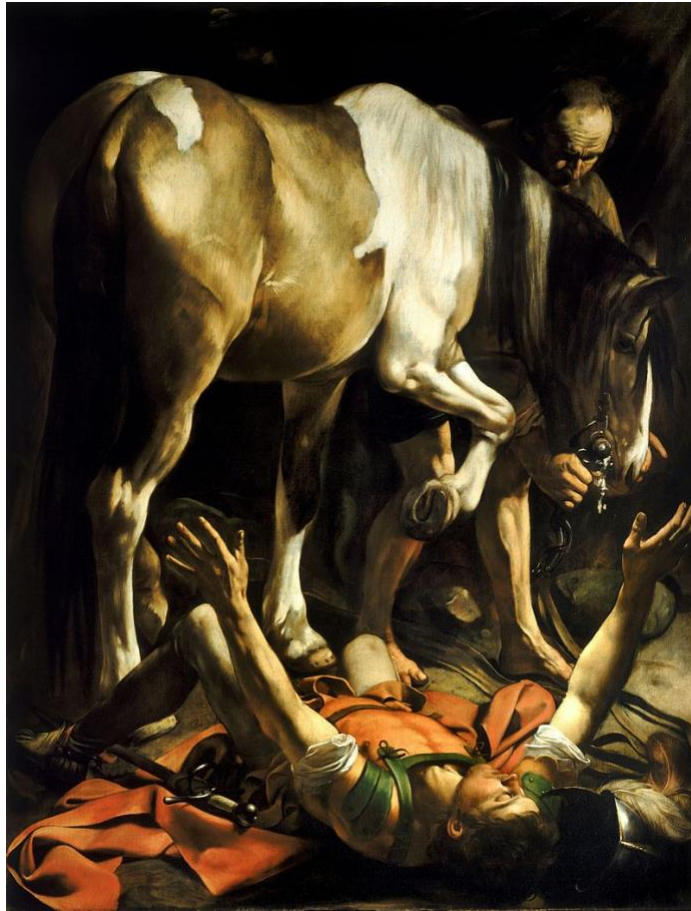


Lancaster St Bernadette Parish Bremen St Mary Parish



The Conversion on the Way to Damascus

the scene of Thursday's feast day

January 21, 2018
the 3rd Sunday

St Bernadette Parish

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

stbernadetteparish.net

St Mary Parish

602 Marietta Street (740) 569 • 7738
BREMEN, OH 43107

cover picture: **Conversion on the Way to Damascus**
the story of Saul/Paul's dramatic conversion, when the Lord Jesus asked the future apostle,
"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
painted (1601) in oil on canvas by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610)

Church of Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome

our parishes

Father Thomas Kessler (614) 634 • 0499 wmthomaskessler@icloud.com
pastor

at St Bernadette Parish

Jeff Carpenter (740) 681 • 9918 carpenter.277@osu.edu
deacon

Mark Scarpitti (740) 438 • 3970 dcn.mark@frontier.com
deacon

Ann Essman (740) 653 • 9347 aessman001@att.net
pastoral minister

Steve Huber (740) 654 • 3137 shuber57@yahoo.com
facilities coordinator

Angie & Kent Kerns (740) 654 • 2588 kwkerns@gmail.com
religious education

Liz Latorre (740) 243 • 1872 lizlatorre@gmail.com
liturgical music

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

<http://stbernadetteparish.net>

at Bremen St Mary Parish

Ben Factor b_factor@lanaster.k12.oh.us
liturgical music

Sarah Borah sborah920@gmail.com

The St Mary Parish office is at the church vestibule.

