

# Celebrating Lay Apostolate History in the Diocese of Pittsburgh

Gathered Fragments – Special Feature – 2018

## THE NEW EVANGELIZATION: ROLE OF THE LAY APOSTOLATES IN THE DIOCESE OF PITTSBURGH

Very Rev. Joseph M. Mele, Ph.D.

Practically every Catholic boy in the 1960s will remember attending his local parish annual Holy Name Society Communion breakfast with his dad. I still remember those rows of tables in the church basement or the school cafeteria covered with long rolls of white paper tablecloths, the wooden folding chairs, and a center piece on every table holding an image of the young Jesus's face. My dad was proud to bring his four sons along with him to Mass and then to the Communion breakfast. On Saturday before the Communion breakfast, we would go to Confession, dad would give us a haircut, we would polish our "Sunday" shoes, lay out our suit, shirt and tie for the next day, and make sure we were ready for the big day when we would pledge our reverence for the Sacred Names of God and Jesus Christ and obedience and loyalty to the Magisterium of the Church. Although I was the youngest of my brothers, I understood the purpose of that Sunday morning was for the sake of personal sanctification and holiness of every man and boy in that room. It was always an impressive sight to see so many fathers and their sons contributing in this way to the evangelization mission of the Church. We would recommit to the Temporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy as a way of spreading the Faith at the local level of our parish through the Holy Name Society apostolate. Many present would become the right arm of our pastor.

In his document *Guiding Principles of the Lay Apostolate* (1957), Pope

Pius XII wrote: "The *consecratio mundi* (consecration of the world) is essentially the work of the laypeople themselves, of men and women who are intimately a part of economic and social life." This is why we see the Holy Spirit prompting more and more laity to participate in Lay Apostolates and parish ministries to further this work of the salvation of the world that Pope Pius XII wrote about so long ago.

Today we think of this activity as the New Evangelization. The Church is dynamically *On Mission for the Church Alive!* through the contribution of the Lay Apostolates!

I am delighted that the Catholic Historical Society's journal, *Gathered Fragments*, continues to include articles on the histories of Lay Apostolates. It pleases me that this edition will cover the exciting missions of The Flame of Love, Family Eucharistic Hour, Oakland Prayer Group, Stephen Ministry, Martha and Mary Ministry, and Catholic Daughters of the Americas. These featured Lay Apostolates and ministries are excellent representatives of so many others that will be covered in subsequent editions of *Gathered Fragments*. The Lay Apostolates are truly a leaven to the world reflecting the fresh stirrings of the Holy Spirit!

I want to personally thank the staff of *Gathered Fragments* for the documentation of the history of the Catholic Church in southwestern Pennsylvania. We are so blessed by your faithful service to the rich heritage of our Catholic community.

*\*The encyclical is available at the website: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius12/p12layap.htm>.*



# LAY APOSTOLATES REACH OUT IN PRAYER AND SERVICE

Sharon Serratore



## CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAS

Peggy Witas couldn't imagine what was in the soft, oversized envelope sent from the unknown Maryland address. As she recounts the story of unwrapping the surprise package addressed to her in her title as State Regent of the *Catholic Daughters of the Americas* (CDA), her eyes well up with tears.

Packed inside was a tattered, checkerboard knit blanket, handmade decades before by a member of the Duquesne, Pennsylvania Court of the CDA. The blanket was part of a care package, one of the many sent overseas during World War II to comfort American soldiers. Back then, assembling and sending these blankets was a project of that particular Court, as the local groups are known. The blanket still contained an attached fabric corner tag, identifying "*Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Duquesne Court #871*" along with the name of the CDA member who knitted it.

The blanket was mailed by a woman whose father served in World War II. Now decades later, the former soldier and his wife had both died, and the daughter was returning it, in the hope of reuniting the treasured item with the same CDA Court that had provided it for her dad as a young G.I. in need. The woman's accompanying letter offered simply and sincerely, "We wish to return it to the Catholic Daughters with our thanks."

Responding to the needs of the time – whether sending knit blankets to WWII soldiers or today, writing letters to Congressional representatives on immigration and end of life issues – this is what the Daughters do. Begun in 1903 by the Knights of Columbus, the CDA offers "updated programs to serve the current needs of church and country." The *Daughters* have a broad perspective in their projects, always aligned with the church and obedient to the bishops whom they serve.

