

St Bernadette Parish

1343 Wheeling Road NE (740) 654 • 1893
LANCASTER, OH 43130-8701

St Mary Parish

602 Marietta Street (740) 569 • 7929
BREMEN, OH 43107

[stbernadetteparish . net](http://stbernadetteparish.net)



saint valentine

Florence

The 6th Sunday of the Year

FEBRUARY 12, 2017

Our Parishes

FATHER THOMAS KESSLER (614) 634-0499
pastor wnthomaskessler@icloud.com

AT ST BERNADETTE PARISH

<http://stbernadetteparish.net>

MARK SCARPITTI (740) 438-3970
deacon dcn.mark@frontier.com
JEFF CARPENTER (740) 681-9918
deacon carpenter.277@osu.edu
ANN ESSMAN (740) 653-9347
pastoral minister aessman001@att.net
STEVE HUBER (740) 654-3137
facilities coordinator shuber57@yahoo.com
LIZ LATORRE (740) 243-1872
liturgical music lizlаторre@gmail.com

The St Bernadette Parish office is in the Mary Good Center, across the back parking lot from the school.
Hours are: 9 AM-1 PM, MWThF; 11 AM-1 PM, Tu.
1343 Wheeling Rd NE,
Lancaster, OH 43130-8701 (740) 654-1893

AT BREMEN ST MARY PARISH

BEN FACTOR
liturgical music b_factor@lancaster.k12.oh.us
JIM SCHMELZER
maintenance chair (740) 215-3894
TYNA FOX-SCHMELZER
religious education (614) 371-7702

The St Mary Parish office is at the church vestibule.
Hours are 9-11 AM, Tu.
602 Marietta St,
Bremen, OH 43107 (740) 569-7929

AT BOTH PARISHES

NIKKI SCHMELZER (740) 654-1893
bookkeeper businessmstbparish@yahoo.com
KATHY KEHNAST (740) 654-1893
pastoral coordinator stbernparish@yahoo.com
ANGIE & KENT KERNS (740) 654-2588
religious education kwkerns@gmail.com
JULIE & CHASE STALFORD (740) 808-7294
youth ministry maristellaspirt@gmail.com

AT ST BERNADETTE SCHOOL

PAM ELTRINGHAM peltring@cducation.org
principal
BARB HUBER bhuber@cducation.org
secretary

Saint Bernadette School is located at
1325 Wheeling Rd, (740) 654-3137
Lancaster, OH 43130-8701
www.stbernadetteschool.com
stbernlan@cducation.org.

Sacramental Life

BAPTISM

To have a child baptized, you must register and attend a class as a couple (unless attendance just isn't possible, in which case some discussion with Kathy Kehnast will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. The next session will be Feb 22. Try to take the class before the child is born. If you are expecting, call Kathy to register for the class.

Please don't ask if you "have to go." This is an opportunity to meet with parents of children about the same age as your little one; they are in the same wonderful boat as you are.

At least one parent must be a practicing Catholic. Both godparents need to be practicing Catholics. If you don't attend Sunday Mass regularly (a major component of being a practicing Catholic), there is something you can do about it: Start coming to Sunday Mass.

PENANCE

The priest is available for Penance

- at St Bernadette Saturdays at 3 PM and Thursdays at 5:30 PM, and
- at St Mary Bremen on Sunday at 8 AM.

In addition to Advent and Lenten Penance Services, every Catholic priest is available whenever there is a need. There are Penance opportunities for parochial school children **four times during the year so that they will learn the beauty of frequent confession.** The Church's law requires us to receive the sacrament of Penance at least once a year.

ANOINTING AND CARE OF THE SICK

The Sick receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick when

- dangerously ill,
- facing major surgery, or
- suffering from the ravages of old age.

We celebrate the sacrament communally at a Sunday Mass before Advent and during the Easter season so that we can all pray with you for "health of mind and body."

And, we are happy to bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to the homes or hospitals of the sick or shut in. It is very helpful to call the parish office to let us know before a hospitalization or when it has been too long since the sacraments were last available.

HOLY MATRIMONY

Couples wishing to marry should contact the parish office six months before they wish to celebrate the sacrament. Why so long? Because **this sacrament, not just the ceremony, requires serious preparation.** And the Church needs to be involved in that preparation.

