



ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

PARISH NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

“Here Comes the Sun”

By Father Phil Kelly

As we celebrate Easter and another spring blooms, I realize that it hasn't been just a season of winter but an entire year of long and lonely winter-like conditions. Thankfully, like the song says: “here comes the sun.” We are beginning to see light in terms of an end to the pandemic. We recognize that we have prevailed, not without loss or change, but nevertheless we have prevailed. Our faith and the communities of faith that have sustained us now illuminate this Easter season of light and the triumph of life over death.

Holy Week was much like the previous year for so many of us—a sharing of the cross in real life. We as the people of God forged a new path in spite of the obstacles. I look back in wonder on “how we got over” as that great hymn sings to us. The selfless service of so many is a testimony that even in the darkest hour a light shone and goodness prevailed. We realized how resilient we were and how blessed we continue to be.

This newsletter speaks of the richness of that grace which is ours through faith. We have said often that while the doors to SFDS may



have closed, our church never stopped. What we have highlighted is but a fraction of what we have done and will continue to do through the grace of God and our shared commitment to mission here at SFDS. My prayer for us this Easter Season is that we can indeed feel and see the power of Jesus' resurrection in the perseverance and commitment of our shared faith; a faith that has guided us through the darkness of this long and lonely winter and brought us to this time of light and new life. As always, thank you for your prayers, commitment, and financial support of our parish community here on East 96th Street. Let us continue in the words of our patron Saint Francis de Sales, to “Live Jesus.”

GROWING IN FAITH

SFDS is the church that never stops in this city that never sleeps

By Jayne Porcelli, Director of Religious Education & Pastoral Associate



Our sacramental life has continued to flourish despite the curves thrown at us in the last year. In fact, educational opportunities have blossomed thanks to the implementation of technology and our awesome Digital Ministry!



ADULT INITIATION INTO THE CATHOLIC FAITH

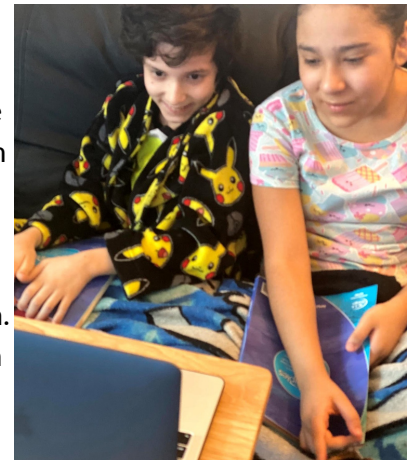
We have seven adults who will be receiving their sacraments or coming into Full Communion with the Catholic church this Easter Season. While many of us may be experience “Zoom fatigue,” this online avenue for communicating has been a blessing for our Initiation groups. Life in NYC being what it has been, some of our folks moved out of Manhattan. Thanks to Zoom meetings, we have been able to continue to work with Kristina in Georgia and Wendell and Mica in Brooklyn. Not only that, but this style of gathering has allowed newcomers like Leslie from Rockland County and Ellie on 97th Street as well as other parents with little ones at home to begin their journey of faith.

Micaela, Kristina ("Zooming" from Georgia), and Katrina celebrate their Rite of Election at SFDS earlier this year.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

Our attendance for Sunday school has been phenomenal. My guess is that our kids like learning about their faith while still in their pjs! Our Communion class has been especially faithful to their Sunday sessions with Ms. Mary and Ms. Laura. (A special shout out to Ms. Mary who learned how to use technology this year!!) We look forward to celebrating their First Communion with them this spring.

Our Confirmation Retreat took on a new dimension this year because of technology. One highlight was a small, socially-distanced hybrid meeting where Cecilia U, one of our parish teens, gave a witness talk about how she puts her faith in action. Three other high school and college students shared their ideas on why and how they pray. In their own words, they described to our teens how to incorporate a daily examen into their lives as well as prayers for those who are suffering and prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, and contrition. They also touched upon how moments of service to others are a type of prayer. It was an amazing gathering of teens and young adults communicating their faith to each other!



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Our SFDS community continues to be actively engaged in conversation and education on Catholic Social Teaching. This pandemic created an opportunity for us to explore more fully the teachings on social justice and solidarity with the parish community at large.