"We're always in support of the church," says Ms. Witas, "one, under the Holy See. What's important to us as a Catholic community or on a moral level." Whatever the mission, she says, "there's always a vision."

This vision includes a devotion to the work of their bishops. As an international apostolate, the *Daughters* sponsor both local and global projects, serving in courts of 25 or more women. Rather than operating independently, "We're much more tied into a national organization," says Carol Brosnahan, a member from Washington, Pennsylvania, for close to twenty years.

On a national level, the *Daughters* send birthing kits to Haiti for expectant mothers. On a state level, they raise and send funds to each Pennsylvania bishop for pro-life projects: sponsoring pro-life ads on billboards and benches, and helping fund the January "March for Life" bus trips.

In Pittsburgh, the CDA hosts a luncheon each September to support diocesan seminarians. Monies raised are presented to the bishop for use at his discretion. The funds come close to \$3,000 each year after being matched by the First Catholic Ladies Slovak Association. One year, funds were used to buy the uniform blazers that the seminarians wear for official occasions. Several of the young men attend the luncheon, and each local Court of the *Daughters* is matched with a seminarian to sponsor. "This way," says Ms. Witas, "our ladies pray for seminarians and they establish a relationship."

In Pennsylvania there are 60 Courts, with nine active throughout the Diocese of Pittsburgh. The *Daughters* also have a branch for young members – the *Junior Daughters* – which is how Ms. Witas became involved as a teen. Her mother was a CDA member in Court Allegheny in the North Side, the oldest in Pittsburgh.

"It's like the Girl Scouts



**Patroness: Blessed Mother Mary**

but with faith,” says Ms. Witas, who, along with her sisters, and her mother before her, all began as *Junior Daughters*. At the time, she says, “Parents wanted something (religious) for their daughters, and there wasn’t something else.” Service was core – whether visiting nursing homes and the elderly, or supplying food banks or items for the homeless – followed by faith formation and leadership. “Anything that would help build a better character and build the world around them,” was the goal, says Ms. Witas. The group helped “form both (the adult) leaders and the girls themselves,” she says, recalling her own experiences.

With an eye to *CDA*’s future, Ms. Witas encourages members to always move forward. “I say: ‘Don’t be afraid to try something new to give to the church.’” The fruits may not be known until years later – like the returned blanket – or at all. Still, she says, “I’m a seed planter. I may never get to see the garden” that comes from the “sowing” but, she adds, “so many times women feel that way. We’re in the trenches, plowing and planting. It’s our connection to our long history.” The returned blanket affirms this. “This is just

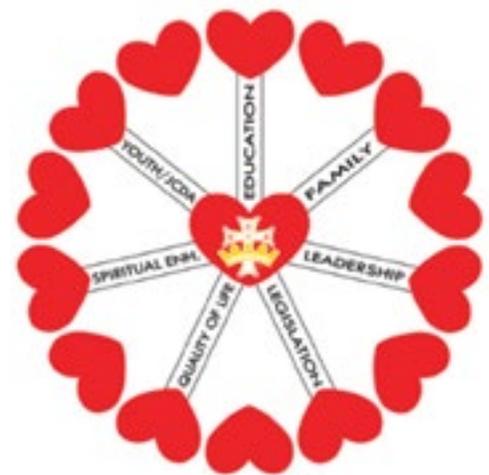


**Catholic Daughters of the Americas, St. Patrick’s Day parade, Pittsburgh, 1974**

something they did that’s now full circle. We’re a living, breathing organization. I always remind the women of that.”

Ms. Brosnahan knew nothing about the apostolate when a parish acquaintance asked her to attend a meeting. “It was not megaphoned,” the former DRE and Youth Minister says, but adds, “I felt such an obligation, (that) once I’m not working, something would draw me. *CDA* was it!”

Among many worthy apostolates for women, Ms. Brosnahan says “we’re not in competition,” and she expresses interest in forming a *Junior Daughters* group in Washington. With the opportunity for leadership and faith formation, she hopes the young women may learn and live the *CDA* motto of



**The Circle of Love**

“unity and charity.” To her, *CDA* exemplifies church people supporting one another through their works. “We are women helping women. Instead of tearing down, at *CDA* we build each other up.”

To learn more about the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, visit the website [www.catholicdaughters.org](http://www.catholicdaughters.org).