The Church wishes to support couples **through the years** of their married life. That's why our diocese offers programs to enhance married life. To learn about these programs, watch the weekly bulletin.

let us pray together

with the Church today

O God, who teach us that you abide in hearts that are just and true,
grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

with the pope in February: comfort for the afflicted

That all those who are afflicted, especially the poor, refugees, and the marginalized, may find welcome and comfort in our communities.

Things You May Not Know about Registering in St Bernadette School

St Bernadette School looks forward to registering students for the 2017-2018 school year. Parish families, and families already established in our school, may register students in preschool, kindergarten, and grades 1-5 during February. Registration will open to the general public in March. Private tours of our facility are always welcomed, and can be arranged by calling (740) 654-3137.

A non-refundable deposit of \$200 per family is due at the time of registration. The entire deposit will be applied to tuition. (Preschool registrants need to pay the first monthly payment then.) New students should bring a copy of their birth or baptismal certificate.

- **St Bernadette preschool** offers a leveled-learning approach, tailored to your child, with an emphasis on one-on-one teaching. The preschool program has a progressive learning curriculum, with the goal of kindergarten readiness. In addition to the academic curriculum, cultural studies of the world are included. These positive, academic experiences are offered in :
 - **The 3-year old Preschool Class** is an introduction to school offered two mornings per week * (usually Tuesdays and Thursdays) from 8:30-11 AM. Your “potty-trained” 3 year old will be introduced to social play, sharing and cooperating with peers, drawing, painting, pretending, and music, along with an introduction to the numbers and letters.
 - **The 4-year old Preschool Class** typically meets three mornings per week * from 8:30-11 AM. Besides social skills and school orientation, your child will explore his/her relationship with God. He/she will discover the alphabet using a unit approach. Weeklong activities will enhance the understanding of each letter. Through the use of phonics, he/she will learn that letters build words. Left to right activities will develop pre-reading skills. Your child will learn about numbers, counting, sorting and patterns. He/she will master story telling and story re-telling. He/she will enjoy painting, drawing, singing and dancing.
 - **The 4 and 5 year old Pre-K Class** class meets Monday through Friday from noon-2:30 PM. It is designed for 4 and 5 year olds preparing for kindergarten. In addition to the curriculum above, the consistency of every day sessions, and an accelerated pace, will allow for a more thorough introduction to the academics required for kindergarten.
- * **Scheduled days for the younger children can be flexible to meet each family’s needs.**
- St Bernadette’s **full-day Kindergarten** program offers children the opportunity to experience more fully the rich tradition that our school has to offer. Full-day sessions will continue the highly respected program of academic excellence and positive experiences for which St Bernadette kindergarten is known. Students in full-day kindergarten programs gain the equivalent of more than a month’s learning in both reading and mathematics, and they exhibit higher test scores. Our kindergarten program meets the standards set forth by the Ohio Department of Education and the Diocese of Columbus. The kindergarten class participates in school-wide assemblies and service projects. Our program includes special instruction in music, enrichment, physical education, library, and technology. The children are nurtured in a **Catholic, caring community**, where Christ’s teachings permeate all areas of our curriculum.
- **Elementary grades of 1 through 5** follow a guided course of study from the Diocese of Columbus, which meets and exceeds all state standards. Our school is fully accredited by the Ohio Catholic School Accrediting Association. Standardized test scores indicate that our students consistently rank higher than national test scores. Each student is a valued individual with unique physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. Students interact in a supportive and challenging learning environment, where mutual respect among our students and staff is evident.
- Our **Extended Day Program** (before and after-school care) provides morning care from 6:30 AM until the start of school, and after-care from dismissal until 5:30 PM. The EDP handbook, which includes rates and policies, is available on the school’s website.

Although **tuition rates for 2017-2018 fees can only be established later this month, we promise that we are working to hold the line on increases as much as possible. Our rates will continue to be well below the actual per-pupil cost because of the substantial support of St Bernadette Parish.** Here are the tuition rates charged for 2016-2017:

- Preschool rates
 - 2 mornings per week \$ 900 annual (monthly payments of \$100)
 - 3 mornings per week \$1200 annual (monthly payments of \$134)
 - 5 afternoons per week \$1600 annual (monthly payments of \$178)
- Grades K-5 tuition
 - Non parishioners \$5100/ student
 - Parishioners 1st child \$3300, 2nd child \$3160, 3rd child \$3060

For more information, please call the school office at (740) 654-3137. We look forward to meeting you.

in both parishes

christian initiation

Please pray for our **catechumens**. They are **officially-welcomed** members (albeit not yet full members) of the household of faith.