Hours are 9-11 AM, Tuesdays.
602 Marietta St, Bremen, OH 43107 (740) 569 • 7738

at both parishes

Stephen Karnes (740) 654 • 1893 stbernbook@gmail.com
business manager

Kathy Kehnst (740) 654 • 1893 stbernparish@yahoo.com
pastoral coordinator

Julie & Chase (740) 808 • 7294 maristellaspirt@gmail.com
Stalford
youth ministry

Saint Bernadette School

Pam Eltringham (740) 654 • 3137 peltring@cducation.org
principal

Barb Huber (740) 654 • 3137 bhuber@cducation.org
secretary

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

Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society www.svdplancasteroh.com
Bremen St Vincent de Paul (740) 569 • 7738
Diocese of Columbus www.columbuscatholic.org
Angels Nurture & Disciple (AND) www.angelsAND.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 Kehnst will be necessary). Sessions are held quarterly for both parishes. Try to attend before the child is born. The next session is scheduled for **Wednesday, Jan 31**. If you are expecting or have a new born or somehow haven't gotten around to having an older child baptized, call Kathy to make plans now.

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; those parents 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.

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

We 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."

We bring Penance, Anointing, and Holy Communion to 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. Remember, Catholics who marry outside the Church have left the sacramental life and need to change that situation before receiving the other sacraments.

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.

at Prayer with the Church

At Mass this Sunday the Church Prays

Almighty ever-living God,
direct our actions according to your good pleasure,
that in the name of your beloved Son
we may abound in good works.
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.

In January the Pope Asks Us to Pray

That Christians, and other religious minorities in Asian countries,
may be able to practice their faith in full freedom.

Listen to God's Word and Honor His Saints

Sunday, Jan 21, 3 rd Sunday		Jonah 3:1-10	Ps 25	Mark 1:14-20	
4 th Sunday		1 Corinthians 7:29-31		Mark 1:21-28	
Mon,	Jan 22	2 Samuel 5:1-10	Ps 89	Mark 3:22-30	<i>Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children</i>
Tues,	Jan 23	2 Samuel 6:12-19	Ps 24	Mark 3:31-35	<i>Saint Marianne Cope, virgin; Saint Vincent, deacon & martyr</i>
Weds,	Jan 24	2 Samuel 7:4-17	Ps 89	Mark 4:1-20	<i>Saint Francis de Sales, bishop & doctor of the Church</i>
Thurs,	Jan 25	Acts 22:3-16	Ps 117	Mark 16:15-18	<i>Conversion of Saint Paul, apostle</i>
Fri,	Jan 26	2 Timothy 1:1-8	Ps 96	Mark 4:26-34	<i>Saint Timothy & Saint Titus, bishops</i>
Sat,	Jan 27	2 Samuel 12:1-17	Ps 51	Mark 4:35-41	<i>Saint Angela Merici, virgin & religious founder</i>
Sunday, Jan 28, 4 th Sunday		Deuteronomy 18:15-20	Ps 95	Mark 1:21-28	

Mass This Week

There will not be Mass in either Parish on Monday through Friday this week.

at Both Parishes

Representatives

The pastor is looking for two Bremen St Mary parishioners to serve on the

- Fairfield / Hocking / Pickaway County **deanery pastoral council (DPC)**
The DPC meets **bi-monthly** on a Monday evening for about an hour at a different parish each meeting. Parishioners with some experience on parish pastoral council make especially good representatives because they can share and work together on concerns common to all of the parish communities.

He is looking for St Bernadette parishioners to serve on the

- Lancaster **St Mary School Advisory Board** and
- **Fisher Catholic High School Advisory Board.**
The school boards each meet **monthly** in the evening during the school year. They serve to keep communications happening between their own parish and the Catholic schools.

Each rep is a volunteer appointed by the pastor for a fixed term. A school advisory board member need not be a parent or an alum of the school concerned. They help keep the pastor and the corresponding councils in our own **parishes in the loop**. Several of the positions are already staffed, but we always need a "strong bench" of people to help. Let Fr Kessler know of your interest.

