



# Our Lady of HOPE

CATHOLIC CHURCH

## Be Not Afraid:

*Welcoming Fr. Michael Troha for Our  
Upcoming Parish Retreat - Join Us on Feb. 3*

Fr. Michael Troha, a priest of the Diocese of Cleveland for 42 years, is no stranger to retreats. He has led more than 60 past retreats, and we will be blessed to have him join us for our retreat with the theme of “Be Not Afraid.” The retreat will include talks by Fr. Troha, along with time for reflection and small-group discussions.

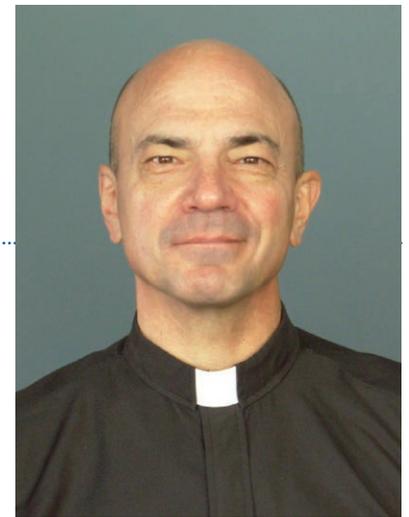
“The goal will be to reflect on how much the Heavenly Father loves you,” Fr. Troha says.

For Fr. Troha, this retreat topic is especially profound because it lays the groundwork for a life of stewardship. He hopes people can come, set aside the other things on their minds, and truly find rest and an increase in faith. He looks forward to presenting the basics of stewardship.

“I want to help attendees understand stewardship,” he

says. “It’s not a program — it’s a call to follow Jesus in a certain way. No matter where you are in life, this retreat will help you to trust God more, love Jesus more, and be more open to the Holy Spirit.”

In 2005, Fr. Troha attended a Msgr. McGread Stewardship Conference in Wichita. Ever since, he has been working to implement stewardship at his parishes. He is the pastor of Immaculate Conception in Willoughby, Ohio. The parish



*Fr. Michael Troha*

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“Stewardship is not just a program. It’s a way of life. It’s not all about money. It’s the thanksgiving way of life. It’s recognizing God’s gifts to us, accepting them, increasing them, and returning them.” — *Fr. Michael Troha*

## Making Time for Prayer: *A Stewardship Resolution to Keep*

**T**ime is one of the greatest gifts God has given us in this life. And yet, how easy is it for us to take it for granted, especially when it passes by so quickly — it seems the days, weeks, and months go by faster and faster with each new year.

Like all gifts from God, time was given to us for a purpose. Because God is the author of time, only He knows how best it can be used to make us happy. How do we find out what God wants for each of us in this earthly life? Just like any loving relationship, to know the desires of the lover, one must first get to know the lover himself.

As it turns out, our Divine Lover wants nothing more than an intimate friendship with us for all eternity. We can begin that relationship right now. The means through which we become friends with Jesus in this life can be summed up in one simple word: Prayer.

Prayer may be a simple word but putting it into practice takes effort. Nevertheless, if there is one goal that is worth all the time and effort we have on this earth, it is to develop the habit of prayer. Prayer is, essentially, a loving relationship with God, without which our lives are meaningless. St. Augustine says, “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” St. Teresa of Avila further explains, “Prayer is nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent heart-to-heart conversation with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved.”

The new year is a great time to ask ourselves if we need to renew our commitment to prayer and to think of ways to cultivate that intimate friendship Jesus wants to have with us.

While there are numerous ways to pray, every spiritual authority includes a few essential elements in developing a life of prayer. Here are some of them:

**Make it a daily affair:** Even if it means starting at five minutes a day, set aside some time each day for conversation with Jesus, and then build from there. Proceed in little steps.

