



# Saint Rita

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY



## The New Pastor *A Glimpse Inside*

AUGUST 2010

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Dear Friends in Christ,

**T**hirty years ago I was privileged to make an eight-day directed retreat based upon The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. It was my retreat in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. At the time, I was in my first of two years of study at the Spirituality Institute of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

For the entire first day of the retreat I had to meditate on the first exercise of The Spiritual Exercises, now known as the First Principle and Foundation. It was a dry and ponderous day of meditative prayer. But, 30 years later, I find the First Principle and Foundation to be a great starting point as I embark upon a new segment of my life's journey – my service at St. Rita Parish.

"God who loves us creates us and wants to share life with us forever. Our love response takes shape in our praise and honor and service of the God of our life" (*The First Principle and Foundation*).



*St. Ignatius of Loyola*

The initiative on the spiritual journey is always taken by God. God is the origin and source of all that is good. The love which created us flows from God, and our very life is a gift from God. We then seek to respond to God's initiative. The teachings of Jesus point out to us that the response must always take the form of love – "Love the Lord your God with all your being"; "Love your neighbor as yourself"; "Love one another as I have loved you." I am convinced

that on judgment day the

primary measuring rod that will be used in evaluating the way we lived our life will be that of love. How lovingly did we live life?

"All the things in the world are also created because of God's love and they become a context of gifts presented to us so that we can know God more easily and make a return of love more readily" (*The First Principle and Foundation*).

God is the Divine Giver. No matter what we might experience in life, the key to our

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# The Man Behind the Collar

## *Our New Pastor, Msgr. Bob Coerver*

**F**or Msgr. Bob Coerver, the move from Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church in Rockwall to St. Rita was a lot like coming home. Our parish's Jesuit heritage and its close proximity to Jesuit Prep will mesh nicely with Monsignor's own Jesuit formation. During his years in seminary, our new pastor earned a Licentiate in Theology for the Pontifical Gregorian University, a Jesuit college in Rome.

"I've always heard of the vitality of St. Rita Parish, and I look forward to being a part of that vitality and of service to it," Msgr. Coerver says.

Msgr. Coerver joined our parish staff on July 23, replacing Bishop Mark as pastor of St. Rita. In the 30 years that he has served as a priest for the Diocese of Dallas, Monsignor has fulfilled a variety of roles. Before moving to St. Rita, he served at three other parishes in the diocese, taught at Holy Trinity Seminary for over a decade, and directed the Offices of Sacramental Life and Priestly Life and Ministry for the diocese for nearly as long.

As far back as he can remember, the Catholic Faith has held a special place in Msgr. Coerver's heart. He attributes this primarily to the examples of his parents and grandparents.

"I grew up two doors from St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, and that had a profound impact on me," he says. "There were always priests in our home; I saw them as human. They would come in and take their collars off."

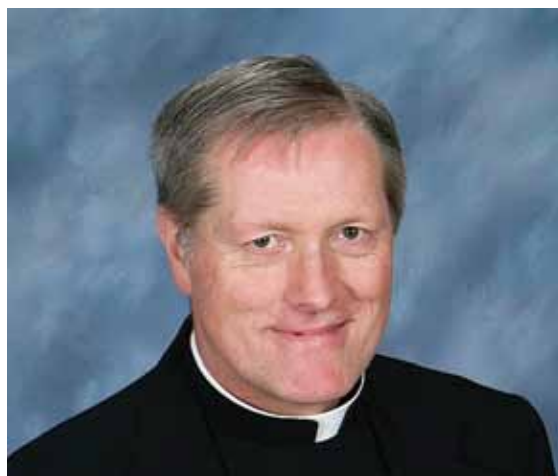
One priest in particular, Fr. Claude Smyth, made quite an impression on the young Msgr. Coerver.

"He was assistant pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas for the first 10 years of my life," he says. "He was a tall Irishman with a great sense of humor. He would visit our home

at least once a month, and I didn't view him as 'on a pedestal.'"

Monsignor says he was privileged to preach at Fr. Smyth's funeral some years ago.

In addition to developing strong and lasting relationships with the clergy of St. Thomas Aquinas, Monsignor says his family was very involved in the life of the parish. In



**"I remember wanting to be a priest when I was 5 or 6. For my sixth birthday, my mother and her sisters sewed me a set of vestments!"**

*– Msgr. Bob Coerver*

fact, his grandfather oversaw the construction of the current church building. Monsignor's father was routinely responsible for opening and closing the church each week. All of this exposure to the Church laid the groundwork for a future vocation to the priesthood.

