Let’s face it – teens sometimes get a bad rap. It seems every generation thinks the one coming after it is lazy, self-absorbed and disaffected. But take a look at the Bible and you’ll quickly see just how many young people God chose to do His work throughout the years. Mary, Daniel and Jeremiah are just a few of the teenagers God used to change the world all because of their willingness to follow His commands.

Here at St. Augustine, we are blessed to have a few Marys and Daniels of our own working as part of the Service and Leadership Team, or SALT. SALT’s mission is “to grow in faith, to love and serve the Lord” as this dedicated group of teenagers develops and plans ways for the St. A Youth Group – known as SAYG – to give back and go deeper in their love for Jesus Christ.

“SALT is basically a team of high school students that serve the church on different things the church might need,” explains Youth Minister DJ Diaz. “One of the main things SALT does is organize youth group gatherings for the youth of the church. Sometimes, the gathering is talking about Bible verses or hosting a social. They also organize fundraisers so that youth can go to Los Angeles for the LA Youth Congress. It’s mainly an overall service and leadership youth team that puts on different events for the church.”

Eighteen young parishioners make up the SALT team, each representing different area schools and each coming with their own unique ideas about how to make SAYG youth a special place. In the past, the SALT team has created events like “Sincerely, SAYG,” a letter-writing program for troops far from home at...
The Eucharist and Stewardship as a Way of Life

More than 20 years ago, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a pastoral letter titled *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*. This document was an invitation to follow Christ Who gave of Himself for us. Each of us is called to serve our neighbors and to be stewards of God’s creation and of all that has been entrusted to us. However, to truly understand stewardship, we must look to the Holy Eucharist. The Holy Eucharist is the total gift of our loving Savior to us. Stewardship is our response to that gift.

Even the word “Eucharist” implies stewardship. The word “Eucharist” finds its roots in the Latin word *eucharistia*, which in turn came from the Greek word *eukaristos*, which meant, quite simply, “gratitude” or “thanksgiving.” How fitting that we, who are called to be a stewardship people, celebrate at the focal point of every Mass an act of thanksgiving and gratitude — namely, the reception of Jesus’ gift to us — the Eucharist.

In their pastoral letter on stewardship, the bishops speak of the Eucharist in this way: “The Eucharist is the great sign and agent of this expansive communion of charity... we enjoy a unique union with Christ and, in Him, with one another. Here His love — indeed, His very Self — flows into us as disciples and, through us and our practice of stewardship to the entire human race.”

When we receive Christ’s Body in the Holy Eucharist, we hear the minister say, “The Body of Christ.” To this, we respond, “Amen” — which means in Hebrew, “Yes; it is so.” This is the essence of stewardship. We should enter the Church for Mass out of “gratitude.” We recognize the presence of the Lord in Holy Communion, and then we truly receive the Lord. What is left for us to do is the fulfillment of stewardship — that is, sharing what we have received in love of God and neighbor. Our entire experience speaks to stewardship — we are grateful; we recognize the real presence of the Lord; we receive the Lord; and then we share what we have received.

Christ’s gift to us through the Eucharist is an invitation to us. We are called to give beyond what is convenient or what may be comfortable. We are called to forgive even when forgiveness may not be deserved; we are called to love even when that love is not returned. We are called to love as God loves us.

The Eucharist is stewardship celebrated. The Mass is more than a ritual. It is an actual encounter with God, with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We need to respond to the Eucharist with our complete selves. What we experience in the Eucharist should, in turn, translate into our daily lives. We are committed to the Church, which is Christ’s body. We show our love for His body by acts of charity and generosity. We spend time in prayer, expressing our gratitude and our love.

God’s greatest gift to us is Christ’s great love for us — this was shown when He was crucified on the Cross to pay the penalty for our sins and to give us eternal life. God’s love for us is without limit, and He offers Himself to us in the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Stewardship is how we respond to that gift.
Dear Parishioners,

There is never a time during the year when we cannot pause and reflect on who and what we are and how we conduct our lives, both as a parish and as people of God. But this time of year in particular lends itself to just that.

