellow parishioners to study a book provided by the parish. Some groups have five to 10 members; some may be a little larger. Some are made up of neighbors or longtime friends; some are created by random assignments based on a mutually agreeable time. Many have remained together for decades, while others come and go each year.

What all the Lenten Faith-Sharing Group members have in common, though, is a desire to learn more about their faith by reading, studying and discussing a book with other Catholics.

This year, ministry leader Chellene Bergman offered parishioners the chance to vote on three books she was considering for this year's study. Of the 52 respondents, 46% listed their first choice as "Mary – Virgin, Mother and Queen: A Bible Study Guide for Catholics" by Father Mitch Pacwa, so that is the book the parish will provide.

Each group is led by a volunteer facilitator who welcomes participants and provides some structure for each meeting, but how the meetings are conducted is largely up to the group members. It is not necessary for either the facilitator or members to have any advanced knowledge of theology.

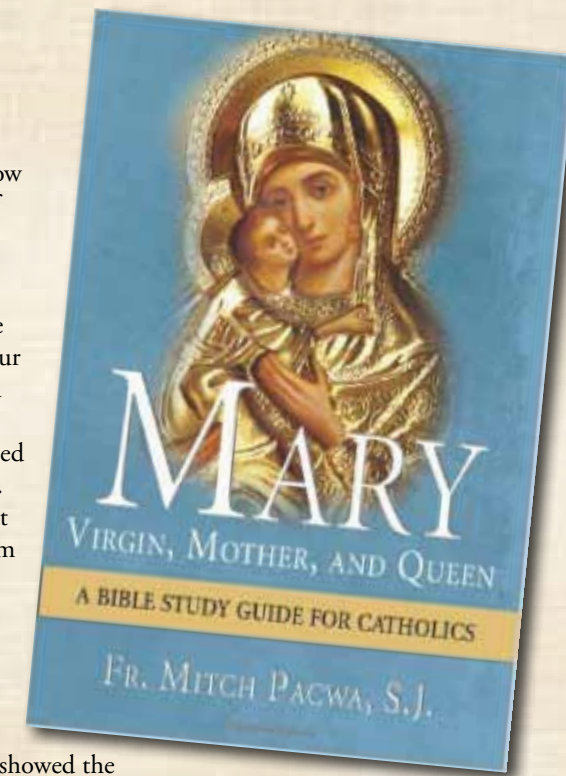
Often, groups look for additional ways to enhance their study. For example, in 2015, when the book studied was "The Feasts of Judaism," by Stephen J. Binz, Mary Kase said her group joined with another led by Sally Pap and hosted by Joanne Weiler to tour the Temple-Tifereth Israel and the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Beachwood. "Because both Faith-Sharing Groups wanted to speak with someone who could answer questions and show us modern Jewish customs," Mary says, "the Temple-Tifereth Israel was the

perfect choice to show us a congregation of Reform Judaism."

One of the temple's board members gave the group of 17 a tour of the sanctuary and let them see one of four Torah scrolls used by the congregation. "He emphasized that anyone can read from the Torah and lead prayer; you don't have to have a rabbi present," Mary says.

At the Maltz Museum, the guide showed the group the Religious Arts and Artifacts Collection, which contained many centuries-old pieces from Europe. The day ended with matzo soup and Reuben sandwiches at Corky and Lenny's, a nearby Eastern European Jewish deli.

"While our Temple guide was a Reform Jew, our museum tour guide was an Orthodox Jew married to a Catholic," Joanne recalls. "All of these people provided us with so many different perspectives and so much information. This was a very memorable and educational experience."



**To join a Lenten Faith-Sharing Group for 2017, visit [www.sfxmedina.com/parish/forms](http://www.sfxmedina.com/parish/forms).**



## St. Francis Xavier

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# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## JAN. 8 & MARCH 5

### LifeShare Bloodmobile

Here, 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Donate, save a life, earn money for our school!

## JAN. 21

### Adoration for Life

8 a.m., Church

### Cub Scouts Pinewood Derby

1 p.m., Church Basement

## JAN. 23

### Patriotic Rosary

1 p.m., Church

### LEAF Ministry

7 p.m., Loyola Room

## JAN. 24

### St. Francis Xavier School Open House (for prospective families)

7 to 8 p.m.

## JAN. 27

### March for Life

Washington, D.C.

## JAN. 29

### Catholic Schools Week Mass

12 noon, Church

### School Open House & Art Festival

1 to 2:30 p.m.

## FEB. 7, 10, 14

### First Eucharist Parent Meeting

(parent/child attend one), 6:45 p.m., Church

## FEB. 13

### Family STEM Night

6:30 to 8:30 p.m., School

## FEB. 15

### St. Francis Xavier School Science Fair

Xavier Room

## FEB. 18

### Cub Scouts Blue & Gold Banquet

1 p.m., Church Basement

## MARCH 1

### Ash Wednesday

Mass at 7:30 a.m., 9:15 a.m., 12 noon, 5 p.m., 7:15 p.m.

## MARCH 4-5

### Men's Renewal Weekend

Parish Campus

### Prayer Service for Renewalists

8 p.m., Church

## MARCH 18

### St. Patrick's Day Dinner/Dance

sponsored by Boy Scout Troop 506, 5:30 p.m., Church Basement

The Navigator newsletter is brought to you by the Stewardship Committee of St. Francis Xavier Parish. Want to help? Have feedback?

Contact Jennifer Webb at <mailto:jwebb@sfxmedina.org>. Find us online at [facebook.com/St.FrancisXavierCatholicChurchMedina](https://facebook.com/St.FrancisXavierCatholicChurchMedina)