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## Celebrating the Lifespring of Our Faith: World Marriage Day

Every year on the second Sunday of February, Catholic churches all around the world celebrate the Sacrament of Matrimony through World Marriage Day. Starting in Baton Rouge, La., in the early 1980s, World Marriage Day is intended as a celebration of the beauty of sacramental marriage. Since then, World Marriage Day has grown to receive worldwide recognition, even receiving an Apostolic Blessing from Pope St. John Paul II in 1993.

"Its purpose is essentially to promote the Sacrament of Matrimony," explains St. John Apostle & Evangelist parishioner Wanya Ogata. "We believe that marriage is the foundation of the family and that everything stems from that."

"When the marriage is strong, it pulls the entire parish together," adds Duane Ogata, Wanya's husband. "It forms the threads of connectivity within the parish community."

Having learned long ago the importance of fostering their own marriage, the Ogatas have been involved in marriage-related ministries for the past 25 years. So, when they were asked by Msgr. John Mbinda to start the Marriage and Family Life Ministry last year, it seemed a "natural fit."

"We believe in marriage and we believe in family, so we felt very honored and called to this ministry," Wanya says.

"The ministry isn't only for those married within the parish," Duane adds. "We are looking to encompass those who are single, as well. Our goal is to help couples and individuals alike discern and better understand God's plan for marriage and the family."



*Wanya and Duane Ogata, coordinators of the new Marriage and Family Life Ministry*

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# Celebrating the Lifespring of Our Faith

*continued from front cover*

World Marriage Day is just one of the many events that fall under the umbrella of the Marriage and Family Life Ministry, designed to help affirm and strengthen married couples in their vocation. This year's celebration will occur on Sunday, Feb. 12. Keeping with last year's traditions, the Ogatas plan to create a bulletin board filled with married parishioners' wedding photos, their names, and the date of their marriage. Other plans include recognizing all married couples at Mass, and hopefully providing them with an opportunity to renew their marriage vows either during or after the liturgy.

"We're also hoping to ask our priest to write a letter promoting marriage that can be published in the bulletin and even read during the liturgy," Wanya says. "In the past, we've also served cake after Mass, and we plan to repeat that again this year."

The continuous theme for World Marriage Day is "Love One Another," taken from Christ's commandment in John 15:12. It reminds us of the challenging, yet also simple way



*The Marriage and Family Life team, following the 2016 World Marriage Day celebration*

that God loves us, and reminds us to imitate that love first with our spouses and families, and then with the entire community.

"It begins at home when we share our love with our spouses and children," Wanya says. "It's that all-important capacity that enables us to then share

our gifts with others, be life giving and inspire others to fruitfulness and unity."

"When couples feel part of the fabric of the Church, they are going to tend to want to get more involved with the activities and heartbeat of the Church," Duane says.

*All parishioners – married or single – are invited to join our celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage on Sunday, Feb. 12. Please help us support this beautiful vocation, the lifespring of our faith and society. If you have further questions about this year's events or about the Marriage and Family Life Ministry in general, please contact either Duane or Wanya Ogata at either 808-625-8863 [ogataohana@msn.com](mailto:ogataohana@msn.com).*

*A Letter From Our Pastor*

# 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?

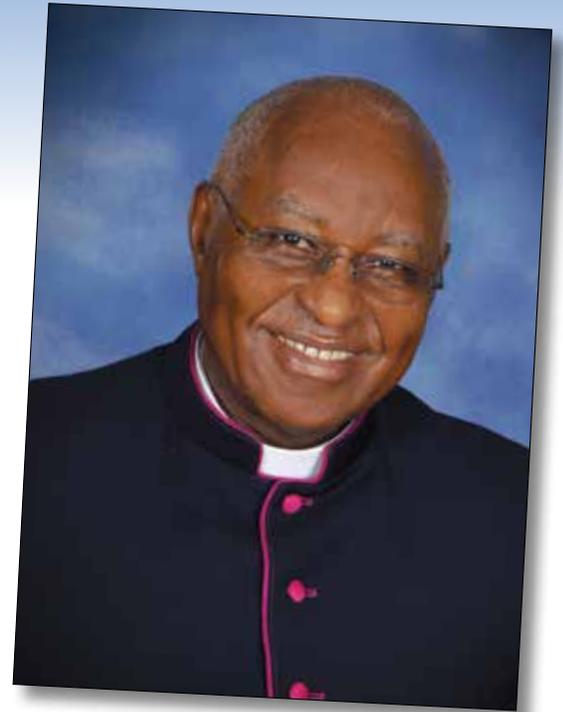
Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part – the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading,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

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Msgr. John S. Mbinda  
Pastor

# “It’s Important for Them” St. John’s Catholic Preschool Students



*Every February, students at SJCP celebrate Valentine’s Day by raising funds to support the American Heart Association.*

Sometimes, the accomplishments of children can take you by surprise.

