



**WE ARE**

*Chosen*

January / February 2022

# GOD REMAINS EVER FAITHFUL

Faith can be such a fleeting thing. One moment it can be so strong, and the next minute you wonder where it went. You feel so close to God and feel connected, then something happens and you are suddenly miles away. Instead of feeling in the presence of the Almighty, you are in the midst of doubt's darkness.

While in the seminary, I found myself in the midst of this darkness, questioning where God was in my life. I was at an internship at a parish in the northern part of the Archdiocese, and it was not where I wanted to be assigned. I felt isolated being so far away from my family and my classmates. The pastor I was assigned to was not very friendly and not much of a role model for me, but that was just the start of my year of troubles. My youngest sister was diagnosed with cancer. She was so young, and she had two small children as well. The treatments were not working, and all the prayers seem to fall on empty ears. It was frustrating to be in the position that I was in.

By Christmas it was clear that Judi was not getting better, and by mid-January I had asked the Pastor if I could take some time off to be with my family to walk the final journey with Judi. He was not so sure that was a good thing, but he said yes. I was angry and mad at the world. Most importantly, I was mad at God; he should have protected Judi from this illness. She died mid-February. I was told to return to the parish four days after the funeral. I didn't feel that this was the most pastoral thing to ask of me in this situation.

How could I go on to study to be a priest? The God who I

was looking to serve let me down, and the ministers that were around me were not much help either. I was ready to quit. I began to talk to my friends, my classmates about how I felt. I got in touch with my spiritual director, and we began to deal with the anger and grief. It took a long time to process that year of pain and suffering, but I came out on the other side healed and made whole. Through prayer, conversations and hospital chaplain work, I found the loving God that was always there. Do I miss my sister? Of course, I do. There isn't a day I do not think about her and the love we shared. But I know she is in a better place in God's loving arms, free of the pain and suffering she had to endure.

Faith is something that we can never take for granted. We need to build on it constantly. Faith is something that must be challenged from time to time. It is ok for you and me to have doubts about our faith. I believe it shapes who we are. Of course, it helps if we have a strong foundation of faith to begin with. But even if we do not, a belief in a loving God is so important. God understands that we may have our doubts; we are only human after all. But God will never abandon us. Through it all, God remains ever faithful. He is there to pick us up when we fall. He is there to shore up our faith when it grows weak. It takes trust - trust that he will find us even when we feel lost. Do not give up, God is always here for you and me.



FR. DON WEST  
PASTOR

## BEACONS OF LIGHT INFORMATION

As of the December-released final draft for Beacons of Light, St. John the Evangelist, West Chester has been paired with St. Michael - Sharonville and St. Gabriel - Glendale. To see the full list of Parish Families, please use this link: [www.catholicaoc.org/beacons-of-light/parish-families](http://www.catholicaoc.org/beacons-of-light/parish-families)

Want to learn more? Check out FAQs about Beacons of Light here: [www.catholicaoc.org/beacons-of-light](http://www.catholicaoc.org/beacons-of-light)

*Mary, Mother of the Church and our Mother,  
Present our prayer of thanksgiving to your Son.  
Beg from Him the graces we need to be faithful disciples  
who follow Him with enthusiasm and joy.  
May our witness to the love of God bear fruit  
in our archdiocese, parishes, homes and hearts.  
Teach us to be God's joyful witnesses,  
to radiate Christ in all we do,  
so that all people might know, love and follow your Son  
through this life and into the next. Amen.*

# TRUSTING IN GOD THROUGH UNCERTAINTY

We are all on a faith journey, whether we recognize it or not. Some of us have always felt a closeness to God and have total confidence in who you are and where you stand with the Lord. I think we all know someone who might fit that category. But the truth is, nearly everyone has ups and downs, and dips and valleys in their faith journey. When life is moving along and things are very positive, it is easy to believe that God is at our side, guiding us through. For large parts of my life, this is how I felt. I knew God loved me. I felt his presence, I was thankful, and I tried my very best to share my faith and goodwill with everyone around me.

But sometimes we hit bumps in the road on our journey. And maybe these bumps even become huge mountains that need to be climbed. We might lose hope and we may even question if there is a God at all. Recently, that has happened to me. My adult son lives over a thousand miles from us. He was feeling ill for over a month and even though he went to the hospital twice, no one could figure out what was going on. The doctors are still struggling to figure out why his liver is failing. Looking back on life, we recognize the signs for his disease were there. But when you are in the midst of living, you sometimes miss the little details. That is how our faith life is as well. We need to pay attention to those little details!

