Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Muncie, Indiana
December 2009
May 2010
Abstract

Have you ever read *Chicken Soup for the Soul*? It contains many stories written by different authors about life and other various topics. Reading the stories is typically an uplifting and touching experience. During the 2008-2009 school year, I lived at the Saint Francis of Assisi parish and Newman Center near campus. I created a project involving the people there. The finished product is a book entitled *Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul* and is a compilation of shared stories written by student and resident parishioners of the Saint Francis community.

This project was challenging in many ways. Although the idea was generally well-liked, it was difficult to motivate many people to submit their stories. I had never participated in, let alone coordinated, a project of this kind. The stories and memories, written by our own community, are evidence that God is at work in our lives. Creating this book has impacted my life and the lives of the members of the Saint Francis community.

Acknowledgements

- I want to thank Mindy Bowman, campus minister at Saint Francis, who advised me during this project. She was especially helpful with proofreading and the printing process.

- I want to thank Tony Costello for providing the beautiful drawings on the cover of the book. He has been a good friend.

- I would like to thank Mark DiFabio for helping me when I needed feedback from parishioners. He directed me to the right people and got things moving.

- I thank my parents for their continuous love and support in all I do.
During my junior year at Ball State University, I lived and worked at the Saint Francis of Assisi Newman Center near campus. I participated in the Christian Leadership Program (CLP) and resided in the Newman House with four other young women. The Christian Leadership Program provides a way/an opportunity for young Christians to use and develop their leadership skills in a welcoming environment. One aspect of CLP that facilitates this leadership is the internship required of each participant. An internship is a unique project or undertaking that the student works on throughout the school year. For my internship, I created a parish book called *Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul*.

At first, I did not know what I wanted to do for my internship. I knew it should be something with which I would have fun, as I would be spending many hours working on it. School started and I was still hunting for ideas. I happened to begin reading a book that contained stories from numerous authors about random acts of kindness that they had done or received and how these acts had impacted them. I decided that I would like to make a book with the students and parishioners of Saint Francis, kind of like *Chicken soup for the Soul*. It would be filled with stories written by the members of the Church and be specific to the Saint Francis parish. Stories could be about anything that related to God.

I believed that student and resident parishioners sharing stories would be a great way to show the work of God in our lives and the good work that the Saint Francis community does. I also thought that making a book would allow people to learn more about each other. Having a parish book that families could keep and read at home would be a nice memento of what the Saint Francis community means to them (i.e. God, friends, faith).

I liked this idea and was excited to start on the project. I received approval for my internship and discussed the next steps with Mindy Bowman, our Campus Minister. It was
necessary to spread the word about this project to the students and parishioners so I began with an announcement in the bulletin. I also recognized that it would be helpful to address the parish with an announcement at the weekend Masses to capture their attention and to ask them for their assistance in creating this piece. In addition, I set up a table in the Narthex (where people enter and exit the Church) with an explanation of the project and how to contact me if there were any questions.

The first submission I received rather promptly and was from one of the resident parishioners who had written a poem about friendship. However, to my surprise, I hardly got any more stories. I wondered why. I heard a comment about not knowing what exactly I was looking for in these stories. I had been rather broad about the topic because I did not want to limit people and also because just about anything can be related to God. I decided that I wanted to put a separate flyer in the bulletin. It would stand out and since I could put something on the front and back, I could provide more details about the project and examples of submissions that I had received. The flyer (see attached) contained a description of the project and what I needed from the parishioners, two examples – one poem and one story – of submissions that I had received, and a list of questions to prompt readers if they were having a difficult time coming up with an idea of what to write. Our priest is not fond of flyers in the bulletin but will allow them from time to time. After making my plea and providing him with a draft and the opportunity to make changes, he consented. I printed hundreds of copies on pink paper to match the color of the third week of Advent and stuffed them one-by-one into the bulletins myself.

I had not gotten as far on my internship as I had expected, as the semester was coming to an end. I started to get discouraged but knew I had to try a different approach, as my former attempts had not worked to my satisfaction. I sat down with a well-known parishioner who is
very active at Saint Francis. He indicated several people in the parish directory who I should contact. Over Christmas break, I sent out over 50 personalized letters to resident parishioners, inviting them to participate in this project (see attached).

I finally began to get more feedback. I had been talking to people in person about my internship since I started, but I began to do this more frequently and with more of an effort. I even attended the parish fish fry and talked to people about my project as they ate. I was very much out of my comfort zone, as I did not know many of the people whom I asked to write a story. However, I received several great memories for the book at this event. I found that it was also important to follow up after talking to people about submitting a story. It helped them to have a reminder and to let them know I was expecting their participation. One parishioner was disappointed not to have a story in the book and told me that she wished I had reminded her again to write something. The personalized letters, emails, and conversations conjured the bulk of these written stories.

I learned that speaking directly to people or having one-on-one contact was a much better way to relate my project idea to them, to peak their interests, and to get them to want to participate in Saint Francis history by writing a story. My good friend, Joe Konopa, wrote the last story to be put into Vegetarian Soup. I was finalizing the formatting of the book and realized I needed one more piece. I had already talked to him several times throughout the semester about sending me a story, so I finally told him I had one more page to fill and that it had his name on it. (I also learned that sometimes you need to be assertive.) Joe came through and sent it to me right before I took the work to the printers.

The personal communication I had with him is what it took to elicit his story. Joe agrees, "I may not have written it if Allison didn't remind me multiple times. I might have forgotten -
but I did intend to do it even if she had only asked once. Good intentions aren't always enough, though. Allison of course understands this and did a good job doing whatever it took to persuade people to get the stories to her.

After I had most of the stories, I began formatting them into Microsoft Word. This part of the process was also very difficult. I will attempt to explain why. I had the page setup as "landscape" with two columns, corresponding to the left and right sides of the book. If you take a look at the book, you will see that with the way the pages are stacked, page 2 at the front of the book shares the same sheet of paper as page 55 at the back of the book, etc. Because not all of the stories are exactly one page, I had to use my critical thinking skills to format all of the pages correctly. This was very time consuming, as I also incorporated a variety of fonts and alignments into the pages. I decided to use several different fonts and page alignments throughout the book to make it more appealing to the reader and to help separate stories.

I, of course, read all of the stories at least once before I put them in the book. However, I did ask for help with proofreading. My Mom and Mindy Bowman, the campus minister, aided me in this task. We mostly left the stories "as is" and corrected major errors. It took several copies to get all of the formatting and pagination correct before I took it to Hiatt Printing for a sample copy and final review.

We ordered 800 copies of Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul. Many people ask me why I chose this title. There are two reasons. "Chicken Soup" already exists, and I did not want to copy that exact phrase. The other reason I chose "Vegetarian Soup" is because our priest, who has been at Saint Francis for over 18 years, is a vegetarian. His story is the first one in the book.
I have learned much from creating and completing my CLP internship. When I began my project, I had no idea what I was doing. I did not know the most effective way to tell people about my internship and to elicit feedback. I did not know how to format different works from different authors into one publication. In doing all of these things, I gained experience and a sense of accomplishment. *Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul* is something of which I am very proud. This project has impacted and taught me more than I anticipated. I learned that not only does approaching someone to talk about an idea generate an effective response, but it builds a personal relationship, as well. The most important things I took from this creative project were the friendships I formed with both students and resident parishioners. I continue to interact with these wonderful people at Newman Center events and at Mass, and am grateful for the time we have shared together.

This project has also impacted the Saint Francis Community. It has provided a way for parishioners to share meaningful stories with one another that they may not have told otherwise. Some of the memories are funny while others bring tears to your eyes or give you goose bumps. All of the stories show how God is at work in each and every one of our lives.

Reading the submissions makes you realize what a close and inviting community Saint Francis has. Writing a story for the book did this, too, for Tony Costello, who is a founding member of the parish (1971). "It gave me an opportunity to reflect back on just how important St. Francis has been in my life and that of my family," he recalled.

*Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul* has also been a topic of discussion in the parish. A friend told me that after Mass, he overheard two older ladies talking about the book. One asked the other if she had picked up her copy of the book and then exclaimed at how neat it was to read the stories from other parishioners.
As I anticipated, the book serves as a reminder of the Newman Center and Saint Francis community. Students who have graduated, like Joe Konopa, can read this book and recall their days at the Newman Center, “I think the St. Francis parish book is a fun thing to look back on and remember good times, now that I have graduated. My reaction to the book was that it was a very fun compilation and I was glad someone had decided to make it. I read pretty much all the stories and since then have read it cover to cover a couple times.”

Longtime parishioners, like Tony Costello, can relate to stories from when the parish began years ago. Costello commented on the project, “I thought it was such a great idea and that it would become an important part of our parish’s ‘institutional memory.’”

Costello also shared his thoughts about the book’s effect on the parish, “I hope that it has had a very positive impact on members who have taken the time to read it. I strongly feel it should be made available to all new parishioners, both student and resident, so that they may get a sense of the uniqueness of our parish.”

The outcome of this creative project was better than I had expected and its impact more significant. Not only did I receive general stories about how God changes lives, but specifically how the Newman Center and Saint Francis have impacted lives, as well. A few lines from my dedication I think sum up this experience nicely: “In reading these contributions from people I have lived and formed relationships with this past year, I realize that I am very blessed to be a part of this loving Saint Francis Community. The memories from students and parishioners years and years ago when the Saint Francis Newman Center began are still being made today. Over the years, many things have changed here and many things will change, but the love, joy, peace, and truth of the Saint Francis Community will always remain!”
March 9, 2009

Dear,

My name is Allison Meyers. I am a junior at Ball State, and my majors are Nursing and Spanish. I am in the Christian Leadership Program (CLP) at Saint Francis and live at the Newman Center. One element of the Program that CLP members take part in is an internship, which means spending time each week working on a project or ministry.

I have created something new for my internship that I would like to share with you. It is something that I am very excited about, and it is impossible to do without the Saint Francis Community. I am in the process of compiling stories about faith, family, traditions, friendships, etc. The best part is that these stories will be written by members of our Saint Francis Community! How neat will it be to share and to read stories about the ways that God has touched our lives?!?

I discussed this project with Mark Di Fabio, and he assured me that you would be a great person for this! I invite you to jot down a memory or story that you have and send it to me or drop it in the collection basket by Monday, March 30, 2009. These can be any length. Everyone has a story to share, and your whole family is welcome to participate! Some ideas for stories include, but are not limited to:

- what being part of the Saint Francis Community means to you
- a memory of how the Newman Center has made an impact on your life
- past/present family traditions and how these have drawn you closer to God and to one another
- receiving help when you weren’t expecting it or going out of your way to help someone else and how this made you feel
- why you are Catholic or why you became Catholic
- witnessing a spouse’s or friend’s journey to God
- something you would like to thank God for
- any funny stories you may have

Below are a couple of examples from fellow parishioners to inspire you! Please contact me if you have any questions at all. Thanks for your help!