This past Lenten season, we took advantage of our digital prowess to offer more opportunities for Adult Faith Enrichment than ever! Dr. Meghan Clark from St John’s University led us in unpacking the richness of Pope Francis’ encyclical ‘Fratelli Tutti,’ a great opportunity to dive deeper into what the Pope believes is possible for our world torn apart by pandemic and poverty. There is so much hope to be found in his words about creating opportunities for kindness and encounter with others. We were also blessed with the opportunity to spend two mornings on retreat with Fr. Tony Ciorra breaking open the topic of discernment for ourselves and for our parish. There are so many issues of justice that confront us—we ask God to guide us in acting as witnesses to his love and mercy on the other side of this pandemic.

OUR FAITH IN ACTION: A CALL TO SERVICE

SFDS grows in service and understanding concerning anti-racism, prison reform, human trafficking, & outreach to our immigrant neighbors

By Jayne Porcelli, Pastoral Associate & Director of Religious Education

Our SFDS community takes the call to service most seriously. We are a parish who recognizes that our faith must be connected to actions at the service of others. In the last year, rather than turn inward and isolate, we looked for ways to reach beyond our doors to find points of understanding and meet the needs of our neighbors.

In the turbulent days that found many people distraught over the death of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (and too many other sisters and brothers of color), SFDS discerned with our Social Justice Ministry as to how we could best respond to such violence in our world. A new endeavor, The Catholic Anti Racism Project, was formed. "CARP" is a collaboration between three churches (SFDS, St. Charles Borromeo/Resurrection/All Saints, and St. Francis Xavier) with the goal of advancing ideas of anti-racism and unity among all. Three products they have already created for our attention are: a short film entitled "The Story of Self" showcasing three African-American women sharing their testimonies as to what their experience has been of being Black in the Catholic church; a Lenten Examen and Stations of the Cross to recognize and counter racism; and a speaker series that deals with issues particular to racism within the church. We know it's good to march and put our bodies where our minds and hearts are. We also know we need to be informed and learn about the realities of all our sisters and brothers. These videos and resources are one way we can do this.

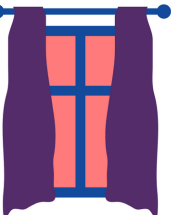


Over the last few years, our parish has grown in our understanding of the realities of incarceration and life both within and outside prison walls. This led us to the Thrive for Life Prison Project and a collaboration with Ignacio House, a house of studies for men coming out of prison and beginning the process of reintegration in society. SFDS parishioners have donated both time and money to the building up of Ignacio House. We have also entered into weekly prayer with Ignacio House on Wednesday evenings. Meeting the men in a context of prayer has been transformative! From these moments of prayer has grown a desire to do more. We are now in the process of creating an SFDS team that will be trained to join in the retreat ministry at two women's prisons.

Human trafficking is a tragedy that is largely hidden in our society. Many are unaware of the thousands of people who are living in this type of slavery. Parishioner Cynthia Bastidas with the backing of our Social Justice Ministry created a powerful film entitled *Missguidance* that describes the horror of human trafficking in our world. I promise you, once you view the film or the webinar on the same topic, you will look more closely at how you choose to shop and where you lend your economic support.

The Cabrini Coalition (which we featured in October's winter newsletter), an arm of our Social Justice Ministry that focuses on outreach to local immigrant families, partnered with Catholic Charities and Union Settlement to successfully organize three distribution events this winter for groceries and coats for kids. They are currently planning another round for our network which has grown to over 300 families in East Harlem and the Bronx.

These are just a few of the ways our parishioners live out their faith each day. We're grateful we get to live and practice our faith together with you.



SFDS BEHIND THE SCENES

GET TO KNOW THE #SFDSFAMILY

Our youth have been uniquely affected in the last year. They've had to cope and adapt their education, social lives, and stress levels. We checked in with four of our SFDS teens for a look at how they've focused their energies and faith.