**CDA State Regent Margaret Witas (L) and CDA Court No. 1651 – Washington Regent Carol Brosnahan (R) with historic World War II blanket knit by CDA Court No. 871 – Duquesne**

## STEPHEN MINISTRY

While our clergy serve as “First Responders” for the immediate needs of their flocks, Stephen Ministers are those trained laypeople who come in afterwards offering ongoing care and prayers. It’s why Stephen Ministers are known as “the After People” – trained, equipped, and ready to be the healing presence of Christ to those hurting – after the funeral, after the divorce papers arrive, after the job loss.



*Stephen Ministry* may be new to our Catholic sensibilities, but it’s been around since 1975, when Dr. Kenneth Haugk, a newly ordained Lutheran pastor and trained psychologist, quickly realized he couldn’t sufficiently care for all those in his congregation. Rather than let those hurting go without the care and love of Christ so needed, he trained nine parishioners to minister in his place. Thus the first Stephen Ministers were formed, named for St. Stephen, first deacon of the church.

“I’m a cradle Catholic,” says Carol Caruso who helped bring *Stephen Ministry* to St. John Neumann Parish two years ago, but “this is a little bit of a foreign idea.” Always very active in parish work with her husband, Deacon Rick Caruso, she adds, “I don’t remember even having a one-to-one ministry like this.”

Ms. Caruso first learned of *Stephen Ministry* from a *Pittsburgh Catholic* article a few years ago. “It really struck me,” she says, and she told her husband about it. Ms. Caruso is used to hands-on care as a bedside nurse at UPMC Passavant Hospital in North Hills. “Many times I would be caring for a person who would be a caregiver,” she says, and recalls one patient in particular, a man diagnosed with lung cancer who was inattentive to his own medical needs. When she questioned him, he replied, “All I can think about is my wife who needs me.” Ms. Caruso thought to herself, “Who cares for the caregiver? Who supports them? In my job, I see so many that are caring for others.”

“I saw the need in my profession and that article came at the right time,” continues Ms. Caruso. Inspired to bring the ministry to St. John Neumann Parish, the Carusos approached their pastor, Father Albin McGinnis. “Fr. Al was very trusting. He is very lay-empowering,” she says. According to Father McGinnis, *Stephen Ministry* “has been a way to ready people in the parish to minister to each other. As our population ages and has become more mobile, it seems that more and more people are being left to deal with problems by themselves. Often times family are living somewhere else and they have no one . . . *Stephen Ministry* has filled that gap within our parish.”

With their pastor’s encouragement and support, the Carusos approached the parish at large. Ms. Caruso recalls that on one designated weekend “We spoke at all Masses. Our parishioners embraced it, though they’d never heard of it. They took a chance and it was quite a commitment (on their part).” That was in May 2016.

St. John Neumann is now one of the 12,000+ *Stephen Ministry* congregations worldwide. The apostolate is found mostly in mainline Protestant churches, yet some Catholic dioceses host and promote it in their parishes: St. Louis, Omaha, Nebraska and

Fairbanks each have active *Stephen Ministry*. In Pittsburgh, this caring apostolate has taken root in a few parishes: St. Bernard, St. John Neumann, and St. Richard.

*Stephen Ministry* can fill a great need in parishes as laypersons are encouraged to more fully respond to their baptismal call to serve. The apostolate not only brings needed care, it helps the pastor by providing high-quality Christian ministering. “There’s only going to be less and less,” says Ms. Caruso about clergy, and adds “*Stephen Ministry* helps out the pastor. Father Al saw this right away. [He] was really trusting. We have care receivers from St. Teresa of Avila Parish, and a Stephen Minister from St. Alphonsus, so we have a real presence in the area.”



**Pastoral Associate Tisha Bridges addresses Stephen Ministry Workshop at St. Bernard Parish, October 2017**

“Parishioners are ministering to one another and the love of Christ is being shown in a visible way,” says Father McGinnis. “Many people want to talk, know they are being heard and being held in prayer. That was never just the priests’ ministry, but the ministry of all Christians. The training sessions equip a good number of people in our parish to better listen and show the love of Christ. It has been good for the parish, parishioners, and the Stephen Ministers.”