Ralph Mohler and his son **Bryant** of Bremen St Mary, and **Jennifer Palmer** of St Bernadette, have publicly ratified their desire to become baptized members of the Catholic Church and are preparing for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Learn their names so you can pray for them. Find out who they are so you can make them feel welcome.

the catholic times

Thank you to all new and returning readers of the *Catholic Times*. Contact the parish office if you missed the special collection and learn how to sign-up for the upcoming year for a minimum donation of only \$17 (parish rate). As an evangelization tool, Bishop Campbell encourages all Catholic households in the diocese to receive and read our diocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Times*. Come enjoy "A journal of Catholic life in Ohio".

some other ways to support your parish

You can support your parish with **gifts of cash, appreciated assets, real estate, retirement plans, life insurance and even a trust or bequest in your will**. Designate St Mary Bremen or St Bernadette (or another non-profit Catholic entity) to benefit from your gift knowing that these gifts are invested in ways that are faithful to Catholic teaching. For donors age 70½ and older, the IRA Charitable Rollover is permanent law. Under this provision, these donors can transfer up to \$100,000 from their IRA to an endowment fund at The Catholic Foundation. The transfer is made free of federal income tax and the gift qualifies for the donor's required minimum distribution. Should you have questions or need assistance, contact The Catholic Foundation. They can help you take advantage of these opportunities in support of your beloved organizations. They can be reached at (614) 443-8893.

friends forever

Join the **Friends Forever** gathering on Thursday, Feb 16, at noon in the Mary Good Center at St Bernadette. Contact Ann Essman at (740) 654-1893 for information.

altar flowers

If you wish to **donate altar flowers for 2017** contact either parish office. Your donation of \$40 may be placed in the collection basket at Mass.

at St Mary parish

Mass intentions at st mary

Sunday, Feb 12 8:30 AM for the people of the parish
 Tuesday, Feb 14 8:20 AM Charles & Regina Kessler
 Sunday, Feb 19 8:30 AM for the people of the parish

st vincent de Paul at st mary bremen

For people in a financial jam, the season of need seems to go on throughout the year, especially when it gets really cold out. So, the **St Vincent de Paul Society in Bremen** takes up a collection after Mass on the first Sunday of the month, every month. New members are always welcome. For information, call Angi Skinner at (740) 438-0027.

sunday at Mass at bremen st mary

	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	gifts	sacristan / usher
Sun, Feb 12 8:30 AM	Karen Wolfe	Brooke Holt, Jillian Wilkinson	Pam Redding, Jim Schmelzer, Karen Wolfe	John Schoenlaub family	Jim Schmelzer
Sun, Feb 19 8:30 AM	Joe Young	Reagan & Spencer Conrad	Neil Boch, Dismas Schmelzer, Cathy Young	Joe Young family	Joe Young

at St Bernadette parish

Mass intentions at St Bernadette

Saturday, Feb 11 4 PM for the people of the parish
 Sunday, Feb 12 11 AM for the people of the parish
 Monday, Feb 13 8:20 AM John & Ann Muetzel
 Wednesday, Feb 15 8:20 AM Hugh Patrick Messerly
 Thursday, Feb 16 6 PM Bill Mooney
 Friday, Feb 17 8:20 AM Hank Schweizer
 Saturday, Feb 18 4 PM for the people of the parish
 Sunday, Feb 19 11 AM for the people of the parish

sunday at Mass at st bernadette

	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion	
Sat, Feb 11 4 PM	Teresa Scarpitti	Abby, Mary & Sam Frazier	Jim & Becky Kuhn Brad Rider Mickey Steyaert	Denise McGuire Craig Shaw
Sun, Feb 12 11 AM	Scott Wood	Brooke, Bryson & Zachary Vogel	Jim & Rita Merk Pat Dreyer Jean Robertson	Tara Craaybeek Patrick Gins
Sat, Feb 18 4 PM	Jennifer Spiegel	Gus & Olivia Spiegel, Cady Tipple	Susan Garrett Joyce Guenther Lee Guinan	Kathy Kehnast Shelia Taylor Kathy Wagner
Sun, Feb 19 11 AM	Amy Woo	Collin & Emma McCrady, Caroline Messerly	Terry Carpenter Nancy Griffith Ben Peters	Anna Sevigny David Shonk Mary Jane Vajen

