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Welcome, Fr. Ramon!

Ever since Fr. Ramon Francisco arrived at our parish this month, many of us have come to know some things about him. For example, his favorite thing to do is pray. During any free time, he likes to play tennis or go for a brisk walk. He enjoys reading books by Thomas Merton, and his favorite movie is *The Notebook* – as the youngest in a large family, it reminds him of his grandparents and his older aunts and uncles. He doesn't usually watch television, but when he does, it's all about the news channels. He loves to eat fish – all kinds and cooked in a variety of ways. All fun things, to be sure, but to know Father is to also know his vocation story – one that finds its roots in the Philippines.

"I grew up in a very religious family," Fr. Ramon says. "We went to Mass every Sunday, we prayed the Rosary every night, and it seems as if there was always a priest having dinner with us. Our faith was an important part of our daily life."

So when did the idea of the priesthood begin? The pathway to the priesthood is different for everyone. For some, the call to the priesthood was something planted early in childhood and therefore they grew up with a sense of their vocation in life, while for others the call was totally unexpected and resulted in them having to change direction in a way they had never imagined. For Fr. Ramon, the idea of the priesthood was whispered to him before he was even born.

"I was the youngest of 11 children, and when I was still in my mother's womb, my father would whisper to me that one day I would become a priest," Fr. Ramon says. "Later, as a little boy who interacted with priests in our house every weekend, I became intrigued – I liked their lifestyle and thought that one day I wanted to be like them. I even liked their white collars. When I graduated from high school, though, my older siblings convinced me to attend college first, and then go to seminary afterwards if I still felt a calling."



Fr. Ramon Francisco has been a priest for 20 years.

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Welcome, Fr. Ramon! *continued from front cover*

So, Father attended university – where he was very involved in campus ministry – received his degree in engineering, and even worked for two years. But he still felt God’s call, so taking advantage of a special program in the Philippines that encouraged vocations for young professionals, Fr. Ramon decided to attend seminary and continue with his discernment. He was ordained into the priesthood June 29, 1996.

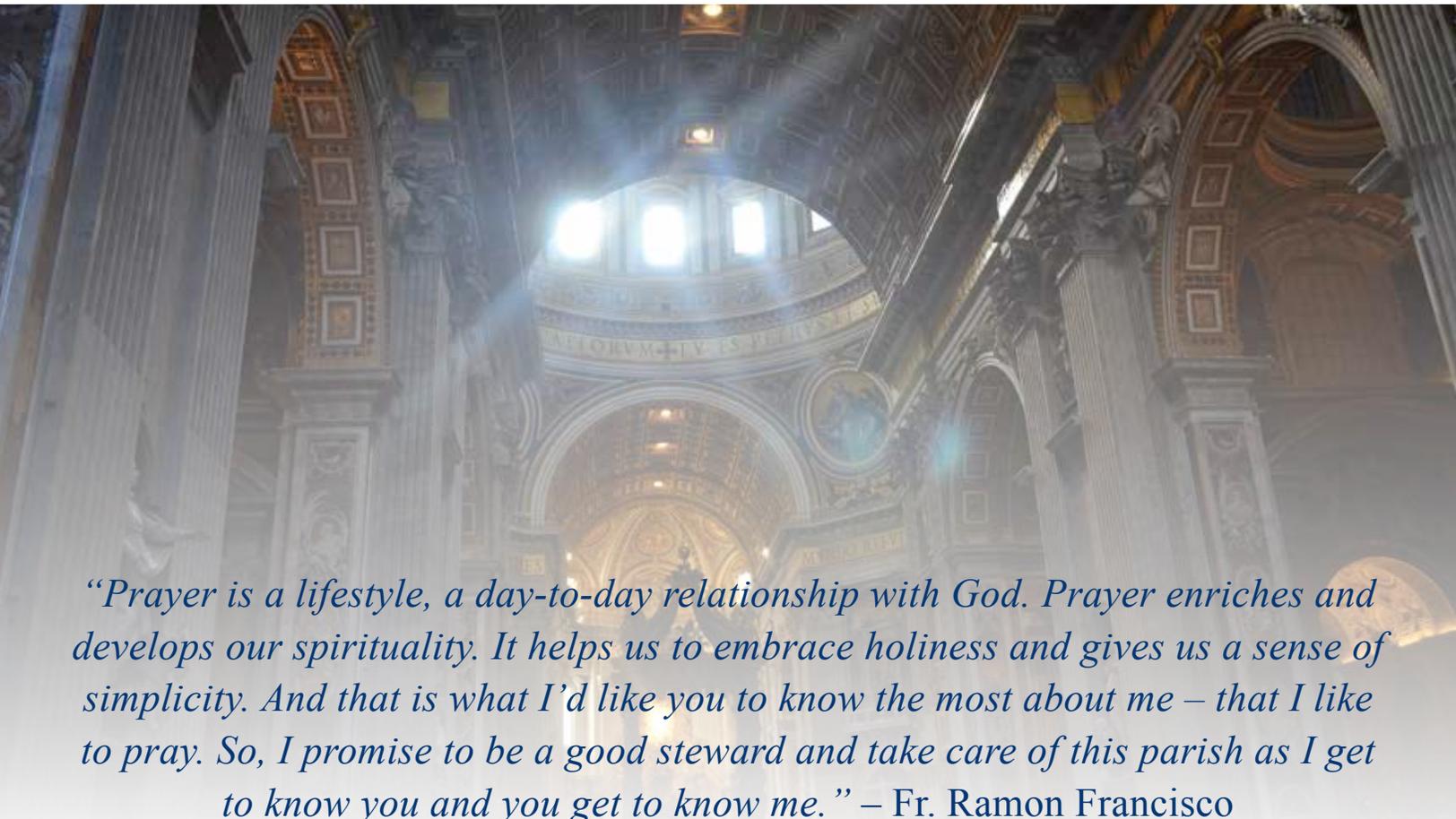
So having been ordained in the Philippines how, then, did Fr. Ramon end up serving here, in the Diocese of Honolulu?

