

## Meet Co-Pastor Fr. Steve Stradinger

Fr. Steve Stradinger, serves as co-pastor, along with Fr. Bill Stanfield, at St. Matthew Parish and St. Marys by the Lake Parish. Fr. Steve began serving as co-pastor of St. Matthews in August of this year. He recently shared some information about himself, as well as St. Marys and St. Matthews.



Fr. Steve Stradinger serves as co-pastor here at St. Matthew and St. Mary's by the Lake parish in Racine/Caledonia.

Fr. Steve grew up in Whitewater, Wisconsin, and was a member of St. Patrick Parish. He attended the Whitewater public schools until the 10th grade. He then attended De Sales Prep Seminary and St. Francis Seminary.

He was ordained in 1974. He credits an early interest in missionary work that eventually led him to his vocation as an archdiocesan priest.

### Early Interest In Priesthood

"We had a Divine Word priest helping out at St. Pats, and I became interested in missionary work sometime in middle school," he says. "I was also good friends with our assistant priest, Fr. Jim Johnson, and he told me about serving as an archdiocesan priest. It had more appeal than being a missionary, so I enrolled in our seminary."

Service to others has been a theme throughout Fr. Steve's life. "I learned about service to my parish early in life. I served Mass, and helped make donuts on Sundays with the Knights of Columbus men," he recalls. "If my dad or mom ever had things to do at the parish, we kids were always volunteered. Serving the church became part of our lives." Fr. Steve remembers that his parish didn't have a religion education staff, so parish parents did the classroom teaching. "However, we learned mostly by watching our parents' faith in action," he remembers.

Like many priests, Fr. Steve has served a number of parishes.

"I served as the second associate(!!) at St. Philip Neri parish on the near north side of Milwaukee for 3 years. I then was associate pastor for St. Alexander Parish on the south side of Milwaukee for 9 years. My first pastorate was at St. Mary Parish in Lomira, in northeast Dodge County, a farming community that reminded me of my hometown parish of St. Pats. I served for 9 years, excluding a 6-month sabbatical in California. From there I served as pastor of St. Benedict Parish in Fontana, on the western shore of Lake Geneva. After three years, I spent a year helping out with the Archdiocese. That is how I came to be assigned as temporary, then permanent administrator of St. Mary by the Lake parish in Racine/Caledonia."

### Earlier Encounters With St. Matthew Parish

Fr. Steve does have some history with St. Matthew parish. "When I was at St. Alexanders, we were in the same district as St. Matthews (15) and I was at most of the district meetings," he says. "I came to know and admire former St. Matthew pastor Fr. Don Surges as a pastor, ably assisted by Fr. Rick Stoffel. They both shared a lot of the good things St. Matthew Parish was doing at the meetings. By chance, I also got to work with Fr. Rick in Racine when he was pastor of St. Joseph. I also met some of the St. Matthew 6th grade basketball teams and fans who came to play at the St. Alexander Parish tournament. I was the one taking all those pictures! I recall that St. Matthews won their share. St. Matthews is a great part of the history of the Catholic Church here in Southeast Wisconsin, as portrayed in Fr. Steve Avella's recent book," he says.

### Long History of St. Mary by The Lake Parish

Looking at his two parishes, Fr. Steve says that St. Mary by the Lake parish is 152 years old, a bit younger than St. Matthew Parish. "St. Mary began in downtown Racine and moved out in the mid '70's," he says. "Fr. Anthony Dorn was its pastor and considered his primary work to be building up a community of believers, not a building. That community

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*Fr. Steve, continued from page one.*

still lives in the neighborhood and is involved in its continuing growth in the faith.” St. Mary’s is now in its fourth building, a converted youth center and elementary school.

Like St. Matthew, where there is a strong cadre of can-do parishioners, the St. Mary parish buildings were remodeled by the parishioners about ten years ago. “The worship space opens out to the eastern end of Cliffside Park, a beautiful place to pray,” he says. “You are all most welcome to come and visit. When the wind is out of the north, we can hear Lake Michigan raising its voice in song!” This complements the sound of the worship space’s unique pipe organ, modeled on the 16th century French style of a Tracker organ. Fr. Steve says that “The only power to the instrument works the bellows and the light. Everything else is hands-on; the stops, the keys and the pedals.”

St. Mary by the Lake faith community is comprised of 465 families with a focus on outreach to the larger community. The parish supports the Racine Catholic grade schools, has built and remodeled two Habitat for Humanity homes, and also supports some of the same charities which St. Matthew supports. St. Marys by the Lake, like St. Matthew, is moving in the direction of Family Ministry and education, and inter-generational experiences. Its staff is much smaller, since there is no school. Volunteers keep the place humming.

