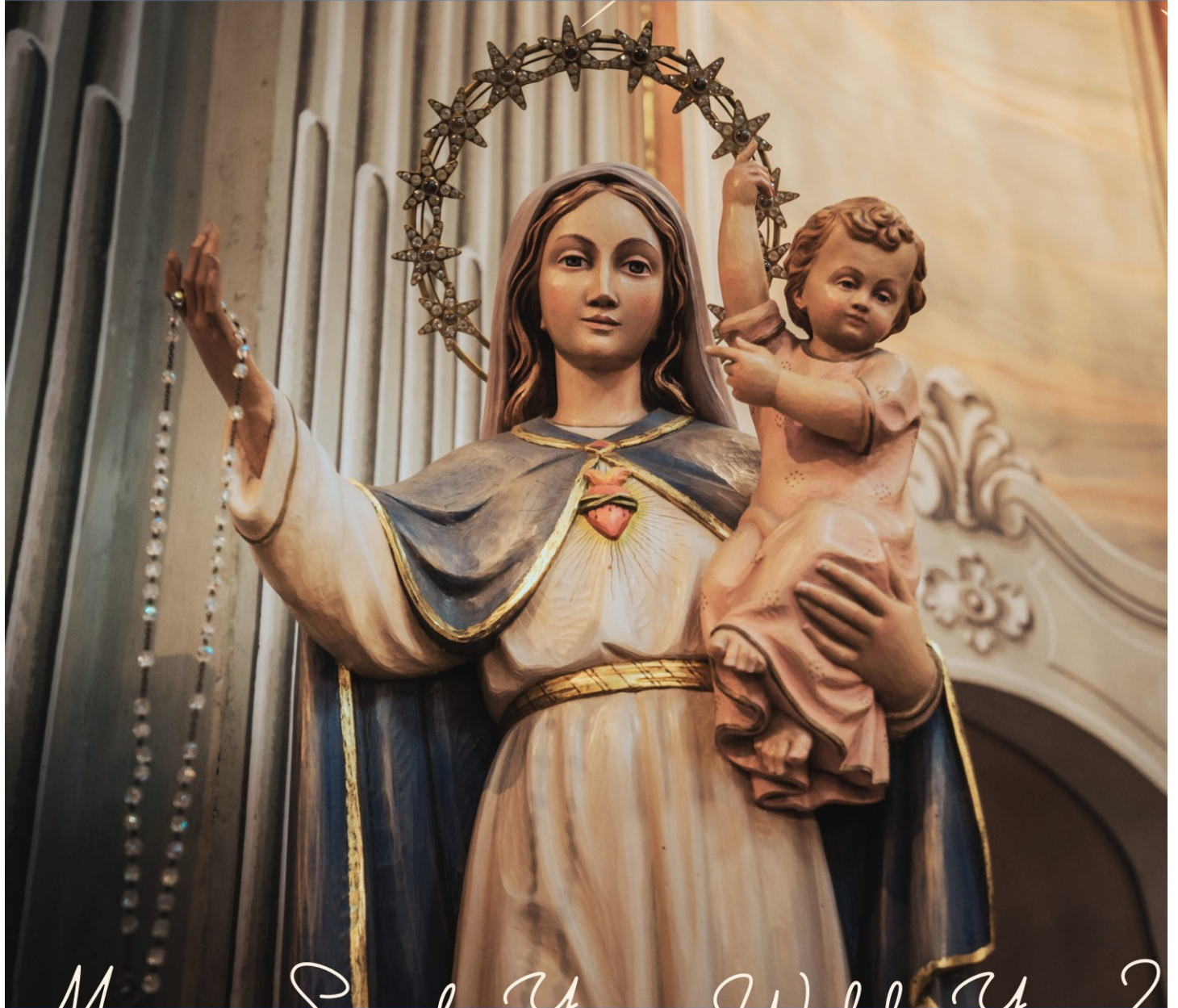


The Ascent

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION | DECEMBER 2021



Mary Said Yes... Will You?

Church of the Ascension | 9510 W 127th Street | Overland Park, KS 66213
(913) 681-3348 | www.kcascension.org | ascensionchurch@kcascension.org

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The Season of Giving

BY: FR. GARY PENNINGS

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, we celebrate God's greatest gift to humanity. Christmas marks God's giving of Himself. The Gospel of John says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (Jn 1:14). God gave of Himself so that what sin destroyed might now be restored by grace.