Society for the Propagation of the Faith

Today is renewal day for membership in the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. To join, use your collection envelope for "**Membership Sunday**." It is included in your envelope packet. Members of the society receive the graces of 15,000 Masses celebrated each day by missionaries for its members—living or dead. Mass is also celebrated daily for society members at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

at Bremen St Mary Parish

St Vincent de Paul

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Bremen takes up a **collection on the first Sunday** of each month. St Vincent always needs members. Call Angi Skinner at (740) 438-0027 if you can help.

Ministry at Mass at St Mary

January 21- January 28	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Communion	gifts	sacristan / usher
3 rd Sunday, Jan 21 at 8:30 AM	Paul Kunkler	Brooke Holt, Jillian Wilkinson	Wyatt Borah, Irene Kunkler, Leo Kunkler Sr	Paul Kunkler family	Ralph Mohler
4 th Sunday, Jan 28 at 8:30 AM	Linda Qualls	Charles Schoenlaub, Isaac Schmelzer	Neil Boch, Pam Redding, Tyna Schmelzer-Fox	James Noll Jr family	Chris Redding

There will not be Mass in either Parish Monday through Friday this week.

at St Bernadette Parish

Lancaster St Vincent de Paul

The Society has a new website. You can learn about the many activities of the Lancaster St Vincent de Paul Society at www.svdplancasteroh.com.

Sandwich Saturday

School has started and the students are serving our community by participating in the "Sandwich Saturday" program. This is a service project for students to live their discipleship by making **sandwiches for Foundation Dinners**, usually on the **last Thursday of each month**. The kids begin this service from an early age. Monetary donations, and donations of bread, lunch meat and wrapped cheese slices are always welcome and can be made through the school or parish office. Contact the school office for information at (740) 654-3137.

Give at Mass Every Week (or Every Month)

In St Bernadette Parish you could use **Electronic Funds Transfer** as a way to stabilize the level of your financial support. This helps the parish's cash flow by preventing unintended seasonal ebb and flow from your commitment to support the parish. Contact Steve Karnes in the parish office for details.



Ministry at Mass at St Bernadette

January 21- January 28	lector	servers	extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion
Saturday, Jan 20, at 4 PM Vigil of 3rd Sunday	Teresa Carpenter	Brianna Hilyard, Joey Mannella, Addy Myers	Rosalie DeFillippo Joyce Guenther Jim & Becky Kuhn Denise McGuire Craig Shaw
3rd Sunday, Jan 21, at 11 AM	John Hartig	Anna Hartig, Collin & Emma McCrary	Tara Craaybeek Pat Gins Teresa Hartig Sandy Landefeld Jean Robertson Anna Sevigny

**There will not be Mass in either Parish
Monday through Friday this week.**

Saturday, Jan 27, at 4 PM Vigil of 4th Sunday	Marguerite Grimm	Becca Fuller, Carley Matson, Brennan Quaintance	Terry Carpenter Bob & Angie Christy Susan Garrett Lee Guinan Kathy Kehnast
4th Sunday Jan 28, 11 AM	David Shonk	Caroline Messerly, Dominic & Emeline Neighbor	Ben Peters Larry Sanford Teresa Scarpitti Mary Jane Vajen Becky Wickham Amy Woo

May They Rest in Peace

Please pray for the repose of the souls of

- Tom Spires of St Bernadette Parish
- Margaret Turner, mother of Marion Krile of St Mary Parish

Here and There

The Difference Between Giving Birth and Giving Life

Angels Nurture and Disciple, AND (formerly known as The Guardian Angels Program, gaP), is a support program serving single women struggling with an unexpected pregnancy. As an extension of pregnancy care services, AND provides the single mom with a loving network of women (Angels) that will walk alongside her as she journeys through her pregnancy, birth, and infancy of her baby. Recognizing the numerous obstacles single parenthood presents, AND celebrates her courage in choosing life for her unborn baby, and hence strives to break down any educational, financial, and emotional barriers that are preventing her from becoming the mother God intended her to be.