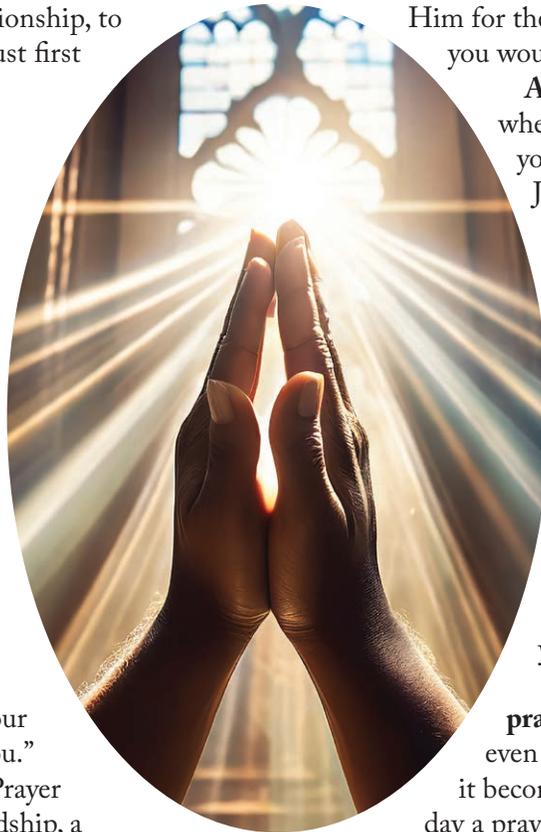
**Give it some structure:** Reading the Scriptures and other spiritual material or studying a picture of Jesus and reflecting on scenes from His life are some great ways to focus your mind on the Lord. Include opportunities to talk to Him, thank Him, express sorrow, or anger, and ask Him for the desires of your heart. Talk to Him as you would your closest friend.

**Allow for silence:** Choose a quiet place where you won't be disturbed and where you won't disturb others. Remember, Jesus often withdrew to pray. This makes sense. People who truly love each other often desire to be alone. Jesus loves each of us individually and wants to whisper words that only we can hear. Silence is necessary if we want to hear Him speak to our hearts.

**Make time for family or group prayer:** Praying with others strengthens us, holds us spiritually accountable, and is a good example to others. Try praying the Rosary with your family.

**Turn everyday undertakings into prayer:** When we perform any action, even the smallest one, out of love for Jesus, it becomes a prayer. We can make our entire day a prayer if we remember this simple concept.

**Don't be discouraged when you encounter struggles:** However, distracted we become, or however unfruitful our prayer seems to be, Jesus is always pleased when we spend time with Him. In fact, it is often when we persevere during difficult times that He is most pleased. And when we feel unworthy, we should run to Jesus in prayer. He alone holds the key to our healing and happiness; He is the only one who can transform us into the persons He created us to be.



# 2024

## Embracing Stewardship in the Year Ahead

Dear Parishioners,

As we stand on the threshold of a new year, it is a time of reflection and renewal, an opportunity to set intentions for how we can grow in our faith and continue to live out our calling as stewards of God's blessings. The concept of stewardship is deeply ingrained in our Catholic faith, reminding us that all we have comes from God and should be used in a way that glorifies Him.

The beginning of a new year is often marked by resolutions — commitments to change, to improve, to grow. This year, I invite you to consider making stewardship a central theme in your resolutions. To live stewardship as a way of life, we must embrace it with a heart open to God's grace, and with practical, intentional actions. Here are some suggestions on how to do just that:

**Gratitude:** Start with a heart full of gratitude. Each day, thank God for the gifts you have received — your family, your health, your talents, and your resources. When we recognize that all we have is a gift from God, it becomes easier to share those gifts with others.

**Time:** Make prayer — Stewardship of Time — an integral part of your life. Seek God's guidance in your stewardship journey. Commit more time to daily prayer, including praying with your spouse, your children, and before meals. Perhaps consider praying the Liturgy of the Hours in the morning and evenings. Pray for wisdom in using your time, talent, and treasure to further God's kingdom and help those in need.

**Talent:** Identify your unique talents and how you can use them to serve others. Whether it's sharing your skills in music, teaching, organization, or any other area, offering your talents for the benefit of your parish and community is a meaningful form of stewardship.

**Treasure:** Stewardship also involves managing our financial resources wisely. Commit to tithing or giving

a percentage of your income to support the work of the church and charitable causes. In doing so, you invest in the spiritual and physical well-being of your community.

**Formation:** Deepen your understanding of stewardship and its role in your life. Read the Scriptures, study Catholic teachings on stewardship, and engage in discussions with fellow parishioners. This will help you grow in your understanding of this calling.

**Community:** Build strong relationships within your parish community. In unity, we can accomplish more. Working together as a community of stewards, we can make a significant impact on the world around us.