your donation to the food pantry

The Bremen Food Pantry needs margarine or butter (among other things!). Place your donation in the refrigerator in the kitchen at St Mary parish hall. This will help the **Pantry Open House** in Bremen, on Saturday, Feb 25, from 9-11 AM, when any family in need can stop by to receive food assistance, with no prior registration or sign up needed.

in the diocese of columbus

in your charity

Please pray for the repose of the soul of **Father Joseph Losh** of our diocese who died last week. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace.

vocation retreat

The Dominican Sisters of Peace invite single, Catholic women, ages 18 to 45, to attend a free "**Come and See**" discernment retreat designed to explore contemporary Dominican life. Experience Dominican prayer and community with the sisters and reflect on God's call. The retreat happens from 4:30 PM Friday, Mar 10, until noon on Sunday, Mar 12, at the sisters' motherhouse in Columbus. For information, call or text Sister June Fitzgerald at (570) 336-3991 or email jfitzgerald@oppeace.org. Participants may register online for the retreat or request a form. Some travel assistance is available.

lenten morning of reflection

Join Sister Louis Mary Passeri for the Sts Peter and Paul Retreat Center's sponsored talk: "**I Thirst (John 19:28) for Your Love.**" Come and pray and reflect on this loving relationship between God and ourselves on Saturday, Mar 18, from 9 AM-noon at the

center located at 2734 Seminary Rd in Newark. The cost of \$20 includes continental breakfast. Register by phone (740) 928-4246 or visit www.stspeterandpaulretreatcenter.com

lenten retreat: overshadowed by the Holy Spirit

The Franciscan Sisters TOR invite you to be **immersed in the Holy Spirit at their Lenten retreat** on Saturday, Mar 25, from 8:30 AM to 4 PM. The retreat includes Mass, adoration, lunch, talks, and testimonies, and happens at Our Lady of Sorrows Monastery in Toronto, Ohio. Registration is required by Monday, Mar 13. Suggested donation is \$25. Register online at www.franciscansisterstor.org/len-ten-retreat-2017/ or call (740) 544-5542 ext 112.

parish mission

St Mary of the Assumption Parish in Lancaster invites you to attend their Parish Mission presented by Fr Thomas Blau OP on **the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church**. The Mission will be offered Monday through Thursday, Mar 6-9, at 7 PM in the church. Tuesday's session will also include the celebration of the Lord's mercy in the sacrament of Confession.

women's silent retreat

Women of the Columbus diocese are invited to come away during this Lenten season for a week-end, to **disconnect from the cyber world and connect with God** by a silent retreat for women from Mar 3-5 at St Therese's Retreat Center, 5277 E Broad Street, Columbus. Sponsored by the Catholic Laywomen's Retreat League, the retreat will begin Friday evening and end Sunday at noon. Fr Al Naseman, CPPS will be the retreat master. A member of the Cincinnati Province of the Precious Blood order, Fr Naseman has been leading retreats for 25 years. Prior to that he taught in three Precious Blood seminaries. He will give four conferences on "**Reflections on Lent from the Book of Ecclesiastes**." The fee of \$140 will cover six meals and a private room. For information, email retreatleague@gmail.com or call Sharon Gehrich, CLRL secretary, at (614) 882-1946. Registration will close Feb 20.

And another women's silent retreat

"**The Seven Deadly Sins vs Life to the Full**" is the theme of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women's annual Women's Silent Retreat, to be held Mar 31-Apr 2, from 5:30 PM Friday to noon Sunday, at the St Therese Retreat Center in Columbus. Presenter is **Father Charles Shonk, OP**. Event donation is \$115; registration deadline is Mar 22; \$50 is due with registration, balance due at start of event. Visit www.dccw.coltsdioc.org or contact Mickey McCormick at (614) 228-8601 or mmccormick@columbuscatholic.org for information.