If you have the desire to serve a mother during her time of crisis, become a part of this nurturing mission that is transforming lives and therefore generations to come. AND cannot function without the core strength provided by our volunteer base, the Choir of Angels. Angels have many roles, all critical to our support network. If you enjoy mentoring, cooking, caring for babies, hosting baby showers, writing letters of support, transporting and more, we need you!

Whether you have 1 hour @ month or 10, there is a need for you.

Every mother is a gift to her baby; help us show her just how much.

For information, contact **Monica Flynn at (614) 353-6765** or **monica@angelsAND.org**

*Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things
with great love. —Saint Mother Teresa*

Read the Catechism in a Year

Join the largest group in human history (120k+) ever to study the catechism together. Get one email a day (Monday-Friday; not on weekends) and cover the entire catechism in a year! It's free. There is no spam. You can unsubscribe any time. The text will be the Holy See's own *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* and will include direct links to the full text of the *Catechism* for further reading. It has already begun Jan 1, 2018, but it's not too late for you to get started. This is made possible by flocknote . com with permission from the USCCB.

Pilgrimage to Lourdes

On this 160th anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes, Fr Michael Dosch OP, from St Gertrude Parish in Cincinnati (until recently at St Patrick in Columbus), invites you to join him on the 64th US National Rosary Pilgrimage to Lourdes from July 2-11. This pilgrimage, which departs from Cincinnati, is open to all and is accompanied by a medical staff to meet the needs of the pilgrims. For information, contact Fr Michael at michael . dosch @ jun0 . com or contact the Catholic Travel Office toll free at 1-877-276-7279 or lourdespilgrimageoffice @ comcast . net. Their website is lourdes-pilgrimage . com. The reservation deadline is March 30.

Pilgrimage to Washington

Join **Bishop Monforton and the Franciscan TOR Sisters of the Diocese of Steubenville** on a pilgrimage to Washington DC on Oct 24-26. Visit the shrine of St John Paul II, the National Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land, Arlington Cemetery and the historic monuments of the nation's capital. The cost, which includes roundtrip motorcoach, all tours and sightseeing, two nights hotel accommodation, daily Mass, and several meals is \$525. Space is limited, so book by Feb 1 by calling Sandy at (734) 565-8888 x 122 or book online at www . ctscentral . net, trip code: 12596, group code: 7311.

in the Diocese of Columbus

St Thomas Aquinas Convocation

Ohio Dominican University's Center for Dominican Studies will host its annual St Thomas Aquinas Convocation at 11 AM on Thursday, Jan 25, at Erskine Hall. The lecture is free and open to the public. Speaker, Fr Brian Davies, OP, PhD, will present "*St Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil.*"

Respect Life !

All over our country people are gathering on Jan 22 to remember the anniversary of the infamous Supreme Court decision permitting abortion. All over our country, the Church **observes a Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children.** In Columbus, Bishop Campbell will celebrate the annual Respect Life Mass on Monday, Jan 22, at 10:30 AM at St Joseph Cathedral.

Following Mass, from noon to 1 PM, Greater Columbus Right to Life invites you to the State Capital Building for a **Roe Remembrance in the Statehouse Atrium.** Allow extra time for new Statehouse security measures; stickers, signs, and weapons are not permitted inside. For information, visit www . gertl . org/roe . html. www . uscgb . org/prolife or contact Social Concerns at (614) 241-2540.

Building a Culture of Life : A Conference on Respect for Life, Bioethics, Leadership

The Diocese and Greater Columbus Right to Life will hold a two-day event featuring prominent **pro-life speakers** and offering **resources to build a culture of life**, at St Peter Church, 6899 Smoky Row Rd, Columbus, on Jan 26 & 27. Visit www.gctrl.org/lifeconference or call (614) 241-2540.

