

# SPIRITLINK

St. Gerald Parish Newsletter † Ralston/Omaha

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**Teaching Religious Ed and Gen Smejkal go hand in hand.**

## Setting Priorities: Parishioner Gen Smejkal Teaches Students Religious Ed Should Be a Top Priority

*By Sherry Wachtler, Parishioner*

When **Gen Smejkal** starts back to teach Religious Education at St. Gerald's for the 19th year this fall, she's doing something she's never done before. She's coming alone.

She started teaching Religious Education when her own children began classes. She taught for 10 years, stopping only when she went back to teaching school full-time.

Then when her grandson was school age, she decided it was time to go back to the Religious Education classroom, too. He was Confirmed last year and will be moving on to high school.

"This fall will be the first time I won't have a child or grandchild in Religious Education," she said. "I'm going to solo it. I think I can handle it."

Gen loves teaching. She has a long history as a teacher, in the Ralston School District. She taught second-grade at Karen Western for 16 years and now is a substitute teacher.

For the last few years Smejkal's been a sixth-grade Religious Education teacher and she looks forward to preparing her students for Levels I and II Confirmation. "But I tell Mike Witt, the Religious Education Director, to put me where he needs me the most," she said.

"Gen is very dependable, very organized, and very eager to teach the kids," Witt said. "She is a wonderful person. Kids like her and she likes them."

How does she do it year after year? "It's fun seeing new kids, meeting them, and seeing what their strengths are," she said. Over the years she's seen a few changes, but she said the doctrine of the Church remains the same.

Parents are busy yet their support is very important, Smejkal said. Kids are more involved in different activities, and their time is limited, she said. "You have to let them know that Religious Education is a priority," she said. "I just keep mentioning that we have to use the whole 60 minutes of class."

Her rewards are many. When she runs into a former student, and he's quick to say "hi," she can't help but smile, or when she has a younger sibling and gets to see the family again, it's always a treat. Plus it's what she does for her parish, and she's glad she is able to do it.

Whether it's with her kids, her grandkids, or all by herself, it doesn't matter. Teaching Religious Education and Gen Smejkal go hand in hand. †

### RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CERTIFICATION

St. Gerald has a team of more than 40 committed volunteer teachers of religious education. 75% have 7 or more years of experience in religion classrooms. The Archdiocese of Omaha has mandated that teachers of Religious Education in its parishes be certified. St. Gerald Parish is in its second year offering a certification program for religious education teachers. St. Gerald is using the "Echoes of Faith" materials, according to Religious Education Director Mike Witt.

This year's focus will be the Creed and Catholic teachings on morality. Other parts of the program include: Liturgy and Sacraments, Prayer and Spirituality, and Scriptures. After the third year the teacher earns a Level I certification from the Omaha Archdiocese.

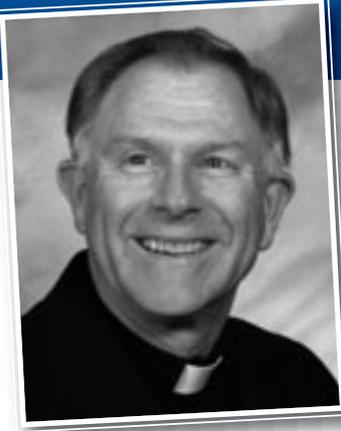
"This program does a nice job of giving everyone an overview of Catholic faith, theology, and scripture," Witt said. All volunteer teachers are also required to participate in the Archdiocesan "Safe Environment" training. †

### ST. GERALD PARISH MISSION STATEMENT

**We, as St. Gerald Parish, are a Eucharistic community who will help each other to be good and faithful stewards of God's love. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we will accomplish this through prayer, worship, education, and service.**

## Growing in Holiness

By Rev. Gary Ostrander, Pastor



**“The most basic implementation of stewardship in our life is growing in the gift of faith.”**

Jesus told the parable of a master and his servants (Matthew 25:14-30). The master was leaving on a trip and put his affairs into the hands of his servants. Each received according to his ability. One received five talents, another two talents, and a third one talent. The first two servants doubled what was given them. The fellow with one talent buried his talent. When the master returned there was an accounting of how they used their talents.