Advent is often called “a season of hope.” However, it is more than that. We have choices and decisions to make at this time. This is the time when we must acknowledge the need for us to change attitudes and to welcome the light of Christ’s presence. In this way, we can contribute to bringing hope to a world that is starved for hope.

Of course, we approach this time of year with a spirit of confident expectation, but now is the time for us to be awake to Christ, Whose presence is revealed as forgiveness, Whose peace reconciles our differences, and Whose hope should strengthen and lift up our hearts.

We have pointed out that each and every day is an opportunity for a new beginning. Our new Church liturgical year began on the First Sunday of Advent. We understand that Advent is a time of preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord – Christmas – but I would remind you that it is much more than that for us Catholics and Christians.

It is a time for us to prepare for Christ’s Second Coming, as well. Much of what we do, our Scripture readings, our prayers, our traditions are built on that reality. One of the traditions in our Church and in many of our homes is an Advent wreath. That custom is filled with meaning. The wreath tends to be circular in shape with four candles – three purple and one rose. The color purple is very evident at this time of year, just as it is during Lent. Purple represents prayer, penance, sacrifice, and good works.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, though, we light the rose candle. That is Gaudete Sunday, a day of rejoicing. Throughout Advent, the candles are lit in progression each week. This builds on the idea of expectation and hope that we may see as Christ’s first coming into the world, but we must also keep in mind that, at the same time, we are anticipating His Second Coming. We cannot ask ourselves often enough, “Are we ready?” Jesus and St. Paul and others remind us often that we do not and cannot know the time and the place.

The point is that the time is now for us. Yes, this is a time of hope, but we are heading toward a time of fulfilled hope. God bless you and yours at this special time of year.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Rene Ramoso
Pastor
It would be hard to imagine our parish without the presence of Danny Molina and his wife, Yolanda! In fact, the Molinas have been around even longer than our brick-and-mortar sanctuary. When they first moved to San Francisco in 1973, the archdiocese was just beginning to plan the building of St. Augustine in the rapidly growing South San Francisco area. During that time, Masses were being held first at a storefront in Westborough, and then in the Westborough High School gym.

Danny still remembers well those early days of our worship community. “We used to have to get our own chair [from a classroom] and bring it into the gymnasium for Mass,” he recalls with a chuckle. “And then after Mass, you would put it back where it belonged!”

“The church was built around 1975,” he continues. “The parish has really grown, and I’m proud that our church is now the biggest in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The parishioners were very helpful in building the church, and still today they are helpful in continuing to build it up.”

Danny has always played an active role in building the parish by supporting many of its ministries. He began serving as an offertory collector and a lector in those early days, and is currently the leader of the Immaculate Conception Charismatic Prayer Group, a member of Deacon Capetti’s Bible study group, and a Eucharistic Minister. This last ministry in particular has provided him with a deeply spiritual experience.

“As a Eucharistic Minister, I’m serving not only the Lord, but also the people – the members of the community,” he says. “You are close to them and you are actually giving them the Body and Blood of Christ during the Mass. It’s a big thing, and a really beautiful thing if you’re concentrating on it. And sometimes I bring it to people I know – the sick or the homebound who can’t make it to church on Sunday – and I feel really good doing it. There is always a meaning to what you’re doing.”

For Danny, the powerful experience of serving Holy Communion and praying over his service not only strengthens his spiritual life, but brings him increased physical strength and perseverance, as well.

“I have a problem with my spine, and most of the time when I’m home, it hurts and I’ll be walking like an old man,” he explains. “But before I go to church, I pray first and ask the Lord, ‘Now Lord, you’re using me for this ministry – please give me strength and allow me to do what I need to do.’ And when I get to church, I walk straight. I never feel the pain in my back. My wife says, ‘I know when the Lord is using you.’ It’s really something.”