Many of us have had the experience of being startled by the insight shared by a child, or amazed by something they’re able to achieve – something we simply assumed was beyond them.

However, at St. John’s Catholic Preschool – or SJCP – these moments are an everyday occurrence. In seeking to follow Maria Montessori’s ideology, honoring the child’s request to “help me do it myself,” we often are rewarded with astonishing glimpses into what our children are capable of.

SJCP, our three-year preschool program, which is designed for children from ages 2.8 through 6 years old, currently serves 50 children, divided into two classes. As a Montessori preschool, seeking to follow the philosophy

and methods of Maria Montessori – who was not only an innovative educator, but also a devout Catholic – SJCP emphasizes the importance of cooperative learning, focus and concentration, and working independently in a Christ-centered environment.

“Here, everything is child-driven, following the lead of the child,” says Catherine Awong, our Preschool Director, who is fondly known as Miss Cat. “Allowing the children to choose what they want to work with and do what they’re interested in, until they feel that they’ve completed their task – that’s amazing. It makes for happier, more well-adjusted children, who are proud of themselves.”

This idea of empowering and honoring children applies in many areas, including helping them understand and embrace stewardship from an early age.

“Throughout the year, we do different projects, so our children learn the importance of service and giving back,” Miss Cat says. “Our children are blessed, and I want them to understand that they need to give back, because they are so blessed.”

It was with this in mind that SJCP began partnering with the American Heart Association to sponsor Jump for Heart each February, celebrating Valentine’s Day. Since 2010, preschool students have had the opportunity to raise funds for the American Heart Association by gaining sponsorship and participating in various games and activities designed to raise support and awareness for heart health, as well as for those who may suffer from heart disease or complications.

The event begins with a visit from a representative from the American Heart Association, who helps to teach and inspire the children about heart health and exercise, while also reminding them that there are children who are not so fortunate.

“[There are children] who can’t run and jump,” Miss Cat says. “They are jumping for the children who can’t jump. It’s important for them to know they can help.”

The day is filled with friendly competitions that encourage the children to meet various incentives, and

# to Know They Can Help”

## Students Learn Value of Giving Back

all funds raised go directly to support the American Heart Association.

According to Miss Cat, she hopes that activities like this will instill the importance of acknowledging your blessings and caring for others, in even the youngest of our children. In accord with Montessori ideals, events like this help empower children and show them that there is something they can do to make a difference.

“I think it’s really important for children to understand how much God has given them, how blessed they are and that there are children who aren’t as blessed as they are. There are children who don’t have what they have, who aren’t as healthy as they are,” she says.



*Children have the opportunity to participate in fun games and challenges with the goals of keeping their hearts healthy and helping those who have heart problems.*

*If you would like more information on St. John’s Catholic Preschool, to find out how you can help support our mission, or to learn about our Jump for Heart event, please contact Miss Cat at 808-744-9538 or [cawong@rcchawaii.org](mailto:cawong@rcchawaii.org).*

## A Look Back on Our 2016 Stewardship Renewal

This past autumn, our parish leadership here at St. John Apostle & Evangelist held the 2016 Stewardship Renewal. As the results of the Renewal certainly demonstrate – our parish received 313 commitment cards, at a return rate of 31 percent – stewardship continues to play a major role in the faith life of our St. John Apostle & Evangelist parish family. We are happy to share some of the highlights of the 2016 Stewardship Renewal:

- ❖ There were 1,282 commitments to prayer (Stewardship of Time). Ninety-five percent of participating households made prayer commitments.
- ❖ There were 877 commitments to ministries (Stewardship of Talent) – of these, 195 were new ministry commitments, while 682 were ministry re-commitments. This was 75 percent of participating households.
- ❖ There were 249 offertory commitments (Stewardship of Treasure) from 80 percent of parish households, with the average pledge of \$1,960.