**The parable speaks to us of growing in holiness.** This parable is about taking the gift of faith, that we have received and growing in that faith. The most basic implementation of stewardship in our life is growing in the gift of faith. When we multiply our talents of faith we are learning more about our faith, we are practicing our faith and we are spreading our faith to others. If stewardship is sharing the gifts we’ve been blessed with and faith is the greatest of all gifts, then sharing our faith with others is foundational to being a follower of Christ. When we go to Mass faithfully every Sunday we are thanking God for the gift of faith. Missing Mass frequently is saying to God “no thanks, there are more important things in my life.” When we practice our faith, when we have a passionate drive in our hearts to be holy, to be like Christ, it is then that we are practicing stewardship to its ultimate.

**As I mentioned above, an essential element of this appreciation of our gift of faith is to share and spread that faith with others. We give it away.** Parents and grandparents do this by carefully teaching their children the faith. Recently we heard from two of our college graduates (Chris and Genevieve) who are going to share their faith with college students as FOCUS volunteers. We can all give witness of our faith in one way or another to those around us.

**Another way we share faith is to support others who are spreading the faith through their various ministries.** We can financially support Chris and Genevieve. We can support missionaries who go far and wide to spread the faith. Closer to home, we can support projects like the Guardian Angel Auction and the roof fund to support our school.

**How many people have deeper faith because of you?** It’s hard to know ... *now*. We will find out for sure in eternity. Share your faith, grow in holiness. †

## To Live in Christ ... *By Kim Hansen, Adult Education Committee*

Deepening your faith and exploring how to live that faith are two goals in the new small group, faith-sharing series “To Live in Christ” that begins this September. St. Gerald’s Adult Education Committee is bringing the Paulist Press program to the parish.

The program is similar to RENEW, a successful program in St. Gerald Parish several years ago. “To Live in Christ” offers five six-week “seasons” that include the topics Jesus: Discipleship, Prayer, Baptism, and Eucharist. The entire program will be stretched over two years ending in January 2010.

The first season, Jesus, starts September 22nd and will continue for 6 weeks. The next season will start in January 2009. Groups of 10 people will meet for one hour each week in a leader/facilitator’s home, at church, or in an agreeable location. Participants will have a

booklet for each season that guides them through prayers, meditations, and scripture readings. There are also questions to help spur discussion.

Small group faith sharing presents numerous possibilities for strengthening an individual’s spiritual growth by looking closely at love of God, love of self, and love of neighbors and friends, cites Paulist Press. This is accomplished through groups small enough to encourage the sharing of beliefs and life experiences.

Complete information will be included in the Sunday bulletin beginning August 24th. The program information will also appear on the parish Website [www.stgerald.org](http://www.stgerald.org) starting the week of August 17th. Sign up after Mass or on the Website. Call the parish Business Office for more information, 331-1955. †

# In "FOCUS": with Genevieve Hunt and Chris Schilmoeller

By Eric Olson, Parishioner



Genevieve Hunt



Chris Schilmoeller

**Genevieve Hunt** faced a choice after receiving her psychology degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in May. She could begin work this fall at the Nebraska Medical Center to become a physical therapist, or she could take arguably a more difficult path and become a missionary in the Fellowship of Catholic University Students, better known as FOCUS.

Hunt followed her heart and will begin her missionary work in the first-year FOCUS program at the University of Illinois-Chicago.

"This is something I wouldn't have a chance to do again," Hunt said. "I've seen the impact FOCUS has had on students at UNL. I'm excited to see it go to other schools and to have a chance to be a part of that."

**Chris Schilmoeller**, like Hunt, attended St. Gerald School and graduated from UNL last spring with a psychology degree. He's headed to the University of Colorado in Boulder this fall to become a FOCUS missionary.

Founded 10 years ago, FOCUS is a national outreach to college campuses, to secular and Catholic schools. There are about three dozen campus chapters around the nation, all there to help students allow Jesus to be the Lord of every facet of their lives. That means their academic and social lives, dating relationships, and major life decisions.

FOCUS missionaries lead Bible studies and mentor students, emphasizing chastity, sobriety and excellence, or being the best you can be. FOCUS calls this "discipling".

The work is full-time, and the missionaries rely on the generosity of donors to provide living expenses. Missionaries make a two-year commitment to FOCUS. For some, the experience leads to a religious vocation. For most, marriage and a career in another area follow.

Schilmoeller said the Holy Spirit moved him to missionary work after spending a good number of his high school years associated with the so-called wrong crowd. He thanks his dad, Mike, for emphasizing the importance of a college education along with the importance of developing a strong spiritual life. The kid who couldn't make better than C's in high school ended up on the Dean's List a couple of times in college.

He signed up for a FOCUS Bible study at UNO's Newman Center and was hooked almost immediately.

