

AT YOUR PARISH

St. Francis of Assisi

The People's Eucharistic League will hold its monthly holy hour, 7 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 26 at St. Francis of Assisi Church on the corner of Orange and Whitney streets. The public is invited to join in the time of prayer.

St. Anne

Palmyra — The human development committee of St. Anne's Parish will meet 7:30 p.m. today, Jan. 23. The public is invited.

Lady of Lourdes

Elmira — Parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes Church were advised last week that the Chemung County Catholic School Board is sponsoring its second annual Help Out Parochial Education (HOPE) Dance, 9 p.m.-midnight, Friday, Feb. 8 at St. Mary's Southside gym. The \$10 per person tickets will cover food and drink.

Immaculate

Ithaca — Ruth Wilson Kauffman, a counselor with Social Ministry Counseling Services, will present Parenting Education Classes, 7:30-9 p.m., Jan. 16, 23, 30; Feb. 13, at Immaculate Conception School. Interested persons are asked to contact Sister Campion 273-2707. The program is free.

St. Ambrose

Parishioners of St. Ambrose Church last week were informed that Francis Bauer, an usher for 60 years at their church, was stepping down from that post. The announcement was made in the parish bulletin along with a thanks and a congratulations.

St. James

The children of St. James School will celebrate Catholic Schools Week beginning Feb. 1. The theme of the venture is "Sharing the Vision — Teaching Values. Family crests or coats-of-arms depicting the values of the school families will be on display. An open house will be held 8:45-11:30 a.m., and 12:45-2:15 p.m., Tuesday, Feb. 5. Pictures of past years' and this year's activities will also be on display.

St. Philip Neri

The parishioners of St. Philip Neri Church will hold a Valentine Dance, 8 p.m., Feb. 16 in the School hall. Tickets to the own bottle event are \$7 per person and are available from the rectory, 482-2400; Sharon Lazzara, 288-1233; or Jeanne Brescia, 288-4499. Mixers and a midnight buffet will be served.

Mother of Sorrows

The adult education committee of Mother of Sorrows Parish will present a two-part program, 7:30 p.m., Jan. 27 and Feb. 3 in the church hall. The first evening is entitled, "What Does It Mean to Be a Bible People?" and the second, "How Does a Bible People Live?" Speaker is Robert Smyth, theology teacher at Cardinal Mooney High School. The program is free and open to the public.

Prayer Weekend Scheduled

Elmira — A prayer weekend for lay and religious men and women will be held March 22-24 at St. Joseph's House of Mount Saviour Monastery. The program includes directed prayer, quiet, prayer and reflection with individual direction provided by four directors.

**St. Bernard/
St. Isaac Jogues**

Union Springs — Ten-year-old John Dzuba of this area will benefit from a baked-and-bakeless sale sponsored by parishioners of St. Bernard in Scipio Center and St. Isaac Jogues in Fleming, following the weekend Masses June 26 and 27. The funds raised will help young Dzuba, born with cerebral palsy, to go to a hospital in California for intense therapy. Following a recent setback, the child is unable to walk.



Casa Italiana Donation

Joseph Anzalone, right, a leader of many area charitable activities, presents a check for \$500 to Nazareth College on behalf of the Rochester Italian Invitational Charity Golf Tournament. The gift, accepted by Dr. Robert H. McCambidge, Nazareth vice president for planning and development, will be used to support the program of cultural and educational activities at the college's Casa Italiana.

Father Bruce Ritter



Prudence and Strength and Courage

would want to be your own kid -- and know that the street is going to kill him?

I usually try to avoid the honest answer that we can't very well. The hardest thing -- the worst thing -- is looking at a kid that you care a lot about, and his eyes tell you: you know that he knows he's not going to make it.

God is not enough. He's really not. I tell my staff that -- when they get overinvested, lose distance and objectivity. God will not substitute. I tell them, for their prudence and strength and courage and detachment.

I try to explain to my staff what detachment is all about: the prayed for and learned ability to protect yourself, to let go of everything, most of all your own desire and need to save a particular kid, the need to justify your own existence by helping others. To let go your dependence on your own skills and insight and your need to be successful with a kid.

I try to explain that if your love for a kid and your need to help him causes you a lot of anguish and self-doubt, it's your needs being met, mostly, and not the kid's needs.

They don't really understand -- my staff -- about detachment. That kind of wisdom only comes with too many years of trying and failing and more pain than you ever want to think about. I tell them that you can only really love someone freely if you're perfectly detached from loving him -- that the greatest gift you can give someone is not to bind and hold them with your love but to leave them free. Sometimes, even free to die. No strings. My staff doesn't understand that. They understand better when I tell them that it's okay to hurt and it's okay to cry, a little, but not for long.