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“FroJo” by Mark Di Fabio
St. Francis is more than just a place to worship; it is the home where we meet with our extended family weekly. Like a family, there are times when things are not always calm and pleasant. We had just gone through a tough period, with students lacking interest, programs at church in an unsettled state, and we had a couple of priests come and go within several days. There was just a real feeling among the parishioners that the St. Francis family was just not the same! I was at the Center one day and happened to meet our new priest, a very tall black-haired man with a very friendly smile and possessing a genuine interest in hearing about the history of the Newman Center. I had a feeling that this was a good man and one that would lead our spiritual family again. Two days later was the homecoming parade and, as always, several parishioners and alumni gathered at the Freiman House to watch the parade. The talk before the parade was that we had a new pastor and no one had really met him or knew anything about him. As the parade continued on and our Newman Float was coming into view, I told everyone that I had in fact met the new pastor and knew that he would be in the parade for everyone to see. As I leaned out to catch that first sighting of our new leader, I saw instead someone who would become our new “clown leader” .... FroJo! I could not contain myself and just had to exclaim to everyone, “Hey gang! See that clown? He’s our new priest!” As we all laughed, I realized it was exactly what we needed God to send us at that time for our parish.... a smile to our faces! (October 1991)

“Mass on the Grass” by Steve James
I was attending mass being held in the courtyard behind the Newman house. We had a pretty good sized crowd. It looked like rain might interrupt. Many of us prayed that it would hold off! Fr. Pat Click was concluding mass and the musicians announced that our final song would be “Send Us Your Healing Waters.” Yes...you guessed it! The rain began immediately. Wow! Prayer is powerful!!
Hi! My name is Allison Meyers, and I'm a member of the Christian Leadership Program (aka CLP) here at St. Francis. I live at the Newman Center with four other young women.

One requirement of CLP members is an "internship," which means spending time each week working on a project or ministry. My internship involves all students and parishioners at St. Francis! I will be putting together stories that you have written about faith, family, traditions, friendships, and random acts of kindness that have happened and are occurring in our daily lives. These stories should demonstrate how God has been at work in your life!

I am asking each of you to write a story or message about your faith, an event, or act of kindness that has significance to you.

Think of this as Chicken Soup for the St. Francis Soul!

This project is ongoing, hopefully for the entire school year, so you are welcome to submit stories at any time and more than once. Submissions and questions should be sent to me at St. Francis or by email. Thank you so much for your help. I am really excited about this project!

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Newman Center Phone: (765)288-6180

Have a story to tell but don't feel like writing it down? Send me an email or give me a call, and we can work something out!

Examples and Ideas (also see reverse):

Excerpt from "Laughter is the Best Medicine" by Kasey Butcher, CLP 2008-2009

I laugh a lot. Just generally speaking. I laugh when I'm nervous. I joke when I'm hurt. I giggle when I'm exhausted.

There's a different type of laughter though, reserved for friends and loved ones. The giddy, on the floor hysteria. The tears on the face. The late-night girlish giggles. There's been a lot of that going on lately.

Something about living in such an odd, loving environment (that isn't the home I grew up in) has sort of allowed my sense of humor and my silly side to flourish. I've been more outgoing in the last month than in all of college combined. Something inside that I've longed to be free for a long time has started to peek out.

CLP moves at such a fast pace sometimes that the only reaction we can afford to have is laughter. I'm reminded of my favorite line from Steel Magnolias: "Laughter through tears is my favorite emotion." Sometimes CLP prayer is the only time when we all see each other during the day. Sometimes prayer is the place where someone breaks down and we all help build her up. More often, however, it is the place where we take a few minutes after praying and talk. And laugh. Sometimes prayer itself is fodder for laughter.

There's a certain type of laughter reserved for the halls of the enchanted fairyland of the Newman Center. It's the type of laughter I hope you can find in your life too.
Excerpt from "God as a Companion" by Mike Haigerty, DRF

He doesn’t talk much
Not at all really
So He doesn’t get on your nerves
But you miss the conversation sometimes

He’s not a slob or a neat freak
So you can be how you want
Without bothering Him
But you miss the give and take sometimes

He’s always there for you
But He’s not there at all
In the ways you sometimes want
Or even feel you need

So sometimes you trade Him
For a sound, or a touch, or an image, or a feeling
But then you see

...
Vegetarian Soup for the Saint Francis Soul

Shared stories from student and resident parishioners of the Saint Francis of Assisi Community 2008-2009
"Preach the Gospel at all times – if necessary, use words.”
- Saint Francis of Assisi

The following stories demonstrate how we as Christ's followers preach and have heard the Gospel in our daily lives. For those who so generously shared their personal thoughts and experiences, I and the Saint Francis Community thank you. Also, thank you Mindy Bowman and Mark DiFabio for your guidance, Tony Costello for the beautiful drawings, and Mom and Dad for your continuous love and support.

In reading these contributions from people I have lived and formed relationships with this past year, I realize that I am very blessed to be a part of this loving Saint Francis Community. The memories from students and parishioners years and years ago when the Saint Francis Newman Center began are still being made today. Over the years, many things have changed here and many things will change, but the love, joy, peace, and truth of the Saint Francis Community will always remain!

- Allison Meyers, Editor
Christian Leadership Program 2008-2009
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A few years ago I moved into the rectory at St. Mary's Parish. Since I have been a vegetarian since 1972 and have also cooked for myself for many years, I decided not to take my meals with the priests living at St. Mary. I am on my own when it comes to my nourishment.

Due to my busy schedule, I eat out often (grab a quick meal before my next appointment). It is not unusual to see a parishioner or two at the chosen eating establishment. I mention all of this to help you understand the random act of kindness that I experience several times during the year.

After enjoying my lunch or supper, I proceed to pay my bill. Many times I discover that my meal has been paid for. Most often I do not know who has blessed my day. I feel very blessed and truly loved. It is another reminder that "God takes special care of fools, drunks, and clergy."
Words of Father Andre Sylvestre about Saint Francis Parish.

I am pleased to take this privilege to speak a little bit about my connection to Saint Francis Parish. First of all, please allow me to say that it is impossible for me to talk about Saint Francis Parish without making reference to Saint Michael Parish where I was the pastor for 14 years. So, please also allow me to begin my story with a short report about the twinning relationship between Saint Francis and Saint Michael parishes.

Well, Father John Kiefer and I were at the origin of the twinning relationship between Saint Francis Parish and Saint Michael Parish. Those relationships were about 10 years old when I left Saint Michael three years ago. They helped me understand the meaning of the "universality" of the Catholic Church and the notion that all the disciples of Jesus Christ are brothers and sisters, no matter which country in which they live and no matter which color their skin has.

During the 10 years of relationship between Saint Francis and Saint Michael, I witnessed the Medical Team saving the lives of many poor people in Haiti. I also witnessed it helping Chedler Joseph come to Indiana for surgery because nothing could be done for him in Haiti. Furthermore, after the surgery, Dr. Tom Mengelt and his wife Lee Ann Mengelt helped Chedler get a university degree in Port au Prince last year. Chedler Joseph's life is a true miracle and a living example of how love of the disciples of Jesus Christ can continue to do miracles today. I also witnessed how the Service Team brought joy and school supplies to the poor children of the School of Saint Vincent de Paul and how the Clohessy family provided a library to that school. I can say that the School of Saint Vincent de Paul is the most visible
presence of Saint Francis Parish at Saint Michael, for without Saint Francis to pay the salary of the teachers, there is no School of Saint Vincent de Paul. I finally witnessed how Saint Francis contributed to spread the good news of the Gospel throughout all the areas of Saint Michael through Radio Saint Michael.

I have been in Muncie for about two years. My coming here was a great adventure and I did not quite know what to expect. I knew that I would be homesick but I also believed that Saint Francis would alleviate the pain of my loneliness, because I expected to meet people whom I knew before. Indeed, I felt welcome and many people of Saint Francis helped me feel at home. As I said above, Saint Francis helped me understand the meaning of the universality of the Catholic Church. It means a lot to me.

I do want to finish my story by saying a special thank you to Father John Kiefer, the pastor of Saint Francis Parish, to all the parishioners of Saint Francis, especially those who support my studies. I also want to use this opportunity to thank all my fellow priests of Saint Mary Parish as well, especially Father Ed (pastor of Saint Mary parish) who provides me with room and board. Finally, a special thank you to two parishioners of Saint Francis: Carole Clohessy and Tony Costello, my official parents in Muncie, who did everything they could to allow me to come to Ball State. May God bless you all!

Father Andre Sylvestre
I was attending mass being held in the courtyard behind the Newman house. We had a pretty good sized crowd. It looked like rain might interrupt. Many of us prayed that it would hold off! Fr. Pat Click was concluding mass and the musicians announced that our final song would be "Send Us Your Healing Waters." Yes...you guessed it! The rain began immediately. Wow! Prayer is powerful!!

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What I like most about the Newman Center is how close it is to campus and how Father John realizes and knows that a lot of the congregation are college kids or college-related people. He mentions this numerous times during mass so we can relate God in our college lives.

"a lover's vineyard" by John McConnell

His whispers send chills down my spine
closeness to the Lord is like the sweetest grape
from our choicest vine
just one taste supplies no escape
His Spirit offers me a new shape...

He sets His eyes on me, I transform
selects in me and presses that which is pure
it's a mysterious place, but my face remains warm
after He ferments me with courage to endure
I am left alone with my heart to cure...

with detail He distills, refines
then hides me away in a darker fashion
confined to the barrel, I will not resign
but come out sweet, complete with the aroma of compassion
He has filled my cup, my ration...

and as I am poured out for those in need
He glimmers within the beauty of my soul
with every ounce of me, may I feed
for within His refinery He has made me whole
in a lover's vineyard He is my console
"Community" by Jamie Johnson

When I think of St. Francis parish, what I think of most is its sense of community. This has been the most consistent aspect of my participation in this church for the 13+ years that I have been here. The community spirit is so precious here, so warm and welcoming and unconditional in nature that it is hard not to be drawn in by it. My personal sense of religious conviction and the level of my catholicity has an inconsistent nature to it -- sometimes I am very devout and pious, other times I am very lazy and unmotivated with regards to my convictions. In any case, I have always, ALWAYS felt welcome and included here. I have never felt judged or scorned in any way. That is easily the most attractive component for me about our community life: no matter how much I am doing to deepen my personal catholicity, whether I am working hard at it or just sort of coasting along, St. Francis has accepted me and embraced me.

It is hard for me to single out one or two dramatic examples that can highlight this; one almost has to just take my word for it and imagine the many ways in which this might be true and real. But I think many people already know exactly what I am talking about and don't need any dramatic examples. This attitude I am describing has been spoken to me before, many times, by people whose faces I know very well because we have seen each other here for years. It really is a common bond.

It's possible that this bond isn't immediately noticed by our "target" audience, the college students. Indeed, I wouldn't be surprised to find out that college students are kind of thrown off by this when they first arrive to our parish. That is one of the reasons why we have such well-run programs here that are aimed specifically at the college students -- we want to get that very group in place and comfortable as soon as possible. Then after awhile, the St. Francis magic starts to happen. After three or four years of hanging out here and getting to know the place better, college students (and other newcomers) begin to feel the power of this community. They see the bonding and love and consistency and stability of this community. They begin to realize
that, yes, life is more than just college or just what they were used to back at their home parishes. They begin to sense the timelessness of a really good faith community.

