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The Journey to First Communion

It seems just like yesterday that I was frantically pacing back and forth through our living room for hours on end trying to get my baby girl to stop crying. And boy, she was a crier! For the first few months, she only seemed to stop crying when she was sleeping or eating. When I wasn't pacing, my husband was bouncing her up and down in his arms as if she was on a train while uttering "choo choo" over and over again.

Well, that was back in the fall of 1998... I can hardly believe how quickly the time has passed. That inconsolable little baby is now a second grade student at Blakewood School in South Milwaukee who enjoys reading, art, annoying her little brother and playing with our

two cats. Like most of the second graders who are members of St. Matthew's parish, she is preparing for her First Communion in April. I had no idea what a long and enlightening journey that would be.

The First Steps

I guess Kelsey's journey began back at age four when we enrolled her in the Sunday morning preschool program here at St. Matthew's. The highlight of that year was her role as Mary in the Christmas play. After two more years in the Sunday morning program, we enrolled our family into the Families of Faith program when Kelsey was in first grade. My husband Kenn have learned much about our faith and our-



Families are encouraged to learn and discover their faith together. Kelsey is shown here at a Families of Faith session from last September.



St. Matthew's Religious Education preschool helps children begin their faith journey. Kelsey's preschool class presented Jesus' birth story for family and friends in December 2002.

elves throughout the process. We realized there were a lot of other families in our own parish who were dealing with many of the same issues our own family was struggling with... namely trying to emphasize the importance of a faith-filled life to our children without letting distractions like work, school, swimming, soccer, gymnastics, social outings, etc. get in the way.

First Reconciliation

The first sacrament the second graders prepared for was First Reconciliation in December. The children attended special sacrament classes (in addition to their weekly or monthly religious

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education training) with their parents and Carol Daun, St. Matthew's Director of Adult and Family Ministry. They also completed a Reconciliation workbook where they had to write and draw pictures about such topics as "living the Great Commandment", "forgiveness" and "peacemaking". Throughout the process, they learned that they weren't being punished for their sins, but celebrating the gift of God's forgiveness.

During Reconciliation, there were four priests present to attend to the children and their families. When my daughter went into the confessional, I waited with nervous anticipation for her return. As soon as she popped out of the door, she exclaimed: "That was easy, Mom!" I breathed a sigh of relief.

First Communion

Currently, the second graders are well underway their preparations for First

Communion Day. Like Reconciliation, they have additional sacrament classes to attend and a workbook to complete. Two weeks ago, they were asked to bake a loaf of bread and present it during Mass to a person or a family they don't know. Attached to the bread was a card decorated by the kids that included their name, age, and one reason they were looking forward to First Communion. (My daughter's reason was so she could know what the communion wafer tasted like!) The card asked the person who received the bread to keep the child who made the bread in their prayers during this special time.

The children will also be writing a letter to Jesus which will thank and praise Him, tell Him something he/she has learned during the preparation process and explain to Him what they are looking forward to regarding First Communion. Look for these letters to

be displayed during the weeks prior to First Communion. The children are also asked to decorate a banner that will add to the church environment during Communion weekend. The preparations will culminate during Jesus Day — a 3-hour day of reflection designed for the child and their parents.

Having not grown up in the Catholic faith, I had no idea how much the kids would be studying and learning this year. Personally, we look forward to sharing Kelsey's First Communion Day with her grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who will be travelling from Ohio to celebrate with her.

Please keep all of the children preparing for First Communion in your thoughts and prayers. You can witness them experiencing their First Eucharist during Masses on April 21st and 22nd.

— Article by Amy Cicigoi

Winterfest 2007: a Fun Time for All

This year's Winterfest at St. Matthew was held on the evening of Saturday, January 27th following the 5:00 p.m. Mass. There were many activities available for people of all ages. Many of those in attendance chose to start the evening out with some dinner, which was being served in the downstairs cafeteria.

Chili Contest Always Popular

Some of the items on the menu included hot dogs, cotton candy, different flavored sodas, corn on the cob... and of course chili. It seems chili was almost the main event at Winterfest this year, with a number of parishioners entering their 'secret' family recipes into the annual contest. The hungry folks

who bought enough tickets to sample all the recipes got to cast their vote for their favorites. And yes, the results are in! Shelly Madden, one of the organizers of Winterfest, proudly announced, "The chili winners were as follows: People's Choice Award-Lisa Cheaney; Most Spicy Chili- John Koleske; Honorable Mention-Julie Anderson; Honorable Mention - Troy Fields; Judge's Overall Chili Winner - Bill Madden." Shelly also thanked all our chili contestants after the event was over. There is of course 11 months left to perfect your recipes for Winterfest 2008!

Maybe you didn't realize it... but there is a lot of work that goes into putting an event like Winterfest together for



Hot Dog! Fr. Bill gets ready to serve up another delicious Winterfest hot dog.

the 300-400 folks who attended. Organizer of this year's event included Barry Johnstone, Shelly Madden, and Tom Schneider. DJ Marty Chilson provided some great tunes, including the Macarena and the Hokey Pokey to keep the crowd going well past 9:00 p.m. The event wouldn't be possible without other volunteers too, including those who helped the organizers create, serve, and cleanup from the fun, family community builder. Tom Schneider explains, "I really want to thank everyone, including our maintenance staff, and especially Dan Wachs, for setup and cleanup help."

Another popular activity was this year's raffles. People attending got to buy a ruler with a number on it for the low price of \$1.00. If the winner's number was called, they got to select a pack of beer, soda, or sausage. Some people even managed to come away with all three! Other Winterfest activities included bingo in the Gathering Space and games for kids in the downstairs hallway.

It's all About Community Building

Some have asked: "How are the proceeds used?" Tom Schneider explains, "Our goal is not to make money, but to build community and just have some fun together. It is used as part of our operating funds and helps support our welcoming activities including the pizza parties for new members. This year it will help pay for a "Parishioner Appreciation Spaghetti Dinner" on April 28th. Our staff will "throw a party" for all those who share their gifts so generously with the parish. This year, we will especially express our gratitude to those involved in "food ministries," e.g. Fish Boil, Sandwich Sunday, those serving the meal program of St. Vincent de Paul, hot lunch, Market Day, Matthewfest/Winterfest, etc."

If you didn't get the chance to attend this year's event, you missed out on a lot of fun...and be sure to mark your calendar and help out at next year's Winterfest.

— Article and photos by Robert Tabern



Holy Name Society Card Social

Fun and games were on hand Friday evening, February 16, as the Holy Name Society hosted a evening of card playing and food with funds raised earmarked for this summer's youth mission trips. Shown clockwise beginning at the top center: (L to R) Tom Collins, Bob Ilk, and Ray Sagan; John Bissel and John Weiss, card players in action; Rudy Sutschek and Tom Collins.

— Photos by Mike Kuick



St. Matthew Parish Buzz

Produced by the St. Matthew
Communication Committee

Rick Barribeau
Amy Cicigoi
Kenn Cicigoi

Robert Tabern
Carol Tenner
Tom Schneider

Submit Photos, Stories or Story Suggestions
to the Communication Committee at
thebuzz@stmattoc.org • 414-764-9617

Pancake Breakfast Helps Raise Funds for St. Matthew School 8th Grade Trip to Washington D.C.

Eighth graders and their parents teamed up on Sunday, February 18 to serve a Pancake Breakfast in the school cafeteria. Shown clockwise beginning at the top left: (L to R) Yong Ae Staszak and Lori Miller; Bruce Lambert; Lynne Szydel; John Szydel.