Getting to Know Fr. Joah Ellis

Since Fr. Joah Ellis came to our parish this past July, we have begun to learn many things about him. For example, during any free time, he enjoys bicycling and playing music, board games and card games. He likes to work on computers, and spend time with family and friends. He likes to eat sandwiches (all kinds), enjoys a good superhero film (like Captain America), and prefers to read science and historical fiction. His favorite saint is St. Albert the Great, he and his family once had their picture taken with Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI), and he can solve a Rubik’s Cube. All fun things, no doubt, but to know Father is to also know his vocation story, one that is rooted in faith and family.

Fr. Ellis grew up in Blaine, Minn. as the oldest of five children. Because his family lived in a small neighborhood with few children, Fr. Ellis and his siblings spent a lot of time together. His parents, Daniel and Carrie Ellis, raised their family with a strong sense of their Catholic identity while being involved in their home parish, Church of the Epiphany, in Coon Rapids. Interestingly, just after Father finished the third grade, his parents decided to give homeschooling a try – and it worked so well for the family that Father was homeschooled until he graduated from high school.

“Besides the classroom lessons on faith, my parents also taught us the importance of faith by living it themselves,” Fr. Ellis says. “We prayed the Rosary together, my mom would take us to daily Mass, and my dad would go to daily Mass, too, often at another church as his work schedule allowed. Seeing their dedication to the Mass and how important it was to them was a key part of the development of my own appreciation for it.”

Father says his calling to the priesthood grew slowly, without a lot of big, dramatic moments, and that the idea was first presented to him by people asking him if he ever thought of becoming a priest. Since he was one of the altar servers who attended daily Mass with his family, the question was asked a lot – so much so that by high school, the question both annoyed and intrigued him. But he began to think about it,
The charism of **Giving** empowers a Christian to be a cheerful channel of God's provision by giving with exceptional generosity to those in need. Giving has always been recognized as one of the fundamental acts of Christian stewardship. Giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to charity; “it is also a work of justice pleasing to God” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2447). But there are some people who have a special charism in this area. For them, generosity is not merely a duty or responsibility, but their idea of a good time! They do not wonder “how much can I keep?” but “how much can I give away?” Christians with this charism have a remarkable confidence that God will provide all they need to live, so they are able to focus on the needs about them. This does not necessarily mean that they live a life of voluntary poverty. God seems to grant some givers with a special ability to make money or other unexpected resources. He can entrust them with these resources because they are such faithful channels of his provision and love to others.

The charism of **Intercessory Prayer** empowers the intense prayer of a Christian for others to be the means by which God’s love and deliverance reaches those in need. In intercessory prayer, the person praying offers one’s self and one’s prayer as a channel through which God’s deliverance can reach those in need. The intercessor becomes a link between heaven and earth, between God and his creation. Although we are all called to pray for others, some of us are called to intercede in a particularly focused and intense way. Christians with a charism of intercessory prayer love to pray for others and can do so for hours without tiring. They often receive specific insights or guidance from the Holy Spirit as to who to pray for and how to pray for them. It is not uncommon for them to wake up in the middle of the night and sense an urgent need to pray for a specific person, even someone they don’t know. Intercessors frequently receive remarkable, even miraculous, answers to their prayers for others. Although their ministry may seem hidden or indirect, they know that praying for others is in fact a direct, effective, and practical thing they can do for those in need.

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**This Month’s Spotlight on our Parish Ministries**

**RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults)**
This program is led by the clergy from the parish with assistance from the RCIA Team. RCIA presents teachings of the Catholic Church, spiritual support and prayer for adults discerning their call to join the Catholic Church. It is also a wonderful way to revisit the religious education you received in the past. Weekly meetings are held on Mondays, from September until shortly after Easter, with occasional breaks for holidays. Parishioners are needed as team members, sponsors and prayer partners. Participating in RCIA will help you grow in your faith as you help others grow in their faith!

Türán Aperas – 612-219-4484 or sdupay@stmcatholicchurch.org

**Adult Choir**
All adults are welcome! This traditional Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass choir sings at the 8:30 a.m. Mass – except the first Sunday of each month – during the choral season. Adult Choir also sings for major feasts, including Christmas and the Easter Triduum. Rehearsals are weekly from September to May on Thursdays from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. in the church or choir room.

Türán Aperas – 763-497-2745, ext. 243 or jkrueger@stmcatholicchurch.org
In his letters, St. Paul often began by greeting his “brothers and sisters.” Every time I read one of these letters, it reminds me that you and I truly are sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ, the Church, but especially here in our own parish. We need to understand that we are indeed a family, and the way we see and treat one another is fundamental to the health and happiness of this family.

Our spiritual family doesn’t stop at the walls of our church, but rather, extends to include every man and woman created in God’s image and likeness. You may be familiar with the term “Catholic Social Teaching,” which is built on a commitment to the poor. These are the beliefs that guide Catholics on how to apply the faith to all aspects of life, and they lay the framework for the Church’s teachings on the dignity and sacredness of human life. Once we make a commitment to be disciples of Jesus and pursue stewardship as a way of life, the principles of Catholic Social Teaching become very easy to incorporate into our lives.