Every time I look up and see faces at church -- a family with kids or a couple of friends or a person sitting alone or a whole group sitting together -- I see real life. I see the stories of life in the Kingdom of God as it is being lived out by real people. Everyone in this room has something in common: we all are living our lives and learning more about God's ways as best we can. Every college student once was a young kid with no real independence yet, tagging along with their parents everywhere they go; the college students at our Masses can look up and see plenty of these kids and parents in this room. Every elderly person was once a college-age person; the elderly folks can look around the room and see the promise of our future and the college students can look around the room and see the elderly and be reminded that life is long and will be filled with many joys and sorrows, many failures and successes. Every college kid who came from a broken home and has to figure out the meaning of life with this added circumstance can look around the room and find plenty of other kids who came from broken homes, whether they were broken up a year ago or forty years ago. Every middle-aged adult who has learned to be grateful for and humbled by the gifts of God can look around this room and find others -- young, old and in-between -- who are likewise grateful and humbled, or who are not quite there yet and don't recognize their gifts, or who have reached depths of gratitude and humility that makes theirs look like a tiny mole hill compared to the other's mountain. It's real life and it's all here!

Community -- it is all of us together. We all have something to give and something to receive here. And it is such a wonderful feeling. There is such awesome strength in numbers.
"Those were the days, my friend!"
by Patricia Eckstein Chambers

The 1980's dances at St. Francis used to attract not only parishioners but many guests. One dance I remember particularly well there were guest appearances by famous singers!

Bob Pinger and Dale Hahn were the "Boos Brothers" (Blues Brothers). They really did a great although hysterical act! Their lip sync was perfect!

Then arrived another memorable act... "Smooth And The Gang" featuring Mark DiFabio, Lenny Baierwalter, Mike Eckstein, and Gary Watson. Jackie Stout made them all matching shirts which were really bright and flashy. They actually got together and practiced so they would be professional!

Enough said...they were trying to be so serious but failed! Everyone laughed and shouted! It was just too much fun!

Our dances on Saturday evening were held in the old church part (now Narthex). We had to move the alter and chairs in and out. There was a committee for that, or at least many hands made light the work. We fixed food and there was a drink or two around.

We had such good, clean fun! Our church friends were also our social friends. Those were the days of just plain crazy and silly! Those times helped to build unity and strength individually and collectively.

We grew together to help build the St. Francis of Assisi parish of today!
“Thursdays are special” by Allison Meyers

During the second semester of my freshman year at Ball State, I decided to join a small faith group at the Newman Center. I had never been to the Newman Center before this. I was a bit nervous about going to a new place by myself and about not knowing anyone and did not know what to expect. I walked in the door and Dan McElroy greeted me excitedly with a smile. He welcomed me into the Newman Center, and little did I know it would become my home (literally).

That semester I became friends with five remarkable people – Dan, Chris, Derek, Patrick, and Renee. The six of us still continue to meet on a weekly basis. This is our fifth semester. Some of our group are graduating and will not be here next year. It is a bittersweet time of change and growing up. Although not as often, we will still meet for small faith group in the years to come.

“The Islander” by Ralph Bremigan

Many of us academics (or at least mathematicians?) are introverts. We earned doctorates because we were happy to sit by ourselves, reading, analyzing, pondering, planning, observing, synthesizing, and evaluating. Then we get jobs, and discover how much of our time will be spent as part of a team (as much as self-absorbed folk can ever constitute a “team”). We come to treasure the time away from committee meetings and report-writing.

And so, I am grateful to be an “islander” at St. Francis, one of the rugged individualists who is allowed to plant whatever he or she likes (OK, so long as it is not too tall) in our assigned parking-lot “island” gardens. I leaf through gardening catalogs, searching for hardy plants that can stand being asphalt-baked through the summer. I observe the annual cycle (daffodils, iris, daylilies and coneflowers, asters and mums; bagworms), analyze what works and what doesn’t, wonder what happened to some of the things I’m sure I planted, try to correct bad decisions from the past, and
dream about what might still work. I water and I weed, alone or with my dear family. I snip at the trees when no one is looking. Occasionally, I grow a few vegetables, to see whether anyone actually is looking. I’m happy when people tell me they enjoy the flowers (being particularly vain about the iris). I don’t have to clear my ideas with anyone. Committee meetings and reports are not required.

Thank you, St. Francis, for letting me cultivate my island, and my Inner Hermit.

“Chain of Love” by Kelly Spieth

Last November, I adopted a soldier who is serving in Iraq. I send him a package of food and other treats every other week. It really means a lot to them to get letters and packages from “home.” A couple of weeks ago I went into the dollar store to pick up some things to send him: a portable grill, some charcoal, and some packages of meat to grill, just some things that they might appreciate over there. When I went to check out, the girl behind the counter saw what I was buying and made a comment. I told her that I had adopted a soldier and that I send him things to make his weeks better. She finished ringing all the items up and told me the total ($19). I went to swipe my credit card and it wouldn’t work. She then informed me that the store only accepted my credit card as a debit card, which I didn’t have it set up to be. I searched my pockets and found that I only had $11 in cash. I looked at her and then she did the most amazing thing she could have then. She walked around from behind the register, pulled out her credit card, and swiped it saying, “It’s for a good cause.” I thanked her and gave her the $11 in my pocket and walked out of the store amazed by the generosity of that girl. She didn’t have to help me (or the soldier), but she did anyway. Looking back on this I am still amazed how she could help a complete stranger. I’m not sure if either of us realized it at the time, but she changed my life. Now when I see someone in trouble, I do my best to help them out because I was there once and I hope, like in Clay Walker’s song “Chain of Love,” that the people I help out won’t let the chain of love end with them.
“Praying Angel” by Marilynn Kallen

This is incredible and it is a true story. Just this past summer a neighbor, only about 30 years old, fell and fractured his ankle. Several nights later his wife woke up in the middle of the night and saw that her husband's head was incredibly swollen and she was not sure if he was breathing. She called the paramedics and they came to the house. While they were there a man came into their bedroom and prayed at the foot of the bed. The paramedic asked if she knew the man and she replied that she did not. He was asked to leave. Before he left he said that he had prayed and that her husband would be okay. He was taken to the hospital with no pulse and revived. He was in intensive care for several days and was unconscious. The outcome looked bleak. Then suddenly several days later he came out of the coma and made a complete recovery. The family asked everyone in the neighborhood if they had known the man who came to pray at his bed so they could thank him. No one had ever seen him or heard of him. To this day his identity remains a mystery. Could he have been an angel? This is truly a miraculous story.

“Saint Francis is” by Steve James

St. Francis... A peaceful easy feeling. Comforting... inviting... loving. Safe... warm... friendly. No strangers, just friends we had not met! A place where we could find ourselves and find God. A place where God put people who would forever impact our lives. What a sweet gift... thirty some years... most of my life... friends and lovers who we hold so close. Please God, let a new generation come to experience your sweet gift... St. Francis!
“Haiti Medical Mission” by Connie Baldwin

My fondest memories associated with St. Francis are related to the Haiti Medical Mission. I have been to Haiti 5 times. There have been multiple wonderful moments I have experienced while I was there but two are especially meaningful.

Lee Ann Mengelt asked Father Andre to take us to one of his mission churches to go to Mass on Sunday. She wanted us to experience what it was like for the villagers to walk to Mass on Sunday. It was a 2 hour walk through fairly rugged terrain. This was a piece of cake for Father Andre who never complains about anything, but a little rough for the rest of us pampered Americans! When we got there, Father realized he had forgotten the hosts for Communion. Father went to one of the villagers homes and obtained a large loaf of bread. When he got back to church he asked if there were any Eucharistic ministers there. I am a Eucharistic minister so I was able to assist him and another village priest to break the bread for Communion. This made me in awe of the universality of our most special celebration of the Eucharist. I also felt very special to be able to break the bread that was to be transformed into the Body of Christ to be shared with our Haitian brothers and sisters.

My second experience was in our medical clinic. We had a young man who was seriously ill with malaria. Dr. Rousseau decided this man needed to be monitored overnight in the dispensary across the street which is a clinic run by Sister Josette. He and I accompanied this man there. A Haitian nurse came to help me start an IV. She did not speak English and I did not speak Creole. Dr. Rousseau was my interpreter and he had stepped out. We were able to communicate without speaking. We started the IV together. This also showed me the universality of nursing. While not quite as awesome as the breaking of the bread it was nonetheless another one of those special moments in Haiti.
“My Faith Community” by Doris Rhea

My husband, Leroy, and I have been a part of the Newman Center and St. Francis of Assisi Parish since the early 60's. We moved to Muncie in 1958 and shortly thereafter Fr. James Bates snagged us and we were involved. Fr. Bates had a way of making you want to be part of helping to build a better place for the students. We belonged to St. Lawrence Parish because our children were in school there but as the children got older, they wanted to be part of St. Francis too. My husband, Leroy, was a member of the Foundation Board that searched and purchased the property that is now the Newman Center and St. Francis of Assisi Parish. Five of my six children and I are all graduates of Ball State University. My two daughters were married at St. Francis.

My son, Lee, was very involved in the Newman Center and served as President of the Parish Council. He always helped with the Annual Fish Fry along with all his buddies at St. Francis and was also a member of the church softball team. He and his wife, Barb Stout, were married at St. Mary’s Church by Fr. Bates and held their wedding reception in Stout Hall, which is now the Narthex. Stout Hall was named after Barb’s father and mother. Gene Stout also served on the Foundation Board with my husband. Three years ago my grandson, Gene Rhea, was married by Fr. Bates at St. Mary’s Church in Indianapolis.

My husband and I worked diligently on the Annual Art Brunch held each Spring when Fr. Bates was Pastor. We always had so much fun and met so many people from St. Mary Parish, along with those we knew from St. Lawrence Parish, who worked each year on the art brunch. We made friends with many of the priests who were assigned to St. Francis, including Fr. Pat Click, Fr. Dave Hellmann, and many more too numerous to mention.

I have been involved with RCIA at St. Francis for over 20 years. First as a Sponsor, then as a team member, and finally as director of the program. It has been a very rewarding experience for me and I have learned so much about my religion from the
people that God has sent to us over the years. I also am involved as a reader, Eucharistic Minister, Mass Coordinator, serve on the Liturgy Committee and am a past President of the Parish Council.

St. Francis of Assisi is a loving community and it has helped me through some very sad times. The one that really stands out is in October 2002. I received news on the morning of October 1st, that my son, Lee, had suffered a heart attack in his sleep and died. Fr. John Kiefer was at the hospital before Lee’s body arrived and before his wife or I got there. He was so helpful and made calls for us to the children’s schools and tried to make things as easy as he could for us. The funeral was attended by the priests that had been an important part of Lee’s life and many people in our community and in the pharmacy community all over the state (both my husband and Lee were local pharmacists and had practiced in Muncie). My heart was broken and the Sunday after the funeral, I didn’t think I could walk in that Church because I thought people would feel sorry for me and I didn’t want that. But I was wrong. What I felt when I walked in Church was love from an entire community. They taught me that I could get through the heartache and continue to function.

