

The Corner **OUTREACH**

*Saint Augustine and Saint Francis Xavier parishes’
newsletter for Summer 2021*

Building a Proud Community

LGBTQS ministry’s mission is to provide pastoral care that reflects Jesus’ message of all inclusive love

The LGBTQS (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Straight) ministry’s mission at SASFX is to build a more just and humane world where all human relationships based on mutual respect and love are esteemed. The ministry offers hospitality and spiritual uplift to everyone looking to rejoice in the unconditional love of God. It encourages people to be themselves, to be more fully human so that they can develop a greater capacity for concern, for suffering, for sympathy, for joy, for love and for the good and beautiful things of life. To paraphrase St. John’s Gospel: Christ came that we may have life, and that we may have it more abundantly. This is what we strive for.

Bishop Francis J. Mugavero of Brooklyn wrote a pastoral letter in 1976, “Sexuality: God’s Gift,” which was one of the first Catholic statements to contain a compassionate and encouraging message to gay and lesbian people. “Gay and lesbian people deserved to be treated equally in society and the Christian community, and we pledge our willingness. . .



Pope Francis and fans, Tom Wargo and Bob Biegen at the Brooklyn Pride Day, 5th Avenue Park Slope

to try to find new ways to communicate the truth of Christ because we believe it will make you free.”

In 2004 the Diocese of Brooklyn established an Ad Hoc Committee on Pastoral Care to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics and their families. The Committee included the late Bishop Joseph Sullivan as well as various religious, priests and lay people. The primary goal of the Committee was to ensure that parishes provide pastoral care to gay people and their families that reflects Jesus’ message of all inclusive love.

St. Augustine was the first Brooklyn parish to create a formal Gay Catholic Ministry implementing the Committee’s recommendations. The pastor, Fr. Fernando Ferrarese, approached a young member of the parish, Kevin Cooper, to implement it. About the same time a young woman from outside the parish, Janine Deitz, approached Kevin about doing something for the victims of the AIDS epidemic. It was decided that a family style dinner would be just the thing,

and the HOPE (Healing Ourselves and People Everywhere) Dinner was born. It is the longest living component of the LGBTQS ministry.

Every third Sunday of the month a dinner is served to about 50 people with HIV/AIDS and their loved ones. The food is prepared and served entirely by volunteers, many of whom are members of the SASFX parish and many who are not. The dinners offer physical and spiritual nourishment in a safe, welcoming and communal atmosphere. Less than two years ago the HOPE Dinners celebrated it's 25th anniversary....so for 27 years now amazing dinners have been served every month until Covid struck. Even now volunteers and guests meet on Zoom each month for mutual support and, beginning last December, take-home meals have been prepared and distributed every other month at the Brooklyn Society for Ethical Culture.

Another long-running tradition of the LGBTQS ministry is the Red Ribbon Memorial Project. During the weeks leading up to World AIDS Day on December 1st, red ribbons are affixed to the fence surrounding St. Augustine church to memorialize family, friends and neighbors whose lives have been cut short by the AIDS virus. A service is held in the early evening on Dec. 1 that includes prayers from many faith traditions, music, poems, a guest speaker, and a candle-lit reading of the names of those who have died. A small reception is held afterwards. This past year, the service was held, as usual, but socially-distanced, and minus the reception. On the way to Sunday mass in late November a parishioner overheard a young girl say to her mother and sister as they walked past the red ribbons hanging on the fence: "They do this every year. Each ribbon represents someone who died of AIDS." Our red ribbons have likely made a lifetime impression upon her. She will always look upon St. Augustine as a church which has a heart. We are constantly adding names to the Red Ribbon Memorial Project so if anyone would like to add a name please let us know

During the observation of Brooklyn Gay Pride Day in June the LGBTQS ministry sets up a table to distribute information about our parish and its ministry. It extends a welcome to those who feel alienated from the church because of their sexual orientation. In June 2019 the ministry was joined by students from St. Francis College along with a life-size cardboard cut-out of Pope Francis, who was a big hit. It



Esther and Sharon Dawson, mother and daughter volunteers at the HOPE Dinner



Janine Deitz, founder of the HOPE Dinners, at the 25th Anniversary Dinner

seemed everyone wanted a photo with the Pope who will forever be remembered for saying "If someone is gay and searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" 2019 was the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, and the ministry was represented at the Pride March in Manhattan, which may have been the largest public assembly ever recorded in the country.



