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APRIL 2026

Were you *there*



Poeppings continue “I Thirst” program in St. Paul’s

The March 15 post-blizzard conditions might have made it difficult for parishioners to travel to St. Paul’s Church in Sauk Centre, but they did so in memory of He who traveled a much harder road: The Way of the Cross. Amy Poepping and her family have brought the “I Thirst” Stations of the Cross program to the Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community for years, musically illustrating Jesus’ Passion and Death with “O Sacred Head Surrounded,” “Were You There,” “Stabat Mater” and other sacred songs.

“It really does follow the stations quite well,” Amy said. “It’s not every station, but it does lead you down the way, down the Via Dolorosa, and so it really brings you from the beginning to the crucifixion, and that’s the core of it.”

The ACC has hosted the “I Thirst” Stations of the Cross since 2021 — with the exception of 2025 — and it started years

prior to that, when Amy came across the “I Thirst” program by Tatiana Cameron, purchasing it and the rights to use it.

The program was held on Palm Sunday in previous years, but for 2026, the Poeppings opted to move it to a Sunday that was less busy for local musicians. The Stations of the Cross had Nancy Schleicher on the piano and organ, Jacque Polipnick on the flute, and Monica Becker on the violin; Eugene Poepping provided narration, and Amy and her daughters — Mara Kirckof, Gabrielle Poepping and Gemma Larson — sang.

“In the past, we have involved a few other people,” Amy said. “Now, the singing is just our family because we have that family harmonious blend; it just feels natural singing with each other, and we’re blessed to have the musicians that really add and deepen the beauty of this presentation.”

I Thirst

from front

Over the years, the Poeppings have adjusted the program by adding and removing songs as needed.

“There have been some small tweaks,” Amy said. “For instance, the first year, we didn’t include the very last song, which is ‘I Believe,’ which is really the Creed being sung. One year ... I added a prelude song called ‘Feel the Nails,’ but we didn’t include that this year. ... It’s just a feeling. I look at it, I listen to it and I just go with that emotional feeling that this is what I want to do this year.”

It is a touching experience for Amy to sing for the “I Thirst” program, walking the Way of the Cross in song.

“I try to put myself in the songs,” she said. “When I’m singing the song ‘Via Dolorosa,’ I’m imagining Jesus walking by and all the people watching him as He is carrying His Cross.

When I am singing ‘Silently,’ which is from Mary’s perspective, as a mother, I can imagine the sorrow she was feeling, so I have to be careful because it makes me want to cry, but I don’t want to be a distraction for people that are listening to it. All the songs are so beautiful; I hope it’s as inspirational to the people listening to it as it is to me when I’m singing because I’m so moved inside.”

The feedback Amy has received from the “I Thirst” program has been positive, including tears and return attendees.

“Throughout the year, I’ve had people stop me and



ask, ‘Are you going to do “I Thirst” again this year?’” she said. “I think the people who come are happy to experience it. I’d like to continue presenting it in the future.”

With the music of “I Thirst” following people through Holy Week and Easter, the Poeppings hope the Stations of the Cross will emphasize Jesus’ Passion and Resurrection in a way that brings parishioners closer to Him.

“We need to be thankful and try to live our lives that would make (Jesus) proud of us,” Amy said. “He’s given us so much, His love and mercy are so deep; He deserves our love.”



Setting aside the sacred weekend

Lord's Day Celebrations bring together people, families

Several Bible verses come to Shari Saltmarsh when she thinks about the prayers, meals and fellowship of the Lord's Day Celebrations: "Through Him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5), "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomes you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7) and "For with You is the fountain of life, and in Your light, we see light" (Psalms 36:10).

"I, personally, cherish setting aside the Lord's Day," Shari said. "It has enhanced our family life in ways of respect, loyalty, love, truth and friendship in the home. ... It absolutely is the highlight of my week. It is more enjoyable than any other holiday on the calendar. There is nothing more beautiful to me than seeing a family growing in holiness together by celebrating Lord's Day."

