



ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

PARISH NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021

Saint Francis and Digital Ministry: Innovative Evangelization

By Father Phil Kelly



Our patron saint, Francis de Sales, was known for his pastoral zeal and ability to bring many back to the practice of their faith. He was innovative in reaching out to those who wouldn't normally hear him preach by printing tracts and pamphlets that would be widely distributed. The force of his arguments and common sense approach toward spirituality attracted many persons to the faith. Saint Francis was innovative in his approach because he was passionate in his faith.

Here at SFDS we can relate. This faith community which we call our spiritual home on East 96th Street nurtures so many because it tirelessly and creatively reaches out into the world around it, much in the same way that our good patron Francis de Sales did back in sixteenth and seventeenth century Geneva. The Church had lost many members as a result of the Protestant Reformation. Francis' approach toward evangelization was one of pastoral creativity and a spirituality based on gentle persuasion. Our investment in creating a digital ministry here at SFDS is our sharing in the passion that led Saint Francis de Sales to innovative forms of evangelization.

Pope Francis has called the whole Church to go out to the peripheries to evangelize and bring the Good News of Jesus to the world. Our digital platform has enabled us to reach so many people whom we would never before have been able to reach. With a strong online presence before the pandemic, we were in a good place to pivot much of our ministry online once the shutdown was in place.

We don't see the online component in competition with the traditional gathering of God's people to celebrate the Eucharist and the sacramental life of the Church. In fact, our online presence allows us to strengthen our community by being able to share at a distance the spiritual gifts of this particular community. That people in spite of distance or social distancing can continue to worship and find comfort and strength with us is a powerful gift we have to offer. On behalf of the pastoral team, thank you for your generosity in enabling this particularly Salesian charism (gift) to flourish at SFDS. May we continue to live Jesus and share that life through our online endeavors!

ENTERING INTO A WINTER OF HOPE

Q&A with Dr. Michael Fraser, SFDS parishioner and Religious Ed. parent

By Jayne Porcelli, Pastoral Associate

Clinical psychologist Dr. Michael Fraser offers us useful tools as we wait out these winter days.

Dr. Michael Fraser is the Chief of Staff at Cognitive Behavioral Associates, providing expert mental health care on the Upper East Side. Dr. Fraser has over twenty-five years of experience in the field and recently increased his attention to "positive psychology" as a tool to alleviate negative symptoms such as depression, phobias, and anger.

Mike and his family are active in our Religious Education program—his three kids have been students and his wife Kathy is our third and fourth grade Catechist.



Science has shown that sunshine does much to improve our mood and mental health. As we move more deeply into these winter months, it seems wise to look for new ways to keep ourselves emotionally healthy as the days get colder, darker, and for some of us, more difficult to manage as we continue to live in the shadow of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

"Acknowledging that we are living in a time of uncertainty and understanding our stress and frustration is a good place to start," says Mike. "The image of a backpack filled with bricks is helpful to visualize how anxiety can build up for us. Normal nuisances of every day can magnify to such an extent that our backpack can get way too heavy to carry. Seemingly little things add up over the course of a day. For instance: on a personal note, street parking used to be more manageable...not so easy these days! I worry about people standing too close without wearing a mask covering their mouth and nose. I used to be able to teach my classes in a room full of students with whom I could interact. Now I have to separate my students, log on, fix Wifi issues, and ask people to mute and unmute just to have a simple conversation. Each of these are bricks that end up in my bag by time I get home. If we take the time daily to acknowledge stress and 'unpack our backpack', that will go a long way in helping us cope.

Moreover, it helps if we can accept the fact that as long as we are under the shadow of this pandemic, these same stressors will rear their heads. We call this mindfulness. If we don't do this, the bricks will build up, our bags will get heavier and we will begin to show signs of irritability, fatigue, and our ability to manage the typical stresses of daily life becomes compromised.

The mental health impact of COVID-19 centers around two main things: loss and worry. When we lose something important, we can expect to experience some form of depressive reaction. When things are uncertain, we can expect to experience anxiety. It's important to know that depression and anxiety share many signs and symptoms, including but not limited to: sleep difficulties, poor concentration, irritability, quick temper, loss of motivation, and a desire to escape, which often happens through excessive use of negative coping activities such as alcohol or substance use, video gaming, and constant smartphone use."