Men's Conference and Women's Conference

You won't want to miss the **entertainment, displays, and fellowship** with a thousand or two of the most interesting people in central Ohio. Bishop Campbell will celebrate Mass and many priests of the diocese will provide opportunities for Penance.

- Women of our diocese will gather on **Feb 17**.
 - Their theme: "*Ask Jesus What He Wants from You and Be Brave.*"
 - Speakers are Uju Ekeocha, Lisa Hendey, the Labodas, and Fr Mazanowski.
- Men will meet on **Feb 24**.
 - And their theme: "*Cast Your Nets... Become Fishers of Men*"
 - Speakers are Jeff Cavins, Dr Scott Hahn, and Chris Stefanick.

Put these days on your calendar now. Both events will be at the Ohio Expo Center at the Ohio fairgrounds in Columbus.

Marriage Encounter Weekend

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. The next weekend in central Ohio is Feb 16-18. For information or to register, contact Paul or Marilou Clouse at (614) 834-6880 or visit www.wmcecolumbus.org.

Catholic Foundation Scholarships

The Catholic Foundation's Applications for Scholarships will open on Jan 29 and close March 9. Scholarships support promising and deserving students by assisting them with the costs of their education. Donors often establish a scholarship to honor or memorialize friends, teachers, family members, or other loved ones. Since 2007, The Catholic Foundation has awarded over \$430,000 in

scholarships empowering over 100 young people to continue their academic and vocational studies. For information and to apply, visit www.catholic-foundation.org/scholarships. If you are interested in opening a Scholarship Fund of your own, contact Scott Hartman at shartman@catholic-foundation.org or (614) 443-8893.

Catholic Men's Luncheon Club

The Catholic Men's Luncheon Club will feature Bishop Campbell of Columbus, presenting the 2018 Catholic Man of the Year Award on Friday, Feb 2, at St Patrick Church in downtown Columbus. Mass at 11:45 AM will be followed by lunch and a talk until about 1 PM. No reservations are necessary. \$10 covers the lunch and meeting. Bring a friend. For information, visit www.catholicmensministry.com/cmlc or contact George Harvey, CMLC president at GLHarvey56@gmail.com.

St Charles Scholarship

St Charles will offer its annual scholarship test to prospective students at 9 AM and 1 PM on Saturday, Jan 27, in the school's student commons. Test results are used to help determine who will receive merit-based scholarships and grants offered by the school to its students in the 2018-2019 school year. This year, St Charles is providing more \$340,000 in academic scholarships and an additional \$1.4 million in tuition assistance to its students. The test is open to all 8th grade boys currently enrolled at any schools in Franklin or contiguous counties. Register by calling Laurie Berndt in the school office at (614) 252-6714 between 8:30 AM-4 PM Monday through Friday.

Blue Jackets Catholic Night

Celebrate Catholic Night with the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday, Feb 10, when the Blue Jackets take on the New Jersey Devils. Tickets are \$38 in the Upper Bowl and \$65 in the Lower Bowl. For every ticket purchased, \$10-\$20 will be donated to the diocese of Columbus and you will receive a free CBJ Catholic Night t-shirt while supplies last. To order your tickets visit www.BlueJackets.com/catholic; for information, contact Jacob Welter at (614) 246-7625 or jwelter@BlueJackets.com.



Weekly Confessions & Weekday Mass

But these times sometimes change, so be sure to call ahead!

parish	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	penance
Bremen St Mary		8:20					8 Sun
Lancaster St Bernadette	8:20		8:20	6 PM	8:20	9 on 1 st Sat	5:30 PM Thu, 3 PM Sat, 8:30 on 1 st Sat
Lancaster St Mary	7	9	7	9			4 PM Sat
Lancaster St Mark	8	8	6	8	8		5:30 PM Sat
Sugar Grove St Joseph	VARIES	NOON	7	NOON	NOON		½ hour before Mass
Circleville St Joseph	9	7	9		9		4 Sat
Logan St John	8	8	9		8	9	4 Sat
Fisher Catholic HS						2:40 on Fri	2 on 1 st Fri

