

St. Louis College Ministry

Keeping you Connected to the Fam



Survival of the Fittest!

So, the Balance Check List is still here, but I'll be honest... I don't actually expect that anyone is going to be able to keep up with it during exams. I know all too well how crazy it can get!

I thought it would be worthwhile to a) talk about exam survival and b) talk about break survival.

Exam survival. At this point, you've made your bed. If you have been slacking off all semester, you're feeling the pain. If you procrastinated on a project, you're going to have to do an all nighter. I can't help you there. But I do want to advise you to take up the goal of NOT GETTING SICK. Unfortunately, a lot of people get sick during exams or immediately following. No one wants to take an exam with a head cold and no one wants to miss out on half of Christmas break because they are bedridden.

To prevent yourself from getting sick, lay on the Vitamin C. get to bed early when you can, and do something you enjoy. Yes, I am serious about the last one! Consider that it might actually be more beneficial for you to take a break to go for a run or to draw a picture than to struggle through a few more pages in your text book. When you do something you consider to be meaningful, your body releases endorphins. Endorphins are AWESOME neurotransmitters that have

Balance Check List

- _____ Enough Sleep
- _____ Eating healthily
- _____ Exercising 3-4 times a week
- _____ Leisure & Rest
- _____ Studying Enough for Classes
- _____ Time to Pray & Attend Mass
- _____ Time for Fun & Friends
- _____ Service to Community

Happy Advent from the CYM Office!

We know that you are totally in "exam mode" so we wanted to send you a little care package to let you know that we are thinking of you and praying for you during this time! Work hard, get some good grades, and hurry home for Christmas!

AWESOME health effects: they lower your blood pressure, your heart rate, and your respiratory rate as well as... here comes the important part... increases the strength of your immune system!! Whoohoo! So take a little break. I think it will be worth it.

Break survival. Depending on your situation, breaks can be really great or really hard. Some of you live at home, so you may be looking forward to friends coming back from school. Some of you may be looking forward to seeing your family for a longer period of time than you were able to at Thanksgiving. Some of you may be dreading the holidays because they tend to be stressful at home.

I found that break was most difficult my freshmen and my senior year. Things change during your first semester of freshmen year. Friends change, too. For the first time, you will have had wildly different experiences from some of the people you are closest too. If you're careful not to fall into a comparison trap, this can be really awesome, and can provide material for great conversations as you share about your new experiences in life. It can also be difficult to find out that your best friend has a new best friend or maybe your best friend doesn't seem like the "good person" he or she used to have. You may struggle to find time to meet up with your friends or you may struggle with feeling like you no longer have a friend group at home. All of these experiences are normal. I challenge you to be proactive— initiate gatherings with your friends— and to be humble— your stories from school don't have to "one up" your friends' stories from school.

Seniors, it's just like your last year of high school. Prepare yourselves from the imminent "What are your plans for next year?" question. And be okay with saying "I don't know." If you haven't already done so, Christmas break is the time to get yourself together. Spruce up the resume. Start sending it out and networking with people you or your parents know that could get you in the door somewhere. If you're hoping to attend grad school, you've probably already applied (but JUNIORS, it doesn't hurt to start learning about the graduate school application process). Get yourself a nice outfit to wear on interviews. Clean up the non-professional social media posts and pictures. Figure out what your loan situation is going to be after you graduate... All the fun stuff!

But mostly, ENJOY your break. Relax, sleep in, eat some good food, contribute to the family life, do some fun activities, etc. You will need to go back to school feeling refreshed!

In God's Time

Melissa Robbins

When I was in high school I struggled with depression and anxiety. I was slowly losing interest in the things that I loved – school, my friends, riding, and most importantly, my faith. I decided not to get confirmed in high school because at that point, it was just another obligation. It felt dishonest to me. I thought that the biggest part of Confirmation was being able to decide for yourself that it's what you want. I wasn't making that decision, it was being made for me, and I just wasn't comfortable with that. I finished high school, moved to Alabama for college, and let my relationship with God sit on the back burner.

A little over a year ago, I felt like I was losing myself and I moved back home. I worked really hard to get my grades up and start taking better care of myself, but I still felt like something was missing. As I watched Megan (my sister) prepare for her confirmation over the last few months, I was torn between being excited for her and feeling guilty and disappointed in myself for letting my relationship with God get so off track. I decided it was time for me to get confirmed as well. Better late than never? Pat



Sprinkle told me it was "in God's time" and I really loved that.

For me, waiting to get confirmed was the best decision I could have made. I have struggled the last few years, but I think I needed it to remind me that my life isn't full without faith. I met with Katie Erskine one-on-one the weeks leading up to it. She was so inspiring and patient with me. After years of Catholic school and Religious Ed classes, I thought I had everything down. But she taught me about the Catholic faith in such a new light and helped me to tie religion into my everyday life. I also was nervous about jumping into the Confirmation process with a bunch of teens, but the whole St. Louis community was so kind, accepting, and excited for me. That felt really great. I know people always say that faith in God means faith in his timing, and I believe that now more than ever.

