

# ST. PATRICK

## CATHOLIC CHURCH

### Meet the ZEPETA FAMILY

*“We Can’t Live Without God”*

Next time you’re at our parish, don’t be surprised if you spot a member of the Zepeta family — whether it’s Gaby proclaiming the readings at Saturday Mass, her three daughters singing in the choir on Sunday, or her husband, Carlos, playing a guard in the Our Lady of Guadalupe play or pitching in on a maintenance project in the building.

Stewardship has been an integral part of the Zepeta family’s life since they joined St. Patrick’s in 2006.

Carlos and Gaby, on an invitation from a friend, each attended a three-day Cursillo de Cristiandad retreat in Tyler, Texas, shortly after joining St. Patrick. The retreat gave them both a better understanding of God’s love, and they hope that their daughters, ages 10 to 20, will be able to make the retreat themselves one day, as well.

“After the Cursillo retreat, a priest told us that it’s not just about praying and worshipping the Lord,” Gaby says. “We should also help out in the parish by volunteering and pitching in where there are needs.”

Gaby was then invited by a friend to serve as a lector at Mass.

“As a little girl, I always wanted to read at Mass,” Gaby says of the opportunity.

In addition, Gaby began volunteering for the Spanish-language RCIA process, which she taught for 10 years. Her involvement began when Carlos enrolled in RCIA and she noticed a need within the program to teach children — so she stepped in to fill it.



*The Zepeta family*

#### WEEKEND LITURGY:

**Saturday:** 5 p.m. (English), 7 p.m. (Spanish)

**Sunday:** 9 a.m. (English), 11 a.m. (Spanish),  
5 p.m. (English)

**First Saturday:** 9 a.m. (English), 7 p.m. (Spanish)

VER AL DORSO  
PARA ESPAÑOL





## The Eucharist and Stewardship as a WAY OF LIFE

In 1992, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a pastoral letter titled *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*. This document was an invitation to follow Christ Who gave of Himself for us. Each of us is called to serve our neighbors and to be stewards of God's creation and of all that has been entrusted to us. However, to truly understand stewardship, we must look to the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is the total gift of our loving Savior to us. Stewardship is our response to that gift.

Even the word "Eucharist" implies stewardship. The word "Eucharist" finds its roots in the Latin word *eucharistia*, which in turn came from the Greek word *eukaristos*, which meant, quite simply, "gratitude" or "thanksgiving." How fitting that we, who are called to be a stewardship people, celebrate at the focal point of every Mass an act of thanksgiving and gratitude — namely, the reception of Jesus' gift to us — the Eucharist.

In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the bishops speak of the Eucharist in this way: "The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity... we enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in Him, with one another. Here His love — indeed, His very Self — flows into us as disciples and, through us and our practice of stewardship to the entire human race."

When we receive Christ's Body in the Holy Eucharist, we hear the minister say, "The Body of Christ." To this, we respond, "Amen" — which means in Hebrew, "Yes; it is so." This is the essence of stewardship. We should enter

the Church for Mass out of "gratitude." We recognize the presence of the Lord in Holy Communion, and then we truly receive the Lord. What is left for us to do is the fulfillment of stewardship — that is, sharing what we have received in love of God and neighbor. Our entire experience speaks to stewardship — we are grateful; we recognize the real presence of the Lord; we receive the Lord; and then we share what we have received.

Christ's gift to us through the Eucharist is an invitation to us. We are called to give beyond what is convenient or what may be comfortable. We are called to forgive even when forgiveness may not be deserved; we are called to love even when that love is not returned. We are called to love as God loves us.

The Eucharist is stewardship celebrated. The Mass is more than a ritual. It is an actual encounter with God, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We need to respond to the Eucharist with our complete selves. What we experience in the Eucharist should, in turn, translate into our daily lives. We are committed to the Church, which is Christ's body. We show our love for His body by acts of charity and generosity. We spend time in prayer, expressing our gratitude and our love.

God's greatest gift to us is Christ's great love for us — this was shown when He was crucified on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to give us eternal life. God's love for us is without limit, and He offers Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Stewardship is how we respond to that gift.

*"The Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' 'The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and the works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church.'"* — Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324



# THE WORD OF GOD:

## How Do We Hear It? And How Do We Respond to It?

Dear Parishioners,

A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time — but before long, we will begin Lent. This is one of those rare years when Ash Wednesday is in March — so, Lent does not, of course, begin in February this year.

The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part — the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider that these readings are about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important.



Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets of how we approach the Word of God.

For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God's Word.

However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act requires time, practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us — that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

In Christ,

Fr. Denzil Vithanage, Pastor



## THE LECTORS MINISTRY

*Bringing Alive the Word and Treasures of the Bible*

As Catholics, we are called to celebrate the Holy Mass each Sunday and on Holy Days of Obligation. The Holy Mass has many important parts, and one of those is the readings — for as stated in the second chapter of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, “In the readings, the table of God’s Word is spread before the faithful, and the treasures of the Bible are opened to them” (57).

Since the readings are an important part of the Mass, the person proclaiming them has an essential task. Theresa Williamson is thankful to all those who have stepped forward to perform this role as lectors. Theresa handles the scheduling, which is also a necessary part of making any ministry at St. Patrick’s run smoothly.

Lectors possess several important qualities, like being reliable and comfortable in front of people. They should also have a strong speaking voice. Theresa says there is a big difference between reading the First Reading, Responsorial Psalm and Second Reading and proclaiming them.

“The best lectors are well-prepared,” Theresa says. “You can tell they have practiced, and they really announce the readings well. They don’t just read — they proclaim.”

