



In front, Jacqueline Weeman, family life and spirituality ministry director at St. Brigid, with Elaine Mariski and Jessica Barajas. In back, Celeste Betzy Samaniego, Elizabeth Zasandy and Chrissie Capron Walsh.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESSICA BARAJAS

# New mothers find support, friendship through Pacific Beach church

BY REGINA ELLING

Becoming a new mother to a tiny little human can be challenging in many ways; rewarding and satisfying, but also at times stressful and lonely.

Having friendships and a community of other mothers to rely on can make a huge difference, so St. Brigid Parish, a Catholic Church in Pacific Beach, has stepped in to help fill this vital need.

"Friendships with other mothers, whether older and more experienced or also brand new to being a mom helps many people realize they aren't alone, and their feelings are valid and real," said Jacqueline Weeman, family life and spirituality ministry director at St. Brigid.

The church offers several ways for young mothers to connect, such as a Young Mothers Fellowship and Prayer Brunch, a walking group and a children's Mass.

While many participants are St. Brigid parishioners, it is not required. The church also offers a group for couples, and some of the attendees are non-Catholics, while some couples are of mixed religions.

The brunch group meets for a few hours once a month. With children in tow, the mothers discuss a topic relevant to motherhood, pray together, share experiences and simply enjoy each other's company.

Jessica Barajas said she had the idea to start the moms' brunch when she was near the end of her pregnancy with her first child about eight months ago.

"When I was very pregnant, I saw another pregnant mom and that day I decided to contact Jacqueline and get the group started," Barajas said.

Her vision is to have a corps group of children who get to

grow up together with like-minded mothers and extended-version families, all sharing their spiritual growth together.

Members of the brunch group range from full-time working mothers to full-time stay-at-home moms, new mothers and even a couple of pregnant moms-to-be.

Barajas described the bunches as sometimes chaotic and sometimes peaceful, with mothers, infants and toddlers all together in one room while attending the sessions. The number of attendees varies from month-to-month.

"Mostly we're just sharing life when we get together," she said. "We're able to have a lot of good conversation, very meaningful. Definitely different from a typical Bible study."

The time the group spends together, members say, gives them a good perspective on motherhood beyond the grind of the day-to-day.

"As a new mom, your spirituality can be called into question. It's beautiful to hear other women and how they do motherhood and what they are working through," Weeman said of the brunches.

The biggest reward is having the ability to relate with other people, during what could otherwise be a difficult, lonely experience being a new mom, Barajas said.

Elaine Mariski agrees. She and her husband, Mark, have a daughter, Brielle, who recently reached 21 months. Elaine is pregnant with their second child. She became involved with the brunch group after being involved with the church's Young

Adult Married and Engaged group.

"Motherhood in general can be isolating, especially for those of us who are far from our families," Mariski said. "It's nice to get together with other young moms who share your experiences."

She explained that for her, one of the most rewarding aspects of the brunch group is having friends that have grown to become her adoptive family.

"When we get together, our relationships are beyond the superficial," Mariski said. "We can invite each other to our homes and be messy and busy and late and loud, and the other moms just get it and it makes sense."

The brunch group has already branched out into a walking group, as several of the mothers discovered they live near each other.

"A couple of us like to walk, so we get together every Wednesday," Barajas said. "It's nice since babies are welcome."

Barajas added that she hopes the mothers' group will continue to grow.

"I would love to diversify the activities that we offer; maybe a group camping day or a hiking event," Barajas said. "Anybody is welcome and I would love it if more people could join us."

The church also offers a children's Mass, with coffee and snacks afterwards, which Weeman said she plans to expand.

"We will soon have an open room with toys where the kids can play together and the parents can converse and get to know each other," Weeman said. "After that, we will start Sunday

St. Brigid Parish has started a mom-focused ministry