God is just not enough. Grace builds upon and supports nature, it doesn't change or substitute for it. So, be caring, but careful, I tell my staff. Prudence rules commitment. Distance, objectiveness, and ruthless honesty about why you do what you do are always a greater protection and service to kids than self-serving prayers for moral miracles we hope will change them.

And when a kid dies, it wasn't you who lost him. Don't blame yourself, or the program, or the world -- or God. Who loves them infinitely more than we do. Simply accept it and try, if you can, to forget it.

I tell my staff that if they try very hard, after a while they can grow this little switch in their brain that shuts down the memory banks and disengages the pain so they can go on to the next kid. And the next.

Father Bruce Ritter, OFM Conv., is the founder and President of Covenant House, which operates crisis centers for homeless and runaway boys and girls all over the country.

Like with these two kids I met yesterday!

Take it easy, Timmy, I said. We'll figure something out. It's O.K., I said. My hands won't stop shaking, he said. I'm sorry, I'm surprised you put up with me so long, he said. He was a moderately tall, lanky, infinitely scruffy kid who really stank bad.

Can I light that cigarette for you, I said. I'm sorry, he said. I don't think I can manage it. My hands won't stop shaking. I'm sorry, he said again.

I'm sorry. I guess I do look like hell, he said. You smell to high heaven, I said.

Your staff are real nice, he said. They keep taking me back, he said. They'd better, I said. We're glad you're here. Stay around, I said. Don't go away.

"I don't like it when I argue with myself."

Where're you from? Ohio, Timmy said. My mother, she just disappeared, my dad couldn't handle me. I started to drink pretty much when I was 14 and split when I was 15. Been on my own three years. The street? I said. He bobbed his head up and down. I'm not pretty anymore. I make party (drinking) money posing for a few pictures. A couple of rich dudes will give me \$50. I deliver porn for them to chicken hawks.

Timmy showed me the contents of his gym bag -- a collection of pretty routine child porn. His sad eyes watched me very carefully. You know you can't have this stuff here, I said. Do you want it, he said off-handedly, his sad eyes now watchful and calculating. No, I said. I'm sorry, he said.

I have this heart condition real bad. Your doctors here want me to lay off the parties and stop smoking, he said. The medication I take for my heart doesn't mix with the booze. Thanks for letting me stay here again. I've got the world's worst hangover... but I'm not drinking now. Haven't had a drink all day, he said proudly, with a sad crooked grin that made him look 16. It was 10 o'clock in the morning.

Your choices are pretty limited, I said. You're either going to die, go crazy -- or give up drinking. I know that, he said. He didn't look scared. I guess maybe because he had faced his increasingly bleak future too many times not to recognize the truth in what I said. (It sounds hard -- when I write it that way -- but I said it that way. It's really important to be clear about certain things with kids like Timmy.)

Let us help you, I said. We can, I said. We want to. I know this great program for kids who can't handle their drinking problem. It works; it really does, Timmy.

I could sure use a shower, he said in reply. I can smell myself, he said. I'm sorry to be such a bother. You're not, I said. I'm really glad you're back, I said.

I tried to flip the switch in my head -- there was another kid named Joey that I knew I wasn't going to like very much waiting to see me -- but it didn't work too well.

He said he was sorry. I was caring -- and careful! But the switch didn't work this time.

It's great theory, Bruce! Right! It's like trying to tell a violent toothache to go away at 3:00 in the morning. Mind over pain! Right!

Why did you cry over that kid in Fort Lauderdale, Bruce? I never said it was easy. And I didn't cry very long. It is great theory and it does work, and most of the time, if you don't make it work, you're in real trouble.

It's always the same old story: Practice what you preach, Bruce.

And believe, maybe, a little harder, in what you preach. God is not enough, huh? Maybe you should try to understand it better. Does God always have to love and help these kids on your terms, Bruce? Maybe you're afraid to get out of the way. Maybe you're not as detached as you thought.

I don't like it when I argue with myself -- I wind up losing too often. Look, I said, back to me. I am not the truth I teach. I'm just trying to help these kids the best way I know how and to survive doing it. I've seen too many good people go down the tubes trying to help kids like Timmy because they thought God told them to and they couldn't handle it. I teach my staff how to handle it, not to rush in where there ain't any angels, not to presume... there are some devils that are cast out only after much prayer and fasting. So, I tell my staff, until you're an accomplished pray-er and fast-er, I'll talk to you about prudence and distance and objectivity and detachment.

I don't know who won that argument.

I wish I understood it better.

Pray for Timmy, and that other kid -- Joey (I didn't like him very much). Pray for me, too. We pray for you every day.

Yes, I agree, all Timmys should be given the opportunity to make it. Enclosed is my contribution of: \$ _____ please print:

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