Jayne Porcelli: *What strategies can we employ to help us cope with our feelings of anxiety or depression?*

Mike Fraser: The pandemic has taken away our control of so many things, so find something safe and healthy that you are able to control and do it. Make a list of things you want to do to develop yourself. This is especially important for young people. Find a hobby or an activity that does not involve simply staring at a screen. Set a goal, make it a part of your day, and work towards that goal every day. This not only gives us a sense of control, but it will fill us with a sense of accomplishment. I told my own kids it would be a shame to be in 'shut down' mode with more time on our hands than ever and not emerge from this without growing in some important ways. If you need inspiration, I recommend the book *The Master Plan: My Journey From a Life in Prison to a Life of Purpose* by Chris Wilson. This book can help us find perspective and motivation to make our own lists for self-development, especially during a time when we might feel locked up.

JP: *What does one do if they feel like they're starting to obsess about some of this stuff?*

MF: It's difficult not to obsess about where we are and what is going on. Every time we turn on the TV, radio, or social media, we are bombarded with information about the latest COVID-19 stats. As humans, we are not built to absorb such a constant tsunami of bad news. I recommend taking a break from the news, especially at night. This is different from completely ignoring the news, which I don't recommend either, because it's important to be informed.

Another recommendation is catch ourselves when we begin to say or do anything extreme. Obsessive thinking is extreme thinking. Many of us are finding that we are showing more extreme emotions of sadness, irritability, or impatience. The concept of mindfulness is about catching ourselves doing this. When this happens, we need to do our best to reign it in and perhaps take a moment or two to step away from a situation and take a breath or do more focused relaxation breathing.

JP: *How does prayer help? Where does a faith life come into play?*

MF: Prayer, meditation, and mindfulness share many things in common. They all involve taking time to reflect on our lives, emotions, relationships, and behaviors. In general I don't think we do that enough. Everyone prays in their own way and has their own relationship with God. I think there is great emotional benefit from communicating in this way, whatever the form of conversation. Setting a time every day to pray helps provide stability which the pandemic has certainly taken from us. Prayer allows us to express ourselves, the positive and the negative, without judgment. An important part of prayer that is also very beneficial is the act of giving gratitude. There is increasing brain research on the health benefits when we search for things in our lives to be thankful for. I believe very strongly in the importance of giving gratitude. On a personal level, it has helped me greatly to take a step back when I get stressed or frustrated to reflect on the people and the things in my life that support and enrich me.

JP: *Is it ok to be angry with God? (Asking for a friend...)*

MF: I think God can handle it. We were created to feel all emotions and I believe it's important to be true to our feelings by acknowledging them openly and without judgement. So many people have lost their jobs, loved ones, and their whole way of life. With such tremendous loss, I can't imagine how one couldn't be angry. As a psychologist, I have seen so many people stay stuck in depression, anger and anxiety because they never fully allowed themselves to express their full, true emotions. It's important to recognize that as humans, we can hold multiple emotions simultaneously that they don't necessarily cancel each other out.

JP: *How do we hold on to hope?*

MF: Staying positive in the midst of this pandemic has been and continues to be our greatest challenge. I'm reminded about the Passion and how Christ was knocked down over and over and managed to get back up. How could He? How can we? We can follow His example, and we are reminded of this as we just celebrated the Christmas season. We can have hope that God put sharp minds on this earth to create a vaccine to keep us safe and healthy; hope that our amazing health care professionals can help us through this; and hope that our community of caring, compassionate neighbors will continue to support one other until we finally return to normal.

A heartfelt thank you to Dr. Michael Fraser for sharing ways we can strive for health and wholeness as we live through the challenges that this winter season brings to us. As a parish staff, we want to remind you that we hold you in prayer always and are never further away than an e-mail or phone call. Together let us hold on to hope and look forward to the blessings this new year will bring to all.




SFDS BEHIND THE SCENES

GET TO KNOW THE #SFDSFAMILY


We have been blessed with fellow parishioners who have stepped up to the challenge of continuing to build up the kingdom of God despite social distance. We asked a few of these active ministers to "unmask" and let us share all the great work they've been doing within our various groups over the past year.

DARA L. DIGITAL MINISTRY




Last March when we found ourselves unable to celebrate Mass in person, Dara reached out our Digital Ministry and casually mentioned that he lived nearby and could assist in recording Father Kelly's masses. Little did we know how integral Dara would become in our early efforts at video production! Dara, who holds MD, PhD and MBA degrees, obviously loves learning and in his words "tinkered" with various video platforms to help us find early solutions to stay connected on Sundays. Since then, we've moved from pre-recording Father Kelly in the Rectory dining room to live streaming full masses with an impressive new video production system. Dara's foresight to anticipate our needs and join forces with our Digital Ministry went far in boosting our ability to evangelize live and online!