While serving as a Eucharistic Minister brings Danny increased...
faith and strength, his participation in the parish Bible study group has helped him to build his knowledge of Scripture and Church teachings.

“I first got involved with the Bible study in 1988 because I figured, what’s the use of being a Catholic and following Christ if I didn’t even know what I was following?” says Danny. “In the Philippines, during the time I grew up, they didn’t teach the Holy Scripture. When I got here to St. Augustine, I realized I had missed so much. My granddaughter, Emma, is in sixth grade in the CCD here. I never had that as a kid, and I’m so thankful she can do it. My son, Eric, just bought her a Bible. It’s really nice.”

Through all these years, from meeting in a school gym to the beautiful sanctuary we have today, St. Augustine has remained a beloved second home to Danny and Yolanda Molina. They are thankful for the many ways they are able to remain active in the faith, and especially appreciate the wonderful Filipino traditions that are honored by the parish, such as the Simbang Gabi novena Masses during the Christmas season. For so many reasons, the couple feels blessed to call St. Augustine their home parish.

“The parishioners are so friendly,” Danny says. “Everyone says ‘hello’ to each other, and we have so many small Christian communities in this parish that are very active. We are blessed that we have Fr. Rene – he’s a wonderful priest and we are really thankful. So many good things are happening here in the church!”

SALT Helping Teens Grow in Faith While Taking Leadership Role  

Christmas, hosted movie nights, and led Confirmation retreats.

DJ says having youth-led programming as an integral part of SAYG helps keep teens at our parish connected to the Church on a number of levels.

“One of the main things we talk about is how important their role is and how important it is for the youth of the Church to see their peers so involved in something that may not be attractive to a lot of people or something they may not really talk about,” he says. “We try to remind them what type of position they can have within our church and our community. It gives them that role.”

As these young people grow into adult parishioners, that position is one DJ says he hopes they will remember and strive to continue in the coming years.

“One of the biggest things that I hear a lot in our parish is how our youth are pretty much the new foundation of the Church,” he says. “I think it’s important that the youth are able to have a place to share their faith. A lot of youth all come from public schools where, of course, they don’t talk a lot about religion. So, at least in this environment, they’re free to talk the way that they do about God. It gives them their own setting to talk about it.”

If you would like more information on SAYG or SALT, please visit Facebook.com/saygministries or email DJ Diaz at saygministry@gmail.com.
Advent is that time of the Church year when we prepare for the “coming” of Christ. Advent, from the Latin word adventus, is the season of the Church year before Christmas.

According to Catechism of the Catholic Church, “When the Church celebrates the liturgy of Advent each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Saviour’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to this desire: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease’” (524).

There is a compelling stewardship message found in this passage of the Catechism. Stewardship very much reflects putting Christ at the center of our lives (“He must increase”) and recognizing our need to serve God, the Church, and others (“I must decrease”). Advent is an important time for us as individuals and as families to emphasize the holy nature of this season. Three dominant Advent traditions have developed that allow us on a daily basis to bring our thoughts back to the significance of this Church season.

The first is, quite simply, the Advent wreath. Most of us are familiar with and aware of the Advent wreath, as it is a common practice in parishes to have a wreath and to trace the progress of Advent with it. By placing an Advent wreath in our homes, praying around it and lighting the appropriate candles are wonderful opportunities to travel with the Lord on a daily basis. The Advent wreath is actually a more recent tradition, beginning in Germany 100 years ago and then spreading through Europe and to the United States. The wreath is circular, representing God’s eternity, and it includes four candles – one for each Sunday and week of Advent. To light the candles and to pray every day is a wonderful way for families to share and focus.

The second tradition is the Jesse Tree, named for the father of David. This tree is decorated gradually throughout Advent with pictures and symbols of Biblical persons associated with the coming of the Messiah, Christ. You may include Noah, the ark, Abraham, Moses, a “burning bush,” Joseph, Mary, or any of a number of other familiar Biblical figures and events. It is a teaching opportunity for children in particular, and also a good way for families to gather and to pray, and to reflect upon preparing for Christ’s coming.