Intercessory Prayer List for January of 2018

Please pray-for the sick and those in need of healing, especially:

Angie Mark	Abel Amato	Bill Laura Fox Mike Meredith	Fisher Fonseca Ford Frear	Nina	Lombardo	Les & Loren	Schmelzer
Nancy Sr. Sharen	Bailey Baldy	Regina Christine	Gallagher Gentry	Brian Nancy Larry	Mahon Mason Mattox	Leon Kayla Sherri	Sevigny Shaw Sheets
Luke Heather	Ball Baskin	Agnes Belinda	Gins Grace	Susan Fred	McClellan Menigat	Barb Tom	Smelzer Smith
Jolene Christen	Beatty Beck	Jim	Griffith	David & Tommy	Meyer	Helen, Sue & Nicole,	Smith Smoke
Anthony & Tracie	Binetti	Marilyn Donte	Haag Hall	Bob & Shirley	Miller	Mary Lee Deb	Stinehelfer
Barron & Rita	Black	Becky Pat	Hams Hanna	Fran & Rod	Miller	David David	Stollenwerk Strohmeyer
Toni Sharon	Blanchard Bloom	Luke Timothy	Hay Heck	Patty Gabriel	Mohler Moore	Marci Jeff	Studer Stuyvesant
Hayden Marcie	Brothers Brown	Julia & Mark	Hedges Hill	Daniel Betty Carol	Morris Moschetta	Jenny	Sutherland
Kathleen	Butler	Jodi Doug & Paul	Hockman	Patrick	Murnane	Chad Clark Rose	Thurkettle Thurmond Trout
Aaron Milissa	Capretta Casto	Ashlee & Phyllis	Hunt	Louie	Niemann	Allen & Betty	Underwood
Tate Mary Jane	Chancey Clouse	Isaiah Chuck	Hurd Huston	Lynda Ava	O'Brien O'Dell	Michelle Derek	Unger Upp
Jeanne Jennifer	Corsi Craiglow	Debbie	Hyme-Bixler	George Aubree	Palmer Parsons	Mary Jane	Vajen
Deacon Bob	Crook	Becky Jim	Jewel Jewett	Mary Zane	Rice-Patt Peters	Robert Bea	Waits Ward
Jim & Pat Denny	Darfus Daugherty	Leon & Mary	Johnson	Janet Karen	Peterson Phillips	Phil Elizabeth	Weldon Wellington
Dolores Rosalie	DeFillippo DeFillippo	Theresa	Juncewicz	Kate Norman	Prentice Ream	Matthew, Michael & Scott	Whitehead
Deacon Paul	Deshaies	DeAnn Greg	Kirkwood Klopfer	Donna & Bill	Roark Ross	Sharon Rose	Willis Wilson
Barbara & Joe	Difilippo	Stacy Carol	Knight Knotts	Tony David	Roundhouse Rowntree	Peter	Yanuzzi
Olivia Grace	Dreyer	Tiffany Steven	Kohler Kress	Vivian Sam Keary	Runco Ryan		
Cooper, Dylan, & Rachel	Echard	Kelly Samantha	Lambert Lamp	Brent Teresa	Sanford Scarpitti		
Anthony Betty	Ellis Estep	Edna Adrienne	Lee Leith	Shirley Matt	Schambach Schmelzer		
Brooke	Evans						

Parishioners have also asked that we pray:

- for all the deceased, and for the comfort and consolation of their families
- for an increase in vocations
- for guidance for Pope Francis, Bishop Campbell, our pastor Father Kessler, and all our clergy and religious leaders,
- that Mary, the Holy Mother of God, will continue to care for our parish and lead us to her Son
- with praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Incarnation!

Please contact the parish office at 654-1893 or stbernaparish @ yahoo . com to keep this list current.