Remember that stewardship is not just a one-time commitment; it is a way of life. It's about consistent, intentional choices that reflect your love for God and your neighbors. By embracing stewardship in the year ahead, you will find fulfillment, purpose, and a deepened connection to your faith.

Let us embark on this new year with hearts filled with gratitude, dedication, and the desire to be faithful stewards of God's blessings. May our collective efforts bear witness to His love and grace in our lives and in the world.

May God bless you abundantly in this coming year, and may you find joy and peace in living stewardship as a way of life.

In Christ,

*Fr. Paul Ferguson*

Fr. Paul Ferguson  
Pastor



# Questions and Answers

## *About Our Annual Stewardship Renewal*

**T**his month, we begin our Annual Stewardship Renewal. This is an exciting time of year when each of us is called to assess the various blessings that God has bestowed upon us. It is an opportunity to reflect on how God is calling us to use those blessings to grow closer to Him and to help build His kingdom on earth. The following Q&A about our Stewardship Renewal should help you and your family as you discern your commitments to Our Lady of Hope this year. Please take some time to look over the materials you will receive in the mail and pray about how God is calling you to grow in your faith in 2024!

quality of service in addition to its quantity. In looking through the opportunities for ministry available at the parish, you may find yourself drawn to a new ministry you haven't tried before or new ways to share of your time with God to enrich and enlighten your prayer life. So, even though your current level of parish participation might not change drastically, how you participate may evolve as you grow in living the stewardship way of life. Even if you end up continuing to participate in the same ministries as you have in the past, marking and turning in a Commitment Card means you have reviewed your present ministries and recommitted yourself to them.

Commitment Weekend  
is January 20-21.  
*Don't forget to bring your  
Commitment Card to Mass!*

**I feel like my life is already too busy with family and work obligations. I barely even have time to relax. How can I possibly share my time and talents with Our Lady of Hope?**

We all have many obligations to our families, jobs, schools, and other endeavors. But we also all have the same number of hours in the day with which to accomplish these things. The issue is not how much time we have, but how we prioritize that time.

Before you fill out your Commitment Card, take some time to reflect on your priorities, and where God fits into your day-to-day life.

**I am happy with my current level of parish participation. Why do I need to keep filling out a Commitment Card every year?**

As part of the renewal process, we must consider our current level of participation in parish life at Our Lady of Hope. Sometimes, the call to stewardship involves the

**I'm not very active in the Church and, frankly, feel like it may be too late to get involved. Why should I fill out a Commitment Card?**

It's never too late to renew your faith life, and filling out a Commitment Card is a simple step through which you can immediately re-enter the life of the parish. Our parish community is not here to judge you but to welcome and nourish you in your faith journey. Begin by checking the box that says, "Attend weekly Mass and Holy Days of Obligation," and take some time to discern additional ways in which God is calling you from that starting point.

**I'm physically unable to attend Mass or be active in parish life at Our Lady of Hope. Is there any reason for me to submit a Commitment Card?**

Of course! Your prayers are just as important to the success of our parish community in carrying out its mission as ministry participation and financial contributions. Take a moment to look over some of the opportunities to spend quiet time with God listed in the "Stewardship of Time" section of the Commitment Card and take a step towards growing in your relationship with Christ and His Church.

**I'm reluctant to make a financial pledge for the year in case my circumstances change and I'm unable to fulfill it. Should I?**

Your Commitment Card is not a legally binding contract; it is a pledge of intentions. Make your pledge based on what you are setting out to do to give back to

# Stewardship Renewal

God and do your best to fulfill that pledge. If your financial circumstances change, your gift will likely change, as well, but it is still important to prioritize God first. Nobody is going to send the bill collector to your house if you can't fulfill your pledge due to a change in your financial situation! But we've all got to start somewhere, and we must begin our commitment by writing down our goals for giving back of our gifts to God.

**I've expressed interest in a ministry in the past by filling out a Commitment Card, but nobody from the parish ever followed up with me about it.**

While we do our best to consistently follow up with everyone who has shown interest in the opportunities for ministry at Our Lady of Hope, we are human, and we sometimes fall short in our follow-up. If this has happened to you in the past, we sincerely apologize, and we encourage you to renew your interest in any activities in which you might like to participate by filling out a Commitment Card this year. Every year, we go into the renewal to make sure that everyone who has expressed interest is contacted with more information, and we will do so again this year.

