

What Will Your Legacy Be?

written by Angela Anno

What will you leave behind after you die? Not a pleasant thought but one all of us will have to face at some time. Many people think primarily in terms of finances and spend hours with planners figuring out how to leave the most money and assets to their families while paying the least amount in taxes. That's one approach and many would say a very important one, but there's more than that to our legacy.

My Dad, who died two years ago this month, left us so much more. He taught us about hard work and integrity. "Remember you're a Labmeier (our family name)," he would say as we started any new endeavor. And he valued education, so much so that he scrubbed out brewery vats to help pay his tuition to Roger Bacon high school. His parents were immigrants from Austria and Romania and could only afford to send his brother to trade school. But Dad loved to learn and was the first in his family with a high school degree. And that wasn't enough for him. He wanted a college degree and took classes one at a time as he worked six days a week and helped Mom raise us four children. He graduated magna cum laude 31 years later with a degree in English from Thomas More College. We should have gotten a hint about how serious he was about learning when he used his mustering out pay from the Navy to buy a Webster's unabridged dictionary. Then it was seen as frivolous by many. Today it's a family treasure. Our house was always filled with books. His love of learning was catching. Mom took college classes with him and all of his children and grandchildren attended college, many earning advanced degrees.

Mom, who is a spry 92, is the family prayer warrior. We all feel supported when we bring our needs to her. She learned the importance of praying from her mother whose days always included periods of prayer—as well as chores and her favorite soap opera. Grandchildren were included naturally in Nona's circle of prayer, often accompanying her to weekly novenas and Third Order meetings, which were sometimes followed by bingo. Mom also learned about hospitality from her mother "Always offer a guest something to eat or drink." Watching her mom, who was the youngest of ten, care for her siblings in their old age led her to years of volunteering at school and at church.

As we approach our 125th anniversary as a parish, it's a good time to reflect on the legacy that has been left to us and how we are going to continue in the spirit of our founders in a different time with people from different cultures, but sharing the same faith. Sacrificing to have a place to worship, coming together in prayer to serve the parish, using their talents to beautify the church and grounds, providing for the religious education of their children, and reaching out to their neighbors are all part of the legacy that has been handed down to us. And we see these characteristics alive in our current parishioners—in Marge Heyob, now in a nursing home, who gave up her career and volunteered to help the sick and suffering of the parish and even traveled to our sister parish in Haiti on her 80th birthday; in our Hispanic community who use their landscaping skills to beautify the parish grounds; and our Burundian women who are forming a Legion of Mary to support the ministries of St.

Leo's. And this is just a small sample of how we continue to live out the values that were handed on to us.

What will our legacy be to St. Leo parishioners 125 years from now? I'm hoping that we will continue to be living out our mission statement:

We are a welcoming Catholic community, grounded in Eucharistic prayer, celebrating our diversity and sharing God's love through ministries of serving and being present in our urban neighborhoods while focusing on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.