"It really made me hungry to learn more about my faith and dive deeper into my faith," Schilmoeller said. "By the second year, I started leading a FOCUS Bible study. It really taught me how to strive for greatness in my life. It was pretty crazy what it did for me. I became a leader instead of a follower. It taught me public speaking. It has truly changed my life around."

Genevieve and Chris are true examples of people returning God's love and reaching out to others in their life choices. †

**WE SHARE OUR  
CATHOLIC FAITH  
WITH OUR CHILDREN**



**Eighth-grader Samantha Perry** crowned the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary during this year's May Crowning. Her escort was classmate **Jake Cotton**.

Photographs by parishioner Mary Slowik.



# Feed My Sheep Annual Appeal

By Deacon Chris Hanson, St. Gerald Parish Development Director

Each fall all 152 parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Omaha unite to help those in need through the *Feed My Sheep* Annual Appeal.

- The Annual Appeal provides funding for a variety of pastoral needs in the archdiocese including:
- Support for Catholic schools (elementary and high school levels)
- Support for campus ministry programs for college students
- Support for housing of retired priests
- Support for outreach to those in most need, including Catholic Charities and Native American programs

All of these needs are provided for through the generosity of the people of the church in northeast Nebraska. They are not funded through the tax that every parish pays to the archdiocese. It is better that way – those in greatest need should receive the direct support of the people of God.

The sharing of our financial resources with these worthy needs is a recognition that we stand united with other members of the Body of Christ that are hurting, or hungry for the Word of God. How privileged we are to support one another, to feed each other.

As with all stewardship, God blesses us manifold for our faithful response to Him. Last year the St. Gerald parish family supported the *Feed My Sheep* Annual Appeal with an \$80,000 contribution. For the fifth year in a row we reached our goal. We in return were blessed in many ways. Consider these two examples:

- St. Gerald School received \$34,200 from the Children’s Scholarship Fund to provide assistance to those who might not otherwise receive a Catholic education.
- A portion of our support went to Westminster Retirement Center; where both Fr. Lammers and Fr. Peschel reside. Our generosity helps care for the priests that have given their lives to serving us.

As we prepare for this year’s Annual Appeal, let us pray for guidance:

**Heavenly Father, continue to bless our parish family as we reach out to help those in need. May our hands be those of your Son, and may our heart be His as well. Thank you for teaching us to love one another better each day; and for providing opportunities to serve You in those we meet. AMEN. †**

## Becoming Stewards ... a life long formation process

In a steward’s life of prayer God reveals Himself intimately to one praying. The steward sees that the gifts received from God are to be shared and not buried; that the gifts come not from self, but from God and are to be shared with others. Here lies the heart of the steward’s personal response as a disciple – to share what one has received and to share with a generous, grateful, and loving heart.

As members of the Body of Christ, the parish and the individuals who make up the parish recognize that they have a call from God to give. The journey toward true stewardship is life-long resulting in the steward growing in love and loving as God loves us.

To know the “stewardship way of life”, does not make one live a “stewardship way of life”. Formation includes quality education, but knowledge itself is not enough. Ongoing Catholic education, (for children and adults), should include a proper understanding of stewardship by example and practice. Catholic schools, Parish Schools of Religion, youth ministry programs, adult education offerings, and parish stewardship committees are wonderful places where this faith formation begins. Yet, these are not the only parish organizations responsible for faith formation. Every parish organization has a role to play in nurturing the faith formation of the parishioners. The meaning of faithful stewardship and how to live this way of life is at the core of the disciple’s response to the gift of faith we freely receive from our loving God. †

*The Pillars of Parish Stewardship, Prepared by the Office of Stewardship, The Catholic Diocese of Wichita, Kansas*



**Holy smiles!  
St. Gerald 2008  
First Communion.**

**Photograph by  
parishioner  
Kristi Mundorf.**

# Confirmation Changes: A Difference for Good

By Kathy Kensinger, St. Gerald Parish Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

At the request of Archbishop Curtiss, St. Gerald Parish changed from a one-year to a two-year Confirmation preparation program in 2007. Kathy Kensinger, directs the Confirmation program for Religious Education students, and Becca Ramm directs the program for St. Gerald School students. Working together, they keep the programs integrated through projects and service opportunities.

The classes, called Confirmation Level I and II (rather than 7th and 8th grade), allow more time to make this sacramental preparation special for both students and their families. This preparation consists of classroom and home learning experiences, a retreat, and Christian service work. An orientation for parents is part of the Level I experience and a retreat is part of the Level II preparation. An exam is given at the end of each level. Any student entering the program for the first time must enter at Level I.