Being a person who treasures being in control at all times (all who know me will be nodding right now), the stress created by a serious disease in your child who is 1,000 miles away is overwhelming. I know that worry does not help, so I try to plan multiple contingency plans for all of the primary plans. But the real truth is, I am not in charge. God is. And that is scary. It takes my breath away sometimes. It is also reassuring and wonderful. Just think, my son is in God's hands. I need to trust and have faith.

For those of you who are experiencing bumps in the road of your faith journey, I understand. God does too, and he has chosen you and is with you every step of the way, even when that is so hard to see. I will pray for you on your journey. Please keep my family in your prayers too. If you need a hand to hold or a voice to calm you, search for God. You may find him in others around you. You may find him on a walk through the woods, or you may find him where he should be - and that is in your heart. God bless you!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan".

JOAN SEIBENICK  
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

## FAITH AND SCIENCE

*"When we read about creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so. He created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that he gave to each one so they would reach their fulfillment." -Pope Francis*

I have heard the statement, "I believe in Science, not God." Sadly, from one of my own kids!

Our secular society today tends to believe that there is a war between faith and science. Some argue that science is concerning the natural world and faith is concerning the supernatural world. Hebrews 11 states, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." In science, faith without evidence is a vice, while in religion it's a virtue, states Jerry Coyne, a professor of evolution from the University of Chicago. However, I believe that you do not need to choose between faith and reason. My dad used to say that God was the most awesome scientist, much like the quote above from Pope Francis. Creation

comes from God, but God used science to accomplish these goals. Faith and science are not mutually exclusive.

God gave us reason, and God gave us faith. Both are gifts. Both are to be used in their maximum capacity. Thank God for science and religion, so that we can have our heart and brain working in unison in comprehending this revelation in the fullest way that we can, at least on this side of heaven!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lynn Meisberger".  
LYNN MEISBERGER  
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

# FAITH IS LIKE A PUZZLE

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There I sat; just staring. My elbows up on my office desk and my hands resting on my cheeks while looking right at this thing in front of me. I am a bit bewildered of its appearance now because it doesn't look anything at all like what it should. As I sit there, I ponder things in my head and say to myself, "why did I let this happen? It's my own fault." I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me. I had to figure this thing out and once again bring it back to its true form. It was not going to be easy.

So let me back up a bit and get you up to speed and how things got to this point. I love certain types of puzzles, especially ones that are hands on and make you think. A few examples are ones like the Rubik's Cube, the Pyraminx, and the Chain Links puzzle game. They are fun to play and certainly a thrill to try and figure out. They are challenging, but I can solve the three I mention here. Each one took a lot of time and effort to do so, but the satisfaction of getting that last move in place and watching it all come together is quite enjoyable. Of course, though, I am always looking for a new challenge.

In my search one day, I found a really cool puzzle game called the Morph Egg puzzle. It is sort of like a Rubik's Cube, but it is one solid color (mine is white) and shaped exactly like a regular egg when it is solved...and I emphasize when it is solved! I placed it on my desk as a little show piece and just figured one of these days I'll work on it.

I was doing some First Communion interviews in my office one day and a young girl came in with her mom and younger brother. The young girl was the one I was interviewing. I had the egg puzzle on my desk and the young boy was quite intrigued with it. I thought, "well, he can go ahead and look at this while I interview his sister in order to keep him occupied." As they were leaving, the young boy handed the puzzle back to me, but it no longer looked like a regular egg. It looked like a scrambled egg. This little boy evidently decided

that I needed to start my challenge with this puzzle that day and took it upon himself to mess it all up. I politely took it from him, placed it on my desk and walked the family out to the front office area giving the young girl much praise for a wonderful interview. Yet, in the back of my mind, I was contemplating, and kind of regretting, the challenge I had waiting for me back on my desk. My now scrambled egg needed some attention.

I knew just sitting there staring this thing down wasn't going to do anything, nor was I going to go home, come back in the morning and see it magically solved on its own. I had to put in some effort and work to shape this puzzle back into its true form. And so, it began.

Our faith is certainly like a puzzle. We know that without great attention and effort in building upon our faith, in our journey through life, it will not grow on its own. We cannot stare at it or leave it in a room behind a closed door and just hope for the best. It takes great patience, strength, courage and of course the guidance of Christ and others in our lives to make it flourish each and every day. And yes, sometimes our faith can seem a bit scrambled as tough times take over and leave us, well, sitting there with a puzzled look on our faces. But we must keep making moves forward in the puzzle that is our faith. For each step forward gives a wonderful satisfaction of accomplishment and without a doubt brings us closer to God. I still haven't completely solved the Morph Egg puzzle yet, but progress continues to be made. Even though it remains a bit scrambled, I am perfectly fine with it as long as I continue to give it the attention it needs and work towards making it, once again, into its true form.