Ms. Caruso agrees. “It’s a success,” she says, sharing that at St. John Neumann they have 13 active Stephen Ministers who have completed the training. “I’m so grateful that God sent us our ministers. They’re unreal. They’re so faithful. They carve out time for meeting that hour each week (with the care receiver). We were sent wonderful people to train. It’s a beautiful ministry all around – for our faith community, for our group of Stephen Ministers. Even when they have their own struggles, their own issues, they are faithful,” says Ms. Caruso. “We just have fantastic ministers.”

With the grouping of St. John Neumann with Assumption and Sacred Heart parishes, Ms. Caruso sees the potential to grow the ministry and therefore grow the care. About the future for *Stephen Ministry* in the new grouping she says: “We’re pretty excited about it. I don’t know, but if God’s behind it, it can only grow. I think it’s great. I don’t know why there’s not more of it.”

For more information about *Stephen Ministry*, contact Deacon Rick or Carol Caruso at St. John Neumann Parish in Franklin Park, or Pastoral Associate Tisha Bridges at St. Bernard Parish in Mt. Lebanon.

## MARTHA AND MARY MINISTRY FOR CATHOLIC WOMEN

Donna Canovali's devotion to those in religious life stems from deep family roots. Her mother was one of eight children, four of whom heeded the call to religious life. "There weren't many cousins," she jokes, and then adds, "My aunts and uncle were the foundation of my faith formation – my models in the faith." Three aunts entered the Sisters of St. Francis of Millvale, and an uncle became a priest. As a result, she says, "I spent a lot of time in the rectory and convents."

Describing a childhood "steeped" in the church, she recalls receiving gifts of rosaries, religious books, and statues with each holiday and birthday. "It was second nature to know the church calendar,



**Signature ministry items:  
apron and silver  
alabaster jar pendant**

devotions, feast days, and saints," she says. Of her aunts' and uncle's witness of vocation, "They really equipped me," she says, adding, "but we have to own it (for ourselves), and see how the Lord acts in our individual lives through all circumstances."

Coming to "own" or discern her personal journey helped Ms. Canovali form the *Martha and Mary Ministry*, a women's prayer apostolate devoted to the needs of the church – particularly priestly vocations – in the spirit of Martha and Mary of Bethany. The apostolate was borne out of Ms. Canovali's powerful conversion experience in Jubilee Year 2000. She recalls entering that time with great joy and, inspired by Pope John Paul II, she traveled to Rome for World Youth Day. While there she experienced an encounter with the Risen Christ which stirred her to reexamine her life and her pursuits.

"I saw myself as so busy and equated that with Martha – children, family obligations, juggling parties, and life occasions." She observed other women, too, similarly consumed with serving and activities. "I realized we have to slow down. Women make time for so many things in their schedules," citing social events, classes, parties. After the Rome pilgrimage, these seemed trivial to her. Inspired by Mary, the sister who "sat and listened" at the Lord's feet, she remembers asking herself, "Do we make time to pray?" It struck her that a balance was needed, one embodied in Luke's telling of sisters Martha and Mary. Paraphrasing Martha's grumbling to her sister – "You were in the living room while I was in the kitchen!" – Ms. Canovali points to Mary's peacefulness in her love and desire to welcome Jesus.

Seeing many "Marthas" among her sisters in Christ, Ms. Canovali wished to encourage them to choose the better "Mary" part. In 2002, after much prayer, she invited women for the first *Martha and Mary Ministry* meeting, to gather in prayer like Mary, and in friendship after the hospitality of Martha.

Ms. Canovali structured the meetings to include familiar prayers, recitation of the rosary, intercessions, and a "Recipe of Faith." These are brief reflections shared to inspire and help one another grow in God's love. It can be based on a particular Scripture passage, a meditation or an experience of God. "We grow in our faith every time we share," says Ms. Canovali of the Recipes. "The Lord



**Ministry meeting, 2018**

is still multiplying," she says, and about the group's sharing of Recipes, "They're going to fortify you, and you're going to fortify others." Hospitality, food and drink follow, so that each gathering reflects a balance. "There's always the Martha/Mary combo," she says, adding that "There's never prayer time or Holy Hour without fellowship." Membership in the apostolate is exclusive to women, (there are currently 23 on her mailing list), although men are welcome to come and pray.

The commitment by the members is remarkable. The group has met every month for fifteen years, with the exception of January 2015 when the temperature on that day was zero. Though most of the members were willing to meet that evening, the hostess cancelled, not wanting anyone to risk coming out in the cold. Although this was the safe call, the women were disappointed to miss.