World AIDS Day Ribbon Project, St. Augustine



Catholic Ministries Outreach Table, Brooklyn Pride Day

In years past when the rectory was open to parishioners, we would occasionally have pizza and show a movie addressing faith and sexuality, such as “The Saint of 9/11” depicting the heroic life of Fr. Mychal Judge, an out Franciscan priest and Fire Department chaplain who lost his life at the World Trade Center ministering to the victims of that tragedy; “For the Bible Tells Me So”, which follows the lives of five religious families as they learn to accept their gay or lesbian child in light of a more analytical and scholarly understanding of the Bible; “Camp Out”, which follows a group of gay Minnesota teenagers spending a week at a Gay Christian Camp, and “Anyone and Everyone”, a moving documentary of American families’ most heart-wrenching

and heart-warming moments as they adjust to their child’s announcement of their sexuality.

During the season of Lent, we participate in a parish-wide Lenten series during which we explore faith and justice from a gay perspective. In previous years, the late Bishop Joseph Sullivan joined us for a frank discussion of issues of concern to our ministry, and in 2019 we listened to a recorded talk by Fr. James Martin urging the Church to aggressively reach out to the LGBTQ community. This year, the program was on Zoom and included personal reflections of members of our faith community.

It is well documented that LGBTQ youth are at elevated risk for suicide compared with their straight peers. This increased risk is linked to experiences of rejection, discrimination, and physical harm due to having an LGBTQ identity. Recently some Catholic bishops signed a statement in support of gay youth which sent a powerful message of solidarity to gay kids everywhere, telling them: “God loves you and God is on your side. As we see in the Gospels, Jesus Christ taught love, mercy and welcome for all people, especially for those who felt persecuted or marginalized in any way; and the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that LGBT+ people are to be treated with ‘respect, compassion and sensitivity’. The Catholic Church values the God-given dignity of all human life and we take this opportunity to say to our LGBT friends, especially young people, that we stand with you and oppose any form of violence, bullying or harassment directed at you. Most of all, know that God created you, God loves you and God is on your side.”

Sadly, many Catholic bishops have not yet signed onto the letter. An acknowledgment of Gay Pride Day at Mass either in the Prayers of the Faithful or before the recessional hymn would send such a positive message to the many young people who desperately need to be acknowledged.

During this year’s Zoom Lenten series a young man shared that he had recently returned to the church after coming upon the ministry’s Red Ribbon Memorial. He initially mistook St. Augustine for a Protestant church being that he himself had never felt welcome as a gay man in a Catholic church. He has since started attending services at our parish. His experience encapsulates the goal of the ministry, which is to bring all of us to Christ.

Baptism Ministry Keeps the Faith



The O’Kain family with Father Jason Smith in the Saint Augustine Baptistery

For many years, both St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier parishes have provided baptism preparation programs to welcome families to our faith communities. The pandemic restrictions put a temporary halt to most baptisms. However, for the better part of the last year, we have been preparing families for baptism using our virtual meeting tools for all but the baptism itself. And as the parishes have combined, so too have our ministries. We are now one SASFX Baptism Preparation Ministry.

The purpose of the Baptism Preparation Ministry is to welcome families and foster a connection to the church that will encourage their faith formation from the moment they request to have their child baptized at SASFX.

We do this by having a pair of ministry members shepherd the family throughout the process, from an initial intake meeting, through a family discussion session and thereafter, the baptism itself.

Before pandemic restrictions went into effect, families would call the respective parish office to request baptism. At that time, some basic information would be gathered. The next step was an in-person intake evening meeting at the rectory with a member of the ministry who would welcome the family, share information about the parish, and further discuss the preparation process. Group family discussion sessions were held in-person the second Wednesday night of the month for parents and godparents. The discussion was facilitated by

a priest and the members of the ministry who were shepherding that month’s families through the process. Baptisms were held the last Sunday of the month or as requested (and agreed to by the priest) and as many as 10 babies were baptized at times. Ministry members assisted the day of the baptism as well.

A number of changes were made to avoid face-to-face contact during the pandemic. Baptism requests are now made by completing the request form on the SASFX website. Intake sessions are held using zoom or video calling. The group discussion is held using zoom. During the discussion, the ministry members share their faith and discuss their experience of Christian parenting. Baptisms are individual and are held after the Sunday mass at the

worship site attended or requested by the family (after the 9:30 Mass at SFX, after the noon mass at St. Augustine). One advantage of the use of virtual meeting technology is that godparents, who may live at a distance, are more able to attend than when meetings were in-person. In addition, parents who do not have a babysitter do not need to take their baby out in order to attend the intake or discussion session.

