Sharpsburg parish retreat provides chance for growth

BY TAWNYA PANIZZI

With Easter as the time for rebirth in the Catholic faith, the Rev. Michael Decewicz says it is the perfect season to introduce a parish retreat. “It’s a time to refresh,” said Decewicz, pastor of St. Juan Diego in Sharpsburg. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to grow.”

The first-ever parish retreat will be March 3 through 6 at two of the parish churches, Madonna of Jerusalem and St. Mary. It will be led by Friar Bernie Tickerhoof, of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis.

Tickerhoof is director of ongoing formation for his religious community and a member of the retreat team, Franciscan Pathways. “Friar Bernie offers retreats and spiritual programs at retreat centers, parishes and religious congregations around the region. These are tailored to the particular needs of the group,” Decewicz said.

Topics include holistic spirituality, faith and biblical conversion and leadership development.

Everyone in the community is welcome to attend the sessions. Decewicz says it will be a time for reinvigorating the soul and refreshing the spirit.

The first night will include a presentation called “Return to the Lord,” at St. Mary followed with a continued theme of prayer and discussion on the next three evenings.

The retreat will conclude with a healing service and an Anointing of the Sick at Madonna of Jerusalem.

This Franciscan, who earned a Doctor of Ministry at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2001, has been involved in retreat work since 1979 and has traveled widely throughout the country for preaching and spiritual conferences.

“Friar Bernie is a founding member of the Vineyard Guild, an ecumenical organization dedicated to promoting spiritual leadership,” Decewicz said.

Not surprisingly, his hobbies include storytelling, liturgical expression and ecological concerns. He is the author of several books about spirituality. "I suggest that we embrace a real challenge for change in our behavior, attitudes and activities," Decewicz says.

The retreat complements other parish programs meant to inspire people. There will be Passion Presentations March 10 and 14 to delve into different gospels.

On March 17, there will be an Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Benediction and Vespers at 5:30 p.m. at St. Mary.

That leads into Holy Week with Masses, confession and a traditional Good Friday walk through Sharpsburg for Stations of the Cross.

On Holy Saturday, there will be a 12:30 p.m. Blessing of the Baskets at St. John. “We have begun our Lenten journey of grace, which calls us to embrace the cross and glory in the resurrection,” Decewicz said.

It is a time to do something to assist in the quest to grow closer to God, he says.

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