Fr. Greg Paffel brought the Lord's Day Celebration to the Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community after a Florida sabbatical; the community where he stayed celebrated the practice regularly, and so he and Father Jim Maderak invited the family of Adam and Shari Saltmarsh to a Lord's Day Celebration on New Year's Day, 2022.

The Saltmarshes took on spreading the Lord's Day Celebration, and as of February this year, they have 47 families who are practicing the commemorative meal. These can include potluck groups of 10-20 families or individual families celebrating in their homes on Saturday nights. The Saltmarshes have even held Lord's Day Celebrations while camping.



"In the biblical tradition, a new day begins at sundown, not midnight," Shari said. "The first day of the week was considered Saturday because the Jewish Sabbath ends at sunset on Saturday; the 'first day of the week,' Sunday, actually starts Saturday evening. The Bible records early Christians gathering 'on the first day of the week to break bread' (Acts 20:7). Since they followed this sunset-to-sunset clock, their 'Sunday' service often took place on what we call Saturday night."

Shari organizes and coordinates the Lord's Day Celebration potlucks which, depending on the number of attendees, are held at either the Saltmarsh home or the Centre for Christ in Sauk Centre. Everyone is welcome — single, married, dating, engaged, priests and religious — and is encouraged to dress well. People need not be Catholic to attend; it is for any denomination and age.

The evenings begin around 6 p.m. as people arrive and the children get some time to run around a little. Then, everyone goes to tables that are set for a fine meal, with an unlit candle, a bottle of sparkling juice and a loaf of homemade bread which is braided to represent the Trinity. After the father of the home begins with an explanation of the tradition,

and then everyone begins the prayers.

The prayer ritual includes the lighting of the table candles, praising God in song and reading and reflecting on the weekend's Gospel. The pastor or father of the household leads the prayers, reflections and discussions.

"It is important for our children to see their Dad as a spiritual leader in the home and to see their Mother encouraging and supporting their Dad to lead in this way," Shari said. "Celebrating Lord's Day has taught our children how much they are loved and appreciated not only by us as parents but also by the Maker of heaven and earth. It has taught them how worthy and appreciated they are on this side of heaven."

The bread and sparkling juice — the "wine" — are shared throughout the tables; as each person partakes of the wine, they share one thing they are grateful to God for, and as they take a piece of bread, they honor someone at table with them.

"Our focus in all seasons of life is to put God first and to be grateful to God in all things," Shari said.

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Vocations start at home

By Fr. Kevin Soenneker

We're just coming off of celebrating the Resurrection of Our Lord on Easter, and we will soon be celebrating Pentecost. We need to realize we are all given gifts to proclaim God's Word to profess the Resurrection. In light of the diocese's All Things New plan, we need to pray about an increase in vocations. We need more apostles, more priests and more religious to continue the work of the Church.



We are seeing some fruits of that prayer; the Holy Spirit is working even in our parishes. Another man in our ACC is pursuing a call to the diaconate formation, so this will be a fourth man in diaconate formation. Emma Meyer, our own Hispanic outreach coordinator, will be joining The Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, a religious order down in Florida. Also, I went on a seminary visit with a young man to The St. Paul Seminary March 5; he's discerning the priesthood.

This is a welcome start, but we're a long way from solving the priest crisis, and the solution starts at home. We need your help!

Jesus called his disciples by name, and I encourage families to foster that same mentality if you see a son or a daughter who may have a religious life calling. I ask you to be firm parents, bringing your children to Mass regardless of sporting events or family vacations while making sure they are receiving their religious education. I also ask parents to especially encourage at home the idea of young men being Mass servers, and finally, to pray together again as a family at home.

One thing I'm working on is coming up with some seminary visits just for our parishes. The diocese does do visits, but that can include over 20 young boys and can be stressful. I know that, for the young man I brought to The St. Paul Seminary, seeing the campus and seeing the fact that the seminarians are just normal guys trying to follow the Lord's call really was helpful in his discernment.