There are currently nine members of the Baptism Preparation Ministry. Lisa Friel is the ministry leader. Other members are: Kathleen Gallagher and Andy Schwartz, Susan Steingass, Peggy Rorke, Jane Tully, Regie Hawkey and Jeff Vieira, and Kathleen Spiessbach. Baptism requests are coming in very

frequently and, at present, our schedule is filled through the summer.

Many of our members have been serving this ministry for 10 years or more. They find it a meaningful opportunity to share their faith and welcome families to our faith community. Reflecting on her years of service, Susan Steingass says, "I have been serving in the baptism ministry at St Augustine (now St. Augustine-St. Francis Xavier) for more than 20 years. Whether they are the newest additions to long-time families of the parish, or recent arrivals to our community, it is gratifying to welcome these children of God into our faith through the sacrament of Baptism." Another ministry member, Jane Tully, says, "It is such a remarkable privilege

to be able to share the absolute joy of welcoming a new baby to our church with the family. There is no happier event than a baptism." And, Kathleen Spiessbach adds, "Getting to know these wonderful young families and sharing their joy is an immeasurable blessing for me."

It remains to be seen what changes to current processes will be made once in-person meetings and larger group gatherings are possible. Going forward, we will assess how best to incorporate the advantages of our pandemic processes in a post-pandemic world. In the meantime, we would welcome new members to our ministry. If you are interested in joining us, reach out to Lisa Friel at lisa.friel2257@gmail.com.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Easter season reminds us that God constantly brings renewal to His Church and that is often seen in the context of pastoral and personnel changes. I

have been the administrator of St. Augustine-St. Francis Xavier for a year and will be concluding my time at the parish on June 30th. Replacing me will be Fr. Frank Tumino, who is currently the pastor of St. Thomas the Apostle church in Woodhaven, Queens. For many years Fr. Tumino was also in charge of the diocesan liturgy offices. He brings to our parish a wealth of pastoral, administrative, and creative experience. I am confident that SASFX will be in more than capable hands and I look forward to hearing of the good things to come!

As for me, I will be heading to the Abbey of the Genesee in upstate New York as a postulant. That means I will be formally exploring a call to the monastic/contemplative life. This has been on my heart for many, many years and I am blessed that Bishop DiMarzio is allowing me to pursue this call.

Many people have asked me why, especially during this tumultuous time, do I feel drawn to the monastery. In short,

when I look at all that I could actively do help "fix" the Church, I realize the one thing that needs the most fixing is me. The monastery is a place where you are brought



face-to-face with your wounds, sins, shortcomings, and blind spots. Allowing myself to be healed in and through Jesus in turn helps heal His Body, the Church. In other words, each one of us plays a role in healing the Body, and I believe that my place is in the cloister of the monastery. For it is in the monastery where the parameters to

love others are shattered, since it is a place where you are able to hold a limitless amount of people in your heart.

Know that each of you will be held in my heart as I embark on this next phase of my journey in knowing Jesus and His Church. Thank you for allowing me to become a part of your lives—I am truly grateful and blessed beyond measure. I ask for your prayers as we all continue our journey of being renewed in Christ!

Peace and blessings,

Fr. John Gribowich

Administrator, St. Augustine – St. Francis Xavier



Photographed in the St. Francis Xavier garden (l. to r.) Sam McGovern, Bob Biegen, Marie Corkhill, Ellen Shea, Regie Hawkey, John Piccard, Bill Cahill, Siobhan O'Reilly and Nancy Tim. Other members not pictured: Joseph Lozito, Iksra Al Larracuenta.

Meet Our New Church Council

On Sunday May 2nd the newly formed Pastoral Planning Council for St. Augustine and St. Francis Xavier Church was formally commissioned at the 9:30 mass at SFX and then introduced at the 12:00 noon mass at SA. We hope you were present, either in-person or virtually for these events. Eleven members of SASFX have been accepted for service on the Council which is the primary lay leadership body for our faith community.

Parish councils have existed in both parishes for as long as we can recall; their purpose being to serve in an advisory capacity to the Pastor. Pastoral Planning Councils such as our newly combined Council serve to advise the Pastor/Administrator but also play a larger role in discerning the needs of the faith community and working to gather the resources of the faith com-

munity to best meet those needs. It is the responsibility of all baptized members of our community to discern ways in which they can best follow the gospel message of charity and justice. As a leadership body, the Pastoral Planning Council discerns the mission of the parish and envisions the ways in which parish membership is being called to apostolic mission. The Council accomplishes their work through attention to mission, liturgy, faith formation, ministry and communication within the parish and the broader community.