Although it has become quite commercialized, the last key tradition is the Advent calendar. Advent calendars tend to follow the calendar month of December, not the four Sundays of Advent, which can begin as early as late November. In recent years, these calendars have increasingly utilized secular images, but if a person or family wishes the calendar to be most beneficial, it needs to be religious and Christian in nature. This, too, affords an opportunity to pause, to reflect, and to pray every day during the Advent season.

The themes and traditions of the Advent season have evolved throughout history. At one time, Advent was more like Lent – penitential in nature. We and our families need to do things that are prayerful and prepare us spiritually for the Second and final Coming of Christ, as well. Stewardship involves planning, practicing our faith, and transmitting it to those close to us. These traditions can fulfill and help that effort.

Embrace Advent Traditions
For Anita Songco, it all began when St. Augustine parish began developing Small Christian Communities throughout the faith community. Seeking to fully participate in this new endeavor, Anita graciously offered her home as a monthly gathering place for one of these new communities. Soon after, the group began meeting the last Friday of each month, with the members naming their group after the Divine Mercy.

“We had to give a name to our group and one of our members suggested the name Divine Mercy,” says Anita, who serves as the facilitator of the Divine Mercy Ministry. “We then found out that several of our members had personal devotions to the Divine Mercy and so it just seemed to fit us.

“In a way, it was kind of like the Divine Mercy chose us,” she adds.

Originally, the Divine Mercy community was merely a monthly gathering that allowed participants to bond with one another and to grow in their own personal faith life. Meetings include reflections on the upcoming Sunday’s readings, opportunities for personal sharing in a safe, confidential manner, and intercessory prayer. Mindful of their namesake, members are also given opportunities to further learn about and be transformed by God’s Divine Mercy. In Anita’s case, this has been the most powerful aspect of the ministry, completely changing her outlook on life and transforming her relationship with Christ.

“Thanks to the Divine Mercy community, this message has grown so deeply within me,” Anita says. “Through it, I begin to understand more about Christ’s passion, the Divine Will, and my faith in general. I used to be so nervous about everything in life, particularly when it came to my own family. But now, I am able to trust and love God so much better.”

In fact, the Divine Mercy group has made such an impact on Anita’s life that she later felt called to start a similar group back home in the Philippines. This way, wherever she is, Anita can continue spreading the message of God’s mercy and receiving the abundant graces that flow from it.

“I started it in the Philippines so wherever I am, I can be part of it,” Anita says. “For me, spreading the Divine Mercy has become a

continued on back cover
Obtaining Peace Through Divine Mercy

continued from page 7

kind of vocation. I cannot imagine not doing it.”

Our Lord tells us through the Diary of St. Faustina, “Mankind will not have peace until it turns with trust to my Mercy” (300). The truth of these words has been emphasized to us repeatedly by our Holy Father during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Because of this, we as Catholics cannot keep the Good News of God’s mercy a secret – it must be proclaimed and spread to everyone we meet. That is why, in recent years, the Divine Mercy Ministry has expounded to also include leading the Divine Mercy chaplet at 3 p.m. each Friday during parish adoration, the distribution of pamphlets and other literature on Divine Mercy, and the coordination of the Divine Mercy Novena and the parish celebration held each year on Divine Mercy Sunday.

“Without the Divine Mercy and our trust in it, we cannot truly obtain peace,” Anita says. “Praying the chaplet gives us an opportunity to reflect on our sins, to repent, and to trust in His goodness. But I think it is important to realize, too, that when we pray the chaplet, we aren’t simply praying for ourselves, but for the entire world. And that is so important, especially in today’s world.”

All parishioners are invited to join in the Divine Mercy Ministry’s monthly gatherings, participate in the Friday Divine Mercy Chaplet and, most importantly of all, to cultivate their own love and appreciation for the God’s Divine Mercy. To learn more about this ministry, please contact facilitator Anita Songco at 650-878-1568.