"I remember wanting to be a priest when I was 5 or 6," Monsignor says. "For my sixth birthday, my mother and her sisters sewed me a set of vestments!"

Monsignor says that his family's observance of the Holy Week services also played a big role in developing his vocation to the priesthood. Even today, he continues to look forward to the beautiful Triduum services.

For Msgr. Coerver, the month of August signals the beginning of a new era, a fresh start full of unexpected joys and challenges. He is excited about ministering to and with a new group of Catholics.

Beyond the vestments, the title "Monsignor," and the various degrees he received in seminary, Msgr. Coerver is a simple man. As he begins a new phase of his life with us, strive to view him as man – just as he did with the priests from his childhood. Discard the pedestal, and discover the avid sports fan (Go Spartans!), the airline enthusiast, and the connoisseur of cruise vacations. Most importantly, may we all learn from his example how to love Christ more deeply.

# Stewardship's "Supreme Teacher"

## *Following Christ's Example*

**F**ormer President and Five-Star General Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "You don't lead by hitting people over the head – that's assault, not leadership." President Eisenhower's words are blunt and humorous, but he makes a great point. Almost any successful endeavor in life requires the benefit of strong leadership. And a truly effective leader does not lead by simply telling others what to do, but by providing a strong example of how to carry oneself on a daily basis.

This is no different for us in our lives as Catholic Christians. As individuals who face a myriad of difficult choices every day, we require a leader who, through word and example, can show us the path to living according to God's will. For us, Jesus is the supreme teacher of every aspect of Christian life, and His life as documented in the gospels is a model that we should strive to imitate in living as good Christians. And as we have learned, stewardship – the sharing of the gifts that God has given to us – is a big part of Christian life, and one for which Jesus left many examples of successful living.

Jesus' nature of selfless service, documented many times throughout the New Testament and culminating with His death for our sins, is an underlying aspect of living the stewardship way of life. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops points out in its pastoral document *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, "In Jesus' teaching and life, self-emptying is fundamental. His self-emptying is not sterile self-denial for its own sake; rather, in setting aside self, He is filled with the Father's will, and He is fulfilled in just this way" (20).

Jesus points out to Peter in Matthew's gospel that this "self-emptying" requires sacrifice, but ultimately leads to "eternal life in the age to come" (Mk 10:30). But the Christian steward's ultimate reward is not his or her only benefit from living the stewardship way of life. By sharing of our time, talents and treasure and living in imitation of Christ, we can relate more closely to Him in sharing, in a small way, in His sacrifice. "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*, 21).

The next time you are frustrated or unsure of how best to respond to God's gifts in stewardship, take a moment to open up the Bible. Jesus may not "hit us over the head" in His leadership, but He does provide numerous examples through His actions and teachings of how to live as one of His disciples.

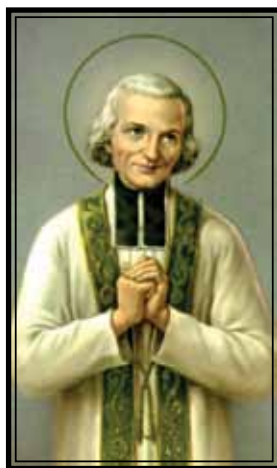


# On Being a Pastor

by Joshua J. Whitfield

St. Gregory the Great in the sixth century believed pastoral care to be “the art of arts” (*Pastoral Care* 1.1). Being a pastor, according to this great doctor of the Church, demanded genuine humility, true holiness, and authentic fear. Allegedly, when St. John Chrysostom heard that he was to be ordained a priest, he ran away. “I examined myself,” he said, “and could discover nothing that deserved such an honor” (*On the Priesthood* 1.6). He was intimidated by the very notion of being a pastor, believing it virtually an impossible calling. The pastor “needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes,” he said (2.4). And what is more, priests traded in fearfully sacred things, having “received an authority which God has not given to angels or archangels” (3.4). They were to be judged more severely, too. As St. Gregory said, for the pastor responsible for the destruction of his flock, “the punishment of Hell would prove less severe for him if he fell alone” (1.2). Being a priest and pastor is frightful business – at least according to the great lights of our tradition.