**I don't agree with everything that goes on at Our Lady of Hope. I feel like when I fill out a Commitment Card, it condones the things I disagree with.**

In filling out a Commitment Card, you are not making a pledge between yourself and Our Lady of Hope; you are pledging yourself and God. Disagreements occur in life. This is a part of being human, and we respect the opinions of every member of our parish family. But it is of utmost importance that each of us fulfills our discipleship of Christ by growing in our relationship with Him and utilizing the gifts He has given us to carry out His mission on Earth, regardless of disagreements or misunderstandings. Beyond helping the parish, filling out a Commitment Card expresses a devotion to spiritual growth and a strong belief in the Catholic faith.

## THE EUCHARIST

*Our Love and our Life*



### 2024 COMMITMENT CARD

First & Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: First & Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse: Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

*After completion, please bring this card to Mass or mail it to the parish office. Thank you and God bless you!*

*Every parish family receives a special "Stewardship Package" in the mail that further explains our parish's vision of stewardship. It includes a booklet that describes every ministry in the parish, as well as your Commitment Card.*

## *St. John Neumann:*

### *A Stalwart of Catholic Education*

In the Catholic tradition, the name of St. John Neumann shines brightly as a pioneer of Catholic education. His life and work have left an indelible mark on the Catholic Church in the United States. Born on March 28, 1811, in what is now the Czech Republic, Neumann's journey from humble beginnings to becoming a revered saint and bishop is a testament to his unwavering commitment to Catholic education.

From a young age, Neumann demonstrated a thirst for knowledge and a strong desire to serve God. His family's modest background did not hinder his pursuit of education. He learned several languages, a skill that would prove invaluable in his later work with immigrant communities in the United States. In his early adulthood, Neumann entered the seminary in Bohemia, where his academic achievements and profound spirituality marked him as a promising candidate for the priesthood.

In 1836, Neumann decided to follow his calling to serve the Catholic Church in America, a decision that would set him on a path of great significance. He was ordained a priest and embarked on his mission to the United States, a country filled with immigrants yearning for spiritual guidance and education.

St. John Neumann recognized the pivotal role that education plays in nurturing the faith and intellectual growth of the Catholic community. He observed that Catholic immigrants in the United States often faced challenges in maintaining their faith and identity in a predominantly Protestant society. Neumann saw education as a means to preserve and strengthen the Catholic identity in the face of adversity.

Neumann's early experiences in America led him to understand that the establishment of Catholic schools was essential. These schools not only provided quality education, but also instilled in students a deep sense of Catholic

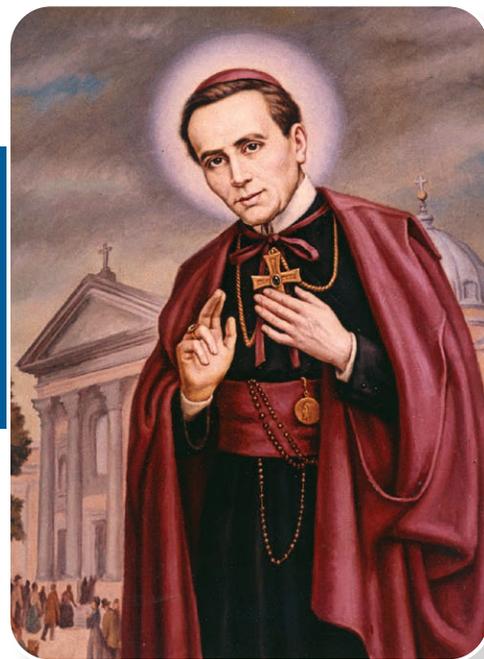
identity and values. He worked tirelessly to establish parochial schools, create a diocesan school system, and promote the importance of education for Catholic children.

In 1852, he became the fourth bishop of Philadelphia, where he continued to dedicate himself to the establishment and expansion of Catholic schools. During his tenure, he increased the number of schools and introduced various reforms to ensure high-quality education. Neumann encouraged religious orders to come to the diocese and assist in the education of children, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds.

In addition to this work, Neumann played a crucial role in the foundation of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, a religious congregation devoted to education and social services.

