

Catholic Passage

SPRING/SUMMER 2026



Choosing Joy

ONGOING CONVERSION

Daily we seek to grow closer to Jesus, asking Him to transform our hearts, minds, and wills, so we can love Him more deeply.



Who was St. Francis?

St. Francis of Assisi was a Catholic saint born in Assisi, Italy, in 1181 or 1182. As a young man, Francis enjoyed a life of wealth, parties, and popularity, but after experiencing illness and time as a prisoner of war, he began to feel called to something greater. He chose to leave behind his riches and dedicate his life completely to God.

Francis became known for his deep love of people, especially the poor and forgotten. He lived simply, served others joyfully, and believed all creation reflected the beauty of God. He often preached about peace, kindness, humility, and caring for the world around us. His joyful faith inspired many followers, leading to the creation of the Franciscan Order.

St. Francis is also remembered for his love of animals and nature, seeing them as part of God's creation to be cherished and protected. His famous prayer begins, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

More than 800 years later, St. Francis continues to inspire people to live with compassion, simplicity, gratitude, and joy. His life reminds us that true happiness is found not in what we own, but in how we love and serve others.

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“Let us always meet each other with a smile, for the smile is the beginning of love.”

— **St. Teresa of Calcutta**

Witnesses in Plain Sight

CHOOSING JOY: How Did St. Francis’ Radical Way of Living Out the Gospel Bring Him Joy?

By Jennifer Redenius

Summer often brings a change of pace. The routines of the school year ease, the days grow longer, and many of us look forward to moments of rest, family gatherings, vacations, and time outdoors. Yet amid the busyness or even the quiet of summer, we are still called to something deeper: a daily journey of turning toward God and choosing the joy found in Christ.

St. Francis of Assisi offers us a beautiful example of what it means to live with joyful purpose. Francis did not

find happiness in wealth, status, or comfort. Instead, he discovered lasting joy by living the Gospel wholeheartedly and allowing his life to be shaped by Christ each day. Whether he was walking through the countryside praising God for creation, serving the poor, or praying in silence, Francis recognized that every season of life was an opportunity to draw closer to God.

Summer can become that kind of season for us as well.

In the warmth and beauty of these months, we are reminded of the goodness of God’s creation. A sunrise over the fields, children laughing outside, evenings gathered with family, or quiet moments on the porch can all become invitations to pause and recognize God’s presence. Like St. Francis, we can learn to see Christ in both the extraordinary and the ordinary.

But choosing joy is not simply about enjoying pleasant moments. Francis teaches us that true joy comes from living with hearts centered on God. Even during uncertainty, stress, or sacrifice, joy is possible when we trust that Christ walks with us. Summer gives us a chance to slow down enough to reconnect with that truth—to pray more intentionally, to spend time with loved ones, to serve others generously, and to rediscover gratitude in everyday life.

This season, may we follow the example of St. Francis by embracing a simpler, more Christ-centered joy. May we turn toward God daily and allow Him to shape our hearts through the small moments of summer. And may we remember that real joy is not found in having the perfect summer, but in walking closely with Christ through every season He gives us.





One simple family challenge: each night at supper or bedtime, have every family member share one moment of joy they experienced that day and one way they saw God at work.

Choosing Joy in Action

Choosing joy does not mean pretending life is always easy. Even St. Francis of Assisi faced struggles, disappointments, and hardships. Yet he continued to turn his heart toward God with gratitude and trust.

When joy feels difficult this summer, try these simple steps as a family:

Pause and Pray – Take a moment to breathe and invite God into the situation. Even a short prayer like, “Jesus, help me choose joy today,” can shift our hearts.

Focus on Gratitude – Name three good things from the day, no matter how small. Gratitude helps us notice God’s blessings even during stressful moments.

Choose Kindness – A kind word, hug, or act of service can change the atmosphere in a home quickly. Joy often grows when we focus on others.