Scott

SCOTT STEINKE  
DIRECTOR OF LITURGY



# DEFINING FAITH

Is it normal to doubt God? I would have to answer, “Yes!” The dictionary defines doubt as “to be uncertain about (something).” Raise your hand if you ever have felt uncertain. If you are like me, you raised your hand. We hope everything will work out, but we still have that queasy feeling that it will not; God isn’t listening. We tend to beat ourselves up when we doubt God and the love God has for us – “God didn’t do what I asked for, so God must not care about me.” You are not alone; throughout the history of God’s covenant with “His Chosen People,” people have doubted God. The list includes such great names as Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, St. John the Baptist, Peter, Thomas, St. Augustine. We could go on ad infinitum. Some would even add Jesus to the list; “My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46)

Often we look for God to work in our lives in miraculous ways. We look for solid proof of who God is, God’s will for our lives, and yet God is speaking in a much quieter voice, waiting for us to tune in. Sooner or later, every one of us feels the unsettling, soul-piercing doubt. Some of us might struggle with intellectual doubt. How do I really know God exists? How can I be sure that Jesus is the way to heaven? Others of us might struggle with circumstantial doubt. How can God be good when there is suffering in the world? If God loves me, why did I lose my job?

There’s nothing “bad” or unusual about the struggles you’re experiencing. Every Christian needs to wrestle with doubt and disbelief. A faith unquestioned and untested is no faith at all. I love what the great poet Lord Tennyson wrote, “There lives

more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.” Christianity isn’t about having faith in faith alone. In the language of the New Testament, faith is a derivative of persuasion; it’s not merely a blind, mindless acceptance of the things our mothers and fathers told us. Instead, it’s solid confidence based on convincing evidence.

The Bible defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for” and “the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). In the dedications to his Gospel and the Book of Acts, Luke emphasizes eyewitness accounts and “infallible proofs” (Luke 1:2; Acts 1:3). We don’t believe simply because we want to; we do because we have good, solid reasons to believe. The process of making our faith our own is going to entail some hard work on our part.

When all the working, studying, and learning is done, we must remember that faith is ultimately a gift of God (1 Corinthians 12:9; Galatians 5:22). I am reminded of the man who brought his son to Jesus for healing. “Lord,” he shouted when he saw Jesus, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24). Jesus responded to that honest cry of the heart. The boy was returned to his father healthy and whole. May we have the same courage to cry out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”



*Fred*

DEACON FRED MERRITT  
DIRECTOR OF ADULT FAITH FORMATION

## DOUBTING THOMAS

It always seemed a little unfair that Thomas is forever saddled with the title “Doubting Thomas.” There was a time when the disciples were trying to talk Jesus out of going back to Judea to see Lazarus because the authorities wanted Him dead. It was Thomas who said, “Let us also go, that we may die with Him” (John 11:16b). But that’s not what we remember about Thomas.

After Jesus is raised from the dead, He appears to the disciples. But John says “Thomas wasn’t with them” (John 20:24). They believed because they were there and saw the Lord. Earlier, when Mary tried to tell them that she had seen the Lord, they didn’t believe her either (Mark 16:11). Thomas responds like anyone asked to believe something that seems too outlandish and extraordinary. He wants to see the evidence with his own eyes.

The beautiful thing is that Jesus makes a special trip to accommodate him. Again, the Lord doesn’t berate or belittle the disciple. Jesus shows Thomas the scars and encourages him to believe. And Thomas responds with heartfelt worship. Jesus’s final statement here is critical. It’s one thing to see and believe, but a vast majority of Jesus’s followers will not have that luxury. And by saying, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,” Jesus recognizes that belief isn’t simple or easy. If you struggle with doubt, Jesus completely understands.

# GROWING IN FAITH THROUGH SELF-DOUBT

No one really talks about when friends break up. Romantic break-ups we'll talk about all the time. We'll listen to songs about them, watch movies about them, confide in our friends about them. But the end of a friendship is comparatively taboo. They can be just as devastating—a close friendship can have the same emotional closeness and the same prospect of permanence as a romantic relationship. Yet we don't turn it into art when they end.

