



Dear St. Stephen's Parishioner,

The time for **Turn Up the Flame, Part III**, has arrived! This is not about raising money! It is about **raising our faith to a higher level!**

Turn Up the Flame is St. Stephen's three-year program to **intensify and deepen our spiritual lives**. The motto is taken from the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-13) in which five wise maidens arose at midnight when the bridegroom arrived and trimmed their lamps. They cut away the charred edge of the wicks, a symbol for cutting sin out of our lives, so their flames would burn more cleanly and brightly, a symbol for the way **our goodness and virtue should shine more brightly before God and neighbor**.

There is a special point of emphasis for each of the three years: Phase I, Learn Your Faith; Phase II, Practice Your Faith; and this year, **Phase III, Share Your Faith**.

Jesus wants his disciples to evangelize, to share their faith, to speak to others about him and his gospel. Jesus told John the Baptist's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see" (Mt 11:4), and he told the man from the territory of the Gerasenes who had been freed from demonic possession, "Go home to your family and announce to them all that the Lord in his pity has done for you" (Mk 5:19). As soon as the apostles received the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Peter immediately stood up, raised his voice, and proclaimed the risen Jesus (Acts 2:17). We, too, are called to share our faith.

Pledging is part of most campaigns, and Phase III will be no exception. Again, the pledge is not for money. **Each person in every household is being invited to state their spiritual intention for the year.** There are adult pledge booklets and cards at church, as well as three different pledge sheets for our young people, one for teens, another for middle school age youth, and a third for children. **Please complete your commitment card and bring it to church.**

It takes great faith and inner strength to share our faith. For most, this is unfamiliar territory. Strategies on how to reflect upon our own faith and share it with others will be given in upcoming homilies, bulletin articles, and other materials.

Wrist bands and other promotional items are available at church. Please help yourself. They are excellent reminders and motivators for us to Turn Up our Flames!

Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun, Pastor