I needed to learn the lesson “that God doesn’t give us more than we can handle”. All we have to do is put our faith in Him and He will help us through all the pain and sorrow in our lives. Four months later, I again received news that my son, Dan, had died of a heart attack in his sleep. Again, Fr. John and the community of St. Francis were there for me and helped me through the sadness. It isn’t easy to this day. There were two holes in my heart, but, with the help of God and my faith community of St. Francis of Assisi, I have learned to live each day to the fullest and to always remember to be kind and loving to everyone I come in contact with during my daily life.

One of the happiest memories I have of St. Francis of Assisi is when we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. We repeated our wedding vows at the 11:15 AM Mass on Sunday with all our friends and family and our faith community in attendance. It was a beautiful Mass.
“Friends” by Debbie Starost

What made us friends in the long ago, when first we met?

Well I think I know.

The best in me and the best in you hailed each other because they knew

That ever and ever since life began, our being friends was part of God's plan.

"Fire Alarm Test" by Jerry and Carol McConnell

Back in 1975 when we were new to St. Francis Parish, it didn't take us too long to get involved in the events of the parish. One event we will never forget (and we know a certain priest, Fr. Pat Click, will never forget) was the welcoming party for the newcomers that we helped host.

We can still picture our 3 year old son, Tommy, running down the stairs after pulling the fire alarm, scared to death that he was in trouble. It was so embarrassing with all of these new couples at this event. The really awful part was that we had to wait until the Fire Department came out to turn off the alarm, because no one knew where the key was to turn it off.

The St. Francis Parish community is a lot like the firemen were on this embarrassing day. They have always been there for us - to share in our ups and downs of life.

GOD IS GOOD!
“A Saint Francis Romance” by Herb Saxon

My wife, Deb, and I both knew Jamie Johnson, our Music Director, before we met each other. Deb was already singing in the Music Ministry when Jamie invited me to sing with the group. He stood me next to her and the rest is musical history.

“A Saint Francis Marriage” by Timothy Lacey

After Larry died and Mary Jane passed away, I asked Ann to have dinner with me. We dated for a few months and decided to marry. We were married at Saturday night Mass and are very happy.

Lou Ann Kuzma

These are some lines from Murder in the Cathedral, a drama by T.S. Eliot. “Destiny waits in the hand of God, not in the hands of statesmen who do, some well, some ill, planning and guessing, having their aims which turn in their hands in the pattern of time.”

“Ethiopia” Anonymous

Our six year old was going to Saint Joseph school where they still had nuns. One evening when we were saying blessings before supper, Michael spoke up and said, “We are praying for a kid at school. Can we say a prayer for him, too?” His father said, “Sure, Michael. What is his name?” Mike broke into a smile and innocently replied, “Ethiopia” to the delight of the whole family who all said a prayer for the child Ethiopia.
“Washington D.C. Service Trip” by Derek Naber

It was Spring Break 2008. I had signed up for the Newman Center Spring Break Service Trip. This year we were going to D.C. Before we left for D.C., there was a huge snow storm. I had a bunch of homework, and I was not feeling well. I also was not very good friends with anyone going on the trip. I really did not want to go.

Once the trip got started, I was surprised how funny and how friendly the entire group was. There were ten of us, and one other guy besides myself. Peter and I soon became close friends, and I had a lot of fun. After the weeklong trip was over, it turned out this was the best Spring Break I had ever had.

“In General” by Patrick Beyer

My first experience with Saint Francis occurred at the Ice Cream Social. I would attend Saint Francis for Mass but did not become active at the Newman Center until a good friend in my dorm, Derek Naber, convinced me to join a small faith group.

There, I made many good friends, and we continue to meet weekly. The friends I have made at Saint Francis will last a lifetime.
“God, Free Will, and Harry Potter” by Dave Izzo
I believe the Lord works in mysterious ways, but I never would have seen this coming. I believe the Lord has worked through J.K Rowling's Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince to explain the gift of free will.

We humans have free will. I believe that God does everything for a reason, including letting humans have free will. Because of this ability, some people have chosen to turn away from God and others have fully chosen to devote their lives to Him. I believe that the Lord prefers it this way. I believe He prefers not to make all humans devoted to Him by default, but rather letting man choose to come to Him via free will.

Now to explain what Harry Potter has to do with it. I believe this quote explains all this. Not directly of course, but covered in the layer of the world of Harry Potter and there none the less.

"But he understood at last what Dumbledore had been trying to tell him. It was, he thought, the difference between being dragged into the arena to face a battle to the death and walking into the arena with your head held high. Some people, perhaps, would say that there was little to choose between the two ways, but Dumbledore knew -- and so do I, thought Harry, with a rush of fierce pride, and so did my parents -- that there was all the difference in the world."

“A Heavenly Reminder” by Susan Meleason
Some people see a penny on the ground and simply keep on walking. Others see the same penny and think of it as a sign from above. Every time I see a penny on the ground, I always pick it up, knowing that an angel is thinking of me. I have definitely noticed that I end up finding a penny on those days when nothing seems to go as planned and everything that can go wrong, goes wrong. However, that one penny reminds me that I am not alone in the world and makes my whole day bright again! Sometimes I pass my heavenly reminder on to a friend who is having a bad day to let them know that an angel is thinking of them as well!
I met Lee Ann Mengelt soon after she started attending St. Francis of Assisi. She didn't know a lot of people yet so I invited her to sit with my husband and me at Mass. This was the beginning of a friendship that was to change our lives! Fast forward to the year 2002. Our son, Brian, rejected the transplanted kidney he had received from his dad, Mike, twenty-one years before. Brian began dialysis. His name was placed on the cadaver waiting list and the search for a new kidney began. Because of health problems I could not donate a kidney. We were surprised and grateful when Andrea Weber wanted to give Brian her kidney. She was too young. Another friend started being tested as a donor but was found to have a medical problem so she could not be considered a donor. Weeks passed and Brian continued to go to work. After work he would get hooked up to the dialysis machine which cleansed his blood. The entire process took close to 3 hours. He did this 3 times a week. Brian doesn't drive. He needed rides to and from his treatments. The rigors of dialysis were beginning to affect him and ME! As I drove through Ball State campus, students would cross in front of my car...I began to wonder what blood type they may be?!? I even went on the Internet to see if we could buy a kidney! What scary and desperate thoughts! Lee Ann called one day and asked how the kidney search was going. I told her we were still praying and looking (at anyone crossing the street!). Lee Ann said she would like to give Brian her kidney! Oh! What a generous woman! Lee Ann had never had major surgery in her life! She didn't think it would be that difficult for her! I sure didn't want to talk her out of her desire but I also knew from the first transplant the trauma her body would feel. Lee Ann passed all the tests and surgery was scheduled. The Saturday evening mass before transplant Fr. John gave both Brian and Lee Ann the Sacrament of the Sick. I cried so hard I trembled. I was so scared for both my son and my dear friend. Only God has control over the outcome of things. He guided the medical team and was with the donor, Lee Ann, and the recipient, Brian. He was with all the family and friends who waited for news about our loved ones. The 6 hour surgery seemed to go fast and the surgery was a success! Our prayers were answered! They both
healed well and were back to living full lives again! What a glorious gift Lee Ann gave to my son! She gave him the gift of life! We thank God for this very special miracle! (This was no coincidence that brought Lee Ann into our lives! It was a Godincidence!)

"Church Softball" by Carl Pieroni

In the mid 80s I wanted to start playing softball again and decided to try to play for the St. Francis softball team in the local Church league. I went to practice and discovered we all made the team. Are we going to be competitive?...are they good players?...do they play to win? Those were some questions that floated in my mind.

Before the first game of the season (as with every game played) both teams joined in for a communal prayer asking the Lord for His blessings on us all and for the safety of everyone involved. That seemed like a good way to start a Church League game. Also in that game I noticed that there were good players on our team and felt we would be competitive in the league. My last question, "do we play to win" was also answered as well. During the game there was a disputed call and a heated "discussion" during which our pitcher was ejected from the game for throwing his mitt in the opposing dugout (then and there I decided I liked this guy). "Yeah, these guys play to win" I thought and at that point I then hoped I would fit in and be accepted by the team. We went on to play together for about ten or so more years.

The second thing about the team was that after games the players and their families would go out for pizza and beer. I bet there were no other church league teams that went for pizza and beer after their games. My two children both enjoyed the after game ritual (children did not get beer) and looked forward to my games. Actually they were more interested in the post-game festivities than the games themselves.
“Tabernacle” by Sue Nuñez

We started coming to Saint Francis in the fall of 1999. Our son, Keegan, was in kindergarten. He was fascinated with the chapel. When we walked in the church, Keegan always wanted to go pray in the chapel before mass. You could see him kneeling before the tabernacle with his hands folded and head bowed. He was pretty regular about his prayer time before mass.

Then one mass, at the end of communion, you could see the Eucharistic ministers talking and some confusion. The mass ended and Father made an announcement, “if anyone knows the whereabouts of the tabernacle key, please return it after mass.” I looked at Keegan, and didn’t even ask him if he had moved the key! I said, “Where did you put the key?” He said that it was lying on the chair next to the tabernacle. He returned it to father and apologized!

And now you know why we have a back-up key!

“Quinceañera” by BreAnna Nuñez

Hello! My name is BreAnna Nuñez and I am not an ordinary type of girl. Both of my parents are Catholic, so I have been raised to be a full-blooded Catholic. I went through the usual steps of being a Catholic - Baptism at the age of 3, 1st Communion and Reconciliation in 2nd grade, and Confirmation at the age of 15. The typical steps for being a Catholic, but at the age of 15, I had the wonderful experience of a Quinceañera.

A Quinceañera is a celebration celebrated when a Hispanic-Catholic girl turns 15. She has a mass for her becoming a woman. Preparing for the Quinceañera took a lot of hard work and dedication. And let me tell you, making paper carnations wasn’t the most fun thing in the world to do!! Along with preparations for the mass, I took classes to prepare myself. Deacon Domingo and his wife, LiLee, mentored my parents and I one year prior to my Quinceañera. During this time, I learned about the Eucharist, becoming a woman, and the history of the Quinceañera.

The Eucharist is Jesus. Jesus died on the cross, creating what is the Catholic Church. When the soldier slit Jesus’ side, blood poured out, creating
what we celebrate in mass - Jesus’ blood - and his body, that they took down from the cross, is what we celebrate as Jesus’ body. And when you go and receive him at communion, it is just you and him. No one else!

Becoming a woman is a bigger role than I thought. Many responsibilities, God’s will, staying pure, and being his princess are things I must do to be a woman.

The Quinceañera is a tradition when a young lady reaches the age of 15, in which she has a celebration called quince años, which means 15 years. The custom dates back to the Mayas and Toltecas. It also dates back to the Jewish custom of presenting the young lady in the temple. The ceremony symbolizes the responsibility of the young lady at this time in her life to the human group of which she is a member. The way this custom is popularly understood today is the presentation of the young lady to society. In order to bring out the religious and spiritual dimensions, Catholics celebrate this custom with special emphasis on the awareness and sensitivity of the young lady in dealing with the values, concerns, and challenges of the Christian Community.