CECILIA | HOSPITALITY MINISTRY & MENTORING

Cecilia has always enjoyed being a part of our Hospitality Ministry and is a regular presence in our online Zoom mixers and Sunday Mass chat on Youtube. This past Advent, she took the lead in hosting a Christmas Eve mixer online. She's also part of our Monday Religious Ed. team which she joined after receiving her Confirmation at SFDS. Cecilia's commitment to building community and educating younger kids is evident in her work with her local Girl Scout troop where most recently she's created content about online safety for kids and a project about the U.S. voting process.



ERIC | RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

As part of his service project for our Confirmation process, Eric collected food and toys which he donated to the Little Sisters of the Assumption-LSA Family Health Services on East 115th St. He wanted to do something to help families and children that were not as fortunate as he has been during this pandemic. He chose some of his favorite foods to add to their food pantry—which included quite a bit of his favorite macaroni & cheese dinners! Eric has taken seriously his Confirmation preparation and grown more deeply in his understanding of faith and prayer as a younger member of our parish community.



JUAN | DIGITAL MINISTRY

Juan has donated his time throughout the last year to assist our Digital Ministry with videography and podcasting—we love receiving texts from him in between classes at LaGuardia High School with feedback about our live streams! Thanks in part to the experience he gained here at SFDS, along with his involvement at “Angeles de NY” Mariachi School where he volunteers as a music instructor and performer, Juan was awarded a spring internship for high school students at the Apollo Theater-Digital Collective. We can't wait for him to put the new skills he's learning to use here at SFDS!



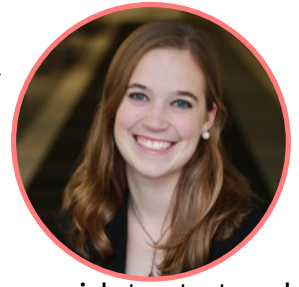
MIA | COMMUNITY SERVICE

Mia approached us seeking a hands-on opportunity to use her free time in service to our neighborhood, and she quickly directed her efforts to our Digital Ministry. Her commitment to service is also a focus of her education. Currently a student at Marymount, Mia was recently accepted at Episcopal H.S. in Virginia, a school she chose in part so she can expand her understanding of what it means to dedicate yourself to community service. We know she'll excel there and look forward to hearing her adventures during school breaks!

THE COVID VACCINE: OUR CHRISTIAN DUTY

Written by Coleen Halloran

Coleen is part of our vaccination task force and Social Justice Ministry



After the Covid vaccines became available earlier this year, I was reading an article about groups that were organizing tech-savvy individuals to help seniors and other eligible groups make vaccination appointments. This seemed like a new twist on the concept of “digital ministry” so I contacted SFDS to inquire if there was interest in our parish to start such a group. Knowing that our church has a large number of young adults who like me are working from home and looking for opportunities get involved in the neighborhood, this type of outreach seemed very much in line with our mission while also adhering to social distance protocols.

One of the reasons this resonated with me is because I did some appointment searching early on for various family members and figured out how to navigate the NYC portals like turbo.vax.info. If you're digitally savvy and spending a lot of time at a computer or working from home, it's easy to frequently refresh the appointment webpages throughout the day while waiting for something to load or listening in on a meeting.

A dozen parishioners answered our call to help and we're each being assigned to work on several appointment requests weekly. I'm happy to report that the majority of our parishioners ages 65+ have already received their vaccinations or have their appointments scheduled. Our Digital Ministry reached out to SFDS community partners Little Sisters of the Assumption-LSA Family Health Services, Bigs & Littles NYC, and the Cabrini Coalition to offer this assistance to the families in their network, and we're also currently planning to collaborate with the office of local Council Member Ben Kallos.

Here are three online references available on the SFDS homepage which can help to educate and inform about the Covid vaccine:

INTEL ON NYC VACCINATION APPOINTMENTS—a compilation of what we're learning about booking vaccination appointments, updated in real time.

VACCINE VIDEO SERIES—Our Digital Ministry has produced two bilingual videos so far with interviews and testimonials by fellow parishioners.

NEED A VACCINE?—If you or someone you know needs help making an appointment, call the Rectory at 212.289.0425 extension 317 and we'll partner you with a parishioner to search online for you, or fill out our online form.