Different members host each month, on a date often coinciding with major feast days. Ms. Canovali facilitates every meeting, and spiritual director Father Nick Argentieri occasionally drops in. For the feast of St. Martha in July, the meeting is usually a Eucharistic Holy Hour; in June, members attend the diocesan priestly ordinations. The apostolate's signature symbols are the *Martha and Mary* apron, and a silver alabaster jar pendant.

When asked about next steps, Ms. Canovali shares that while she's "always seeking approval with the diocese," one year ago she requested specific help with discernment. She'd received an inquiry from a parish administrator in California, and wondered if the ministry was meant to grow beyond the Pittsburgh diocese or remain local. She relies on the monthly meetings for inspiration, too, and hopes to continue as long as possible, believing the apostolate is "not meant to be an experiment."

Ms. Canovali envisions a related ministry, opening a café to offer distinctively Christian hospitality. The décor would depict gospel stories and while there, patrons could "sense that they'd be ministered to, and know the love of Jesus," she says. In the near term, Ms. Canovali hopes to introduce the apostolate to young mothers so they may bring fruits back to their families.

But no matter the age, nor whether a Martha or Mary type, Ms. Canovali knows, "Women of faith will always welcome the Lord because of the constancy of Jesus Christ. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

To find out more about *Martha and Mary Ministry*, visit its website at [marthaandmaryministry.com](http://marthaandmaryministry.com).

## FOUNDATION OF JESUS THE DIVINE MERCY

An event that blends families, the Eucharist, and a prayerful Holy Hour devotion is certain to be a powerful combination for children to grow in their Catholic faith. Pat Polachek, co-founder of the *Foundation of Jesus The Divine Mercy*, recognized immediately the like missions of the *Family Eucharistic Holy Hour* and her organization, and through it, she's worked to champion the apostolate and bring it to local schools and parishes.

The *Holy Hour* fills a void she saw missing in children's faith formation: teaching them to pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Citing the revelations from the diary of St. Faustina, Ms. Polachek is sure and direct, insisting, "Jesus says to pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet. It's not so-and-so – but Jesus and his mother, and we need to listen!"

Tailoring the chaplet devotion to young ones was already an inspiration of Renna Music, a Catholic music ministry of the Renna family of Birmingham, Alabama. Ms. Polachek came across their bilingual "Kids Sing Divine Mercy" and was inspired to promote it under her *Jesus The Divine Mercy* foundation. She had long sensed a need to evangelize children with devotions like the chaplet and the rosary, and the Renna format inspired her to continue. "I knew there would be a need to form children," she says about promoting the chaplet. "God can work in a second, in a millisecond through their hearts," she says, and adds "we want to put them in a situation to be inspired by God's promptings."



**Family Eucharistic Holy Hour**

Source: *Foundation of Jesus the Divine Mercy*

Thanks to the work and prayers of many, there is a format for the *Family Eucharistic Holy Hour* for schools and Religious Education programs to use. The hour-long occasion becomes an activity of praying and singing the chaplet in motion, appealing to the young ones' tactile impulses. "Their entire beings are being lifted up," she says, noting that "reverent motion is a key part." Along with the recitation of the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the *Holy Hour* includes a Eucharistic procession with clergy, color banners and flowers.

Father Joseph Mele, Vicar for Leadership Development and Evangelization for the Diocese of Pittsburgh, presided at the Oc-



**Divine Mercy Kids' Prayer Group**

tober 13, 2017 *Holy Hour* at Holy Trinity Parish in Robinson with over 400 children worshipping.

"What touched me most of all was the procession around the church that was filled with school children while we carried the Blessed Sacrament and the beautiful statue of Our Lady" said Father Mele. "I will never forget being moved by the apostolic spirit of the children. They had just prayed the Rosary not only for their own families but for children and families throughout the entire world. As the procession continued, I could see in their eyes and feel in my heart that our children understood their responsibility to pray for the salvation of the whole world. That was a remarkable moment!"

The event came to Holy Trinity thanks in part to the eagerness of school Principal Kimberly Stevenson. "Let's have one right away!" Ms. Polachek recalls the principal's response when she approached Ms. Stevenson about hosting the *Holy Hour*. "The reverence and awe I saw in the children as they prayed, sang, and participated in the hand motions touched my heart," says Ms. Stevenson – her words captured on the foundation's website. She adds that, "For days after this spiritual event, the children talked about how much they enjoyed their time with Jesus."