male & female He created them: complementarity & intimacy in marriage

All married couples are invited to the diocesan celebration of World Marriage Day on Sunday, Feb 26, from 1-4 PM at Immaculate Conception Church, 414 E North Broadway, Columbus. Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers will search Sacred Scripture and Church teaching to examine **what God teaches us about the differences between authentic male and female spirituality**. He will explore how to enhance the intimate relationship of husbands and wives. A **holy hour for marriage** will follow his talk. There is no charge for the event but space is

limited. RSVP by Feb 13 at <http://familylife.coltsdioc.org> or (614) 241-2560.

men's conference and women's conference

These are **big events coming in February** you won't want to miss. At each of these Saturday events Bishop Campbell will celebrate Mass and there will be opportunities for Penance, as well as some entertainment and lots of fellowship with a thousand or two of the most interesting people in central Ohio. Put them on your calendar now.

- Women of our diocese will gather on Feb 18 with a theme of "**Courageous Faith, Contagious Joy**."
- Men will meet on Feb 25 with a theme of "**Into the Breach – Call to Battle**"

Both events will take place at the Ohio Expo Center at the Ohio fairgrounds in Columbus.

catholic youth summer camp

Catholic Youth Summer Camp is Ohio's one week-long, residential high adventure camp for students entering grades 6-12. Activities typically include jet skis, water tubing, paintball, blobbing, high ropes, archery tag, zip lining, rock climbing, giant swing, and mountain boarding. CYSC offers **a truly Catholic and safe environment with daily catechesis that awakens faith and builds missionary disciples**. A week at camp includes daily Mass, adoration, reconciliation, small group conversations, worship, service and authentic community. This is especially valuable for young people who are not now receiving other catechesis as well as to reinforce catechesis for those who are. Go to www.cysc.com for information and to register for 2017 dates:

- high school sessions in the weeks of June 11, 18, 25, & July 2;
- middle school sessions in the weeks of July 9, 16, 23, & 30.

Registration is open now.

happily ever after ... despite the rough spots

Come to a Marriage Encounter weekend and learn ways to use your marriage's ups and downs to deepen your love for each other and for God. Why not **try a Worldwide Marriage Encounter weekend**? The next weekends in central Ohio are Feb 17-19 and Apr 21-23. For information or to register, contact Paul or Marilou Clouse at (614) 834-6880 or visit www.wmecolumbus.org.

pilgrimage to fatima and lourdes

Fr Stash Dailey, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Columbus, invites you to join him on a pilgrimage to Fatima and Lourdes from June 19-30, **celebrating the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima**. For details, contact Liz Grinder at the Lourdes Pilgrimage Office at (877) 276-7279 or lourdespilgrimageoffice@comcast.net or go to www.lourdes-pilgrimage.com. Reservation deadline is Mar 15.

holy land pilgrimage

Have you considered adding **a new dimension of understanding regarding Christian history and the life of Jesus**? Fr David Schalk and hosts Aimee and David Walton invite you on a life-changing pilgrimage to the Holy Land of Israel. Experience the places where Jesus walked, lived, taught, and performed miracles. Mass is celebrated daily at various holy sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of our Lord's crucifixion and tomb. This spiritual journey happens from October 17 to 26. Cost is \$4149 per person with meals, fees and tips included. For

information, contact Aimee Walton at waltonisraelpilgrimage@gmail.com or (740) 225-6136.

pilgrimage to italy

Fr Jeff Rimelspach, former pastor of St Mary Bremen, will lead a pilgrimage to Italy from Oct 2-14. The trip will include visits with daily Mass to **Venice, Bologna, Assisi, Cortona, San Marino, Rome, the Vatican**, and the island nation of **Malta**. Brochures are available at the parish office or by contacting Fr Rimelspach at St Margaret Church, 1600 N Hague Ave, Columbus, OH 43204 or jrimelspach@msn.com. This is a great **opportunity to visit many holy places in Italy**. And it is a great time of year to go.

guidance in prayer

liturgical antiphons for this week

entrance antiphon

Psalm 31 Be my protector, O God,
a mighty stronghold to save me.
For you are my rock, my stronghold!
Lead me, guide me, for the sake of your name.

responsorial antiphon

Psalm 119: Blessed are they who follow the law of the Lord.

communion antiphon

Psalm 78 They ate and had their fill,

and what they craved the Lord gave them;
they were not disappointed in what they craved.