Spend Time in God’s Creation – Go for a walk, watch a sunset, or sit outside together. St. Francis found great joy in the beauty of creation because it reminded him of God’s presence.

Remember Joy is a Choice – Feelings come and go, but joy is something we can choose by trusting that God walks with us through every season.

Sometimes the holiest thing we can do is choose hope, gratitude, and love even on hard days.

Parenting Corner

Choosing Joy This Summer

Summer brings a change of pace for families—longer days, later bedtimes, vacations, sports schedules, and moments of both laughter and chaos. In the middle of all the busy moments, St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that joy is not found in having a perfect life, but in living close to God.

St. Francis of Assisi lived a radical life. He gave up wealth, comfort, and status to follow Jesus completely. Yet despite hardships, Francis was known for his deep joy. Why? Because his happiness was rooted not in possessions or success, but in love, gratitude, simplicity, and trust in God.

As parents, we often feel pressure to create the “perfect” summer for our children—perfect memories, perfect schedules, perfect experiences. But Francis teaches us that joy grows in smaller moments:

- praying together before a road trip,
- eating dinner outside on a warm evening,
- serving a neighbor in need,
- laughing during a family game night,
- noticing a beautiful sunset and thanking God for it.

Francis found joy in creation because he saw God in everything. This summer, help your children slow down enough to notice those little gifts too.

One simple family challenge: each night at supper or bedtime, have every family member share one moment of joy they experienced that day and one way they saw God at work. Over time, this practice helps children recognize that joy is not something we chase—it is something we choose.

True Christian joy does not mean life is always easy. It means we trust that God is with us in every season. Just like St. Francis, we can teach our children that the happiest hearts are often the ones most focused on faith, gratitude, and love.

Check out actions you can take > >

Shining Their Light at Paton-Churdan

At Paton-Churdan Community School District, this year's theme, "Shine Your Light," became more than a slogan—

It became something students could see lived out each day in the actions of their teachers. While public schools may not openly teach the Gospel, they often reflect its values through love, service, patience, and compassion. Paton-Churdan is just one example of public school educators quietly choosing joy and leading with light.

Teachers shined their light in countless ways this year. Staff members gave up planning periods without hesitation to help cover classrooms when coworkers needed support. Teachers packed sack

lunches and rearranged schedules so students could experience field trips and learning opportunities outside the classroom. They spent mornings greeting students at the door with smiles, high-fives, and encouragement—small moments that reminded children they mattered.

Others stayed long after the final bell to tutor students, coach practices, sponsor clubs, or simply listen when a student was struggling. Teachers organized service projects, FCA activities, food drives, and community events that taught students how to care for others. In the hallways, classrooms, lunchroom, and gym, students witnessed adults choosing patience, teamwork, and kindness every single day.

June 2026

Pope Leo's Prayer Intentions

*From the United States
Council of Catholic Bishops*

For the Values of Sports

Let us pray that sports be an instrument of peace, encounter, and dialogue among cultures and nations, and that they promote values such as respect, solidarity, and personal growth.

The joy of St. Francis came from living out love through humble acts of service, and that same spirit can still be seen in schools today. At Paton-Churdan, teachers showed that shining your light does not require recognition or perfection—just a willingness to serve others with joy. Their example reminds us that even in ordinary places, extraordinary light can shine brightly.

Do You Have an Interest in Guest Writing?

Here at Catholic Passage, we publish a quarterly newsletter and are looking for guest writers. If you're interested in sharing your abilities, whether as a one-time contributor or on a regular basis, we'd love to hear from you!

Each issue will have a theme, and we're happy to share upcoming topics with anyone interested.

For more info., please email: newsletter@catholicpassage.com



Family Activity

Joy Hunt with St. Francis

By Jennifer Redenius

This summer, invite your family to slow down and notice the simple joys and blessings God places all around us—just as St. Francis of Assisi did. St. Francis found joy in nature, relationships, prayer, and serving others. This activity encourages families to intentionally seek God's goodness together throughout the summer months.