A Retreat Endorsement

Mike Bentivenga

Tis' the season of giving thanks and joy! With the upcoming holiday season let's remember the true meaning of Christmas and celebrate the birth of our lord Jesus Christ. For all ye merry college kids and young adult's, all are welcome to join St. Louis in attending the College Epiphany retreat. This retreat is a joyous and loving time, off from the stresses of college (and young adult) life and is a great way to get in touch with Christ and the holy spirit during the Christmas season. Great games, fun talks and spiritual reflections are all in store when you come to the shrine of St. Anthony's, January 6th, with the St. Louis College ministry. So Sign up before it's too late!! Happy Holidays!!



Sneak Peek at the "Do Not Be Afraid" Retreat Schedule!

Time	Activity
9:45am	Coffee, Donuts, Gathering
10:15am	Opening Activities w. Katie
10:45am	Talk on Vocations w. Deacon Scott Lancaster
11:30am	Break
12:00pm	Mass at the Shrine
1:00pm	Lunch
2:00pm	Talk on Relationships w. Kristen and Kevin Lusic (new volunteers)

Time	Activity
3:00pm	Break
3:00pm	Talk on Mercy w. Katie
3:30pm	Reconciliation w. Msgr Luca & Father Pete and "Desert Time"
4:45pm	Dinner with College Alumni Ministry
5:45pm	Ending Activities & Reflection w. Katie
6:15pm	Leave for St. Louis
7-8pm	Taize Adoration in St. Louis Chapel

We are dark, but lovely.

On the first Sunday of every month, the College & Young Adult Ministry has been gathering for praise and worship in Rooms 301 & 302 of the Parish Social Hall. There are usually around ten people there and though it is a small group, I have really been looking forward to and benefitting from our time praying together.

During the December 6 gathering, the leader, Pete Daub decided to give an impromptu testimony about how he has experienced the mercy of God. It was a beautiful and inspiring story of how God's love has pursued him during all times and circumstances in his life. He shared with us this quote: "We are dark, but lovely. We are so dark, but oh so very lovely to the Lord." Though we are sinful, weak willed, selfish, broken, WHATEVER. God loves us with the full abundance of his mercy. It says in Scripture, "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

As you hopefully know by now, Pope Francis declared this upcoming year the Year of Mercy. It has begun on December 8, which seems random, but it is the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (celebrating the fact that Mary was born without sin). I hope that over this Year of Mercy, I can "get it" the way Pete gets it. I want to strongly know the love and mercy of God. And I want others to know it, too. I want you to know it; I want your friends at school to know it; I want your family members to know it; I want the whole world to know it.

That's what Christianity is about: we are dark, but lovely. *Not*: we are dark, we need to become better, and then we will be lovely. We are lovely to God NOW. Not when we get our crap together, but NOW. Let me keep repeating that until it's written on my heart. :)

Christmas Break Schedule

GRASSROOTS

Dec 20, 11:30-1:30pm– We are looking for 5 volunteers to help make brunch at Grassroots Homeless Shelter. I also need 1 or 2 volunteers who could take the shopping list and pick up the food that we need and bring it to Grassroots.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

Dec 20, 7-11pm– Bring a plain sweater, vest, or t-shirt (check Walmart and thrift stores) for the "Make Your Own Ugly Sweater" Competition! We will also have an Advent Prayer Service and watch a Christmas movie.

Dec 21– Registration Deadline for the January 6 "Do Not Be Afraid" Retreat

RETREAT

Jan 6, 10am-8pm- "Do Not Be Afraid" College Retreat (See schedule on the left)

The Spotlight on Priest Scandals

This past weekend, I went to go see the movie "Spotlight" in theater. The movie is about a story that the Daily Globe, a newspaper in Boston, investigated regarding priest scandals in their diocese. By priest scandals, I am referring to sexual acts that priests had committed against children and minors. The reporters at the Daily Globe discovered that there was an absurd number of priests in Boston who had molested children and minors. For a while, the Church, a handful of attorneys, and even the press were doing everything they could to keep the issue under the radar.

Priest scandals are not unique to the Boston Diocese. Scandals at large have been uncovered throughout the entire United States and world. The movie quoted that an estimated 6% of all priests have acted sexually against a minor. The victims of these assaults suffer from a great deal of trauma which often leads them to depression, anxiety, a distorted self-image, and a disordered sex life. The victims are referred to as survivors— emphasizing that some victims are so traumatized by the event that they find the only escape to be suicide.

One of the reasons I chose to see this movie is that I wanted to be able to respond to anyone who asked me questions about the Church, priest scandals, and how they are being dealt with today. I am writing about this movie now because I want you to hear a response from someone in your Church. There are two things I want you to hear.