Yet what transcends fear is love. St. John Vianney said that if a priest understood the true nature of his office while on earth, “he would die, not of fear, but of love” (*Little Catechism* 1.9). We know well enough from Jesus’ dialogue with Peter by the Sea of Tiberias in John’s gospel that tending and feeding the flock are the first fruits of loving Christ. “Do you love me?” Jesus asked repeatedly (Jn. 21:15-17). This remains the first question for every priest, every pastor, and every bishop. Being a pastor is an “office of love,” according to St. Augustine. The pastor should love the community he serves while always keeping in mind that the flock is Christ’s and not his. It’s as if Jesus said to Peter and to every pastor, “think not of feeding yourself, but feed my sheep as mine, and not as your own; seek glory in them, and not your own; my dominion, and not yours; my gain, and not yours” (*Tractates* 123.5). Love for his flock born of his love for Jesus: this is the very beginning of what it means to be a pastor.



St. John Vianney,  
patron saint of priests

Vatican II (in the decree *On the Ministry and Life of Priests*) also gives us some insight into what it means to be a pastor. In communion with our bishops and also with the Holy Father, our pastor’s ultimate task is to “gather the family of God...endowed with the spirit of unity and lead it in Christ through the Spirit to God the Father.” That is, our pastor is to be a man of communion. He is given power both sacramental and canonical for this very reason, “a power whose purpose is to build up.” His duty is to tell us the truth and to treat us according to the truth, “not according to what may please men, but according to the demands of Christian doctrine and life.” He is

to help us reach “Christian maturity,” just as Paul labored among the Galatians “until Christ be formed” (Gal. 4:19).

Because of communion, he is also a man dedicated to the marginalized, to the poor, the sick, the elderly, and even the immigrant. He is to bring them to us and to send us to them for the sake of love, support, and friendship. He is to care for young people and married couples and parents, helping them to remain faithful to their various callings and ministries. He is also called to remind us of the wider Church, to represent to us the whole Catholic communion of the world. He is a man who should break down the comforts of our isolation and show us that our neighbors (whom we should love as ourselves) are also those people we like to ignore, dislike, or whom we wish just weren’t here. He is a man of communion in the fullest and most powerful sense of the word.

And of course, at the center of all of this, is communion received in the Eucharist. The Church is clear that “no Christian community is built up which does not grow from and hinge on the celebration of the most holy Eucharist” (1.6). Thus, our pastor will always be a man of the Eucharist. He will always call us together around the altar—again and again and again he will invite us to the Eucharist. He’ll do this not out of any sort of institutional or rote mentality, but because it is in the Eucharist that we receive our

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# The New Pastor *continued from front cover*

ultimate fulfillment will be found in our appreciation of how blessed we are and have been as recipients of God's gracious generosity. Every experience of life can be appreciated from the vantage point of the question: "Where can God or the working out of God's plan be found in the experience?" From that vantage point we are always better able to see the glass as "half-full" rather than "half-empty."

"As a result, we show reverence for all the gifts of creation and collaborate with God in using them so that by being good stewards we develop as loving persons in our care for God's world and its development. But if we abuse any of these gifts of creation or, on the contrary, take them as the center of our lives, we break our relationship with God and hinder our growth as loving persons" (*The First Principle and Foundation*).

Since my days as a student next door at Jesuit, I have known St. Rita to be a community of generous givers. Tithing was a familiar topic in the St. Rita community. Today, stewardship is still a familiar topic. Having served on the Diocesan Stewardship Committee for a while, I have come to appreciate stewardship as a viable, effective spirituality for parish life today. All the way back in the sixteenth century, St. Ignatius of Loyola understood the concept of stewardship, albeit without using the word. In the Church of the 21st century, we must use the word. Because stewardship is our call, our mission – "What return can we make to the Lord for all the good he has done for us?" We care for the people and relationships, the world and its resources, the Church and its principles of faith, which have been shared with us. We "show reverence" for the gifts God has shared with us.

"In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance before all created gifts, insofar as we have a choice and are not bound by some responsibility. We should not fix our de-

sires on health or sickness, wealth or poverty, success or failure, a long life or a short one. For everything has the potential of calling forth in us a more loving response to our life forever with God" (*The First Principle and Foundation*).