Members of the Pastoral Planning Council (PPC) serve as a key communication link between the Administrator/Pastor and the people of the parish. That is the primary reason for the commissioning and introduction at masses; that the Council members are known to the larger faith community. Our

SASFX Council members are excited to work across our SASFX community and experience the joining together of the many gifts of our SASFX parishioners. Let us all pray that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are with the Council as they serve our faith community.

The PPC section of the SASFX website (sasfx.org) is under construction. You can find photos and brief bios of our members there. Soon, you will also find the PPC bylaws as well as notes from our monthly meetings. PPC member photos and bios have also been printed and these posters have been placed in the vestibule of each SASFX worship site.

Please join us in welcoming our new PPC members to their role and feel free to reach out by email to PPC@sasfx.org should you want to contact the PPC.

Christian Service in Park Slope

In addition to leading and assisting the Social Justice-related ministries based at SASFX, members of our faith community have found other ways to help neighbors in need. Christine Doyle is one of these members.

Christine has been involved in social justice work at SFX for many years. Her involvement began with the inception of The Deacon Jack Franca Sandwich project through which parishioners get together to make “lunch bags” distributed on the street on Thanksgiving morning. Christine went on to become a volunteer at the Respite Shelter at Old First Dutch Reformed Church.

When the Covid shutdown went into effect and so many were in need, Christine explored volunteer opportunities in our neighborhood. She found a “wonderfully warm group of volunteers” at Camp Friendship on 8th Street. The food pantry at Camp Friendship serves “large volumes” each Saturday to a long line of needy neighbors. In addition, on Tuesday and Saturday, homebound neighbors receive the pantry food delivered along with hot and cold meals. Christine has helped to organize the donated food and mark it properly so that it gets to the right person. Volunteers get to know the individual’s needs and tailor the donations to the right neighbor. When Christine popped in on a recent Saturday to volunteer She met fellow SASFX parishioner Maryanne Mazzola volunteering there as well.

Here’s a link to find out more: <https://www.campfriendshipbrooklyn.org>

As mentioned previously, Christine is familiar with work-



ing at Old First Dutch Reformed Church. During Covid, the space at Old First has been converted to Brooklyn Relief Kitchen (BRK). She volunteered there as well. Sponsored by Old First, BRK prepares, packages, and distributes donated food to CHIPS and many other sites around Brooklyn. Christine donated cooked meals and helped prepare, package and distribute BRK meals as well as helping with clean-up.

Here’s a link to find out more: <https://brooklynreliefkitchen.org/>

Christine is also familiar with CHiPS which has had to close its traditional dine-in soup kitchen during the pandemic. In its place, they are running a program called the Pop-Up at CHiPS. Through the Pop-Up, they serve takeaway bags filled with hot meals, sandwiches, snacks, and water from 12:00-1:30 pm, Mondays-Saturdays. Because of COVID restrictions, each meal has to be packed in containers that can be reheated. With the assistance of other volunteers (some of them SASFX parishioners.) she has successfully made well over 100 meals for hungry neighbors at the CHIPS Pop-Up. The recipes were suggested and the operation organized virtually and socially distanced.

Here’s a link to find out more: <http://chipsonline.org>

Reflecting on her social justice-related volunteer activities during the pandemic, Christine is grateful to have touched so many lives. “I feel it’s the best way we can touch someone’s life personally,” she says, “Even if I don’t get to meet the person, I treat them with great dignity not just as a neighbor but as a guest. It’s an extremely rewarding thing to feed the hungry. Additionally I get to meet terrific people who are donating time, food, or money in cooperation with one another. I couldn’t ask for any better opportunity to reach out during this challenging time.”

We are a lively community where interesting things happen. Please feel free to peruse our website, call with any questions and/or follow us on Facebook: @staugustinerpcparkslope; @stfxbrooklyn

St. Augustine - St. Francis Xavier

Saturday Vigil Mass

**5:00 PM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)**

Sunday Masses

**9:30 AM at St. Francis Xavier
(225 6th Avenue)**

**12:00 Noon at St. Augustine
(116 6th Avenue)**

Contact Information

**225 6th Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11215**

**718-638-1880
info@sasfx.org**

www.sasfx.org

Ministry

**Rev. John Gribowich,
Administrator**

**Rev. Richard Bretone,
Parochial Vicar**

**Sr. Helene Conway, C.S.J.,
Pastoral Associate**

**Deacon Dean Dobbins, Business
Manager**