### **Co-Pastoring Sprang From Creative Thinking**

As for the concept of co-pastor, Fr. Steve explains that it sprang from the dialogue on how best to provide pastoral care for all Catholic parishes. “It began in the Strategic Planning Process, as an ‘out-of-the-box’ suggestion and developed from there over a year ago,” he says. “I was, at the time, working with the Racine Catholic Parishes in its planning for the future, the same process St. Matthew Parish was undertaking. We then entered into dialog with District 15 (Racine, east of I-94, is District 2) and things developed from there. With Fr. Bill accepting a half-time assignment with the Office of Clergy Continuing Formation, our plans were moved up considerably,” he explains.

With the Planning Process, I was and am assigned Team Moderator of the pastoral ‘in solidum’ team of Fr. Bill Stanfield and me, serving St. Matthew and St. Mary parishes.” This is the first time Fr. Steve has served as a co-pastor. “It might help to define what an ‘in solidum’ team means,” he says. “It is Latin, meaning ‘together, a pair’ and it is a canonical term. Together as a team, Fr. Bill and I come to a consen-

sus of opinion about issues, policies and the like. As Team Moderator, I speak for both of us about that issue, policy, etc. in the team’s name. We divide our time between our assignments and try to arrive at an equitable balance. Each of us has different interests and skills and we try to take that into consideration,” he says.

### **Why Co-Pastoring?**

Fr. Steve sees it as a part of an answer to a question, one which concerns all of us: How can our parishes utilize priests in the best, most equitable way? It involves compromise, creative thinking and acting. He explains that “Our Southern Cross Team has been dealing with this issue, and it will require the best efforts of all of us. The benefits to the archdiocese are obvious; this ‘in solidum’ team will serve the pastoral needs of our two parishes into the future. We cannot go back into time, but we can, and we must face up to the priest shortage and make the adjustments necessary to continue as a Catholic Church,” he says.

Co-pastoring does bring its own set of challenges. Fr. Steve discovered that when Fr. Bill was on sabbatical, it was very challenging to keep up with everything in both parishes and still remain sane. He remarks that he “continues to be both surprised and rewarded by the great efforts on the part of the staffs and committees to keep us all informed, helping us to fulfill our Mission Statement as parishes.”

### **Parishioner Involvement is Key To Parish Success**

Fr. Steve feels parishioners can be most proud of fellow parishioners filling leadership positions within the parish. Our parishes are truly blessed with some of the most dedicated, most hard-working people I have had the privilege to work with. The need still remains for more people to step up and join in the work of the parish, the work of God’s Kingdom. The Holy Spirit is counting on you! Calling you, as well!”

As for hobbies, you may be interested to know that Fr. Steve enjoys motorcycling. “Yes, I am a biker,” he says. I own and ride a ‘96 Yamaha 750 Virago. I have been an enthusiast ever since American Choppers was on the Discovery Channel. I have only had this bike for six years. My favorite rides are the small country roads away from traffic in Walworth County, plus the Holy Hill area. With gas prices as they are, this may become a more acceptable mode of transportation, at least in the warm months,” he explains. Fr. Steve’s other hobbies when he gets the chance, are golf and jet skiing.

# 7th Graders Share Christmas Memories and Traditions

*Article and photos by Robert Tabern*



**Nicholas James:** “We eat and then we have a sock exchange. It works by taking unused socks and filling them with trinkets and gifts. Then we pick numbers to find the order in which we take turns. After that we crack Christmas crackers.”



**Crystal Stasyak:** “We have a party every year, and after that we go to my mom’s church to the midnight Christmas Mass. It’s really touching. Of course since we were up late, we sleep in on Christmas morning. But right when we wake up, we open our presents. I love Christmas!”



**Evan Johnsen:** “During the day our Grandma prepares a list of random words. If we say those words we get a dollar. If we peek at the list we lose a dollar. Ever since I can remember, we have done this and it always is a lot of fun.”



**Stephanie Gonzalez:** “During Christmas, we drink hot punch. It’s a Mexican tradition. We have these good cookies my grandma makes called bunelos. It has cinnamon and honey on them. We pray at dinner also.”



**John Hammernik:** “We sled when there is snow and we always have a talent show. We always have ham and shrimp. Every year the family always takes an updated photo so we can see how we have grown each year.”



**Jessica Szydel:** “After we eat, we exchange gifts with everybody, and after we do that my aunt usually brings a pickle as an ornament and hides it in a tree and whoever finds it gets an extra gift from my aunt.”

## 7th Grade Students Decorate Cathedral Square Tree

Milwaukee's Cathedral Square continues to glow thanks to the help of students from more than a dozen schools, including the 7th grade class at St. Matthew Parish. In mid-November, students braved the cold weather and headed downtown to the corner of Jefferson and Wells to decorate their seven-foot high tree. The students made almost all of the decorations that were used. The Milwaukee Downtown Business Improvement District provided guide wires, white lights, and signage in front of the tree. If you want to see St. Matthew's tree at the Milwaukee Holiday Lights Festival you have about another week. The decorations at Cathedral Square Park will remain up through the start of the New Year.

*Article and photos by Robert Tabern*



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