Tips for Living Our Parish Theme & Calling:

**Teaching children to encounter Jesus in nature.**

“As followers of Jesus the Christ and members of the Catholic Church, we believe we are called to new and full lives that include a personal, active, genuine encounter with Jesus, Our Lord.”

– Parish Theme & Calling Statement

Using the example of St. Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. As Pope Francis said in his apostolic exhortation on the environment, “The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us.”

As cosmologist Brian Swimme points out, “Our children can reproduce dozens of tinny tunes from advertisements, and yet they cannot distinguish between the songs of the meadowlark and the mockingbird. Our preschoolers, even before they can speak, can recognize the corporate images of so many of our commercial enterprises, and yet few if any of them can draw the insects or trees or flowers or mammals of our life space.”

Invite your children to walk with you outside in the fresh air. It doesn’t need to be a forest preserve or park – although that would be wonderful. It could also be your own neighborhood or even your backyard. Make sure it is a cell phone free time when you can go off the social media grid.

Pay attention to your surroundings; see the trees, the plants, and the wildlife. Hear the birds, the wind and the sound of your own footsteps. Feel, touch and ponder the entire world that unfolds before you. Open yourself to the awe and wonder of it all and share it all with your children!

Let them see, hear and feel your excitement. My mother was a tree hugger – literally. Even as an adult child I learned from her example how much awe and wonder there was even in the smallest of God’s creation, and how each could be a doorway to the divine.

Teach your children that walking does not have to be destination driven; it is all about the journey. Talk to your children about all these wonderful gifts from God and invite your children to thank God for all you see, hear, smell and feel. Gratitude and thanksgiving are the gateways to encountering God and coming to know Jesus (Luke 12:27-28).

by Tom Cordaro