Balance. That is essential to living a healthy and holy life. We cannot reach out in love and service to others if we do not have a healthy love for self. A healthy love for self demands of us an appropriate sense of self-respect, self-esteem, and care for oneself. When we hole ourselves, our life, our responsibilities, our vocation in balance, then we accept all as gift and we have the freedom to return all as gift – a gift to others and to God. As priest and pastor, the best way I can give of myself in service to the parish is to live my life with a healthy sense of balance. I care for my health but do not obsess over it. I use financial resources on behalf of the Kingdom of God but am not driven by wealth or any sort of social status. I worry not about human assessment of success or failure – I simply try to live a life inspired and marked by love. I appreciate the 56 years of life I have been privileged to live, and take the remainder of my life one day at a time. Part of my role as pastor is to encourage others to live a life marked by balance. "In everyday life, then, we must hold ourselves in balance . . ." (*The First Principle and Foundation*).

"Our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and I choose what better leads to God's deepening life in me" (*The First Principle and Foundation*).

My only desire and my one choice as your pastor is to do whatever I can to facilitate God's deepening life in you.

In Christ,



Msgr. Bob Coerver

# On Being a Pastor *continued from page 4*

very life and our only reason for existing as a community at all. We should all, with tears of joy, give thanks for this gift whenever we first celebrate the Eucharist with our new pastor. It will be like God saying "Yes!" to everything our community is about.

So, to be a pastor is to be fearfully in love with Jesus and to desire the communion He gives us. Our gift and responsibility at this particular time in the life of St. Rita Catholic Community is to be the sort of people who desire communion too.

We should not see our pastor as chief administrator, but as shepherd and father. We should understand something of our pastor's eternal responsibility, that ultimately he is responsible for telling us the truth and giving us Christ. We should be in awe of that. And likewise, we should pray for him. We should pray that the Holy Spirit strengthens him and never leaves him. We should ask our Blessed Mother to pray for him too, for she loves priests so much. We're sharing in blessed things here at St. Rita; we should pray that we remain faithful to it all.

# Back to School at St. Rita

If there were a list of words that could not, under any circumstances, be spoken during the months of June, July and August, for most kids “school” would be at the very top. School represents the end: the end of 11 glorious weeks of freedom, of afternoons spent at the pool, of middle-of-the-week sleepovers – the list goes on.

Although they know it’s coming, the return to school seems to sneak up on kids every year. But for the students at St. Rita School, the end of summer isn’t a cause for sorrow. It’s a time for reconnecting with old friends, strengthening those unused “mental muscles,” and building a solid relationship with Christ and His Church.

The 2010-11 academic year officially begins Thursday, Aug. 19. Helping ease students and their families back into the school-year schedule, the St. Rita faculty and staff will begin the day with a special “Back to School Coffee.” This annual event will begin at 7:30 a.m. – before the bell rings – and is the perfect time and place for parents and students to “catch up” with each other after months spent apart.

It is events like the “Back to School Coffee” that set St. Rita School apart from other educational institutions in the area. Preserving a sense of community is a top priority for staff members. The unity within the school exists among school families as well as staff, which in part accounts for St. Rita’s low level of staff turnover. In fact, our principal, Dr. Elena Hines, is celebrating her 20th year at St. Rita this year. Throughout her tenure, Dr. Hines has come to appreciate the way in which our community “pulls together to help those in need,” she says.

“The school and parish have helped me to grow in my relationship with Christ by the witnessing I experience daily of true community and caring,” Dr. Hines says. “[It] is truly inspirational and reflective of what Christ taught about loving and serving your neighbor. As Fr. Heaney always said to us at the end of Mass: we are to go out and love and serve one another. I think our parish really takes those words to heart.”

The importance of community is communicated to students at an early age through programs such as “Prayer Buddies.” This partnership

between sixth-grade students and kindergartners lasts for three years (through the eighth grade and second grade, respectively). The older students accompany the younger children to Mass each week as well as other activities throughout the year, teaching them to sit quietly during the liturgy and to pray. Often, small gifts or cards are exchanged between buddies during the holidays. During the last year of the partnership, the students share in some important sacramental celebrations: Reconciliation and First Eucharist for the second-graders, and Confirmation for the eighth-graders.