My Quinceañera consisted of 15 guys who were called Chamberlaines, 14 girls that were called Damas, and me, the Quinceañera. The number of girls and guys represented the 15 years of my life. My father and I choreographed a dance for all of the Chamberlaines and Damas to perform at the reception after the mass. It is the custom to do a dance.

The Mass of the Quinceañera started with everyone seated inside the church, the priests standing inside, and the Chamberlaines and Damas outside of the worship space. The music started and the Chamberlaines and Damas walked in pairs. Then the flower girls and everyone stood for my entry, and I walked in, wearing flat shoes to represent my childhood. I seated myself in the chair that was in the middle of the church in front of the altar. Mass went along like a normal mass, with the scriptures that I picked out: Jeremiah 1:4-10, I Corinthians 13:4-8, and the Gospel reading of Luke 1:46-55, The Magnificat. Then came the Rite of Quinceañera, which is the renewal of my baptismal promises, but this time I did it of my own free will and conviction instead of having my parents and godparents say it for me.

Then there was the prayer of dedication where I went and gave a prayer of myself to God. And then the Blessing of the Gifts. This is where I received my birthday presents, and they were blessed by the one and only God! My Uncle Joel and his wife brought up a pair of earrings that were blessed to remind me to faithfully listen to His word on my pilgrimage. Then I put them on. My Grandpa Lloyd came up with my tiara that was blessed so it will be a reminder for me on my pilgrimage that I am a beloved princess before Him. This tiara symbolizes my triumph over childhood and my ability to face the challenges ahead. I am God’s princess; He will be with me to support me and to guide me. Then Grandpa put it on my head. My Grandma
and Grandpa Núñez came up, bringing my scepter that is blessed as a symbol of responsibility to our brothers and sisters, to my family, community, Church, and the world, and that I am to be Christ to everyone I encounter. My Godfather in his Navy uniform brought up a rosary bracelet from Mexico. It was blessed to be used as a prayer tool for me on my pilgrimage. Then he put it on my wrist. My father, Oscar Núñez, brought up my shoes that look like Cinderella slippers. These are blessed and symbolize my journey from childhood to adulthood. And that my footsteps lead me to the eternal home with Him. My father put my Cinderella shoes on my feet, taking off my flat shoes. Then my Mother, Sue Ann Núñez, came up with my promise ring that has a heart hidden beneath the silver foil and bow. It was blessed to be a special symbol of the promise that I have made to keep myself pure for true love. A blessing for the ring’s glow to never fade and for God to stand by my side and to empower me to hold steadfast in my beliefs, even though criticism and peer pressure may occur. And that true love can only come through God in his time. And then my mom put the ring on my finger.

The Prayers of Faithful were read by my brother. I got receive Communion first in Spanish and then in English by the priests. Then there was the prayer after Communion and then the presentation to the Virgen de Guadalupe, where I walked to the picture of Mary and lit all 15 candles as the song “Hail Mary, Gentle Woman” played. Then the concluding rite, which is a blessing for me, and Deacon Domingo gave the dismissal and my mass ended with the song, “Awesome God”. And I got escorted out by my escort, Tyler Roderick, as I was then a full woman, and everyone followed me to go downstairs to the reception.

Once everyone got downstairs, the Chamberlaines and Damas made a tunnel for me and my escort to walk through. And I walked through the arch for the first time, marking a passageway. And then we got into our places to dance the choreographed dance my father and I put together. We had a special dance for all the girls attending the party. I made crowns with streamers for all the little girls. My mother and I were called to the dance floor where I gave her my porcelain doll to symbolize that I am not a little girl anymore and shall not have anymore dolls now that I am a woman. Then the rest of the night was left for dancing and ice cream and cake.

From celebrating my Quinceañera, I learned that my faith is really important to me. I learned that by listening to God and following his Church that He would help me in my life. I found out that God knew me before I was born. I learned about my friends and how I can count on them and look to them for help. Without the support of my family, I would not have had this celebration. They have a lot of dedication and love for all of their children. I learned that being a Latina is an honor! I thank my mom and dad for having me! When I grow up, if I have a daughter, I am going to have a Quinceañera for her and show her that being a girl is a special gift and lots of fun!
In being God’s Princess, I was able to find a scripture in the Bible about being God’s princess, which is Psalm 45:10-17. It says “Bride of the king, Listen to what I say------Forget your people and your relatives. Your beauty will make the king desire you; he is your master, so you must obey him...The princess is in the place —how beautiful she is her gown is made of gold thread. In her colorful gown she is led to the king, followed by her bridesmaids, and they are also brought to him. With joy and gladness they come and enter the king’s place. You, my king will have many sons to succeed your ancestors as kings, and you will make them rulers over the whole earth. My song will keep your fame alive forever, and everyone will praise you for all time to come.” Amen.

“Universal Ashes” by Sue Kuphall
While I can think of many reasons why St. Francis is so very special not only to me but as a faith community, it is no surprise that my personal St. Francis story involves the Haiti Twinning Ministry. My first trip to Haiti was during the second year the service and medical teams made trips to Plaisance and the now established relationship was still in its early developing stages. Those of us that have made repeated trips to St. Michael’s now attempt to plan our trips to be sure we are there for Sunday mass, as the celebration there with our Haitian brothers and sisters truly brings forth the reality that we are all “one” under God. Our team’s mass at St. Michael’s was the Ash Wednesday celebration. Father John was a member of our team and he had brought with him ashes from those that would be used at the Ash Wednesday mass back home. He and Fr. Andre combined the St. Francis ashes with the St. Michael’s ashes for distribution to us and our Haitian brothers and sisters. While it was a very meaningful symbolic representation of the budding relationship between the two parishes at the time, as I look back now we had no idea the blessing that this ministry would be to both St. Francis and St. Michael’s. It is my hope that this ministry is one that will continue to thrive and evolve for many years to come because it is has touched the lives of so many people and demonstrates that God does show his presence in miraculous ways.
"God as a Companion" by Mike Haigerty

He doesn’t talk much
not at all really
so he doesn’t get on your nerves
but you miss the conversation sometimes

He’s not a slob or a neat freak
so you can be how you want
without bothering Him
but you miss the give and take sometimes

He’s always there for you
but He’s not there at all
in the ways you sometimes want
or even feel you need

He knows you better than anyone
and loves you more than anyone
but never says it in ways you’d like
and sometimes you wonder
if it wouldn’t be better
to have someone limited that does say it
than “The Great Infinite One” who doesn’t

So sometimes you trade Him
for a sound, or a touch, or an image, or a feeling
but then you see
how they can never be
or even come close
to who He is to you
and you miss Him

So you return
to the not seeing
and the not hearing
and the not touching
and the not feeling
and you sigh and say
"Hello God, I'm sorry.
I missed you."

and you hear...silence
and you see...nothing
and your arms are empty
and you feel sad
but glad
that God is your companion.

"A Saint Francis Moment" by Tom McCarthy

The new construction was complete and the dedication of the new area was taking place. I expected a few speeches and maybe a blessing with holy water.

What followed was something that moved me a great deal. It was literally a baptism with oil rubbed into each corner of the Church, dedication of the altar, and holy water sprinkled liberally throughout.

Our founding priest, Father Jim Bates, Bishop Higi, and many other priests conducted this awakening of a new Church and charged us with its care. It is a rare occasion that a new Church is dedicated, and I am proud to have witnessed this one.

"Our God is an Awesome God!" Anonymous

In my 75 years of living, one of the most important things that I have learned is that God does answer prayers and often gives more than is asked for. Sometimes he answers in a different way than we ask, but with time it becomes evident that his response is for our benefit.
“Going Home” by Melinda and Jake Marhoefer

My husband and I are Pastoral Care Ministers, bringing the Blessed Body of Christ to residents of various nursing homes. Over time, we develop warm relationships with our residents and see them through periods of physical health and illness.

On one Sunday, we visited a resident who had recently returned from a period of time in Ball Memorial Hospital. We found him in his bed surrounded by family. He was so gaunt and lifeless that we didn’t really recognize him, and we stood at the doorway debating between us whether or not this was the man we knew and visited each week. A member of his family turned to us and confirmed that it was him.

We came into the room and introduced ourselves and asked if he would like to receive Holy Communion. The relative said that he had been unresponsive for several hours. We were about to offer the Lord’s prayer instead when he opened his eyes and nodded. I broke off a small fragment and placed it on his very dry tongue. I let a small amount of water drip into his mouth so he could swallow the Body of Christ. The relative, one of his two daughters at the bedside, wished to receive communion with him, so I broke the host and both daughters received Holy Communion with their father.

We learned he died that evening never again regaining consciousness.

Later we received a card from his daughter thanking us for our ministry and telling us, “He was waiting for you that last day and I am so grateful we could share communion and prayer. He passed peacefully. His family here on earth were there to help him let go of an aged and ill body and at the foot of his bed he saw his Lord and his family there to help him go home.”

Actually, we are the ones who are grateful to have known him and to have been with him and his family in his final hours on earth.
“He Got What He Asked For” by Margarita Baer

[Margarita’s husband was not Catholic but always made an effort to go to Church with their family. The following are a prayer and a story about his conversion to Christ.]

“Heal Mary, full of grace,
The Lord is with thee.
Blessed are you among women.
Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
- Lord, please take care of us while we are on the road.”

A little VW would take us for miles, discussing politics, religion, sports, childhood experiences, and the wonders of this great country. One thought was always lingering in my mind – In case of an accident, will I have the nerve to tell him, “You need to make peace with your Maker.”

Time passed, and the accident happened – I was not with him, but the Lord gave me an extra week. When I saw that time was coming, the Lord gave me the strength I needed, and 24 hours later, he passed away after receiving the sacraments. His last words were, “I feel so touched!” I knew he was in God’s hands. One of his famous lines had been, “I’m going to have a deathbed conversion and I’ll go straight to Heaven.”

“The Gardener” by Steve James

He who plants a seed beneath the sod and waits to see...believes in God! However, if there is no gardener, there might not be a garden! Fr Jim Bates was the gardener. He planted seeds in us students that have continued to grow. How God can grow in each of us and what we could accomplish with Him was the seed that Fr Jim planted. Every time we got together in fellowship the seeds were nourished. Little did we know that we were the garden and Jim was the gardener. God truly does work in mysterious yet wonderful ways!
“A Funny Story” by David Dale

Larry Wert – who has passed away – was a dear friend, a brother to me. Well he and I would often help take up collection. Larry was very short and had cerebral palsy (and an incredible sense of humor). Due to his unsteadiness, he would sometimes accidentally spill or drop the collection money, checks, and envelopes on the carpet as he passed the basket. He would always tease Father John saying, “You know, Father, any money that I find on the floor I get to keep!” And we would always laugh. He never kept any of it of course.