We thank all who participated in the 2016 Stewardship Renewal at St. John Apostle & Evangelist. If you did not turn in a commitment card, we encourage you to think of ways you can give back your gifts to God through time, talent, and treasure. It’s never too late to build a healthy prayer life, participate in a ministry, or return your treasure to God!

# Stewardship

## Hannah, the Good Steward

**W**hat should we do when our prayers are answered?

Is there anything left to do after we have sincerely thanked God for His favors? If God were a human peer, we would probably try to reciprocate by granting Him a favor in return. But the truth is that God cannot be made greater by anything that we do for Him. Instead,

God receives our thanks and tells us to “go and do likewise.” That is, He tells us to share with others the good that He has bestowed on us. And in doing so, we are really sharing God Himself. That is the definition of stewardship!

The Old Testament Book of Samuel contains one of the most poignant examples of stewardship in the entire

Bible. The first chapter teaches us of an unhappy, barren woman named Hannah. Desperate in her barrenness, Hannah prays that God will give her a son, vowing that she will raise him to be a man of God.

Imagine Hannah’s elation when she was granted her prayer! When Samuel was born, her heart’s desire had come true! Imagine further the pang of motherly sorrow, as Hannah kept her promise to God by taking Samuel at a young age to be the servant of Eli, the high priest. The Book of Samuel tells us that once Samuel became Eli’s servant, Hannah saw her young son just once a year.

Indeed, Hannah knew that Samuel was truly a gift from God – an answered prayer. Hannah’s response is that of the Good Steward – with an attitude of both gratitude and sacrifice, she gave up her son to honor God. One imagines that Hannah probably struggled with this sacrifice during those first years. She probably did not know what God had in store for her son. Yet, through her faithfulness, God used him as a gift to an entire nation. Samuel would, in time, become one of the greatest prophets of Jewish history.

Sometimes it is difficult to understand the sacrifices we make in the name of stewardship, while the results may just be impossible to miss! However, He asks that we continue to be faithful in either case. God has undoubtedly bestowed gifts on all of us – at whatever the cost, we are to “go and do likewise.”



## Women's Guild Shares the Love With Veterans on Valentine's Day



Every day, our American servicemen and women make sacrifices in order to protect and serve us. For the past 5 years, the St. John Women's Guild gives back to our veterans by showing them some appreciation and love on Valentine's Day. Together with the Knights of Columbus, they work to package and deliver bags of cookies to veterans at U.S. Vets at Barber's Point, Kalaheo.

"The number of cookies we give grows every year," says Women's Guild President Erlinda Nishimura. "Last year, we gave out 300 bags, and this year we hope to give out 400 bags of cookies. It's a way to express to them that we care, and to

thank them for their years of service to our country. We want them to know that they are not forgotten."

Women's Guild members donate all the cookies to the project – some are store-bought, and some are homemade by members. The women gather together on one day to put the cookie packages together.

"We get all kinds of cookies, a nice variety," Erlinda says. "The day we do the bagging, we have all the cookies laid out, and we put about seven to eight cookies in small plastic bags. We wrap them with these special Valentine's Day napkins, and tie them with ribbon."

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*We want them to know that they are not forgotten."*

– Erlinda Nishimura, Women's Guild President

## Women's Guild Shares the Love With Veterans on Valentine's Day *continued from page 7*

For the past five years, Knight of Columbus member John Loughlin has delivered the cookies to the veterans. He also delivers some cookies to a nearby women's shelter.

"We work very closely with the Knights on this, and he has very graciously volunteered to deliver the cookies each year," Erlinda says. "This year, I want to personally go down with John to experience it, and see their faces when they get the cookies delivered to them."

This project gives the members of the Women's Guild an opportunity for fellowship through service, and gives them a chance to serve those who have served us.

"Showing them that we care and giving to them is part of being Catholic," Erlinda says. "Valentine's Day is a time for love, and this way, we can express love through our actions – not just saying 'thank you,' but taking action. It makes us feel good to not only be a part of the Church, but part of the community – to go out there instead of sitting back and forgetting these people and what they have done for us."

"When people see us doing things like this, the more people want to get involved," she adds. "So, in this way, we are evangelizing. People can see what we do for our church and also for our community, and this makes parishioners want to be a part of our ministry, too."



*This year, the Women's Guild will be meeting to package the cookies on Tuesday, Feb. 14 on the church lanai. If you are interested in helping out with this project, or if you would like more information about the Women's Guild, please contact Erlinda Nishimura at 808-286-1071.*