

THE BAZAAR

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Almost every parish that I have been in has had 'big' parish events that happen annually and are meant to raise funds for either the parish or the school. Christ the King in Fort Smith had an annual spring bazaar that raised money for the school. St Theresa had Autumn fest in early October that raised money for the parish, St Raphael had Summerfest and Brewtober Chili fest that help raise funds for the parish and St Joseph in Tontitown had the Grape festival in early August which raised funds for the parish. Here at St Joseph in Conway, we have our annual bazaar in early August which raises funds for our school.

These events take months or even all year to plan. They often rely on a large committee and subcommittees to get the planning done. When it is time for the event, the team relies heavily on volunteers from the parish and school to work the event so things go smoothly for the one- or two-day celebration.

This year our annual bazaar will be held on Friday, August 1 and Saturday, August 2. There is no need in this article to describe the event; each of you know what happens at our Bazaar. What I would like to share with you is my perspective on why these annual events are so important.

Community Building: My first Bazaar was in 2023. As your new pastor looking at all of you from the viewpoint of an outsider, I was impressed. I know I heard the stories of the massive crowds from years gone by, but from my point of view, I saw an event that drew from the school family, parish family and the community at large. What caught my attention was everyone seemed to form one community as they worked the event and participated in the event. Conway may have Toad Suck Daze, but St Joseph has its Bazaar to try and continue building on idea that we are community that supports each other. If you never attended our Bazaar or have not been in a long while, make this year the year you return to the bazaar and see community building in the making.

Drawing us into Service: Like all major events, getting enough volunteers is always difficult. I know that the booths are manned by the different classes at the school, but we are always in need of more help. My experience as pastor over the years is that recruiting volunteers is difficult on an event such as our Bazaar. It's too hot, the hours are too long, or let the young people have their turn are just a few of the reasons I have heard from people not volunteering for parish or school events. Yet, events such as the bazaar are an opportunity to get involved in the parish, meet people, be of service to another and fulfill that need of helping another. Volunteering at the bazaar is a chance to be of service to God and neighbor not simply for this event but in other ways at St Joseph. Serving has the ability to focus the way you respond to Lord in every aspect of your life. This year, as always, we are needing more helpers. I promise your reward will be greater than you can imagine.

A common goal: The goal of most big events is to help the parish and school financially. Over the years, our Bazaar has done that by providing a little relief in a very complicated budget at our school. However, the real goal is to help our kids at St Joseph. We want them to go to a school which meets their needs academically, spiritually, socially, and in other ways which will allow them to be well prepared for life after St Joseph. Your attendance at our annual Bazaar is actually helping our children learn, grow and live their faith with the tools necessary to succeed.

Celebrating our uniqueness: Our annual bazaar may look like many other parish festivals in our diocese and across this country, but we are St Joseph's in Conway and we are a unique and wonderful parish with a lively faith. Participating in our bazaar contributes to making ours unique because you are there. You make the difference!

An opportunity to grow in faith: I am surprised each and every year I participate in parish events at how it deepens my own sense of faith, parish, and community. As I watch those around me enjoying the food, games, conversations, and friendships it gives me joy. If I am having these feelings, I know those who attend our Bazaar are having a heightened sense of faith and community. Attending our Bazaar will help you feel more Catholic and part of a community of believers who come together for the purpose of bettering our school.

A job well done: When the bazaar is over those who worked on the committees and the volunteers breathe a sigh of relief. We are done for another year! Some even conclude that they could not ever do it again. They are tired, exhausted, and just worn out. Yet, statistics show that the majority of committee members and volunteers return the next year because of the reward of being part of something successful. The feeling of exhaustion is replaced with joy. Helping out at our annual Bazaar will not only tire you out, but offer you joy as well.

The Bazaar this year is Friday, August 1st and Saturday, August 2nd. Please make plans to attend and enjoy this annual event. It will help our kids, our school, and our parish and you'll find yourself blessed. You'll even have the opportunity to dunk Father Daniel in the dunking booth! **Father John**