Easy Money for Our School

These programs provide free money to our school with very little effort on your part. Simply register and our school will start making money. Tell your family and friends and encourage them to sign up.

- **Kroger** www . krogercommunity rewards . com
School Code: 80359
- **Meijer**: www . meijer.com/rewards

School Code: 733374

- **Giant Eagle**: “Apples for the Students”
School Code 5424
- **Target**: Apply for a Target debit card (link to your checking account) or credit card. Link to our school online with School Code: 14047 (You also save 5% on every transaction at the register).



Saint Paul and Conversion and Christian Unity

Paul of Tarsus is probably the most famous convert in the history of Christianity. The story is told in the New Testament three times. He was “breathing murderous threats” and then the voice of Jesus stopped him cold on the Damascus road. It must have been a powerful experience.

From very soon after his conversion, Paul was known as an apostle. He was not one of the Twelve Apostles. And, on the surface anyway, he was not very much like them. They had all been among the comrades of Jesus, disciples who accompanied him on his teaching travels. Nothing indicates that any of the Twelve were particularly educated.

Paul was educated. He too was a Jew. Unlike the Twelve, he came from outside the Holy Land (not very far outside). Even though he was an outlander, he had been well educated as a rabbi. And there is nothing to indicate that Paul had ever even met Jesus before his conversion experience, some time after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

And yet the apostles must all have had a conversion, whether or not they all had such a dramatic experience. It goes with the business of being a disciple. To be a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ — then or now — means to come to the awareness that he is worth giving one’s life to. Many evangelicals talk about “making a decision for Christ.” That isn’t the way we Catholics talk about it. We are aware that there is more to the decision than one turning-point moment. We know that it is a decision that has to be made over and over again. Every day. Day in, day out. We are reminded every morning in the liturgy, in the words of the Psalm: “If *today* you hear his voice, harden not your heart.” That’s why we don’t put all of our focus on “the hour I first believed,” as though the decision, once made, were complete. And we are aware that it isn’t just *my* decision; it is also, and more importantly, *God’s* call.

And yet there is something to that moment of conversion. And on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul we can’t help but notice that Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus was an awesome moment. God called Paul. And Paul responded. And he kept on responding. And the Church was deeply affected.



A very old Christian tradition links both the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul with the foundation of the Church at Rome. Peter was the Prince of the Apostles, on whom Jesus had promised to build his Church and to whom he promised to give the Keys of the Kingdom. Paul was the great letter-writer, the great missionary, the apostle to the Gentiles. It is pretty clear that there were already Christians at Rome even before either of the two great apostles arrived. But they grounded the newly founded Church on the solid doctrine of the apostolic Faith. They worked together in this wonderful task. With each other — and with the Lord.

Protestants tend to think of Paul as *the* apostle because he wrote much of what became the inspiration for the teaching of the Reformation (especially in the Letter to the Romans). Catholics tend to think of Peter as *the* apostle because he was appointed by Jesus to be the first pope. The old tradition got it right by rejecting the “either/or” choice and encouraging us to look to the “both/and” truth. In fact, the full reality of church life is to be found where Peter and Paul are together. This is symbolized in the old icon tradition which shows the two apostles embracing. And it is

expressed in the modern practice of making the week between the feast of the (teaching) chair of Peter (Jan 18) and the feast of the conversion of Paul (Jan 25) into a **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**.

Christian unity is not just a tactical matter. True, united churches would be less scandalous, more effective in making the presentation of the Gospel to the world. But there is a much more basic reason for that unity. Jesus knew we would not always be united and he let us know that he prayed for that unity: that “they may be one as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.” The bond of the Father and Son’s unity is the Holy Spirit himself. To reject unity is to reject the unity that is of God. The way to regain unity is to pray. And to hold fast to our Catholic faith. And to listen with humility to the insights into the message of Jesus that have been preserved in the other churches and ecclesial communions.

— *Father Kessler*

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