Firstly, the priest scandals were and still are a horrific evil in our Church that have greatly wounded its members. Survivors, their friends, and their families still suffer to this day. The image of the Church and the priesthood as safe and sacred was compromised. Trust was lost. The issues are far more complicated than priests being sexually suppressed by their vow to celibacy. There is an illness here and thankfully, it is now being addressed. Remember Worthy of the Call, or STAND, or Shield? They are all child safety & abuse prevention programs (the include reference and background checks) that have become mandatory within the Catholic Church for all priests, staff members, and volunteers. The program teaches people about appropriate boundaries to have with others and children, and what to do if you feel like that boundary is being crossed. That is a result of the scandals. To enter into seminary, the men have to participate in a series of different tests including a psychological health exam. I have personally known two people who were unable to enter into seminary because they failed the exam. That is a result of the scandals. I also have a best friend who works in a treatment center for priests and religious who are "sexually deviant". These men and women suffer from depression, anxiety, OCD, paranoia, etc and are oftentimes victims of sexual abuse themselves. The fact that there are treatment centers available for them is a result of the scandals. I want you to know that preventative and reactive measures are being taken.

Secondly, as we enter into the Year of Mercy, let's recall the "SPORT" acronym from the last newsletter. The "O" stood for Opening Doors and the "R" for Reconciliation. The priest scandals have opened our eyes to the intense need for healing within our Church. The priests and religious who have committed these sexual crimes are in need of healing. The survivors and their loved ones are in need of healing. The Church's relationship with the world who may struggle to trust her is in need of healing. One of you reading this article may be in need of healing. We don't know how close to home this issue comes. Let us strive to open doors and reconcile this year. Let us seek healing for this situation through prayer, dialogue, education. Let us try to open ourselves to God's mercy in a tangible way.

YOUR PARISH IS PRAYING FOR YOU!

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REGIONAL EVENTS WHILE YOU ARE HOME

Dec 16– ChristLife Young Adult Meeting from 7-9pm at the Shrine of St. Anthony

Dec 19– Frassati Night in Baltimore at Sts. Philip & James from 7-10pm (Talk, Adoration, Praise & Worship, Reconciliation, followed by a reception with Gingerbread House making)

Dec 23- ChristLife Young Adult Meeting from 7-9pm at the Shrine of St. Anthony

GOD ISN'T FIXING THIS: BUT I STILL PRAY

The cover of the New York Daily News on December 3 featured the inflammatory title "God Isn't Fixing This". The title was surrounded by images of different tweets in which politicians expressed that they were holding in prayer those involved in the San Bernardino massacre situation. The cover alone makes many statements about gun control laws, the power of politicians, and the passivity of Christianity.

I had a multi-faceted reaction to this cover, as well as to the many responses which it provoked. Truth is, a lot of the implied criticisms hit home with me. I, myself, have been asking: **"What is the purpose of prayer?"**

Is it good and worth while to pray about the shooting in San Bernardino? Does it make any difference? I'm going to be real with you and share an excerpt from my own personal prayer journal, written less than a month ago: "I understand how prayer impacts the *one who prays*, because they become closer to God. But how does prayer affect *change*— good weather, job acceptances, healing of a disease? Is there greater power in prayer based on the holiness of the person? The frequency of prayer? The importance of the prayer?"

To answer the original question, I first had to recognize that "to pray" means more than to ask for stuff. I can pray about the San Bernardino shooting and my prayer may sound something like: "Lord, how could you let this happen?" or "God, I am so scared that something like this could happen to me or to someone I love." That's prayer right there. And that's good. And that's worthwhile to be in communication with God.

But, what if, in response to all the evil in the world, I pray to God that the evil will stop? Is that good? Is that worthwhile? We are told in Scripture, "...whatever you ask in my name, I will do..." (Jn 14:13), "Ask and it will be given you..." (Mt 7:7), "...by prayer and petition... make your requests known to God..." (Phil 4:6). It sounds like God thinks it's good and worthwhile to ask for stuff. He even seems to promise that we will get what we ask for, considering we are asking for something positive. Whelp, I've prayed for the evil in the world to stop and it hasn't. Plain and simple.

This is basically where I got in my reflection before talking to Maggie Fischer (our Confirmation coordinator). For about twenty minutes, we spoke in circles and got ourselves caught in the question of "Does prayer change the world?" I thought we were just going to end up stuck, but then she said something that I will paraphrase: "I don't know exactly how prayer changes the world, but I know it changes me. When I pray for peace every day, I am more apt to make decisions that contribute to world peace. And if you think about it, that is changing the world. Prayer is one of those mysteries. There's so much more mystery to the world that we can comprehend. And we've got to be okay with that."

I can often get overwhelmed by the "mystery", all the questions I have about God and how the world works, the amount of evil in the world, the amount of work we have to do as Christians to make right some of the wrongs. Perhaps the relief to all of my worries is in simply taking care of my own heart by praying to God that *I* may be changed. I know the power of prayer to change my own heart because I have experienced it, and maybe you have too.

I encourage you to continue praying... even when you don't fully understand... even when you're unsure of the difference your prayers make. By allowing God to change our own hearts in prayer, maybe we will find more of the answers as to what we can do in this broken world!

With love, Katie