A total of 45 service hours is required of each candidate, in the areas of *Church Service, Family Service, and Community Service/Community Building*. Many service opportunities are offered through our Confirmation program, including

- The Living Nativity
- Living Stations of the Cross
- Our annual Great "Advent"ure - a birthday party for Jesus
- Students are also invited to watch the bulletin and volunteer at parish events, such as the Parish Festival.

This year a three-day service camp was also offered over the summer. It is hoped that these hours will be enjoyable and meaningful chances to become more connected to our parish as our candidates discover the special gifts that they have to share with the world.

Families are always encouraged to participate with the candidates in service opportunities, as family service is a great way to bring families together. Service work is intended to instill a pattern of stewardship which will continue after Confirmation.

## ARCHDIOCESAN CONFIRMATION GUIDELINES:

- The period of preparation for Confirmation in the archdiocese is two years (for students, usually 7th and 8th grade).
- The preparation program should include retreats and shared prayer experiences as well as classroom instruction.
- Candidates should attend Sunday Mass regularly; those who do not attend Sunday Mass regularly during the two-year preparation program should not present themselves to the archbishop for Confirmation.
- Candidates should participate in areas of community service both before and after reception of the sacrament.
- Community service should include service to the candidate's family, as well as service to the larger community. †

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSES:

Classes begin this year with an Open House on August 27th. Classes will be held on Wednesday only at 5:00 PM or 6:30 PM in the school at 78th and Lakeview. The Religious Education staff and volunteers are looking forward to another year of making a difference for good in the world and in the lives of our parish families! †

## CHRIST IN THE REAL WORLD:

Once again, St. Gerald will be offering weekly Faith Sharing groups for high school students. These groups talk, question, laugh, learn, eat, serve, and pray their way into a Christian lifestyle that takes faith past Confirmation classes and into real life. Watch the bulletin or the St. Gerald Website for registration information.

If you would like to share your faith by being an adult mentor for our youth programs, please call Kathy Kensinger, 331-1955. †

For up-to-date schedules of all parish youth activities visit the Website at [www.stgerald.org](http://www.stgerald.org) and click on "YOUTH".



## WE SHARE OUR CATHOLIC FAITH WITH OUR CHILDREN

Join in the celebration!  
St. Gerald children celebrated the dedication of the new school addition in 2006, benefiting both Religious Education and five day school students.

## PARISHIONER CHRIS ZADINA

### More Than Twenty Years of Giving Back ... *By Eric Olson, Parishioner*

School came easy for **Chris Zadina** when she was a child. She figures that's why, as an adult, she wants to see all children be successful in the classroom. She's made it her life's work.

Zadina is going into her 20th year at St. Gerald School and ninth as special needs teacher/academic adviser. Her primary focus is to assist any K-8 student who has been identified as having a learning disability. She also helps primary students who might need a little boost with reading or math skills, and she preps eighth-graders for high school entrance exams.

Zadina spent her first 10 years at St. Gerald as a second-grade teacher, and she thoroughly enjoyed preparing students for First Communion and Reconciliation. She also loved the bond that existed between herself and her students in the classroom setting.

But she said she felt a calling to use the master's degree she earned at Creighton University in learning disabilities. "If I had to pick what I want to do, it's what I'm doing now," she said. "To see someone struggle so hard and then make small steps that are huge for that child, to see kids who want to come to school who didn't used to want to, or to be someone who can make it easier for him or her. It's so rewarding."

Zadina and her husband, Joe, put their four grown children through St. Gerald's. Joe is a teacher at Meadows Elementary School in Ralston, daughter Kate is a resource teacher at Marris Magnet Center in Omaha, son Phil is a teacher at Cather Elementary in Millard, and daughter Anne is Recruitment Director at Mercy High. Son Joe is the only one working outside education. He's an engineer.

Chris Zadina said her rewards aren't monetary and not immediate, but well worth the effort. "Sure, there is some professional satisfaction because it's my job. *God's been really good to me and my family, and I want to do whatever I can to give back.*"



**Pictured are St. Gerald parishioner and teacher Chris Zadina and student Luke Cotton, son of Margaret and Dave Cotton.**

Zadina said the school is a great place to practice stewardship, especially for parents and grandparents. Principal Dave Garland said a good many are giving of their time and that lack of volunteers is not a problem.