This year, St. Rita welcomes 66 new kindergartners to the school family, as well as two new

staff members: new assistant principal Michael Davies and new first-grade teacher Colleen Tehan. Michael is the former assistant principal of Northrich Elementary, which is part of the Richardson Independent School District. The halls of St. Rita School will be a familiar sight for Colleen, as she is a St. Rita alumna.

Refer to the parish bulletin and future issues of the newsletter for news on upcoming events taking place at St. Rita School.



# Making a Difference Through Dallas CASA

**S**t. Rita parishioner Larry Dolan is a regular “gumshoe.” The 63-year-old former salesman spends much of his time buried in court documents or meeting with “persons of interest” as he investigates child abuse and neglect cases. Larry is one of 450 CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteers in Dallas County.

Throughout the county, on a given day, nearly 2,000 children live in foster care due to an unsafe environment existing in their homes. The turmoil that results from removing children from their homes can throw a young person’s life into a dangerous tailspin. Children need stability, a place they can call home for more than a few weeks at a time, and adult guardians they can count on and trust. However, the current scenario is one in which the caseload greatly outweighs the number of hardworking state caseworkers. There are too many children in the overworked foster care system. Kids need consistent care, and are sometimes unable to receive it because resources are so limited. This is where CASA volunteers can make a difference, serving as a voice for children in need.

Dallas CASA was founded in 1979 to advocate in the judicial system on behalf of abused and neglected children – the most vulnerable members of society. Each CASA volunteer is assigned to a case and family, and he or she remains with the children involved until that case is closed. Individualized attention is of primary importance to CASA volunteers. Most handle only one case per year, devoting their energy to one child or family at a time.

“We have two primary functions: we try not to let the kids get lost in the system, and we independently investigate the facts and circumstances of each case, reporting directly to the court so better decisions for the permanency of the children can be made,” Larry says. “We target the basic needs of the kids – whether they are physical, emotional, educational or psychological. We try to ensure the same things are done for these kids as we would do for our own.”

Larry began working with Dallas CASA in 1997. Since then, he has worked a total of 26 cases and advocated for 62 children.

“It’s rewarding when kids are able to reach out to you, and you’ve been a consistent presence in their lives,” he says. “The kids know you are there for them.”

Much of the advocacy process revolves around court appearances, testimonies, investigations and follow-up in the kids’ lives, but the outcome can be most gratifying: a child at risk is provided a stable and permanent place to call home. Often this means a new life with relatives, individuals not related to the family but who have a strong positive presence in the child’s life, or adoptive parents. Sometimes, the children are reunited with their parents, but only after the parents have spent considerable time in working services, and can show positive results for the safety and protection of the kids. In his time with CASA, Larry says he has witnessed just about every type of situation. This regular confrontation with family breakdowns can wear a person down, but Larry says it is important to be able to distance oneself, so to speak, similar



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# Saint Rita Catholic Community

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## Dallas CASA *continued from page 7*

to how doctors distance themselves from their patients in order to provide the best medical care.

“You can’t get overly emotionally invested,” he says. “You have to remain a bit removed, and continue to be professional in your advocacy efforts.”

Larry, who has sought various ways to volunteer through the St. Rita community, says he first got involved with CASA because he felt the need to “try to do something more meaningful.”

“If you are going to give of your time, do something where you feel that your time is well-spent,” he continues. “In this case, with CASA, I feel my time is incredibly well-spent and meaningful.”

One finds fulfillment in this work simply by knowing he or she was able to do his or her best for the kids in a time of need and possibly make a difference in a child’s life.

In addition to Larry, approximately 25 other parishioners have advocated for children through CASA. Larry encourages additional community members to consider volunteering for the organization.

“With 2,000 kids in foster care and 450 advocates in the area, we are only able to help with roughly 25 to 30 percent of the actual court caseload,” Larry says. “The only thing holding us back from assisting more kids is a lack of volunteers. If you love kids, we need you.”

Larry invites anyone with questions to give him a call at 214-357-0815, or send him an email at [lj.dolan@att.net](mailto:lj.dolan@att.net). Each year during our annual Stewardship Renewal, Larry and the other St. Rita parishioners involved with CASA host a ministry booth during Community Weekend. This year, Community Weekend falls on Aug. 28-29. Stop by the booth and visit with CASA. Learn about how you can make a difference in a child’s life. You’ll be glad you did.