How it Works:

Choose one evening or afternoon each week for a “Joy Hunt.” Take a walk around your neighborhood, farm, park, campground, or backyard and look for small signs of God’s love and beauty.

As a family, try to find:

- Something beautiful God created
- Someone you can help or encourage
- A moment that brings you peace
- Something that makes you laugh
- A reminder of God’s love
- A way to care for creation

Bring along a notebook or phone and write down or take pictures of the things you discover.

Family Reflection Questions

After your walk or activity time, gather together and discuss:

- What brought you joy today?
- Where did you notice God?
- What was one simple blessing you may have overlooked before?
- How can we share joy with someone else this week?

Bonus Challenge: Spread Joy

Inspired by St. Francis, complete one small act of kindness together each week this summer:

- Deliver cookies to a neighbor
- Write encouraging notes
- Visit a nursing home resident
- Pick up litter at a park
- Donate items to a family in need
- Invite someone who may feel lonely to join you for supper or a game night

Closing Prayer

“Lord, help us to see You in the beauty of summer, in the people around us, and in the small blessings of each day. Like St. Francis, teach us to choose joy, live simply, and share Your love wherever we go. Amen.”

A Place Called Golgotha

By Jeanna Clayburg

This year during Lent I participated in the diocese-wide book study with a few friends. The book was *A Place Called Golgotha* by Elizabeth M. Kelly, and I feel like it unexpectedly touches on this month's theme of joy. Not the kind of joy that brings warm and fuzzy feelings, but the joy that can be found even in suffering.

The book challenged me to see suffering differently. That it can be done with purpose and it's something that can draw us closer to Christ when we unite it to Him. Easier said than done, I know. However, after reading this book my mindset has definitely shifted when it comes to suffering. I've always been told to "offer it up," but this book gave those words a different meaning. Redemptive suffering means allowing our pain, struggles, and hardships to be joined with Christ's suffering on the cross, trusting that God can bring purpose, grace, and even transformation through it.

To witness the author speak about this during her live Q&A was so beautiful. Your suffering is given purpose when it's united to His. And somehow, even in hardship, that purpose can lead to peace and joy because we know we are never suffering alone.

The book meditates on the last words of Christ, not just His suffering. It invites readers into deeper prayer and reflection. My favorite takeaway comes from His first words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). One insight that stayed with me was the reminder that sometimes we can ask God to forgive others for us until we are able to forgive them fully and freely ourselves.

Here are a few quotes from others who participated with me:

"Meditation on Jesus' last words made me feel closer to Him and the power of the cross."

"I liked how we were encouraged to use our imagination and visualize. That helped me grow deeper in prayer and my faith."

"It reminded me that through your suffering, you can imagine Jesus' arms around you."

This study was a beautiful reminder that joy does not always come from the absence of suffering, but from knowing Christ is present within it.

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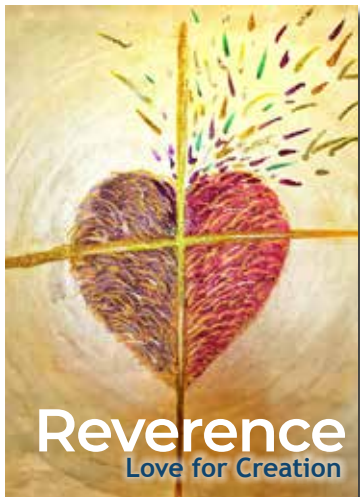
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In the next issue:



- St. Francis encouraged stewardship of the earth, highlighting the responsibility to protect it.
- Practicing compassion and kindness towards all living beings.

“Spiritual joy arises from purity of the heart and perseverance in prayer.”

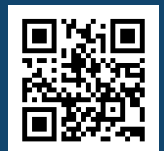
— St. Francis of Assisi

Catholic Passage supports parents and educators as they pass on the Catholic faith and way of life to their children and students.

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in touch**

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