Garland pointed out that a number of other parish schools have mandatory volunteer hours for parents. Fortunately, he said, that has not been necessary at St. Gerald. The Home and School Committee coordinates volunteers who help in classrooms, the library, and kitchen, among other places.

"It saves us a lot of money and time," Garland said, "and people are giving their time, treasures, and talents." †

### WE SHARE OUR CATHOLIC FAITH WITH OUR CHILDREN

Who do we admire?  
All Saints' Day at St. Gerald School.

Photograph by Rita McKinney  
St. Gerald School computer teacher.



# BE A GUARDIAN ANGEL

By Deacon Chris Hanson, St. Gerald Parish Development Director

As children many of us learned to recite the “Prayer to our Guardian Angel”:

**Angel of God, my Guardian Dear**

**To whom God’s love commits me here.**

**Ever this day be at my side**

**To light and guard, to rule and guide. AMEN.**

Our guardian angel assists each of us throughout our lives, and provides a special envoy from God to watch over us. This life-long companion demonstrates how God loves us unconditionally, and how the Lord takes a personal interest in each of His sons and daughters.



Angels not only help plan and work to make ready the dinner and auction items, but also attend the gala.

Pictured (all are left to right) are angels:

A. Erika Hanson, Jenny Valasek, Kathy Valasek.

B. Joan and Art Luebbert and Dan and Kim Stevens.

C. Sherry and Bill Wachtler.

**This image of helper and guardian is perfect for describing how the Guardian Angel Dinner and Auction helps St. Gerald School.**

Each year St. Gerald hosts an elegant dinner and auction evening to benefit improvements to our school. In past years enhancements have included adding air-conditioning to the school, and have helped offset costs from the middle school addition – particularly the new science lab and the Carole Manders Media Center (library).

**The theme of this year’s dinner and auction, *Faith, Education, Community: Together Under One Roof*,** signifies the coming together of the parish family and the Ralston community to assist our school children. It is impressive to note that many of the gifts auctioned off are from local businesses and other benefactors that are not parishioners of St. Gerald.

This fall the Guardian Angel Committee is very concerned with the leaky gym roof and will use the auction proceeds to supplement any possible shortfall that the Roof Fund may not cover. This will ensure the roof is replaced next summer (2009). The Fr. Foster Parish Center (gym) serves as not only the lunchroom and gymnasium for the school, but also for various groups like Youth Ministry, Men’s Club, Knights of Columbus, youth sports, and receptions.

**The success of the auction is due to the many volunteers** who work together (months before the event) to manage a myriad of tasks to provide a delightful evening. Guardian Angel volunteers solicit donations and items for auction, produce invitations and programs, receive reservations, and tag all gifts to be auctioned. The dinner portion of the evening requires planning menu, refreshment, and catering details.

Chief among all those who assist with the auction each year is the chairperson who provides leadership to the team of volunteers, and ensures all the hard work of the committee is knit together seamlessly for the gala evening. **This year’s chairperson is Mary Sheridan.**

+

**Mark your calendars and plan now to attend the**

*St. Gerald Catholic School  
Guardian Angel  
Dinner and Auction*

**Saturday, November 22nd, 2008**

**Tickets are available for \$75.**

**To purchase, contact the Business Office (331-1955)  
or Mary Sheridan (933-9394).**

**Additional volunteers are always welcome –  
please contact Mary  
to serve as an angel to our beloved school!**

*In this issue*

## WE SHARE OUR FAITH WITH OUR CHILDREN:

*"By sharing it with others ... we give it away."*

— Fr. Gary —



## SPiRITLiNK

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\* \* \*

*Stewardship is giving thanks by giving back.*

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## Another Point of View!

by Kathy Kensinger, Youth and Young Adult Minister

### Making a joyful noise.



**That's Stewardship!**

### ST. GERALD CATHOLIC CHURCH MASS AND CONFESSION SCHEDULE

#### Weekend Masses

- Saturday 5:00 p.m. Church, 96th & Q
- Sunday 7:00 a.m. Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
- 7:30 a.m. Church, 96th & Q
- 9:00 a.m. Church, 96th & Q
- 10:30 a.m. Church, 96th & Q
- 12:00 p.m. Church, 96th & Q

#### Weekday Masses

- 8:15 a.m. Chapel, 78th & Lakeview
- 5:30 p.m. Church, 96th & Q

#### Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession)

- Saturday 3:30 – 4:45 p.m., Church, 96th & Q
- Anytime by appointment