ADRIANA D. GRUPO HISPANO DE SFDS



Adriana is part of our Grupo Hispano which mobilized early and quickly to keep our 12:30pm Spanish Mass-goers digitally connected. They organized a nightly Rosary group on Zoom during the shutdown that continues to pray every Friday and planned socially distant events for Day of the Dead & the Feast of Guadalupe. The Grupo Hispano has an active WhatsApp text chain to share news, inspiration, and keep parishioners engaged and feeling less lonely. With the help of Fr. Rudy Casals who leads a monthly catechism Zoom group in Spanish, faith formation for adults continues online. Most recently, Adriana represented SFDS in an online anti-racism workshop so keep an eye out for future events and announcements from her and the Grupo Hispano leadership squad!

ALICE B. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CATECHIST; STEWARDSHIP BOARD



When the pandemic hit, Alice sprung into action utilizing her natural charm to keep us linked as a community of worshippers! She was a regular fixture at our online hospitality Zooms and is an active force in the 11am Mass live stream chat box every Sunday. She's been an invaluable resource in our stewardship efforts, helping to plan outreach campaigns related to our parish finances. Alice is also an integral part of our Religious Ed. Catechist team tasked with the difficult mission of moving all our religious education for kids online. Be sure to say hi to Alice next time you see her, either online or in person—she truly embodies the spirit of welcoming hospitality and service that SFDS is all about!

HOPE AND RESILIENCE IN EAST HARLEM

Written by Johna Till Johnson, parishioner & part of the Cabrini Coalition leadership team



Since 2018, St. Francis de Sales has been an active part of the Cabrini Coalition, an interfaith group formed and supported by three neighborhood churches: SFDS, Brick Presbyterian Church, and Church of the Living Hope. The Cabrini Coalition's mission is to follow in Mother Cabrini's footsteps by offering practical and spiritual support to immigrants, particularly children, in our East Harlem neighborhood.

In 2019 and the beginning of 2020, the Cabrini Coalition has supported our neighbors via the LA MESA Program of monthly community meals, conducting immigration and financial literacy workshops, and supporting community celebrations including Day of the Dead, Fiestas Patrias, and Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Last fall, the Cabrini Coalition provided tangible assistance to some of our neighbors who are hardest hit by Covid-19. On November 20, 2020 the Cabrini Coalition, working with Catholic Charities—and thanks to a generous grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation—provided 120 families in need with \$300 “Cabrini Cards” to be used for food and other necessities, for a total of \$36,000 distributed. We delivered 150 grocery boxes donated by Catholic Charities, and also provided families with a community resource packet containing information about migrant legal services and other community services and opportunities. Seventeen representatives from our various churches participated, including nine parishioners from the SFDS Grupo Hispano and Social Justice Ministry.



Our neighbors were grateful for the assistance, and eager to tell their stories. We asked them to tell us about themselves via a survey we administered on the spot. Participants, who were on average forty years old and overwhelmingly (89%) female, typically lived in households with children and parents as well as spouses. 77% had lost jobs because of the pandemic and 38% reported they were staying home to care for children due to the pandemic.

Their top concern was paying for housing followed by paying for food and utilities, but there are many others: “We are all in a family crisis, which has greatly affected my daughters,” writes one woman. “My husband got sick with Covid and they reduced his hours at work,” says another. A third writes simply that her greatest challenge is, “Depression.” Cabrini Coalition is planning another large aid distribution event early in 2021. You can help! If you'd like to donate funds or volunteer, please contact cabrinicoalition@gmail.com or follow up with Lydia Serrano at 212.289.0425 extension 317.

“I wanted to go to Heaven, but what with one thing and another we have entered New York Harbor.”

—MOTHER FRANCIS XAVIER CABRINI

SFDS STEWARDSHIP REPORT

Written by Lydia Serrano, Director of Communications, Stewardship, & Outreach

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

—2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7

If there's one lesson that I would highlight in my personal journey from parishioner to full-time staff member at SFDS, it's that the modern church operates with few safety nets. As many in our community who've joined us from nearby churches that were shuttered over the past few years know all too well, nothing guarantees that a church will remain open when faced with financial uncertainty. Therefore, the Bible readings we hear every week about tithing our time, talent, and treasure are as relevant to the farmers, weavers, and goat herders of Jesus's time as they are to the social media managers, scientists, Uber drivers, and everyone who sits in our pews or tunes in online each Sunday.