Theresa appreciates all those who have a special gift for proclaiming the Word. While she isn’t shy herself, the thought of proclaiming the Mass readings makes her very nervous. However, doing the schedule is a perfect task for her. This is just one of many ministries she has taken on since she started attending St. Patrick’s Catholic Church in seventh grade.

“I call St. Patrick’s ‘Holy Ground,’” she says. “This parish is home to me.”

***“The best lectors are well-prepared. You can tell they have practiced, and they really announce the readings well. They don’t just read — they proclaim.”***

— THERESA WILLIAMSON



*Lenette Shadow serves as a lector at St. Patrick’s.*

Over the years, Theresa has been involved in many different ministries, from Rite of Christian Initiation to St. Patrick School. She is currently involved in the Arts and Environment Ministry, as well. Members keep St. Patrick’s looking beautiful all year long. For many years, Theresa taught fourth-grade Religious Education.

“When I taught Religious Education, I had to prepare and take the time to study what I was going to teach,” Theresa says. “It really deepened my faith. I would learn things while preparing, which I think is the same as when lectors are preparing for the weekend readings.”

Theresa would encourage everyone to consider participating in a ministry at St. Patrick’s. It’s an excellent way to contribute and meet new friends along the way.

“It gives you a warm feeling to be part of things,” she says. “It’s important to be a servant.”

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were two lectors at each Mass — we will likely return to that in the coming months. Lectors sit with the congregation.

*Theresa Williamson conducts one-on-one training for new lectors. If you would like to become a lector, please contact Theresa at 936-635-0083 or [theresawilliamson@yahoo.com](mailto:theresawilliamson@yahoo.com).*



## The Fifth Pillar of Parish Life:

# OUTREACH

### *Ensuring that Everyone Has a Place at the Table*

James 2:26 says, “just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” If we are to be Christians, we need to do more than just attend Sunday Mass. We need to reach out to those beyond our parish walls, so everyone can have a place at the table. Without doing the good work of helping others and spreading the love of Jesus, our faith is dead.

Fr. Denzil Vithanage has chosen Seven Pillars on which we can focus, as we make St. Patrick’s the best it can be — the fifth pillar we will explore is Outreach.

We have several ministries at St. Patrick’s that represent the Outreach Pillar, including the Knights of Columbus, St. Patrick Men’s Group, Outreach Guild, St. Patrick Guardians, 60-5 Group and Catholic Daughters of America.

Guessippina Bonner is living out the pillar of Outreach by working for others at St. Patrick’s. She’s been a member for about 15 years.

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*Guessippina Bonner helps with a 2021 Christmas event.*

*“It’s no good to just sit in the pews. You have to think about your gifts and consider how you might use them. We don’t all have the same skills, and that’s a good thing.”*

— GUESSIPPINA BONNER

## The Fifth Pillar of Parish Life: OUTREACH

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"I just try to do whatever is asked of me to help out," she says. "I like to just consider myself a 'worker bee.'"

Guessippina serves on the Parish Council and the Advisory Board at the school. Prior to the pandemic, she also helped the Knights of Columbus and other volunteers with landscaping at St. Patrick's. She also recently attended training to advocate for those seeking annulments through the diocesan Marriage Tribunal — as an attorney, Guessippina thought this would be a great ministry to use her talents. Guessippina also helps by providing treats and refreshments for various Faith Formation meetings and gatherings.

"I don't like to just put my name down for a ministry," she says. "When I volunteer, I want to contribute something and help out where I can."

For Guessippina, witnessing active ministry involvement demonstrates that we have a caring community here at St. Patrick's. After living in many different places across the United States, she is thankful to be here at St. Patrick's. She would encourage everyone to get involved in a ministry or two.

"It's no good to just sit in the pews," she says. "You have to think about your gifts and consider how you might use them. We don't all have the same skills, and that's a good thing."

Fr. Denzil also encourages everyone to get involved in a parish ministry. It's a great way to get to know people and support those struggling or in need.

"Reach out to your friends and family, and invite them to church," Fr. Denzil says. "When you reach out, you become a missionary."

*Please visit the parish website at [stpatrickslufkin.com](http://stpatrickslufkin.com) to learn more about the parish Outreach ministries.*

## Meet the ZEPETA FAMILY *continued from front cover*

"It brought me closer to the Lord," Gaby says. "I'm a better person because I taught RCIA. I enjoyed being able to teach children who came in not knowing anything and left with so much knowledge about God and His creation. It was a very happy experience, to be able to help these children to know more about God."

Teaching children about the Lord is something Carlos and Gaby do at home as well, as they raise their daughters.

"One of the reasons I serve in the parish is to make sure that my children take the right path and have a better future," Carlos says.

Carlos and Gaby invest in their daughters by having daily conversations with them, and by providing a strong example of discipleship and prayer, both within the parish and in the domestic church of their home.

*"We can't live without God. It's like food — our body needs food in order to live. It's the same thing with our faith."  
— Gaby Zepeta*

"We eat as a family and pray before meals," says their daughter, Marlene.

Their daughters have followed their example of stewardship. Seven years ago, after she began taking guitar lessons, Marlene joined the parish choir, and her sisters, Diana and Jamie, have followed in her footsteps.

"I decided to use my guitar playing as a way to show God's love to others, as well as my singing," Marlene says.

She was initially invited to join the choir for the formerly held bilingual Mass, and currently, all three sisters sing with the 1Voice choir at the 5 p.m. Sunday Mass.

In addition to participating in the choir, Diana, who is now in college, has found another way to offer her gift of time to the parish. When classes became virtual, freeing up more of her time, she decided to volunteer as the parish secretary.

Gaby says that being a part of St. Patrick is vital to the family's faith life.

"We can't live without God," she says. "It's like food — our body needs food in order to live. It's the same thing with our faith."