Catholic Social Teaching has been around since those first followers of Jesus tried to balance their new faith with the realities of living in a world of Roman oppression. Jesus reminded His disciples then, just as He reminds us now, that caring for and ministering to the poor should be at the core of all we do. Recall when the Lord said in Matthew, “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me; I was naked and you gave me clothing; I was ill and you cared for me; I was in prison and you visited me.”

This is our foundation as we seek to embody mercy and justice to our fellow man, and should be one of our major goals as a faith community. Many of our parish ministries provide for us an opportunity to do just as Jesus asked; to serve those most in need. As we move into the fall season, with Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas soon to follow, now is a good time for us to recommit ourselves to addressing the needs we see around us — both as a parish society and as individuals.

I am proud of our collective efforts in assisting and serving the poor, but I also know that we can do more. Many of us personally need to get involved in these efforts. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has a great love and regard for the poor and, like Jesus, he reminds us often of what we need to do. In a recent homily, Pope Francis said, “The measure of the greatness of a society is found in the way it treats those most in need, those who have nothing apart from their poverty.” Together, we can make a difference.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Peter Richards,
Pastor
A key aspect of living out stewardship is the understanding that there is always a need. There is always work – His work – to be done. As the President of our St. Michael Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Kent Herbst reminds us that there is important work to be done right here, in our very own community.

“In my years of effort with SVdP, I have come to realize that we do not need to go to Africa or even Minneapolis to find people with material or spiritual needs,” he says. “They are living among us. In the past year, we have served scores of people right here and provided more than $20,000 in financial assistance.”

And as we celebrate the Feast Day of St. Vincent de Paul on Sept. 27, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of serving others and in following the example of St. Vincent de Paul himself. Known for his devotion to the poor, St. Vincent de Paul was known as “The Apostle of Charity” and the “Father of the Poor.” However, Blessed Frederic Ozanam was the moving force behind establishing the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He and the others founded what was originally known as the Conference of Charity “to serve the poor.” From those beginnings developed the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which now includes more than 800,000 members in 140 countries. We are privileged to have our own conference here at St. Michael.

Kent – along with his wife, Erin, and their four children – has been a member of St. Michael for more than 10 years. A few years ago, he attended a St. Vincent de Paul meeting, and soon realized that the Society offered a “great avenue” to give back to the community. Kent also found that he was profoundly impacted in return.

“I feel that being a Vincentian is the epitome of a stewardship way of life,” he says. “We are being disciples of the Lord, we are being stewards of the Church, and we are helping those in need. It may not always be easy, it may occupy more time than we feel we have to give, or it may be uncomfortable at times. But as each one has received a gift, we are using it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

The needs met by the Society are many, and our St. Michael Conference members offer their time and talents in a number of impactful ways.

“We are completely supported by private donations,” Kent says. “Our primary focus is on home visits, where Vincentians – one man and one woman – meet with the client at their home to discuss their needs. Sometimes, it’s guidance. Sometimes, it’s a need for food or gas. Others may need help with insurance, rent or utilities. In some cases, it might be just

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spending time in prayer and in the Adoration Chapel in order to discern God’s plan for him.

“For me, I discerned this calling by meeting and spending time with seminarians and priests,” Fr. Ellis says. “Serving at Mass allowed me to get to know the priests at my parish, and the seminary had a program in which high school men could come to the seminary once a month to pray and have pizza with the seminarians. Both experiences helped me see that priests and seminarians, while living out a calling from God, were human beings like me.”

By the time Fr. Ellis graduated from high school, he knew that God was at least calling him to the seminary and he enrolled at the St. John Vianney College Seminary as a freshman. For the next several years, he discovered that seminary life was full – with classes, community outreach and volunteer work – but very blessed, and he became more and more convinced that God was calling him to the priesthood. So, he continued his studies with four more years at the St. Paul Seminary, and on May 25, 2013, he was ordained to the priesthood at the Cathedral of St. Paul.

“I especially remember when we were lying prostrate, flat on the floor, during the singing of the Litany of the Saints,” Fr. Ellis recalls. “It was overwhelming to realize that as we were laying down our lives for Christ and the Church, so many people were praying for us – both those in attendance at the Cathedral, and the saints and angels we were calling upon. I then celebrated my Thanksgiving Mass at Epiphany in Coon Rapids. When Fr. Bernard Reiser from my home parish died, I learned that he had wanted his chalice to be given to the next man to be ordained from the parish. So, it was passed on to me and I used it for my Mass of Thanksgiving. I was humbled to be entrusted with this sacred vessel which is such a significant part of the parish’s history.”

It has been two months since Father arrived at our parish, and while he is still settling into what is just his second assignment since ordination, he is excited to be here as he lives the vocation that God called him to do.

“I am looking forward to continue meeting and getting to know more parishioners at St. Michael,” Fr. Ellis says.
Pope Francis has traveled to Israel, Brazil and Turkey, among other countries throughout the past 30 months of his papacy. This fall, our Holy Father will travel to the United States for the 2015 World Meeting of Families.