Many parishioners come up with ideas to solve the priest shortage. Many ask for homilies encouraging boys to join the seminary — which is a good reminder for us priests to do — but what is most helpful is for families to encourage and plant the seed when they see a young man who may have the qualities of being a good priest. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who calls, but we all must help cultivate the ground for their hearts to be open.

God Bless,
Fr. Kevin

Sealed with the Holy Spirit



Upcoming EVENTS

Divine Mercy Sunday

Sunday, April 12

St. Paul's Church

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament

1:00 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

1:00–3:45 p.m.

Chaplet and Consecration

to the Divine Mercy

Benediction 3:00 p.m.

Holy Mass 4:00 p.m.

Procession to Saint Faustina Chapel

Baptism Class

Monday, April 13,

St. Paul's Church meeting room

6:30 p.m.

If you are expecting your first child or it has been over three years since you last attended the class, please call our parish office to register.

Bethlehem Christian Families sale

Saturday, April 18

Representatives will be selling religious hand-carved olive wood artifacts that are made from the Holy Land at all the parishes.

Daughters of the King Retreat

Saturday, April 25

Feathered Acres, Belgrade

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

First Saturday Devotions

Saturday, May 2

& Saturday, June 6

Our Lady of Angels

Confession: 7:45 a.m.

Adoration: 8 a.m.

Rosary: 8:30 a.m.

Mass: 9 a.m.

ACC Picnic

Sunday, June 28

Sts. Peter & Paul, Elrosa

12–5 p.m.



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"It is an incredibly special time intentionally set aside to celebrate our Lord and Savior and recognize all He has done for us."

After all this, which lasts about 20 minutes, the potluck meal begins. Everyone fills their plate and waits for the head of the table to raise their fork before they all eat. Games and social time follow the dinner, and the celebration usually ends around 8 p.m.

The Saltmarshes aim to continue holding large-group Lord's Day Celebrations monthly while spreading the practice to more families inside and outside the ACC. To anyone interested in joining the celebrations, Shari can be contacted at 320-491-4858.

"The community can help by encour-

agement and prayer," Shari said. "Also, be aware of ... (any) family or individual who would be interested. You don't know what you don't know, so it's important for the community to help disciple others into celebrating the Lord's Day by this rich and beautiful tradition across our ACC and spreading into other ACC homes as well."

For Shari herself, she has enjoyed seeing God work in the people who come to the Lord's Day Celebrations, putting the Lord first as they enter the day of rest and renewal.

"I have really enjoyed seeing the friendships in Christ that have developed through these celebrations," she said. "Seeing the children eager to attend the next celebration has moved my heart, (as well as) hearing the children and adults talk about how God has been working in their lives (and) seeing them grow in holiness together as they praise God as a family as well as individually."



Praying for sunshine

ACC picnic at Sts. Peter & Paul set for June 28

What started as a parish picnic in Elrosa has expanded into a celebration for the entire Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community. This year's picnic at St. Peter & Paul in Elrosa is set for Sunday, June 28, the closest weekend date to the June 29 feast day of Sts. Peter and Paul, and there will be food and entertainment for everyone.

Diane and Robert Landberg have been chairing the parish picnic for five years so far, initially taking on the role at the request of Fr. Greg Paffel.

"We're like, 'Father, we just moved out here; we don't know anybody,'" Diane said. "He said, 'What a perfect way to get to know people,' and it has been a blessing."

The festivities will begin with a 10:30 a.m. Mass inside the church; the picnic follows the Mass and will continue until 5 p.m.

"There will be parking in the church parking lot because we're not having an outdoor Mass (and) we're not going to have that big trailer," Landberg said. "That trailer took up a lot of space; we couldn't have people parking in the parking lot at St. Peter & Paul's ... (and) that parking lot got so hot."

The picnic's spread will include pulled pork sandwiches, hot dogs, baked beans, chips, beer, milk and water, as well as root beer floats that will be served by local chapters of the Knights of Columbus. Mid-Flight is returning to perform live music for the event.