John 3: 16

God so loved the world
that he gave his Only Begotten Son,
so that all who believe in him may not perish,
but may have eternal life.

God's word at sunday Mass

<i>Sunday, Feb 12,</i>	Sirach 15:15-20	Psalm 119
<i>6th Sunday</i>	1 Corinthians 2:6-10	Matthew 5:17-37
<i>Sunday, Feb 19,</i>	Leviticus 19:1-18	Psalm 103
<i>7th Sunday</i>	1 Corinthians 3:16-23	Matthew 5:38-48

God's word during the week

<i>Mon, Feb 13</i>	Genesis 4:1-25	Ps 50	Mark 8:11-13
<i>Tues, Feb 14</i>	Genesis 6:5-7:10	Ps 29	Mark 8:14-21
<i>Weds, Feb 15</i>	Genesis 8:6-22	Ps 116	Mark 8:22-26
<i>Thurs, Feb 16</i>	Genesis 9:1-13	Ps 102	Mark 8:27-33
<i>Fri, Feb 17</i>	Genesis 11:1-9	Ps 33	Mark 8:34-9:1
<i>Sat, Feb 18</i>	Hebrews 11:1-7	Ps 145	Mark 9:2-13

saints to celebrate and prayers to offer

Tues,	Feb 14	Sts Cyril & Methodius St Valentine
Fri,	Feb 17	The 7 Holy Founders of the Servite Order

confessions & weekday Mass nearby		These times sometimes change, though, so be sure to call ahead!					
	<i>Bremen St Mary</i>	<i>Lancaster St Bernadette</i>	<i>Lancaster St Mary</i>	<i>Lancaster St Mark</i>	<i>Sugar Grove St Joseph</i>	<i>Circleville St Joseph</i>	<i>Logan St John</i>
<i>Monday</i>		8:20 AM	7 AM	8 AM	8 AM	9 AM	8 AM
<i>Tuesday</i>	8:20 AM		9 AM	8 AM	NOON	7 AM	8 AM
<i>Wednesday</i>		8:20 AM	7 AM	6 PM	8 AM	9 AM	9 AM
<i>Thursday</i>		6 PM	9 AM	8 AM	NOON		
<i>Friday</i>		8:20 AM		8 AM	8 AM	9 AM	8 AM
<i>Saturday</i>		<i>1st Saturday only 9 AM Mass</i>				10 AM	9 AM
<i>confessions</i>	Sunday @ 8AM	Saturday @ 3 PM & @ 8:30 am on 1st Saturday only	Saturday @ 4 PM	Saturday @ 5:30 PM	½ hour before Mass	Saturday @ 4 PM	Saturday @ 4 PM



Maybe You Can Afford St Bernadette School !

There is money out there for tuition assistance for children attending or hoping to be able to attend our Catholic school. Read on. Here are four sources of substantial financial aid: one is a full scholarship; three others are substantial financial assistance. And if you try all of those without success, let's continue the conversation. Where there is a will, there is a way.

- **EdChoice Expansion Scholarships** are income-based vouchers available for Ohio families from the Ohio Department of Education. Students whose families meet the income eligibility requirements (eg: family of 4, income \$49,200) can attend St Bernadette School next fall at no cost to parents, thanks to scholarships available for kindergartners, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders. This is an extraordinary opportunity for single parents, one-income homes, fixed-income households, and working families. Every family is encouraged to explore this possibility. Contact the school office for information or visit <http://education.ohio.gov/edchoice>.
- **Diocesan Tuition Assistance** applications must be completed on-line at www.factstuitionaid.com. File your 2016 taxes early, as that information is required on your application. All applications must be submitted and verified by Mar 15.
- **Local Tuition Assistance** uses the diocesan application mentioned above. Local assistance will be awarded based on the prioritized list generated by the diocese. (This does not refer to your parish subsidy).
- **Ohio Catholic Federal Credit Union** will award \$35,000 in Catholic education scholarships. Online applications are at <http://www.ohiocatholicfcu.com> before Friday, Mar 3. To become a member, visit <http://ohiocatholicfcu.com> or call (888) 696-4462.