This papal visit will be a historic event for the United States. Many expect Pope Francis to speak about immigration and our responsibility as stewards of creation along with other current topics of interest.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, Sept. 22, the pontiff will travel from Cuba to the United States. The following day, the leader of our Church and the leader of our country will convene at the White House. President Obama has called Pope Francis “transformative,” publicly thanking the pontiff for his moral example and his instrumental role in furthering relations between the United States and Cuba.

After midday prayer on Sept. 23 with bishops at St. Matthew’s Cathedral, Pope Francis will canonize Blessed Junipero Serra, the Spanish Franciscan instrumental in establishing the California missions, at a Mass in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

In keeping with his reputation for the unprecedented, Pope Francis will then speak to a joint session of the United States Congress on the morning of Sept. 24, thus becoming the first pope to address Congress.

Afterwards, Pope Francis will visit St. Patrick in the City and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington before departing for New York City and arriving to participate in Vespers at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

On Sept. 25, Pope Francis will become the fourth leader of the Catholic Church to visit the United Nations and speak to the United Nations General Assembly.

From the United Nations, Pope Francis will travel to the National September 11 Memorial & Museum at the World Trade Center site. There, he will lead an interfaith service for peace.

Despite his limited days on American soil, Pope Francis designated time to visit Our Lady Queen of Angels School in East Harlem. The pope will be received by a largely immigrant student population at this Partnership School, which is one of a six-school organization devoted to urban Catholic education in the communities of South Bronx and Harlem.

The celebration of Mass at Madison Square Garden concludes this last full day in New York City.

After arriving in Philadelphia on Sept. 26, Pope Francis will celebrate Mass at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, and then speak at Independence Hall on immigration and religious freedom.

In the evening, the pope will at last arrive at the World Meeting of Families 2015, the theme of which, chosen by Pope Francis, is “Love Is Our Mission: the Family Fully Alive.” That evening, he will be the guest of honor at the Festival of Families.

On Sept. 27, the pope will convene with bishops at St. Martin’s Chapel at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary before visiting the Curran-Fromhold Correctional Facility, where he will meet with select prisoners and their families.

In the afternoon, Pope Francis returns to the World Meeting of Families to celebrate the concluding Mass at Benjamin Franklin Parkway before departing in the evening for Rome.

As we prepare for the Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis’ actions exemplify for us the Corporal Works of Mercy. Let us remember our call as Christians to reach out to our brothers and sisters in Christ.
The members of the Ruhland family are no strangers to St. Michael Catholic School. By the time their youngest child completes the eighth grade, they’ll have had at least one child attending the school for approximately 22 consecutive years.

Pete and Kathy – parents to Matthew, Emily, Thomas, Molly, Claire, and Zachary – have packed countless lunches, washed and re-washed countless uniforms, and watched day-by-day as St. Michael Catholic School became a fixture in the lives of their children.

“Our oldest was at a different school for kindergarten and first grade,” Kathy says. “Then, we moved and he started at St. Michael in second grade. All of the kids have been going there ever since.”

Community has played a big role in keeping the Ruhlands at St. Michael. Their oldest, Matthew – now 20 and a junior in college – still keeps in touch with his St. Michael classmates, and the family expects the same might happen for their youngest, Zachary, who is just entering kindergarten.

“Our friends are the families that we met at the school,” Kathy says. “Our children’s friends are the kids that they met at the school. Our community here is our friends. They share their faith with those kids, and that’s a beautiful thing.”

With their middle son, Thomas, now entering high school, the Ruhlands say they are confident that the values each of their children learned during their time at St. Michael will carry over into their public education.

“The school has done a really good job of incorporating faith into the everyday classroom, and it’s a good opportunity to share it with their friends on a day-to-day basis. For us as parents, the school also helps teach the faith. We’re the primary and the first teachers, but we certainly get reinforcement from the school.” – Pete Ruhland
Ruhland Family Praises School for Years of Faith and Friendship  
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“The school has done a really good job of incorporating faith into the everyday classroom, and it’s a good opportunity to share it with their friends on a day-to-day basis,” Pete says. “For us as parents, the school also helps teach the faith. We’re the primary and the first teachers, but we certainly get reinforcement from the school.”

The couple says one of their favorite parts of the week is taking turns attending the Friday school Mass, a moment that has become something of a family affair.

“Spiritually, one big thing for us is the Friday Mass,” Kathy says. “Our kids participate in that and they get to lector and sing, so they’re more directly involved in that Mass. One of us often goes to that Mass on Friday mornings at the school. We like that they participate in their faith with their peers.”

Pete says seeing the faculty and staff at Mass and witnessing their efforts to encourage a life of faith among their students is just one reason for parents of future students to give St. Michael some consideration.

“It is easy to see how much the St. Michael school staff members care about the kids,” he says. “To me, the value of the school flows from the character of the staff and the faith that they’re trying to pass on to my kids. I encourage everyone to take a close look at our Catholic school to see if it might not be a good fit for your family.”

Parents who are interested in learning more about St. Michael Catholic School can visit stm catholic school.org or call the school office at 763-497-3887.