In these times of uncertainty, we Christians are called to share the love of God with everyone by protecting them. I'm so happy to have helped organize our parish efforts to assist those who have been struggling to get an appointment.



SFDS STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Written by Lydia Serrano, Director of Communications, Stewardship, & Outreach

“For we are co-workers in God’s service;
you are God’s field, God’s building.”

–1 CORINTHIANS 3:9

As the pastoral team worked to put this newsletter together, one theme kept resonating with me: stability. It might seem counter-intuitive to reference stability after the year we've all had, but SFDS has proven to be extremely consistent in our commitment to liturgical life through the continued celebration of the sacraments and evangelization through service. These have certainly taken on new forms as we journey together, socially distant but spiritually unified. Our parish was consistently forward-thinking in vision and best practices so we had a solid foundation of digital ministry and recurring online giving going into the pandemic. This facilitated our seamless transfer of ministries and events online to stay true to our core mission.

With a year of pandemic behind us and vaccines that hopefully point to a new way of living, I am proud and humbled at how SFDS has been able to “be church” for so many in our community. I feel very blessed to report that we are holding our own despite the current extraordinary circumstances. After the crushing yet understandable decrease in donations we experienced last Easter during the height of the NYC shutdown and into the Fall, we've been able to neutralize the sharp decline in weekly in-person collections caused by social distancing and the number of parishioners who opted not to come in person. These factors have helped us to steady our course:

- 1) The number of parishioners who registered to give online for the first time nearly doubled in the last year.
- 2) A number of recurring online givers not so affected financially chose to increase the amount of their regular contributions.
- 3) Special donations to SFDS increased in the form of IRA retirement distributions directed to us, gifts from family trusts, and employer matching gifts.
- 4) We received pledges to contribute tax refunds and stimulus funds to the parish.

This all speaks volumes about the commitment of our SFDS family. We asked you to step in if you could to make up for what was lost, and you did! As 2021 unfolds, there are a number of projects in the works of considerable cost which will require our dedication to stewardship:

- Façade of the church—You've seen the scaffolding...parts of the façade and windows facing onto 96th Street need to be fixed to protect the structural integrity of our church building.
- Stained glass windows—Our historic windows are in need of even more extensive repair of the wooden frames and replacement of the protective glass than we had anticipated.
- Roof—This is a long-term project of both the lower roof behind the two windows on the altar and the back roof which are in need of necessary repairs.

Your financial support enables this work to take place and funds our ministries year-round. **As we continue the Easter season, you can still make your one-time Easter Donation to SFDS. The suggested contribution for each wage earner this year is \$150.** The link to give online is on our homepage where you can also sign up for recurring online giving if you haven't yet done so.

As always, THANK YOU for everything you do and are for our parish! God is blessing us through your generosity and participation to operate actively as a church whose focus is on mission and ministry.



SPRING CALENDAR

FRANCINEMA

Discussion Series—Films About Faith



Thur, April 15 @ 7pm | Zoom

Green Book film discussion

Inspired by the true story of a 1962 tour of the Deep South by African-American pianist Don Shirley and his driver. (2018)

POP-UP THEOLOGY



This spring, SFDS is partnering with Sacred Heart University to engage their professors in conversation with our parishioners!

Thur, April 22 @ 7pm | Zoom

Theology on Broadway

with Prof. Charles A. Gillespie, Sacred Heart University

Thur, May 20 @ 7pm | Zoom

The Catholic Imagination in Modern Art/Basquiat and Warhol's "Punching Bags"

with Prof. Daniel A. Rober, Sacred Heart University

Thur, June 17 @ 7pm | Zoom

A Conversation about Science

with Prof. Chelsea A. King, Sacred Heart University



CATHOLIC ANTI-RACISM PROJECT

Spring Speaker Series

Tue, April 6 @ 7pm | Zoom

Implicit Bias, Structural Racism: What is White Privilege?

Tue, May 4 @ 7pm | Zoom

The Realities of Immigration

Tue, June 1 @ 7pm | Zoom

Anti-Racism Guide



**ST. FRANCIS
DE SALES**

WHERE THE UPPER EAST SIDE AND EAST HARLEM MEET

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