Being a Catholic Means Being a Sacramental Christian

One thing that has almost always characterized Americans, anyway, is informality. Americans are the people who boast that we “don’t stand on ceremony.” Is that a good thing or bad? It is good that we try to avoid the rigid excess of meaningless ceremony. The danger is that we may think that if we can’t figure out the meaning, it must be meaningless. The remedy is **to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning of the ancient ceremony**. That **requires a humility** that doesn’t come easily for modern people. It requires effort on our part. We are not just the passive spectators sitting on the couch, watching a TV show. We are the body of Christ. The Second Vatican Council says that we need **to be actively involved in the liturgy**. That doesn’t mean that we need more slots to fill or that we have to be moving around or talking in the liturgy. Rather, we need to **be engaged in what is going on**. Thinking and praying and playing the role that is ours.

The Church is a life that is lived around seven sacraments. They are from the Lord; they are the ordinary channels of his grace in the basic moments of life. They belong to Holy Mother Church, who keeps a careful loving eye on the ceremonies by which we celebrate each sacrament. She does this so that we will understand what we do—and what God is doing in us—by doing the same thing as Christ and the members of his Body are doing, always (through the centuries) and every-where (in every culture in the world).

When Catholics say “sacrament” we mean something very precise. In catechism class when I was a little boy I learned that a sacrament is **“an outward sign, instituted by Christ to give grace.”** So much has happened in the meantime, but that brief statement still serves me—and about 1.1 billion other Catholics—well, as a basic statement about the main way God touches lives with his gifts of grace.

There are three things going on in that simple statement:

- Sacraments are outward signs.
- Sacraments were instituted by Jesus Christ,
- Sacraments give grace.

And all three tell us something important about what life is all about.

The seven little rituals that we call “sacraments” are **outward signs**, apparently because that is how God wants to deal with us.

- He knows that we are body and spirit. He touches our spirits in a bodily way, through symbolic communication from other people.
- He knows that we are at the same time individual and communal; he touches our personal lives by contact with other people in a symbolic language that we have in common.

Jesus doesn’t have to do things that way. He can touch my heart directly, without going through things and without going through people—as he does, for instance in “baptism by desire” or “spiritual communion.” But that isn’t the main way—the **default way**—he acts with us. **He made us and he knows how he made us**: All through Scripture we read about how he dealt with people both individually and communally. Each time he touches the hearts of men and women, he does so internally, but also with comprehensive external signs that he employs to make the contact.

The sacraments were **instituted by Christ**. Two of them are more obviously so: Jesus told his disciples to

- “Go and teach all nations and **baptize them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” and
- “This is my body and this is my blood. **Do this in memory of me.**”

He was pretty explicit that these rituals were what his followers were to do. Catholics believe that the other five sacraments—Confirmation, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony—were also instituted by Christ, for they are grounded in the ministry of Jesus:

- who **sent his Spirit** on his disciples gathered together in the form of a mighty wind and with tongues of fire;
- who **spoke** aloud the **words of forgiveness** and breathed his Spirit on them to empower them to do likewise;
- who **healed the sick** (and gave his Spirit to St James to write about how the sick person was to call in the priests)
- who **blessed marriage** with a very tangible (and potable!) gift of new wine (and gave his Spirit to St Paul to say that the relationship of husband and wife was a sign of the self-giving love that Christ had for his bride the Church);
- who commanded his apostles to **do what he had done at the Last Supper**, for the Church in his memory.

And all seven have been **charged by the decisive moment when the Lord, who had been crucified for us, rose again to life**, no more to die. From that moment the thing he had spoken of was **put into gear and became effective** for his followers.

The sacraments **give grace**. That means that they each give a share in his divine life. These simple gestures have been embellished by Holy Mother Church with important ritual accents that enable us to understand their true meaning. This is vitally important, for **each sacrament touches the deepest level of what it means to be a human person, because they touch the deepest facts of human life**.

Think about it. What else is there that is more basic to human life than ...

- | | | |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------|
| • birth | into a family | (Baptism), |
| • maturation | and deepening | (Confirmation), |
| • nutrition | and dining together | (Communion), |
| • forgiveness | and being reconciled | (Penance), |
| • health | and getting over the fixation on suffering | (Anointing of the Sick), |
| • mating | and creating a family | (Matrimony), and |
| • approaching God | in Christ’s name and on behalf of his people | (Holy Orders)? |

We take such ritual care because it is important that we get these basic things exactly right. And **these rituals actually work!** They accomplish what they “act out.”

Father Kessler

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