I had a very close friendship in high school that ended suddenly at the end of 10th grade, and not on my terms. In fact, I didn't even know my friend was upset until he said he didn't want to talk to me anymore. I started my summer break feeling friendless and alone. I wondered anxiously if the other people I considered friends at school didn't want me around either. I doubted everything about myself.

God has a way, though, of using these low moments in our lives to remind us: we are chosen. That same summer that started with me feeling completely dejected, my mom convinced me to go on my parish's mission trip to Harlan, Kentucky for a week. I went, and, beyond my expectations, I really enjoyed it. I liked working with my hands, sure, but more importantly, I loved the people I was with. I was surrounded by people my age, from different schools who

just enjoyed each other. There weren't cliques, or social politics. We were just working on a project and growing as friends.

That mission experience led me to joining the youth group. Up to that point, I'd been an active Catholic, sure, but I did that because I was supposed to. This was the first time I was doing it because I wanted to. I could feel God working in me for the first time—starting the chain of events that led me to working in the Church now.

God creeps up on us. What was probably my greatest moment of self-doubt in high school led directly to what is now my career. As we bring back the St. John mission to Campton this summer and build back the youth group post-COVID, I hope I can provide a similar opportunity for our parish teens to understand that God has chosen them for something special.



*Joe Neidhard*  
JOE NEIDHARD  
DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY

## CELEBRATING OUR

## *catholic faith*

### *Our Sympathies Go Out To...*

Karin Gonzalez on the death of her husband Jorge and to Lucy on the death of her father

Theresa Kraemer on the death of her husband Michael

Diane Biehle on the death of her father

Jerry & Julie Sharp on the death of their daughter

### *Congratulations to Those Who Were Baptized*

Isabelle Florence Meierdiercks

Ellison Mae Keane

Easton John-Thomas Keane

Bennington James Lynch

Emerson Becket Hoffman

Chiara Vargas Cruz

# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

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Welcome to a new year! We are sending prayers to all our parishioners for a healthy and happy 2022. I am entering this year with hope and faith. Here's to a year filled with happy memories and good health. Looking back on 2021, we do have so much to be thankful for. Our parishioners stepped up in so many ways! We held our Mini-Fest with a parish picnic, basket bonanza and grand raffle, resulting in \$66,000 in earnings (our festival usually earns around \$150,000). Parishioners donated to our parish wish list in an amazing way. In 2021, 2/3 of the items on our wishlist were fully paid for by specific parishioner donations. To view a current wishlist, go to [www.stjohnwc.org/parish-wish-list](http://www.stjohnwc.org/parish-wish-list). We provided support to so many community organizations, like Reach Out Lakota, Campton Mission, St. Francis food pantry, St. Leo the Great and many others. The bottom line is that our parishioners are givers. You give of your time, talent and treasure in ways that can't be surpassed. We are blessed to have you as part of our parish family.

At the time of writing this article, we are at our budgeted income from weekly giving. Of course, in the second year of COVID, this is a position to be proud of! Our YTD income is \$579k and our budget is \$573k as of the end of November. We do thank you if you are able to give and ask that you please prayerfully consider making a tax-deductible donation to your parish! Also, giving electronically is the perfect way to "set it and forget it" for your giving. If you are interested in setting up your regular contributions electronically, it is easy to do. Just click on the "Give Online" button on our website homepage and follow the instructions. As always, if you ever have questions about giving, I am available via phone, email or in person! Don't hesitate to stop by, call or email me with your questions.

If you would like to give to St. John parish with a stock donation, that would mean a lot to us as well. Donations of stock to St. John Church are processed through our individual custodial account at Fifth Third Bank. To donate stock to our parish, please make sure to include the information below in your communication. Please note: the Archdiocese of Cincinnati Gift Acceptance Policy requires a donor name be included with the transfer. All stock transfers without a donor name and a recipient account number will be rejected and returned to the donor account.

Company Name: Fifth Third Bank  
DTC Number: 2116  
Account Number: 010447175IBV  
Account Name: St. John West Chester

If you have any questions, please contact Brigid Loebig in the parish office at 777-6433 ext. 119 or [bloebig@stjohnwc.org](mailto:bloebig@stjohnwc.org).

Have a truly blessed 2022! I pray daily for our parishioners. For this year, I will be focused on praying for kindness for everyone. I hope that you give it and that you receive it. You are *chosen* to share your love with others. Kindness is the root of all good things!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joan".

JOAN SEIBENICK  
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION



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