Ms. Polachek's next step in growing the apostolate is to provide a manual as a resource guide to help parish schools and Religious Education programs to host the *Holy Hour*. "This is what we've been given to do," she says about spreading the chaplet, and the *Holy Hour* in particular, for children. "As they grow up in the presence of Jesus, it brings them there so they'll be closer to Christ," she says, noting also the evangelizing witness to their own families. "When they sing and pray, that melody stays with them. They go home singing this and the parents ask them, 'What's this?'"

To bring the *Family Eucharistic Holy Hour* to your parish, visit the website [jesusthedivinemercy.com](http://jesusthedivinemercy.com).

## FLAME OF LOVE



When Linda Rhein speaks about the *Flame of Love*, she shares her great faith and conviction about a movement that's become a mission for her. Calling it both her "work and her charity," she points to its urgency for our times: "You can see why I call this the sequel to Fatima."

*Flame of Love* is both a movement and a name of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The title was revealed to Elizabeth Kindelmann (1913-1985), a Hungarian woman who received locutions from Jesus and Mary between 1961 and 1982. Ms. Kindelmann's diary recounts the private messages urging repentance, prayer, and sacrifice through devotion to the *Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*.

By now the movement has spread throughout the world and has reached the status of a Private Association of the Faithful. Its statutes are canonically approved, and several church leaders have given their imprimaturs to the diary's text, among them Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia and Hungarian Cardinal Peter Erdo, who called the messages "a gift from God," says Ms. Rhein. "People need to know it's approved," she says, and adds, the devotion is a "very universal call. The *Flame of Love* is a universal call offering the grace that's known as signal grace. This is the grace that abounds even more" and is much needed for our times, she says.

According to the apostolate's website, the devotion is much like Divine Mercy. *Flame of Love* serves to make the faithful "aware of a new fire coming from Mary's heart. Divine Mercy comes from the diary of St. Faustina. *Flame of Love* comes from the diary of Elizabeth Kindelmann."

Ms. Rhein's introduction to the movement came in 2016 while she was searching for a place to make her annual retreat. She discovered the apostolate's conference scheduled that September in Philadelphia. Though unaware of the topic – *Flame of Love* – she recalls God's providence in directing her there. The dates turned out to be the only ones she had open for getting away. Of all the retreats she saw, she remembers thinking, "This is my last chance for a retreat this year. So I got off work, I went, and I got handed this book." The book was *The Flame of Love*.

"I was just drawn to it immediately," Ms. Rhein says, recalling its appeal and its power. She read the entire 120-page volume within 24 hours. Since then, she has prayerfully worked to foster devo-

tion to the apostolate in the Pittsburgh diocese through her own book ministry, giving away, by her estimate, over 200 copies of *The Flame of Love*.

"You'll be surprised who will cross your path, who needs them (the books)," she says, adding, "What pushed me, what gave me the impetus was that Mary wanted me to keep going." Ms. Rhein has handed out books while waiting in a doctor's office, in a restaurant, and in churches – one time very intentionally to Auxiliary Bishop William Waltersheid.

Ms. Rhein was attending Mass at Epiphany Parish during the church's hosting of the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima. Bishop Waltersheid's homily alluded to Marian apparitions, and suggested "the hearts of Mary and Jesus are one" says Ms. Rhein, recalling his inspiring words. Always toting copies in her car or purse ("Never travel without them. I should get a bigger purse!" she jokes.) and encouraged by prayers to Our Lady, Ms. Rhein gave *The Flame of Love* to the bishop after Mass that day. He very kindly accepted it, which, to her was "an indication that Mary wanted me to keep going. She wanted me to keep giving them away."



**Flame of Love book**  
Source: Flame of Love



That was August 2017, and Ms. Rhein was eager to launch *Flame of Love* cenacle groups. Bishop Waltersheid suggested she contact Rev. Joseph Mele, Episcopal Vicar for Leadership Development and Evangelization. From him, Ms. Rhein learned of the Lay Apostolate Network (LAN) that had recently formed. Representing the *Flame of Love*, she attended a subsequent LAN meeting that enabled her to spread the apostolate with others in the diocese.

Ms. Rhein is excited for *On Mission* changes that will help expand devotion to the *Flame of Love*.