Kathy Knoblach chairs the children's activities for the festival; as of writing, there is expected to be a climbing wall from 1-4 p.m. as well as a petting zoo, a dice game and an inflatable for small children.

"Every year, we see more and more families coming," Knoblach said. "It's wonderful to watch the parents and children enjoy the day together."

For the adults, the St. Peter & Paul



Christian Mothers group will host bingo games. Axe throwing will not be coming back this year, but Diane is working on getting together a cornhole tournament with cash prizes.

The community can help with the picnic preparations as well — mainly by praying for the usual good weather.

"It's a joy getting to work with people

from the different parishes we otherwise wouldn't have met or gotten to know," Diane said. "We look forward to seeing and working with people we don't ever get to see. We have a big area, a big ACC, and it's an opportunity to get together and work and play with people; what a blessing."



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parishesontheprairie.org

In defense of the Faith

ACC parish mission set for July 12-15, featuring Fr. Menezes



Fr. Wade Menezes

In order to lead the world back to Christ, one needs to be adequately anchored and prepared in one's own life. This year's Parishes on the Prairie Area Catholic Community parish mission, featuring Fr. Wade Menezes, is aimed toward fortifying the faithful in being good, informed examples for those around them.

"I specifically asked Fr. Menezes to give this mission since many feel we are in a 'time of crisis' with the upcoming changes in our diocese," said Fr. Kevin Soenneker. "As this new reality can test one's faith to the core, I am excited to hear the hopeful message of Fr. Menezes. Each night's topic will speak into those challenges with hope in all the Catholic Church has and reignite our faith."

The conferences run from Sunday through Wednesday, July 12-16, and the overall theme of the parish mission is "In Defense of Truth and Faith: Our Catholic Calling," focusing on re-inspiring parishioners' commitment on pursuing and living

the truth of the Faith, fortified by the Sacraments and following the examples of the lives of the saints. In an age where "good is called evil and evil is called good" (Isaiah 5:20), it is important to be grounded in the Truth and the Sacraments, particularly the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

The mission's four nights are themed "In Pursuit of Divinely Revealed Truth and Faith," "Strengthened by the Sacraments," "Remaining Steadfast in Times of Crisis" and "Saintly Examples in Time of Crisis."

The schedule for each day of the mission begins with an hour of Confessions from 5:30 – 6:30 p.m., followed by the mission hour from 7-8 p.m. For July 12-14, the hour begins with exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament, followed by the mission conference and ending with Benediction; however, for July 15, the hour will instead be a solemn closing Holy Mass, with the conference portion being an extended homily. Additionally, receiving Holy Communion fulfills one of the five requirements for obtaining a plenary indulgence associated with having attended a parish mission.

The speaker for the mission will be Fr. Menezes with the Fathers of Mercy, a Kentucky-based missionary preaching religious congregation based in Auburn, Kentucky. Ordained in 2000, he has a Bachelor of Arts

Degree in Catholic Thought from the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Toronto, Canada, and dual Master of Arts and Master of Divinity Degrees in Theology from Holy Apostles Seminary in Cromwell, Connecticut, where he also received an Honorary Doctorate in Moral Theology.

Fr. Menezes has served as assistant general, director of vocations and director of seminarians for the Fathers of Mercy as well as the chaplain-in-residence at the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Alabama. The shrine and monastery are both affiliated with the Eternal Word Television Network, and Fr. Menezes has produced and hosted many televised and online series for EWTN, including "Gospel of Life vs. the Culture of Death" and "The Ten Commandments of Catholic Family Life"; he also hosts "Open Line Tuesday" for EWTN Global Catholic Radio.

Fr. Menezes will also conduct a book signing at the conference, and his catechetical books, CDs and DVDs will be available for purchase. His books include "Catholic Essentials: A Guide to Understanding Key Church Teachings" and "Stand Firm, Be Strong: A Men's Catholic Daily Devotional of Scripture and Saints."