The Christmas season is about gifts. I don't mean the buying frenzy that started on Black Friday and continued through Christmas Eve, but rather the desire of the heart to share something that will bring joy to a loved one. We show our love by giving a gift. The Magi brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to honor the newborn King. The time they gave to travel so far, as well as the valuable treasures they placed before the Christ Child reflected God's desire to gift humanity with His own divine life.

We too should imitate God's actions by giving the best gift we have to give, namely, oneself. There is no gift that anyone can give that is greater than the gift of one's time and presence. To spend time with someone is of extreme value. Each of us is unique and when we share ourselves with others, we give them a unique gift.

As 2022 approaches, I challenge each you to share your time and talent with others. Spouses, make sure to make quality time for one another; parents spend more time with your children, grandparents with your grandchildren and friends with one another.

As you think ahead of your participation at Ascension in the upcoming year, I invite you to consider volunteering in one or more of our many ministries or outreach initiatives. YOU are the best gift you can give. Irrespective if you are young and fit or aging with limited stamina, you can be a gift. Whether it be ushering at Mass, showing hospitality as a Greeter, serving food at a funeral luncheon, bringing Holy Communion to the sick or homebound or forming our youth as a Catechist, your gift of time will bear fruit.



All registered households should have recently received a 2022 Stewardship Commitment Packet in which you will make a financial pledge of what you wish to tithe in the upcoming year, but also how you might share your time and talent with others.

Feel free to call the parish office or any of the ministry leaders to learn more about a specific ministry or outreach initiative. The Church of the Ascension is a vibrant Catholic parish that provides many opportunities to share the gifts of your time and talent. Volunteers can commit to as few or as many hours as they like. Please consider sharing the greatest gift you can share... the gift of YOU.

Merry Christmas and may God abundantly bless you in the year ahead.

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,
the Way, the Truth and the Life,

Fr. Gary

A Gift From Your Parish!

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A Christmas Season Calendar

BY: SARAH STREITWIESER

Merry Christmas Celebrate like a Catholic!

YOUR FAMILY HAS BEEN PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE FOUR WEEK SEASON OF ADVENT. WHY LET CHRISTMAS END AFTER JUST ONE DAY?

Our Church celebrates the Christmas season from Christmas Eve through the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord (celebrated the second Sunday of the new year). Here is a calendar of thoughts, devotions, and ideas to keep the party going! Your particular Christmas season celebration should be as unique as your family! This calendar is only a starting point; feel free to customize, delete, and insert your own ideas. If you are a parent, be careful not to fill your calendar with activities that over require your energy. Christmas should be enjoyable and restful for everyone, parents included!

**Slow your Statues:*

Rather than putting up your entire Nativity set during Advent, add only one statue a day leading up to Christ placed in the manger on Christmas morning. Let the Wise Men "journey" toward Jesus by moving them a little closer to Jesus each day, until they arrive on the Feast of the Epiphany.

**Party on: Plan*

Christmas parties during the Christmas season rather than prior to Christmas day.

**Decor up: Keep*

your Christmas decorations and lights up (and on!) until January 10th.

**Sacred and Secular: Keep Christ*

in Christmas by connecting family activities to faith. Also remember that you do not have to "over spiritualize" family fun. Spending quality/positive time with loved ones honors Christ!

Dec. 24 Christmas Eve

Do you ever feel overly anxious or busy during Christmas Eve and Day? Take a deep breath, reorient yourself toward Christ, and envision the first Christmas morning. There was no trimmed tree or decorated hearth; perfectly wrapped gifts could not be afforded. Hospitality simply meant welcoming shepherds. Consider which nonessential tasks you can forgo; give your family the gift of peace and your undistracted presence!

Dec. 25 Christmas Day

Today we are invited to look backward to the first Christmas, within to Christ reigning in our hearts, and forward to the second coming of Christ. For many, this unique Pandemic Christmas is marked with loss. Suffering reminds us that the Kingdom of God is not yet complete. Christ was, and is, and is yet to come. Christmas joy goes deeper than today's comfort or yesterday's memory; hope in Christ is the ultimate source of our joy.

