

PARISH OF ST. MICHAEL

October 2018 Newsletter & Calendar

Dear Parishioners,

I am always appreciative when parishioners are traveling and bring back a bulletin to share. There are wonderful things happening in other parishes that could be incorporated into our Parish. I am especially appreciative of ideas that help us be a more welcoming parish family to others. The following is an article from "America" magazine in their August issue by Colleen Duggan. I was inspired by it and hope you find it so as well. *Fr. Terry*

The Kids Are All Right

How you can help parents struggling in the pews

One recent Sunday, my 4-year-old discovered an already-been-chewed piece of gum underneath the pew just as our pastor stood to deliver his homily. Before Edward popped the wad into his mouth, I leaned over and hissed, "Do *not* eat that."

He glared at me, and I asked Mary, my 11-year-old, to throw the gum in the trash. Then, I turned my scattered attention back to father's homily. After a minute or two, my 13-year-old daughter tapped me on the shoulder to let me know Edward had escaped from the pew, hot on the trail of Mary and the A.B.C. gum.

I slipped away from my seat to find him.

One man sitting a few rows behind me, having witnessed the entire scene, whispered, "Go get him, mom!"

Another parishioner pointed over his shoulder and said "He went that way."

I endured the long walk of shame as several more onlookers informed me of my little escapee's whereabouts. When I finally spotted him, Edward was standing in front of his sister pleading his case about the gum and his unreasonable mother.

I overheard him say, "I'm *not* sitting in the pew with *her*."

If someone had warned me before marriage about the difficulties I would face in bringing my small children to Mass, I am not sure I would have believed them. There is no way to anticipate the rambunctious behavior kids produce during a 60-minute Sunday Mass. For a long time, most of my church experience included silencing squabbles between warring siblings and discouraging at least one child from scaling the kneelers while I half listened to the readings.

My husband and I struggled for years to manage our posse of small people until one random Sunday something happened that revolutionized the years of theatrical religious drama we had endured. One morning at the 10 a.m. Mass at our new parish, some longtime friends, Janet and Danny Hoover, professional parents of a large brood of children, sought us out and sat down in the pew with us and our five children, ages 8 and under.

I wanted to lean over and tell Janet and Danny to get up and run. I wanted to inform them that sitting with our kids was like sharing a pew with a traveling circus, but before I had a chance to plead my case, Janet grabbed a toddler, Danny grabbed another toddler and a few of Janet's older kids sat between my other little ones. For the entire 60 minutes, our children were quiet and entertained by the person with whom they sat.

The next weekend, Janet met us in the parking lot and invited us to do the same thing. It was hard to accept help, but it was impossible to deny how efficacious it was to sit with the Hoover family. The stress of managing our children was gone, as was the worry we were annoying and distracting other parishioners. Janet and Danny weren't shocked by anything the kids did (they'd seen it all by then), and they helped teach my children the appropriate re-

sponses to the prayers. When we moved out of state several months later, we were sad to leave the Hoovers, and Mass was never again as manageable as it was during those months when we had backup in the pew.

I was reminded of the help from our friends those many years ago last weekend when my husband and I filed into a pew with our six children, right behind a young mom and friend of mine, who just had her third baby under 3. When her 2-year-old began to get antsy, we invited her into the pew with us. It was our turn now to help the other younger parents in the church who needed help surviving Mass.

Catholic families want to feel wanted in church. Unfortunately, instead of receiving a warm welcome, many of us are met with criticism, judgment and a general intolerance of the behavior of our little people. There is a general attitude that these families should come back to Mass when their children know how to sit quietly and "behave".

As someone active in parish ministry, I work with a devoted team of people dedicated to spreading the Gospel. We are constantly brainstorming ways to communicate God's love to those sitting in the pews and beyond. We strive to create programs and events that nourish the hearts and minds of our parishioners.

But perhaps we should redirect our energies.

What if we quit trying to develop the perfect pastoral program and instead tried to make those people we see every Sunday in the pews feel welcomed and loved?

What if we embraced those families who show up at the back of the church, self-conscious and starving for the body of Christ?

What if we asked ourselves, "How can I serve the people struggling in my pew?" instead of sitting silently and judging them.

We do not need perfectly designed programs to smile at newcomers or to invite someone to sit with us. We just need an open heart and a willingness to serve.

So, if you are a young mom or dad struggling with your kids at church and feeling embarrassed or discouraged, take heart. You are not alone.

And if you need help managing your brood, look for me at St. John's Catholic Church. We sit on the right side, fourth pew back. We have extra hands, open hearts and room for you to join us.

I can hold the baby while you receive Communion.

Colleen Duggan is the author of *Good Enough is Good Enough: Confessions of An Imperfect Catholic Mom*. She is a Catholic writer, catechist and speaker whose work has appeared in many Catholic media outlets including *Catholic Digest*, *Creative Catechist*, *CatholicMom.com*, *Aleteia* and *Integrated Catholic Life*.