"Men's Prayer Group" by Bill Moore

I have been a member of St. Francis for twelve years. After researching the three parishes in Muncie, I knew St. Francis was the place for me with its music ministry, liturgy, and student population. Since being a student once, before cell phones and computers, I became involved in several student resident committees. This was a lot of fun and I enjoyed seeing the students grow during the year and tried to add some words of wisdom.

During the next year, I became involved in the men's prayer group. Our group has approximately 10 members who meet during the school year once a month at the host's home. The host prepares a program of his choice that lasts about forty minutes, and refreshments are served afterwards. Some past topics included, The Papacy, Haiti, Mary-Her Role in Devotion and Practice, Cardinal Newman, The Masons, Medjugorje, Sacrament of Reconciliation, Islamic Terrorism, Scientology, and The Amish.

Many of us have developed personal friendships with each other and with each others' spouses. Two years ago, Tom hauled me off to go snow skiing in Massachusetts. I think I overworked my guardian angels since I didn't break anything.
If you would like to join a close group of religious men, think and pray about becoming a member, open to residents and students. The St. Francis community has also allowed me to make Cursillo, be on CRHP Team 1 and become a Knights of Columbus member.

Thank you St. Francis for helping me with my faith journey.

“Our Pastor” by Patricia Eckstein Chambers

Father Jim Bates left St. Francis in 1982. Father Jim was the closest friend/priest our family ever knew. We had such deep respect and love for him. His weekly homilies were inspirational and motivating. He was a "father" figure to us.

Who could ever fill such a man's shoes? In walked Fr. John Kiefer. He was close to our own age. He wasn't going to be another Fr. Jim...he was Fr. John. He took days off and went to Ball State for an art degree. He was a priest yet a man who made time for himself and his parents.

We grew to know the man, John. He became our friend too. I have learned a great deal from him. When he takes time off it is to renew and re-recreate himself to better serve his people.

Fr. John is indeed a Christ-like figure. He doesn't judge. He makes mistakes but he also does so many good things!

For me personally he was very present when my husband, Mike, died. He accompanied me to pick up my son, Brian. He then drove us to the hospital. He prayed with us and for us. He came home with us and instructed us as to who to call and what to say. He led us through the most difficult days in our lives. We never felt alone. We only had to ask and Fr. John was there for us.

I have seen him on numerous occasions most recently at Pat Astemborski's house fire and at Johnetta Dolon's bedside... assisting those in need. He is a quiet, behind the scenes man. He truly IS Christ for us.
"Hugs" by Rachel Buskavitz

To those who know me, you might be surprised that I wasn't always a hugger. Strange, I know. I discovered my love when I traveled to Muncie and met so many people. Hugging just became a necessary part of life for me!!!

During my first year at Ball State, I met Katie Rada....amazing to say the least. One night, after a Newman Center event, Katie and I struck up a conversation about how many different kinds of hugs there were. We decided right then and there that it was imperative for us to explore all of these hugs as soon as possible, which led us to the kitchen of the Newman Center.

We came up with 12 different kinds of hugs: the arm lock hug, the tree hug, the lift-up-and-spin-around hug, the armpit hug, wrap-around-the-neck hug, the bear hug, the full frontal hug, the monkey arms hug, the sideways hug, the back pat hug, the A-frame hug, and the waist hug.

Needless to say, we documented all of these hugs with pictures and detailed descriptions of how to execute them and the downfalls of each. I laughed so hard my stomach was quite sore for a couple of days. It was wonderful to meet someone who shared my affinity for hugs to such an intense degree. :)

"Man Kingdom" Anonymous

Even the army of Roman majesty, which was want to conquer the innumerable forces of foreign kings, both on the ground and out in the sea, fled once, when the soldiers knew or believed that their general had fallen.
And so the Duke of the Normans, when he saw that the enemy had abandoned the advantage of the higher ground in pursuit, wheeled his horse around and stopped in front of his men. "Eyes on me!" he shouted, waving his spear through the air, threateningly. "You have been given the opportunity for immortal honor, yet you approach eternal reproach! Where do you hope to hide yourselves in your flight?"

...and that was a summary of the randomness of things that go on at the Saint Francis Newman Center every day.

“Good Friends” by Chris Schenkel

One of the best things in life is finding good friends in unexpected places. Nothing rings more true for me than the great relationships I have formed with my small faith group. What started as a project for Claire List, a Newman Center resident, resulted in putting six people together who would most likely not have met at all. We all have been getting together every week for three years now. Topics can range from issues of faith all the way down to wondering about each other’s weeks. It has truly been a great experience for me to get to know these wonderful people. It’s sad to think that our weekly routine will have to be broken as a couple of us are graduating. No matter though, for this group will figure out a way to meet if only a couple times a year. Good friendships last forever. Thank you, Allison, Dan, Derek, Patrick, and Renee for being the best SFG group ever, and thank you, Claire, for getting the whole thing started.
“Irish Fest” by Amanda DeRoche

So, what do a seminarian band, leprechauns, a blizzard, and Arnold Schwarzenegger have in common? Well, they made for one interesting weekend that taught me to be prepared, but to have fun no matter what life throws at you. This is the story of a mini senior year road-trip my best friend and I took in high school to an Irish Fest in Ohio.

This Irish Fest is an annual fundraiser put on by the seminarians at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio where some friends of ours are studying to become priests. My best friend, Krista, and I wanted to go visit them, give some support to their school, and take a little road trip before graduation (and our mothers were driving us crazy).

We drove three hours, had a great time catching up and blaring our favorite music, got to Irish Fest and had a blast all day and into the night. We listened to the seminarian band, watched Irish dancers, ate some great food, learned an Irish jig or two, hung out with our friends and the “leprechauns” (one of which, by the way, graduated from Ball State and who I spent some time talking with: BSU) and danced the night away! Sure it might sound cheesy, but you’d be surprised at how much fun this actually was.

When the night was over, we sadly said goodbye and stepped outside, but instead of seeing four leaf clovers and green grasses, we found ourselves in a white winter wonderland. A blizzard had hit Columbus and we hadn’t been paying attention to the weather and were not prepared for this. We started driving home, but couldn’t even go over 10 miles an hour because of the snow, ice, and car accidents, so we decided to get a hotel for the night. We pulled into the hotel across the street, full. Okay, full of people from Irish Fest, no problem, we’ll try the next one. Next one, full, another one, full, 10 minutes down the road – all full. What in the world?! What could possibly be
happening in Columbus, OH on a Saturday in March that filled up all these hotels? Is the President in town or something? No, but a governor was. Arnold Schwarzenegger was in town hosting his annual Sports Classic where hundreds of athletes from all over the U.S. involved in a huge range of sports come to compete and meet the Governator. What are we going to do now? Well, we pulled into the only restaurant open at midnight – Steak and Shake, of course – to figure out what to do. Sleep in the car, brave the drive home and hope for the best, drive a little ways and try for a hotel? We decided our safest option was to keep trying to find a hotel. So, we got a phone book and just started calling one hotel after another. About 45 minutes and 40 hotels or so later, we were about to give up and just sleep in the car somewhere, when Krista picked a random hotel on the last page of the list for one last phone call. They had one room open and just happened to be right around the corner, just set off the road a bit so we had missed it while driving. (Maybe the leprechauns we were hanging out with gave us some luck). We got to the hotel, swiped my credit card, got toothbrushes from the front desk, got some sleep, and hit the road in the morning to clear roads and clear skies. Well, we hit the road after attending Sunday morning mass at the Seminary, which was one more interesting experience added to the trip. There was a special bishop visiting that weekend and the seminarians wear full black suits to mass every Sunday. So, my friend and I went, wearing sweats and pj’s (hers with a big Mickey Mouse on the front), and were, of course, the only girls there – this was slightly embarrassing.

That was one of the best weekends of my senior year - road trip with my best friend, Irish dancing, getting stuck in a blizzard, and random luck. However, it did teach me to be a little more prepared, but at the same time, to roll with the punches and have fun with whatever life throws at you.
“Home Away From Home” by Gemma Park

St. Francis of Assisi parish has been truly a home away from Home to me and my family for almost 42 years. It certainly gives me the warmest feeling whenever the name St. Francis comes up. You see, my Dad took the very same saint's name when he was baptized during the middle age of his life, after his deep search and determination for religious destination, and lived his life very much like him until his death.

Almost 42 years ago, Fr. Jim Bates at St. Francis baptized Jae, my husband, married us, and later baptized all of our three children. I never forget the evening of our wedding rehearsal when he ordered various Chinese foods and fed all of the wedding party at his residence. As we have been through our own son's wedding years later, and have become more familiar to western culture, we now realize how much Fr. Jim loved us and enacted on behalf of our parents since none of our parents were able to be with us.

Now, we have entered our retirement era and feel more comfortable and at home when entering into our beautiful church. We feel like we are in the good hands of our pastor Fr. John, who diligently leads us in the right direction. Almost 12 years ago, I received a totally unexpected tragic phone call from our son, Michael, during the middle of the night saying that our little granddaughter, Sarah, was in trouble and that they just transferred her into Pediatric ICU. I was home alone while my husband was out of the country. Scared, upset, lost, and not knowing what to do, I spontaneously picked up the phone and called a good friend. She came over immediately, stayed by me, and comforted me to her greatest ability until I went to the airport.

So you see why I feel so fortunate to have a friend like her right here in the St. Francis community and why I feel right at home here at St. Francis parish.
Fifty-nine years ago while at a Christian Church Youth Camp, I found Christ. I came home from that camp and asked my mother if she would like to come to my baptism the next Sunday. Complete submersion baptism was the order of the day and I felt as if I had new life. Years later with adolescence dominating me, I drifted away from my church. Upon graduation from high school and entering college I sought knowledge in all that I could read. *Time/Life* magazine published a series on the great religions of the world. This series tugged at my soul and haunted me until I decided to talk with my roommate, Phil, who was a Catholic. I was nineteen and knew that Christ was calling me again. My roommate took me home for Easter - what wonderful services we attended with his family. Upon returning to campus, I took instructions in the Roman Catholic Church from Fr. Charles Xavier and was conditionally baptized. I have practiced the Catholic Faith since that day. I know that God called me to be Catholic and laid a path for me to follow to Him.

"The Rest is History" by Steve James

I remember a late evening at Ball State. I was feeling particularly low and alone and I went for a walk. As I walked I found myself talking to God and asking Him to lift me up and to help me through my troubles. When I finally focused on my walk I was standing in front of St Francis Newman Center. The lights were on and as I peered through the windows of the church, I saw a short, bald priest trying to manhandle a very tall ladder. He was knocking over chairs in his attempt to place the ladder for use. A voice told me to go inside and help. I offered to assist and the priest gladly accepted. When were finished, Fr Jim said...Now what is your name...Give me your phone number...and as they say...the rest is history. God does answer our prayers though sometimes not the way we want. This time, I know he heard my prayers and put Fr Jim where I needed him. Thank you God!
"Where it all started" by Sarah Slater-Brown

As a Ball State student in the mid to late-70s, I had no idea there was a Catholic church on the edge of campus. One evening my BSU roommate, Pat, invited me to join her for Sunday evening Mass. Great! I had been quizzing her endlessly about church traditions, prayers, basically "all that is Catholic." Her invitation was the pinnacle of years of questions I had since I was a young child.