"These new groupings will create larger churches, more people to pray, more people to come together in cenacle," she says. She believes that parishes are where the apostolate will flourish, whether directed by laity or clergy, but always with the consent of pastors.

"Mary says we need the community. There's much peace and joy in praying as a community, not to mention support. The communities make it stay. Anyone can start a cenacle," she says, and "Everyone can practice it. The promise is for families, parishes, individuals – the whole world."

To order books or to learn more about *Flame of Love*, visit the website [www.flameoflove.us](http://www.flameoflove.us).

## OAKLAND PRAYER GROUP



It was Spring 2015, just after the initiative *On Mission for the Church Alive!* was announced. Parishes throughout the diocese were hosting worship evenings inviting the faithful “to pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the *On Mission!* process,” as the official timeline describes. After one such gathering at St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland, a small group of attendees

felt urged to continue to pray and intercede. That night the seed for the apostolate *Oakland Prayer Group (OPG)* took root.

“A group of us, after the very first Festival of Praise at the cathedral, we were just standing around talking, and we ended up praying together. And what came out of that prayer afterward was just a powerful, beautiful prayer,” says Alicia Hartle, one of those who gathered that night.

“We kept meeting, sometimes two times a week, sometimes once a week throughout the summer,” says Ms. Hartle. The gatherings consisted of a loose association of members from various *Life in the Spirit* and other Spirit-led worship groups from around the diocese. The common thread was Father Joe Freedy, she says, who, while living at the cathedral, was also organizing worship events throughout the diocese. At Father Freedy’s suggestion, the group that formed from that first *On Mission!* evening of worship became more closely associated with the Cathedral parish. Ms. Hartle describes approaching Father Kris Stubna, the cathedral rector, who said yes to the apostolate becoming a ministry there. That’s when it formally became *OPG*. The first gathering was held in October 2015 and it was huge, says Ms. Hartle, estimating some 130 people in attendance.

Since then the *OPG* has blossomed into a regular gathering of song, praise, and small group discussion that continues on the third Monday of each month at the cathedral’s Synod Hall. Frequent attendees are many folks from the cathedral community and also young adults from throughout the diocese.



**Celebrating at Oakland Prayer Group**

The *Oakland Prayer Group* is open to everyone. As Ms. Hartle says, the event is “perfect for mission – being a missionary disciple. You can go Salsa dancing (for example) and invite someone to come and be a part of that. There’s some interaction, so they’re not just observing, but encountering the Body of Christ. That’s just been beautiful, just seeing people who’ve never set foot in the church come,” says Ms. Hartle.

“We’ve also seen people return to the church,” she adds, and shares a story about two frequent attendees who’d been baptized but, she says, “weren’t really practicing.” The two later entered into



**Oakland Prayer Group meets at Synod Hall, Oakland**

full communion in the Church, along with six from Protestant backgrounds who became Catholic in this past year. “It’s beautiful to see a lot of the people from a megachurch background and just seeing it’s okay to be expressive and worship, and see the richness of the Roman Catholic faith.”

One of those who came in was Erik Pintar of Oakland. “I became Catholic about a year ago from an Evangelical background and *Oakland Prayer Group* is where I realized the depth and richness of the charismatic tradition in the Catholic Church, which I was not expecting!” says Mr. Pintar. “I never realized as an Evangelical Christian that modern Catholics would have such a community alive and unafraid of charismatic spiritual gifts – tongues, prophecy, and healing, for example. All these gifts we see in the New Testament as expected and helpful in the Church, but in the modern day they are often misunderstood or missing in church communities. Being a part of *Oakland Prayer Group* has given me a community where charismatic spiritual gifts can be celebrated in a helpful and holistic way in alignment.”

To some the name *Oakland Prayer Group* might sound generic, but Ms. Hartle points again to the missionary dimension of the apostolate, calling the title “perfect.” “It’s definitely been part of the call that this is the territory of our parish, to go out and pray, (where) prayer walks, and inviting people to come in and just really taking that to heart.” The apostolate is not exclusive – and the name signals that, without mentioning denomination or creed or indeed anything but prayer. “Just come and pray,” invites Ms. Hartle. “This is for everyone who wants to pray. Prayer is for everyone.”

All are welcome at the *Oakland Prayer Group*, which meets at 7:00 P.M. on the third Monday of each month at Synod Hall, St. Paul Cathedral Parish.