“After serving as priest for 10 years, I qualified for a three-year sabbatical abroad,” Fr. Ramon says. “When I was deciding where to go, I eventually picked Hawaii since the climate would be most like the Philippines. I came, and eventually asked for an extension from my bishop. I was granted permission to stay, mainly because there was a shortage of priests in the Diocese of Honolulu,

whereas in the Philippines, we have many vocations. This will be my third assignment.”

He is excited to be here. In fact, if there is one thing that you will immediately notice about Fr. Ramon, it is that he has a great sense of humor, he loves people, he likes to laugh, and he is very enthusiastic. But anchoring everything is a deep-seated faith, of which prayer plays an important part. It is what drives him as a priest, and it is what will be the foundation of his time here with us.

“Prayer is a lifestyle, a day-to-day relationship with God,” Fr. Ramon says. “Prayer enriches and develops our spirituality. It helps us to embrace holiness and gives us a sense of simplicity. And that is what I’d like you to know the most about me – that I like to pray. So, I promise to be a good steward and take care of this parish as I get to know you and you get to know me.”



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Stewardship and Discipleship Begin With

LOVE

Dear Parishioners,

In John 13:35, Jesus says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” So many times, the Lord calls us to love one another. This was one of the Gospel readings back in April. On that particular Sunday, Pope Francis gathered with a large group of teenagers, and the whole theme of his homily was built around that message. It is a message that is equally appropriate for all of us, young and old.

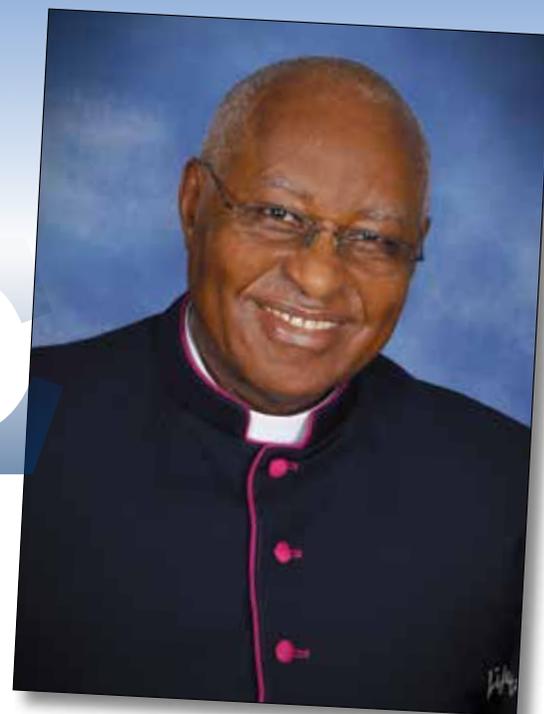
Pope Francis is well aware of modern technology and modern communication, especially with how it is so prevalent among today’s youth. He also said in that April homily, “Happiness cannot be bought; it is not an app that you can download on your

phones, nor will the latest update bring you freedom and grandeur in love.”

The pope explained that “Love is the Christian’s identity card, the only truly valid ‘document’ that identifies us as followers and disciples of Christ.” Nevertheless, we must work to constantly renew this card, because if it ever expires, we cease being witnesses of the faith. If we are really followers of Christ, then genuine love needs to shine forth in our lives. As Pope Francis said, “Before all else, love is beautiful, and it is the path to happiness.”