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Feast of the Holy Family

In our desire to honor the Holy family, we often gloss over their humanity. We forget that Mary and Joseph married amid "unplanned" pregnancy rumors; they were poor, gave birth in a stable, and lived as refugees; and they once lost their Son for three days. The Holy Family brimmed with love, but their life was not easy or polished! Celebrate your own family (imperfections and all!) with a fun family outing, movie night, or activity.

**December 26
Double-Dip!**

Feast of St. Stephen

Have you ever wondered why we honor St. Stephen (the first or "proto"-martyr) on the day after Christmas? Why does the Church link martyrdom to Christ's birth? The answer is wrapped in the gifts under your tree! The tradition of gift-giving points us toward the one perfect gift: Christ. St. Stephen reminds us of the gift we offer God in return: the imperfect (though beloved by God!) gift of our total self, offered in joyful trust.

December 27 Feast of St. John

The theme of Jesus as the Word of God is emphasized during Christmas (Jn. 1:1). Have you ever wondered why? Read Gen. 1 and Jn. 1:1-18, and then consider the two main parts of Mass – the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist. Discuss this theme with your family, and introduce a Christmas Haiku contest. (A Haiku is a simple poem that follows a 5/7/5 syllable pattern). Why are our words important? How do our words relate to The Word?

**Dec. 28
Feast of the Holy Innocents**

Today we remember the little children massacred by Herod (Mt. 2: 1-18). We remember that we were once little too. God often reveals Himself in small ways (and through "small," humble people!). We consider the mystery of Christmas, of God incarnate as a baby. "He could have approached us through beauty and power & strength, but He has chosen to come to us through littleness and humility" (Caryll Houselander).

December 30

Speaking of Christmas sales (see Dec. 29th), consider buying extra strands of Christmas lights. Children may enjoy choosing and hanging Christmas lights in their bedrooms, a playroom, or a secret fort. Connect the new Christmas lights to the theme of Christ as the light of the world. What happens when one light is turned on in a dark room? Does darkness ever overpower light? How does light "feel" compared to darkness? Reread the Gospel from Christmas Day (Jn. 1:1-18).

December 31

Perhaps you are more than ready for 2021 to end – what a year! Likely you can easily list losses and complaints, but challenge yourself to closeout 2021 with gratitude. Together with your family, create a "Top 21 for 2021" list and post it in your home. What are the top 21 ways that you have been blessed during this year? Try to include a few "silver lining" blessings (graces received due to a loss). Thank God in prayer. Read Jas. 1:17.

December 29

As you adjust your internal calendar to embrace the full Christmas season, you will discover "after Christmas" sales happening during Christmas! If you are a parent or grandparent, this is an excellent time to pick up gingerbread house kits or other Christmas crafts/sweets on sale. There are many creative ways to connect secular Christmas traditions to Jesus, but also remember that positive family fun is also a great way to honor Christ and share His love.

**December 29
Feast of the Holy Family of Mary & Joseph**

Today's New Year greetings are actually one month late! The Church's New Year began with Advent; it began with Mary, with Jesus gestating within her womb. Today's New Year also begins with Mary, celebrated as the Mother of God. No matter the calendar, Mary is honored on the first day because Jesus was first made incarnate through her. Mary always leads us to Jesus; has she led you to receive Jesus at Mass today?

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Jan. 2 The Epiphany of our Lord (Observed)

Following a rare astrological anomaly, Wise Men journeyed, seeking a foretold King. The star did not shine upon earthly grandeur, but merely upon a baby, born to peasant parents who were not in possession of power or prestige. How did the Wise Men recognize the One whom they sought? How do we? Gold for a King; Frankincense for a God; Myrrh for a Man. What can we offer our newly born Lord? Only our friendship, trust, and love.

Jan. 4 Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Have you experienced dissonance with your friends or family during the past year due to the pandemic or socio-political division? St. Elizabeth Ann Seton wrote, "The accidents of life separate us from our dearest friends, but let us not despair ... the more we are united to [God] by love, the nearer we are to [others]." Extend Christmas grace to those from whom you have grown distant; let Christ be the bridge.