You see, I had been baptized and confirmed in a Protestant church when I was 12 years old, yet there was always something about Catholicism that intrigued me. My Aunt Mary Ellen had converted as a young woman. When I would visit her, I was so drawn to her small statue of Mary on her bedroom dresser, the patron saint medal that she constantly wore, even watching her as she solemnly lit candles at church when her brother was critically injured. I also had fond memories about my Uncle Edward who converted when he married a Catholic, the deep devotion he had to his faith, along with his volunteer ministry in Alcoholics Anonymous. Even the Catholic families in my neighborhood had a special closeness about them. WHY was I so drawn to all of this, even as a young girl?

I accepted Pat's invitation to Mass...several times. She was the FIRST person to actually invite me to a Catholic service. But for some reason, I wasn't ready to take that next step. Pat smiled one day and said, "Hey, I'm always here for you, but remember, so is God. He's very patient."

How right she was! It did take time, but a dozen years later, I completed RCIA (along with my husband) at the Catholic Church in the community where we were living at that time. When we eventually moved to Muncie, the natural choice was to become a part of St. Francis of Assisi. It was as if I was coming "home" after a long journey, yet starting another one.

My point: After years of being drawn to our faith, it was a BSU student who kicked the door open for me and said, "ok, why don't you come with me and we'll see what this is all about....together!" I think of this very scenario as I see the young
women living at the Newman Center, our students who volunteer for missions in Haiti and countless other projects, even as they worship in Mass every week. What an influence they have on others! I hope they understand that perhaps the greatest ministry they can be a part of is closer than they think. It may be down the hallway of their dorm, sitting next to them in class, or even right before their eyes with a roommate or dear friend.

“Bad News” by Kasey Butcher

There’s nothing quite like bad news for making people uneasy. Knowing just how to react when a friend’s been hurt or let down is not easy. I still find it hard to believe that when my best friend told me her dad was going to be deployed I started telling her about watching sumo wrestlers train on ESPN and how they basically went to all you can eat buffets and ate until they were asked to leave. It’s funny, though, that when you get bad news and you’re busy looking up at the heavens asking “What the heck!?" there’s often little pieces of comfort to be found in friends, no matter how small or how silly.

There’s the friend who leaves the note, gently boosting your ego. The friend who makes the dry comment about how you didn’t really want that anyway or how so-and-so doesn’t know what they’re missing. There’s the friend who uses silliness to make you laugh. The friend who politely ignores the mist in your eyes so you don’t start bawling. Hugs are always a bonus and if you’re really lucky, like me, you get a combo pack of all of the above, plus the friend who pats you on the shoulder as she walks by and didn’t even have to ask what was wrong.

Friends are a gift from God, a gentle reminder that we’re not in it alone. As Jane Austen said, “Friendship certainly is the finest balm for the pangs of disappointed...” Well, disappointed anything.
St. Francis of Assisi Parish - *It is in giving that we receive.*

- **Tony Costello**

Forty-two years ago this coming September, I arrived in Muncie to start my teaching career as a young (23 years old) assistant professor of architecture. Born in Corona, Queens, I spent from 5th grade through high school living in the Hudson River Valley, 50 miles north of "the city." However, I returned there for my undergrad and graduate education. I guess I was one of those "New Yorkers" who grew up believing that New Jersey was "a mid-western state!"

Never in my wildest dreams did I believe that ... 42 years later ... I would be so blest to be semi-retired and planning to spend the remainder of my life with my dear wife, Carmen, in Muncie. I have had a wonderful and meaningful career teaching at Ball State's College of Architecture & Planning for all that time except for a year of post-graduate work in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a semester as a visiting scholar in Oxford, England. This is where John Henry Newman, for whom Newman Centers for Catholic Students on secular campuses are named, taught, wrote and preached. Although never really contemplating a permanent move to another university or full-time practice as an architect elsewhere, I always felt that if we did, leaving my faith-community at St. Francis / Ball State Newman Parish would be much harder than leaving the university.

My experiences as a parishioner ... starting in the "pre-parish years" when we were a Newman Apostolate ... would truly fill a book. These have included: my first opportunity as a young architect to explore with Fr. Jim Bates the design of "sacred space;" helping to build the platforms for Stout Hall with Lenny Baierwalter ... what was that sound inside one of them?; co-designing exhibits with John Eiden for the annual Art Show & Brunch; teaching adult classes with Carmen for, and having our boys baptized here and attending FEP classes through confirmation. More recently: being a part of four Haiti Service Mission Teams [three with Eric Banter]; assisting Tony Jeroski [and suggesting "the steel column under"] the baptismal font; and
helping Carole and Mike Clohessy to form the Haiti Library Foundation ... are all truly priceless. Taken collectively, these experiences define my years as a member of our faith community.

However, as I begin design development work on the last phase of the redesign of the southern one-half of the original Stout Hall that includes the design of the new entry and south wall, the one project that I look back on with great fondness took place during the summer of 1997. That was the total restoration and modernization of the Newman House (originally named the Oesterle Mansion, in honor of the Muncie banking family who built it in 1928) for which we served as interior designers and construction administrators.

Beginning the day after the 1997 spring graduation and completed three days before the start of classes for the 1997 fall semester, almost every week day of my summer begun and ended with a site visit to ensure that decisions were made in a timely fashion and so that I could witness the step-by-step rebirth of a truly magnificent residence that has served as the “home away from home” for thousands of Ball State Catholic students since 1972.

We provided our architectural services for this project pro bono as a gift to our parish. What I received during the rededication ceremonies on September 27, 1997, was a gift that I will always cherish ... the naming of the living room, “the Costello Room.” For me it is a tribute to my entire family ... from my parents who were role models for me in giving “to the Lord” by serving Him here on earth ... and certainly to my dear wife, Carmen, and our sons, Andy and David, who have always supported me in all of my involvements here at St. Francis.

Thus, I am living proof of the saying paraphrasing the prayer of our parish’s patron saint ..., “It is in giving that we receive!”

Thank you and may God Bless each and every one of you and your loved ones.
“Snow Day” by Allison Meyers

It was Wednesday, January 28, 2009 when I got up at 6:00am to get ready for my 7:00am nursing clinical at the hospital. It was still dark, and I knew it had snowed overnight, so my plan was to get ready quickly so I would have more time to scrape the snow and ice off of my car. By the time I got ready, I had about 25 to 30 minutes to deal with the snow, drive to Ball Memorial, park, and meet my clinical group. “Plenty of time.” Until I stepped out the front door of the Newman Center into a foot of snow. “Hmmm.” I marched out to my car, picking up my feet much higher than usual. The snow plow had gotten rid of some of the snow in the parking lot, but had hindered my attempt to utilize my car more than it had helped. The snow behind my car was piled up higher than my back bumper. “Well, I might need a shovel.” There was one by the back door. I’m sure I would have been fine, but when I found that my car doors were frozen shut and wouldn’t open, I panicked. I got huffy and whiny and marched back to the front door. I thought about throwing rocks at Kasey’s window in an effort to wake her and tell her to get down there and help me, but I couldn’t bring myself to plunge my arm into the foot of snow to find any. My shoes were full of snow and my ankles were hurting. I reached the front door, took out my cell phone, and called Mom. “Yeah, she’ll be able to help me...all the way in Fort Wayne.” Good one. She told me to start walking. I wouldn’t make it on time if I walked, and you are NOT late to clinical.

I called my fellow nursing student and grade-school friend, Sarah, who lives a few streets up on Rex. Yes, she would pick me up on her way to the hospital. She had the nerve to get her roommates out of bed to help push her car out of the snow. She picked me up and we slid and swerved all the way to the hospital. We were 7 minutes
late and very happy, with our snow-filled shoes, wet socks, and frozen ankles. Thanks to Sarah and her kindness, I made it to clinical safely, without having to walk all the way to class knee-deep in snow.

Later that afternoon, with the sun shining, I went out to the parking lot with a shovel to dig my car out. As I was digging, a man saw me and pulled into the lot. His truck had a snow plow on the front. He rolled up and asked if I'd like him to take a swipe at the snow. I said, "Yeah, that would be great!" He was finished in a few seconds, I thanked him with a huge smile on my face, and he drove off.

God sent me two angels along with the foot of snow to help me through the day. That smile still returns to my face when I think about it. I hope that through my words and actions, I bring out this same smile on other's faces.

"Music To My Ears" by Patricia Eckstein Chambers

Jamie Johnson and the music ministers are a wonderful asset to our parish. Think what our liturgies would be like without music and song! We have gone through numerous Music Directors and Liturgy Coordinators. Jamie has done an outstanding job!

I have hummed a tune or repeated many verses in glad times and in sad times just due to the songs Jamie has selected. It is so wonderful to carry with us the words we sing to praise God, to comfort us, and to ask His blessings on us! I think everyone in church gets uplifted when the music makers play and sing with a faith that pours from their soul. Too often I do not tell the musicians I appreciate their time and talent. They make the music that makes my heart sing!
“Growing Up in Music Ministry” by Brian Eckstein

“Don’t touch that microphone,” my mom yelled from halfway across the orange-carpeted worship space. “Maybe when you’re older.” I was five years old and my mom, dad, sister and I had just moved from Anderson to Muncie. We tried the other parishes but settled on St. Francis because of the welcoming and energetic spirit of everyone there. I couldn’t stop being fascinated by the music equipment, and I so badly wanted to join in with the college students who were singing and playing.

I didn’t have to wait long. I got my first chance to get involved in 2nd grade. There was an old organ in the back of the church often played by Frank Cemino. By that time I had discovered I could play the organ by ear. My vision impairment made reading music difficult, and so I was mostly self-taught. But I did have guidance from then BSU student music leaders Laura Barr and Tim Wood, who would play the next weekend’s Mass music into a tape recorder. I would take the tape home and listen to it, and learn, by ear, the whole Mass.

So the day came for my debut at the organ. In those days my mom took a “nerve pill” before I would play. The first song I played was “Silent Night” at the age of eight.

Now I’m in my late 30s, and I still call St. Francis my home parish. I have remained part of our music program since those childhood days. I’ve watched many, many people come and go; from students, to liturgists, to priests. All have left an imprint on my heart and on my own spirituality.

I think the thing that’s so enduring, and endearing, about St. Francis is that same vibrant spirit that began with Fr. Jim
Bates in the 70’s and has continued throughout the years. Now, as then, we do eclectic, upbeat songs. We worship openly with a wide variety of music leaders. We sometimes wear jeans to Mass and it is okay. It’s a “Come as you are” party! But what St. Francis sometimes lacks in decorum, I believe we more than make up for with a GENUINE spirit of compassion, openness, and welcome – whether it be the next freshman class at Ball State, or that eager, small child who can’t keep his hands off the microphones.