As you read this newsletter, one theme should jump out at you: SFDS DOES NOT STOP! The work of building up the kingdom of heaven on 96th Street goes on, even as we continue to face the uncertainty of pandemic living and now, awaiting vaccinations. In the past year, we necessarily had to expand our scope. Whether it was to assist the growing number of struggling families facing unemployment, addressing the sudden spiritual malaise caused by prolonged isolation, or finding new points of connection through our live streamed masses and video content, our outreach has grown in countless ways.

The most reliable, consistent method for us to support SFDS is through regular online giving. We were stressing this point way before the pandemic hit, and it rings even truer now that many remain connected from a distance. So, as we see the needs and suffering of our community grow exponentially, it's heartening that many of you are responding to this need. This past year, 1,123 total donors used Tithely, our primary online payment platform, to make a donation. Compared to 633 in 2019, we nearly doubled the amount of users! Our recent Christmas Collection was also a success, raising a total of \$67,184.43. Especially since our Easter Collection (which took place during the shutdown) decreased 57% from 2019, the 2020 Christmas Appeal was a much-needed boost for our yearly budget and a promising sign that our parishioners are engaged and committed to the mission of SFDS.

As we look ahead in 2021, I'm hopeful at the movement and plans throughout our various groups and activities. Our Social Justice Ministry is committed to anti-racism projects, discerning the current needs in our community, and ensuring that the church is a safe and welcoming space for all. The Grupo Hispano is working hard at creating opportunities for engagement and faith formation utilizing technology and their creativity. Our Religious Education program for kids and Adult Faith Formation continue to meet online weekly and grow together in their faith. The Cabrini Coalition is planning another aid distribution event for early 2021. Digital Ministry is hard at work to provide as many opportunities for our parish to connect as possible. Our Lenten calendar is already brimming with events. Baptisms, weddings, and newly registered parishioners continue to flow into our fold...all of this is made possible because we continue to cheerfully give so that our church can grow.

To sign up for online giving or to make a one-time donation:
visit www.sfdsnyc.org/give or Call our Stewardship Director at 212.289.0425 extension 317



LENT 2021 AT SFDS



**This Lenten season, we have a wide variety of virtual events planned!
Join us digitally so that we may LIVE JESUS together online!**

'FRATELLI TUTTI' ON 96TH STREET AND BEYOND

A 3-part discussion series on 'Fratelli Tutti,' the recent encyclical from Pope Francis led by theologians Meghan Clark (St John's University) and Leo Guardado (Fordham University)

Thur, February 25 @ 7pm

"The call of discipleship rooted in the parable of the Good Samaritan" with Dr. Meghan Clark

Tue, March 9 @ 7pm

"Good politics: ways to build dialogue and friendship" with Dr. Meghan Clark

Tue, March 23 @ 7pm

"People of good will" with Dr. Meghan Clark and Dr. Leo Guardado



FRANCINEMA

films about faith

This Lenten season,
let's explore our faith together through films!

Thur, February 11 @ 7pm—*The Way* film discussion
Thur, March 18—*Of Gods and Men* film discussion
Thur, April 15 @ 7pm—*Green Book* film discussion

DISCERNMENT WITH FATHER TONY

A 2-PART RETREAT FOR SFDS MINISTRY LEADERS

These two sessions will help us discern which, of all the needs facing our parish and our community in the present moment, most call for our attention.

Sat, February 27 @ 10-11:30am via Zoom
Sat, March 27 @ 10-11:30am via Zoom

CENTER FOR
CATHOLIC STUDIES
Sacred Heart University

THE HUMAN JOURNEY COLLOQUIA

Our friends at Sacred Heart University have an exciting lineup of speakers this spring and the SFDS family is invited to join in online!

February 17 @ 2pm—Building a Bridge: Reaching out to LGBTQ Catholics with James Martin, S.J., *America Magazine*

February 24, 2021 @ 7pm—Catholic Women on Racial, Environmental & Gender Justice with Catherine Mooney, *Boston College*

March 10, 2021 @ 2pm—A Symposium on Pope Francis's Fratelli Tutti: Finding Justice in an Unjust World with Sacred Heart Professors Charlie Gillespie, Chelsea King, Brent Little, Jill Plummer and Dan Rober

March 17, 2021 @ 2pm—Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Art of Solidarity with Nichole Flores, *University of Virginia*

March 31, 2021 @ 2pm—Experiencing God in the Struggle for Liberation with Andrew Prevot, *Boston College*

April 7, 2021 @ 7pm—Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Catholic Thought: A Proposal with Nancy Dallavalle, *Fairfield University*

April 14, 2021 @ 7pm—Reshaping Our Imagination of Salvation with Sr. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Fordham University*

www.sfdnsfyc.org/lent