January 3

"A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love" (St. Basil). Consider making a "family sized" New Year's resolution. Collaborate with your family members to set a shared resolution that promotes familial growth in authentic friendship, kindness, and love. Choose a resolution that is doable/attainable and (at least somewhat) fun!

January 5

"Everyone who breathes, high and low, educated and ignorant, young and old, man and woman, has a mission, has a work. We are not sent into this world for nothing. ... God sees every one of us; He creates every soul for a purpose. He needs ... every one of us. He has an end for each of us; we are all equal in His sight. ... As Christ has His work, we too have ours; as He rejoiced to do His work, we must rejoice."

-St. John Neumann

January 7

If your family's Christmas season spirit has been waning, then look for fun ways to reiterate that Christmas is NOT over. Institute an ugly Christmas sweater day. Play Christmas music in your home. Turn on all of your outdoor Christmas lights (you still have those up, right?!) Invest in an extra activity that the whole family will enjoy (outdoor ice skating, a movie night, a dinner out, or an evening around a backyard fire pit).

Memorial of St. John Neumann

Giftwrap your favorite puzzle and set it out for your family to discover. Yes, you can find giftwrap items that you already own! Work on the puzzle in spurts, over time, with each family member. Use the puzzle time as conversation time, catching up with each family member about what is important to them. Consider the interdependent nature of families and of our Church. Each member contributes their unique "self" to the whole, like puzzle pieces.

January 8

If you typically rush through holiday baking, making all of your favorite treats before Christmas day, then you may want to rethink your baking schedule! Why rush through recipes for a single day when to enjoy the process allows time to enjoy the process? Today, bake holiday treats with your family. Notice the warmth of the stove and the sweetness of the result! Draw ties to the warmth of Christ's love and the sweetness of His presence!

January 6

*Congratulations!
You partied like a Catholic and Celebrated the Entire Christmas Season!

January 9

Celebrate Jesus' Baptism by recognizing your own! Find the Baptismal dates of your family members and note them on your personal calendar. If you cannot find original certificates, contact the church where the Baptism occurred and inquire. Determine a simple way to celebrate a simpler anniversary going forward. Or for Water from church and bless some Holy family members with it. Reflect: what happens during Baptism?

Lord, it is Good that We are Here

BY: SISTER PETER MARIE, C.K.

When I was growing up, the experience I had of God was through the hearts of my parents. They formed my own heart to not only have the ability to hear God when He called me to religious life but to also follow Him with my whole heart.

I grew up in Overland Park, Kansas with two younger brothers. Although we did not go to school at Ascension, we were members of the Parish. The three of us enjoyed playing sports very much, and we also enjoyed eating our mom's home cooked meals. Some of my favorite memories from growing up involve my family sitting around our dinner table and eating together.

After graduating from Blue Valley West High School in 2006, I attended the University of Nebraska utterly thrilled by the possibility of new friends and football games. During the first few weeks, I hesitantly joined a bible study and was stunned to see several other young women a part of it. These women attracted my attention towards God because they asked questions about the people and events in the Bible as though those things were real.

Shortly into the school year, our newly formed Bible study went on a retreat together, hosted by the Newman Center, and it was there that I realized Jesus is real. More than just being an idea that is out there, somewhere, I learned from other students my age that Jesus is a Person who seeks a relationship with me. I started going to daily Mass more often and I learned from friends how to pray. When I looked at Jesus on the altar or talked to Him in front of the tabernacle, I was drawn to Him as a Person loving me in return.

Continued





The experiences of prayer and friendship continued to grow throughout my freshman year and into my sophomore year at UNL. I surrounded myself with people who wanted to know God deeply to the extent that they wanted to give their entire selves to Him. Like the heroic saints that I was learning about, my friends wanted to say “yes” to what God was calling them to do, no matter where the call led them. My heart too began to seek His will, and during my prayer I would ask Him what He wanted me to do with my life. During the summer after my sophomore year, I moved back home to Overland Park and made a daily routine that was scheduled around Mass and prayer time. It was just Jesus and me.



Daily I went to the Adoration Chapel at Ascension. When I talked to Jesus and looked at Him during my prayer, He made me aware that He loves me a lot. Having felt that love, my heart was ready to say “yes” to the vocation He wanted for me. During that summer, I heard Him call me to become His spouse by becoming a Sister. His voice, His presence and His desire were all real.