“Friday Night Dinner” by Joe Konopan

One thing that always seems to be a highlight in the week at St. Francis is Friday Night Dinner. I think that the students really enjoy starting off the weekend by having a fun meal and chatting with their friends at the Newman Center. Volunteers cook, and one FND that I remember best was the one that Allison Meyers and I prepared. We decided to have it be breakfast-themed. We tested our 'secret' recipe for the batter, made a facebook group, and prepared everything. When Friday came we were pretty excited. We prepared fruit salad from scratch, cooked up some turkey sausage, and made three kinds of pancakes: regular, chocolate chip, and blueberry. About thirty people showed up - it was an amazing turnout - so we kept flipping pancakes for at least another hour. In the end I was pretty tired, but had a ton of fun and loved seeing all my friends coming in to enjoy something that I was able to be a part of.
"st. francis wisdom" by John McConnell

a tender touch
a prayerful tear
some words of wisdom
"thou shall not fear"
we find our worth
not in your stone
but with your people
and God alone
students come
scholars go
for every reason
we do not know
it's sad to see
people leave
yet His peace
helps us grieve
we won't forget
the lessons learned
st. francis wisdom
we have earned
then in time
we must depart
let us forever recall
our st. francis heart
"An Angel in a Little Blue Car" Anonymous

On one very dark and rainy morning I was driving to attend a workshop when all of a sudden I felt the car pulling to the left. I didn’t know what had happened until I realized that the car was surrounded by water and sinking. We had hydroplaned off of the road into a flooded area and water was coming into the car.

Because of the water, the electrical system was off and the electric doors would not open. The cell phone which was plugged into the car didn’t work either. I knew that I had to get out of the care before it was totally under water. In a panic I said a quick prayer and kept trying to get a door open, but without success.

I noticed that a small blue car had stopped over on the road and that a small fellow was walking toward my car. He saw the predicament and was able to open the trunk door, helped me out and carried me to a bank nearby. He said that he would send help. When I asked him if he was from the police he said that he was with a law enforcement agency in New Castle and then left.

Unfortunately, no help came. After about fifteen minutes the little blue car returned to see if the help had come. When he found out that they didn’t, he said that he would call again. Shortly after that, the Muncie Police arrived. My car had to be towed away and the road was then closed because of high water.

I wanted to thank the fellow who rescued me, so the next day, I called the New Castle Police and gave them the description of my rescuer and his car, but they didn’t know of any such person. I called several other law enforcement agencies in the area, but no one knew of anyone fitting the description.

At that point, I decided that God had sent an angel in a little blue car to rescue me. There is no other explanation for the rescuer and I am forever thankful for the answer to my prayer.
“Favorite Day” by Beth Bremigan

One of my favorite days of the year is the second Sunday in December. Much of that day I have spent cooking and baking, decorating the house, and wrapping a $5 gift. That evening about 20 students, Father John, and the campus minister arrive at our house after 6:30 mass. Within minutes our house is filled with coats, packages, and lots of lively conversation and laughter. After enjoying hot chocolate, hot apple cider, and other holiday goodies, we settle in for the annual gift exchange. Father John explains the gift exchange rules, we each draw our number, and the exchange begins. Some years students are eager to steal from each other; other years they are too worried about being nice! There is always that one gift that becomes highly valued by many and inspires conspiracies to form. The evening goes by very quickly, and students are off to study for final exams and head home for Christmas. Even cleaning up is part of the fun, as Ralph and I put on Christmas music and share stories about new students we met and new stories we heard.

It has been 10 years now that we have hosted the Christmas party for the BSU students who comprise the CSUC and CLP. I remember so many smiling faces and so many creatively wrapped gifts, some that were lovingly handmade and others that brought out the child in all of us. We still have “gifts” in our home that we can trace to the gift exchange, such as our treasured pig soapdish and the hat that Tommy bought to give away, but then desperately stole in order to keep for himself. I remember some significant conversations I had with students in the midst of all the evening’s activities. Each year as Advent begins, I look forward to preparing for and celebrating this special time in our home with yet another group of St. Francis students.
“What Matters Most...Who Matters Most...” by Mike Haigerty

Remember...
God is not impressed
by the beauty of your face
the money in your purse
your dresses all in lace
or that you won first place.

God is not impressed
by the books you have read
the power you hold
the groups you have led
or the witty things you’ve said.

When in time all these things go
when you’re poor, weak, and old,
with nothing to show
and your mind’s a little slow.

God will still love you
when others have gone
in the joy, in the sorrow
as the sun rises at dawn
til your last breath you’ve drawn.

And what does God ask in return for His love
when earthly glories mean nothing above?

Seek after those things which God treasures the most
gifts sent from heaven of which you can boast

A heart filled with kindness, a welcoming smile
that cares for the stranger and comforts the child

A mind full of wisdom, lessons learned in time,
to counsel the troubled, a guide for the “blind”

A soul pure and humble, devoted in prayer
to forgive those who hurt you, to find hope in despair

A life filled with giving, without counting the cost,
such a life is worth living, its rewards never lost.
I have been around the St. Francis Newman Center since All Hallows Eve of 2003. In this time, I have met some fantastic new (and older) friends, both students and resident parishioners. There have been some trying times, they are nothing compared to the good times and fellowship. One of my favorite activities with the Newman Center is going on retreat, and this serves several purposes, including spiritual growth, fellowship with other students, and most important of all, the worship of the God alone who created heaven and earth. However, from then until now, I have experienced changes that most others, myself included, would call simply extraordinary.

The beginning of this incredible change actually occurred for me in the waning days of the fall semester of 2004. It was during this semester that I received the dreaded and inevitable news that my National Guard unit was being deployed to Iraq; the first dates given to us were March of 2005, and this changed to the 20th of January 2005. In this time, I struggled to remind myself that my life is in the hands of God. Before my deployment, I received a blessing from Fr. John Kiefer who invoked the blessing of St. Michael the Archangel for my protection; St. Michael is one of my favorite angelic Saints who, by the power of God, repelled Lucifer and his angels and is called the prince of the Heavenly Host. When I first got to my training facility at Camp Shelby in Mississippi, I knew that I was beginning a new chapter in the journey of my life, one that I would not forget (good and bad). However, nothing really happened until I finally set foot on Kuwaiti soil, and then, the nearly four-month waking nightmare of my life began.

For ridiculous reasons, I let the complaints of some of my fellow soldiers nearly bring about the ruin of my body and soul. It started with a complaint from someone who refused to talk with me first. Unfortunately, it got worse from there, and it was as if I weren’t even Catholic. My anger was welling and I wasn’t going to Mass, as is my duty. I could not think of a time when my anger had become as murderous as that of Cain against his brother Abel other than in this time period of my first few months in Iraq. No amount of comfort would have helped me in this case, but I still enjoyed hearing from my friends and family as they did help take the edge off my anger. Finally, after being tired of fearing death and assurance of hell, I said, “Enough is enough” and sought out the priest for a confession of my sins; after what would be considered one of my longest confessions, my life in Iraq finally started to turn around. The anger, having been confessed, no longer had a grip on me (although I did endure periods of severe irritation), and I thought that if I didn’t have a chain, I was going to go flying. Confession really is good for the soul. After this, I started to appreciate the simpler things of life again, especially hearing from my home and college parishes of St. Mary’s Anderson and St. Francis of Assisi in Muncie. I did receive more support from St. Mary’s parish at this time, but one of the best gifts that I could have received was a hand-written book from students of the Newman Center, some I knew very well, and others with whom I would become very good friends sometime after my return. Some of my fondest times, though, would be in the clear Iraqi nights in the summer during a full moon; this is clear evidence of the lesser light being the moon (cf Genesis 1:16), and these times were so beautiful that I could not help but to smile.
The biggest challenge of my Christian life would start in the middle of November of 2005, with the arrival of a new priest to our base near Ar Ramadi, one of the most violent places in Iraq while I was there. I was mindful of a friend who wanted to join the Catholic Church; part of his reason for desiring this was due to his engagement to his Catholic fiancée, but what prompted me to introduce my friend to my new priest was because he wanted to draw closer to God. I introduced my friend to the priest and told him that he was interested in joining the Catholic Church, and much to my surprise, and worry, we started the following night; such breakneck speed made me very nervous because I had never sponsored an adult catechumen before, and I worried about possibly failing my friend. I don’t think I have ever met a priest as consoling as Fr. Michael Duesterhaus, who told me simply to continue to do what I was doing to help my friend. The classes for RCIA (we were in the accelerated program) were some of the best times of my tour as I had gradually begun to understand not only the what’s of the Catholic Faith, but also the why’s and the hows; this nurtured a love of the Catholic Faith that I had never had before. One of my duties as a sponsor was to teach him the basic prayers of the Church, and my means of helping him was the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary; I had no idea that not much later than I started teaching him to say the Rosary that we actually began praying together on a regular basis with the only real break coming when he went home for leave. I think I upset my mother more than anyone else by deciding not to go home on leave because I thought this journey was more important than my wish to come home. After 5 months of RCIA classes, my friend was formally initiated into the Catholic Church on April 16, 2006. Then, I had yet another period of trial and failure before my homecoming, but my thoughts were so intent on getting home to my family that I just endured it, although grudgingly. When I was home, it had been clear that I had stepped back into yet another new world; I knew that from here onward, my life as a whole would never be the same again.

There are many changes that I am still undergoing in my time after Iraq. Some of the more wonderful changes were the increase in my love for the Faith into which I was born, a much greater appreciation for our brothers and sisters in the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, but the greatest change to date of which I can think is the change from seeing Mass as a duty to seeing Mass as a great joy. One of my favorite changes that I have experienced is the greater desire to receive Christ in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist; one of my favorite Saints was a martyr bishop of the Apostolic Age, St. Ignatius of Antioch (St. Ignatius of Loyola changed his name in honor of this first century bishop), who was a disciple of the Apostle St. John and a friend of St. Peter who ordained him to be the third bishop of Antioch. While he was being taken to Rome to be a feast for the lions, he told the faithful: "I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible" (Letter to the Romans 7:3 [A.D. 110]). This little statement has touched my heart in ways that defy explanation. My exposure to the early Church Fathers, both Latin and especially Greek, has further improved my own understanding of the Faith, and I hope that God will continue to bless me and satisfy my desire to learn more about and to love my Faith.
"porch poetry" by John McConnell

the veil of my mind had been lifted

it is life's intricate journey

no sense in not smiling as i am drifted

and now that i can see through His screens

i know it is not the end or the justification

it is the means

we have no hurry to leave this world

let's enjoy every instant that we have left

inhale! tree... chirp... sweet... slip... bad breath...

exhale! rain... patter... retain... splatter... mint...

in each moment there shall be joy

for there is a moment!

inhale! LIVE with what is given to you

exhale! live WITH what is around you

inhale! live with YOUR service to others

exhale! remember that it is GOD that lets us... inhale!
Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.
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Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadbere, joy.

And a world where there is thanks, for you.

Let's enjoy every moment that we have left.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
in isolated places above, below, and within,
in each moment and in every way,
for there is a moment
whether I live with what is given to you

inhalal: Live with what is given to you.

Exhalal: Remember that it is God who lets us...
Allison Meyers
Christian Leadership Program
Saint Francis of Assisi Parish
2008-2009