St. John Neumann's commitment to Catholic education left an enduring legacy. His influence is still felt today, as Catholic schools across the United States continue to thrive, providing students with a strong foundation in both faith and academics.

In recognition of his remarkable life and work, St. John Neumann was beatified in 1963 and canonized in 1977. His life was a testament to the power of education in preserving the faith and nurturing the spiritual growth of Catholic communities, especially in the United States. St. John Neumann's commitment to Catholic education continues to inspire educators, students, and the faithful, reminding us of the enduring importance of quality education in the service of God. His feast day is celebrated on Jan. 5.





# Catholic Schools Week 2024

## *A Celebration “United in Faith and Community”*

As Catholics, we understand that parents are the primary educators of their children, but it is not an effort that parents must undertake alone. A Catholic education also guides children as they learn about the faith and teachings of Christ. With this in mind, each year, Catholic schools across the country take a week at the end of January to celebrate the importance of Catholic education and those who are involved in our schools.

This year, Washington Catholic Schools will participate in Catholic Schools Week, along with schools across the country, from Jan. 28 through Feb. 3. This year’s Catholic Schools Week theme is “Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community.”

“We take this week to recognize those who sacrifice to make Catholic education possible in Washington from generous donors, parents, relatives, and the parishioners of Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church,” says Karie Craney, Principal of Washington Catholic Middle and High School.

Throughout the week, the schools plan to celebrate all the many blessings they have been given through Catholic education. Some of the activities include all-school Mass, a silly safari, bowling with families, and the Amazing Grace. The school also completes a weeklong service project through Penny Wars, donating funds raised to various charities and people in need.

Mrs. Craney especially looks forward to the diocesan Mass at St. Benedict’s Cathedral, in which all the schools of the diocese are represented and participate. This and other

key activities during Catholic Schools Week offer a unique experience set apart from the rest of the school year.

“This week is truly a weeklong celebration and school team-building event that reminds each of us of how special we are in God’s eyes and how blessed we are to teach, work, and learn at Washington Catholic Schools,” Mrs. Craney says.

As an alumna of Washington Catholic herself, Mrs.

Craney feels honored to lead the middle and high school students in our Catholic school. Her husband and their three children are also alumni of the school.

“I want to be able to share what I was blessed to receive at Washington Catholic with many future generations — a strong foundation in faith and academics,” she says.

Catholic school attendance offers a different experience than public school education. Being able to discuss matters of the faith, receiving the Eucharist, and celebrating Mass are some of the ways that Catholic education is truly set apart. There is also a smaller student-to-teacher ratio in the Catholic system.

“Parents should consider sending their children to Catholic schools because we are supposed to educate the whole child, from academics to athletics, but also spiritually and mentally through faith and morals,” Mrs. Craney says. “Based on our size alone, as administration, we know all of our students and work with them and their families to make sure they receive the best education possible to meet their child’s needs.”



*For more information about Washington Catholic Schools, visit [www.ccwash.org/school](http://www.ccwash.org/school).*

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## Be Not Afraid *continued from front cover*

has experienced increases in spiritual growth, parishioner ownership, parishioner involvement, and financial giving since embracing stewardship as a way of life.

During our upcoming retreat, Fr. Troha will give four talks — the first is titled God Loves Us, and the second talk will be on the topic of discipleship. To supplement his presentations, Fr. Troha will use personal stories.

“God gives us an invitation to discipleship,” Fr. Troha says. “We have to be willing to serve Him as a disciple and steward.”

The third talk will be on how to be a disciple, and the fourth will cover taking responsibility.

“I want people walking away knowing how to be generous with their lives — their time, talent, and treasure, and how to be prayerful and joyful,” Fr. Troha says.

Please join us for the retreat on Feb. 3 — starting with Mass at 8 a.m. — and make the time to reflect and grow in faith. Fr. Troha looks forward to being with us for this time and discussing a topic he is so passionate about — stewardship.

“Stewardship is not just a program,” he says. “It’s a way of life. It’s not all about money. It’s the thanksgiving way of life. It’s recognizing God’s gifts to us, accepting them, increasing them, and returning them.”

*Plan to attend the retreat with Fr. Troha on Feb. 3, starting at 8 a.m. Following the opening Mass, the retreat will proceed in the middle school gym with breakfast and presentations.*