I entered the School Sisters of Christ the King, from Lincoln, Nebraska, in August of 2009. Since entering the convent, I’ve become more grounded in His love for me and for the people I meet each day. Every morning, I kneel down by my bed and I ask Jesus to take care of all that I have, all that I am and all that I ever hope to be. He is our King and He has promised and He will do it. On August 1st, 2021, I made perpetual vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Not only have I given Jesus my whole life, He has also given His entire Self to me.



It is my prayer that you will also have the courage to say “yes” to whatever Jesus asks of you. When you do, you will be the happiest you could possibly be because you are fulfilling exactly what He has created you for.

I Take What is Set Before Me

BY: SR. MARY TERESA LAVILLE, IHM



My greatest trial in 3rd grade can be summed up in 14 letters: multiplication. As a nine year old, I was bewildered by the fact that people actually pass 3rd grade because, to me, it seemed utterly impossible. Surely timed multiplication tests will be the death of me. I preferred to quit school rather than to try at all. Thank God my father had a better outlook that was rooted in reality. He knew I was capable, but he also knew I was going to have to work hard to succeed. Just as my earthly father prodded me along to apply my mind to math, so also our heavenly Father provides the encouragement we need through His grace to cooperate with His will.

Fresh out of high school, I received another great trial when after only two weeks of college at Fort Hays State University, I received my first call to religious life. I was filled with doubt and fear. I don't think I will be happy. I can't leave my family. I'm not good enough for this. What underlying principle ultimately propelled me forward to seek religious life? I knew it was God's will for me.

I entered the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita in August of 2015. Upon entering, the Church allows for an extended period of formation during which the young woman becomes imbued with a deep knowledge of and love for a religious vocation. If I had not taken a leap of trust by entering religious life, then I never would have known how beautiful religious life is and how God made me for it. From the first day I walked through that door, my misconceptions started crumbling left and right as I witnessed the joy of my Sisters and the love of Jesus through authentic religious life.

Continued



After almost three years of initial formation (learning how to be a Sister), I made my First Profession of Vows and received the habit in April of 2018. For the next three years (2018-2021), I returned to school (first at Butler Community College and then at Emporia State University) to finish my degree in Elementary Education. Graduating this past spring, I entered the teaching apostolate of our community as a 1st grade teacher at St. Joseph Catholic School, Ost, which is located west of Wichita. Four days after I started teaching, I made my perpetual vows on the Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary, August 22, 2021.



THE MOTTO OF OUR COMMUNITY IS ‘I TAKE WHAT IS SET BEFORE ME’. IN IMITATION OF OUR LADY, THE SISTERS SEEK TO RECEIVE WHATEVER GOD SENDS US, TRUSTING IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL CARE REGARDLESS OF HOW FEW DETAILS WE MAY HAVE.

The motto of our community is ‘I take what is set before me’. In imitation of Our Lady, the Sisters seek to receive whatever God sends us, trusting in His providential care regardless of how few details we may have. Now I can see how God had prepared me for a vocation in this religious order through my father’s loving persistence even with something as small as multiplication facts. Although committing oneself to mastering multiplication or embarking down the narrow path of a religious vocation may appear treacherous, the fruits of denying ourselves and trusting in God are pearls of great price.

A characteristic I believe we often struggle with as Christians is blind obedience: obeying God without reserve, trusting in His promises though I do not know how they will be fulfilled. Although 1st graders love school, sometimes it is difficult even for them to do a certain activity which they predict will be daunting or unenjoyable. Whenever I hear a complaint, I ask, “What’s your attitude?” The student (and often many others with him) respond with, “Full of gratitude.” No matter what God sets before us it is always a gift. I am so grateful that I followed God’s will though it was far from my own plans. His grace is enough—we have only to cooperate with it. Living in the convent now for six years, I cannot imagine life anywhere else for I have truly found my heaven on earth.



Abortion in America

HOW DID WE GET HERE AND WHY THAT MATTERS TODAY?



DO YOU KNOW WHO WAS ONCE KNOWN AS AMERICA'S "ABORTION KING"?