Who among us does not want to be happy? We all strive for that, and the Lord gives us a formula for achieving it. It may seem simple on the surface, but we all know how difficult it can be. Love – the kind of love to which we are called by Jesus – is work. Lots of work. It takes effort, renewal, conversion, and persistence.

During his homily, Pope Francis completely captured the essence of stewardship, and of love. He declared, “Look to the Lord, who is never outdone in generosity. We receive so many gifts from Him, and every day we should thank Him... Let me ask



you something. Do you thank the Lord every day? Even if we forget to do so, He never forgets, each day, to give us some special gift. It is not something material and tangible that we can use, but something even greater, a lifelong gift. He offers us His faithful friendship, which He will never take back.”

Gratitude is, of course, at the very basis of stewardship. It is this thankfulness that should inspire us whenever we run up against one of life’s many roadblocks – those things that make it hard for us to love as we should. If we rely on the Lord, we can accomplish this love. As the pope said in closing on that day in April, “Loving in this way, you will be recognized as disciples of Jesus. And your joy will be complete.”

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. John S. Mbinda
Pastor



“Committed to the Parish and Community” *The St. John Apostle & Evangelist Parish*

Like many people at St. John Apostle & Evangelist, Les Hunkele loves the parish and the community of which it consists. Two years ago, he was asked to serve on the Parish Planning and Building Committee, or PPBC. For several years, the parish had been considering ways to improve the community and its facilities, but as the members are aware, nothing seemed to be happening. Msgr. John S. Mbinda organized several committees and charged them with moving forward. One of those committees is the Parish Planning and Building Committee.

“When I was asked to serve on the committee and to chair it, I said ‘yes’ immediately,” says Les Hunkele, who serves as Chair of the PPBC. “I had heard the message of stewardship, and



Four of the 12 members of the Parish Planning and Building Committee – (from left) Ann Swider, Mary Smart, Rob Garnsey, and Steve Uyehara

I understood that God had gifted me in ways that would serve the parish and this group. There are 12 lay people on the committee, and I feel very strongly that this committee is made up of people committed to the parish and committed to the idea of stewardship. They are dedicated and conscientious. We are not going to waste parish resources. There are so many diverse gifts brought by the members of the committee. I am humbled by what we have accomplished so far, and when we

bring it to completion, I will be even more humbled.”

Les’ background, training and experience certainly lend themselves to the work of the PPBC.

“I have degrees in engineering and construction management,” he says. “My experience includes more than 40 years of work in these areas. I was recently honored by being named to the National Academy of Construction. I feel as if God has prepared me for exactly what we are doing. Monsignor has a vision. He

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Church fan cleaning.

Committed to the Idea of Stewardship" Parish Planning and Building Committee



"As a people and a parish, we are working hard at being good stewards," says Les Hunkele.



is a wonderful listener. I was not really looking for something to do, but I cannot imagine doing anything better."

The parish had developed a five-year pastoral plan and prioritized the items included. That plan and the prioritization were given to the PPBC, and they have taken it from there.

"We do not have space in this article to list all that we have done and what we are working on," Les says. "At the center of everything is the One Community Center, which we believe will accomplish much of what the parish has been talking about for years. However, there was a lot of other work, which the facilities and the parish needed. At this moment, we are improving and repairing roofs. We have upgraded electrical systems and

lighting. The whole plant has become and is becoming more energy efficient and practical. Work has been done on the parking lot, the outdoor cross, the overhead fans, and much more."

The committee meets the second Tuesday of each month with Monsignor and reviews what has been done, what is being done, and what needs to be done, including the major building project, which is imminent.

"As a people and a parish, we are working hard at being good stewards," Les says. "I am struck by one section of our Stewardship Prayer every time I pray it or see it. We pray, 'Grant us the

wisdom to understand Your mission for us, and the courage to joyfully bring it to completion.'

"Those words have a lot of meaning for our committee and for me personally," he continues. "I think the one word that jumps out at me is 'joyfully.' This is challenging work and can be stressful and difficult at times. Nevertheless, I can honestly say that I, all of us on the PPBC, do it with a real sense of joy and satisfaction. I and the others are just small cogs in what is happening and in the ongoing operation and strength of SJAE. We are blessed to be a part of it."

In the near future, upcoming developments will be made known. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please direct them to Les Hunkele at leshunkele@yahoo.com or 808-638-2002.

STEWARDSHIP

A Need to Give

When the church needs a new roof or the local food bank needs donations, we jump at the chance to give for the sake of the need. It's part of our human nature – we identify a need, and we want to give of our time, talent and treasure to help.

But as a stewardship people, we are called to give of ourselves not simply because the Church has needs, but because each of us has a *need to give*. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states in its pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, “We need to give our money to individuals and families in need, to the Church, and to other worthwhile charitable organizations because giving money is good for the soul and because we need to return thanks to a loving God for all of the many blessings each of us has received” (67).

