

Giving from the Heart

It is highly unlikely that you have never met Nannette Kern; you've no doubt seen her working a St. Mary's event, helping in a parish office, teaching catechism, or have heard from her by email or phone in regard to any number of parish-related matters. Nannette is one of those people about whom you wonder if she has been cloned. She is an extraordinarily enthusiastic volunteer in our parish, and in encountering her, you experience the faithfulness, generosity, and joy that are truly fruits of the Holy Spirit working in her. Nannette's own words best describe her life of giving to St. Mary's:

I have been a parishioner at St. Mary's since 2001. I started coming to mass here, and it just felt really welcoming. My kids were still very young then, and I didn't even think that they would end up going to school at St. Mary's or that I'd be as involved as I am now. I remember coming out of church one time and someone was signing people up to be Ministers, etc. I signed up to be a Lector and that's what started it all. Then a friend of mine invited me to attend an Arts & Environment meeting. I remember sitting around the dining table in the rectory with Fr. Chris Bransfield and several other people and thinking, "I shouldn't be here – I don't know anything about decorating!" Now people ask me what altar cloth we'll be using for what season and how the plants should be arranged!

St. Mary's used to have a program during early summer called Glad Days where elementary-age kids could spend the day learning about God. I volunteered to do the nursery for the younger kids whose moms were teaching the other kids. The junior high kids from St. Mary's and Fisher also volunteered to help with that and it was fun. Later on, I remember Diana Couch was doing Scripture Study sessions where a group of people came together to discuss Bible readings. As a fairly new parent, it was good to spend time with other adults and get their perspective.



Two of my boys have graduated from St. Mary's and my third is in Grade 7 and they have had some wonderful teachers at St. Mary's. My older boys, who now attend Bellarmine, still volunteer at St. Mary's EDGE on Monday nights, and all three kids have helped me with my first grade catechism class. Our parish first-graders love having an older child there, as it becomes a youth-on-youth mentoring thing.

Several years ago, our church decided to use a new software program to schedule Lectors, Eucharistic Ministers, and Altar Servers on an online platform. I volunteered to implement that and have been handling it ever since. It has proven to be very helpful, as we now have more than 300 ministers who have made themselves available to actively participate in the liturgy at St. Mary's.

I won't list all the ministries/church activities I am in right now - let's just say I keep myself busy with the volunteer work.

As for my background, I came from a heavily Catholic culture and was at private Catholic schools until I went to college. Then, I was working in the construction industry way back when and I always had deadlines. So, I was always very aware of all the different "balls" that I had to juggle and keep in constant motion. With the volunteer work, my "juggling" skills are still very much in play.

So, you ask...why do it? Well, everyone has an innate desire to be a part of something. St. Mary's makes it easy to be a part of the community. And it's fun! I've met some wonderful people and made a lot of new friends. Being able to benefit the community by using my enthusiasm and talents is a blessing. It truly is wonderful to be able to give back when I consider what I have been blessed with in my life. That's not to say that my life is a bed of roses. We all face challenges and nothing is ever easy, nor free, but if I can in some small way benefit our community, then why not?

If you are feeling an urge to get involved at St. Mary's, just jump on in! If you have some time, even just an hour or so every week, check the Sunday bulletin or the church website to see if there's something that could make use of your talents. The old adage "many hands make light work" is totally true. Look, St. Mary's is OUR church. Take ownership of it. Get involved. Get to know who's in our community. If you come to mass all the time, great! Be a Eucharistic Minister...sign your kids up to be Altar Servers...be a Minister of Hospitality...sign up to be a Lector...join the Arts and Environment Committee and see what goes on behind the scenes, or sign up to be on call as a volunteer to come decorate the church on Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, or Easter. Be a sponsor for someone who wants to be a Catholic or is seeking Confirmation...sit in one of the Thursday scripture studies and share in the discussion. The Country Fair is an event that takes place every October and it takes a lot of volunteers! We have families and multi-generational families, mind you, that have been involved with that for 20, 30, or even more years! Just know that you are never too old or too young to truly be a good steward. All it takes is a little effort, and then you can truly be a part of the greater St. Mary's.