One doctor is primarily responsible for unleashing the abortion monster on America. By using his skill and reputation as an obstetrician/gynecologist, he cofounded what is known today as NARAL Pro-Choice America, a political action organization with the goal to spread its pro-abortion mentality across America. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, he became abortion's public face as he executed NARAL's 8 point propaganda strategy - including targeting Catholics - to deceive the American public and the courts into accepting legalized abortion.

8 POINT PROPAGANDA STRATEGY

Dr. Nathanson paved the way in America for the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision. He and NARAL worked diligently and deceptively to get abortion decriminalized on the state level beginning in their home state of New York. Dr. Nathanson and his colleague Lawrence Lader, led the NARAL team in selling its dream of abortion on demand by using an 8 point propaganda strategy.

DR. BERNARD NATHANSON

Dr. Bernard Nathanson claimed responsibility for the death of over 75,000 unborn babies, including two of his own children! He personally aborted 5,000

babies, instructed doctors how to perform abortion on 10,000 babies, and while he ran the largest abortion facility in the US, another 60,000 babies were killed under his management.

"CATHOLIC STRATEGY"

One aspect of this propaganda strategy included the "Catholic Strategy". The Catholic Strategy had four parts: Blame. Emphasize. Support. Straddle. 1) NARAL blamed the Catholic Church every time a woman died of an illegal abortion. 2) NARAL emphasized Catholic politicians and candidates in the media whenever they softened their stand against abortion, 3) NARAL supported pro-abortion candidates during election campaigns and 4) NARAL implemented the "Catholic Straddle". This targeted pro-life Catholics and persuaded many that they could straddle the issue by remaining personally against abortion but still vote for pro-abortion candidates under the guise that very woman has the "right to choose".

Many may not know that Dr. Bernard Nathanson ended up having a miraculous conversion and becoming prolife. It was because of his own study of fetology as well as ultrasound technology that made the humanity of the unborn child undeniable. Through the friendship of one Catholic priest, he discovered the Catholic Church in 1996.

WHY DR. NATHANSON'S STORY MATTERS TODAY

Before he died, Dr. Nathanson said to Terry Beatley, author of “Teach the Strategy of How I Deceived America.” Understanding this “Strategy” helps explain to some extent how abortion has become so ingrained in our culture and why we now need the Value Them Both Amendment in Kansas. It will also help us to prepare for the work we have ahead to pass the amendment. As Archbishop Joseph Naumann states in the October 1st issue of The Leaven, “The abortion industry has nearly unlimited resources to protect the economic profits they reap from destroying the lives of the most innocent.”

They will use the same tactics and strategies that Dr. Bernard Nathanson and his colleagues created, especially the “Catholic Strategy”. They will blame the church for being against women. However, quite the contrary is true. Here in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas we have several ministries that focus on loving and supporting women in need such as the Gabriel Project, Project Rachel and Walking with Moms. They will misinform people that the Value Them Both Amendment is going to abolish abortion altogether. This is not true - the purpose of the amendment is to keep all existing laws that protect women in place and allow legislature to regulate abortion per the will of the people.



VALUE THEM BOTH

Although this is a statewide issue, the opposition has national and far-reaching support. All eyes are on Kansas right now to see what Kansans will decide in August 2022. Kansas is on the national radar as it is becoming a “destination” spot for abortions. Many of our neighbors including Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana and Arkansas have made positive efforts in limiting abortions which is driving those seeking abortions to Kansas. Elle magazine even published on October 13, an article titled “The Eye of the Storm.” This article is a good example of what is to come this next year -- misinformation and trying to normalize the lie that abortions are healthcare and without access, women are in danger.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Educating ourselves about the amendment is an important first step. This allows the opportunity to speak about Value Them Both with confidence, compassion and truth which can truly change hearts. As stated by Archbishop Naumann, “Together, we can defeat the 'culture of death' and build a 'culture of life.' Together, we can make a difference and renew our society so that every human life will be cherished and loved.”

T A K E A C T I O N

Contact your parish pro-life committee,
your local Knights of Columbus council or the
archdiocesan pro-life office for more information
on how you can assist and get involved.
www.archkck.org/prolife prolife@archkck.org
www.valuethemboth.com