As fellow members of the Body of Christ, created in God's image, we should strive to go beyond simply co-existing with one another on earth. The life we live should be fueled by love for each other. This love should dictate how we live – by giving of ourselves.

Jesus Christ showed us the perfect example of this self-giving love when He died on the cross. His death was a completely selfless act. He gave of Himself for our sake, offering us – through that gift – life everlasting.

As Christ's disciples, we follow His example, and we give of ourselves for the sake of others, out of love and an inherent need to give.

That's not to say that we gain nothing through our gifts. In fact, in His goodness, God sees to it that we do. Most of us have experienced what happens when we give of our time, talent or treasure. We feel as

though we get more out of it than we give. If you speak to someone who serves at the soup kitchen or someone who has made it a regular practice to tithe to the Church, you are likely to find that he or she feels blessed to be able to give. As the U.S. Bishops point out, “To be a Christian disciple is a rewarding way of life, a way of companionship with Jesus, and the practice of stewardship as a part of it is itself a source of deep joy. Those who live this way are happy people who have found the meaning and purpose of living” (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 21).

Find out for yourself. Get involved in a ministry. Make a commitment to put some money in the collection basket next Sunday. Don't wait to find out if there is a need – give of yourself right now. You will be richly blessed for doing so.

Rosary Making Ministry Builds Rosaries and Faith

When Ellen Dona's husband, Fel, died three years ago, she found herself at her wit's end.

"I was really going crazy," she says of her effort to center herself after her loss.

But when she encountered a news story about a local group teaching others how to make rosaries to send to our troops overseas, hospitals and third-world countries, something clicked.

So, Ellen went to the training sessions. Then, she looked into what our parish might be doing, and found that there was no similar ministry here.

Ellen soon began noticing how rosaries were being treated.

"I saw them hanging in cars, and being used as necklaces," she recalls.

She then asked herself if the rosary would be shown more honor if people were shown how to make a set.

She approached Msgr. John S. Mbinda about the idea, and he agreed. He read the letter Ellen had prepared at Mass outlining the ministry and its mission.

The letter read, in part: *"Our mission is simple – we are a Catholic Christian group inspired to help as many people as we can to pray the Rosary to honor Blessed Mother Mary and to spread the devotion to the Rosary. To everyone interested, you will be taught how to make a very simple rosary, use and pray the Rosary and the finished product is yours to keep and be part of your Catholic journey. Materials needed are provided free and you may attend once or twice so to allow others to participate."*

The first session was held April 20 and the room was filled.

"Monsignor said the ministry was needed," Ellen says.

Then, the second session in May was equally full.

"We weren't expecting such a big crowd," Ellen says.

"I said, 'I need help,' and two friends, Melody Ofalsa and Lily Pascual, have stepped up to help me."

The process to make the rosaries takes only about 15 minutes, she says. The materials are either glass crystal beads and wire, or plastic beads with a thin rope.

Once the rosaries are completed, Ellen talks with the group about how to properly use the rosary in prayer.



Some wire, crystal or plastic beads come together to make beautiful rosaries, taught here during our first session by Ellen Dona.



The turnout for our rosary making sessions has been larger than anticipated, as parishioners work here during the first session April 20.

Ellen's goal in offering the ministry was also explained in her introductory letter:

"This opportunity to help our fellow parishioners become closer to God and the Blessed Mother through the power of praying the Rosary is part of our own Catholic journey to be more evangelical and we pray that your consideration of our ministry will be blessed."

Rosary Making Ministry Builds Rosaries and Faith

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Another goal of Ellen's is to make enough rosaries so she can present them to next year's First Communion and Confirmation classes. She's also hoping that as parishioners learn how to make the rosaries, someone will step up in future to take over her work. However, she is determined to continue as long as she can.

In the meantime, there are additional sessions scheduled this year. Each date is at 10 a.m. They are:

- Wednesday, July 20 - church lanai
- Saturday, Aug. 20 - breezeway
- Wednesday, Sept. 21 - church lanai
- Saturday, Oct. 15 - breezeway
- Wednesday, Nov. 16 - church lanai

The sessions are offered once a month with alternating days of Wednesdays and Saturdays. Notices will be posted in the weekly bulletins.

If you would like to learn more, or if you are interested in attending the sessions, you are welcome to call Ellen Dona at 808-625-0248.



The first session of our Rosary Making Ministry drew a large number of parishioners who learned how to craft rosaries.



(From left) Melody Ofalsa, Ellen Dona and Lily Pascual.

“Our mission is simple – we are a Catholic Christian group inspired to help as many people as we can to pray the Rosary to honor Blessed Mother Mary and to spread the devotion to the Rosary.” – From Ellen Dona’s original letter introducing the Rosary Making Ministry