

Annunziata Branch (MO)

The Annunziata Branch of Cornerstone enjoyed once meeting once again at the Webster Hills United Methodist Church Christian Life Center. We were warmly welcomed to use this lovely building that offered us plenty of space to serve our large branch of over 90 active members. We still miss our original Church of the Annunziata home, but changes within our diocese and the merging of many parishes made our future there a bit uncertain.

We had a wonderful Cornerstone year and were blessed with 9 new active members.

The return of this year's branch surveys reflects the happiness of our new members and the continued faith-filled Cornerstone Spirit among our 90+ long-term members. We have no shortage of volunteers willing to help make our study of the Gospel of Matthew very special indeed.

We will begin our new Cornerstone Study on Thursday, September 5, 2024, and complete the first semester on December 5, 2024. Our annual branch retreat will take place at Mercy Retreat and Conference Center on November 7th. We will begin our second semester on Thursday, January 9, 2025, and conclude the Study on March 20, 2025.

This past year we enjoyed several small group brown bag lunches after our Thursday morning meetings. Some small groups chose to go out to lunch together at a restaurant or at a group member's home. The entire Branch gathered for a Christmas lunch celebration and an end of the year celebration.

Our second semester of the Study of Prophets included a lovely Shepherding Board visit from Jan Melnyk and Sue Derdeyn. We were able

to continue our visit with a delicious lunch at a favorite local restaurant. Many of our Cornerstone members have lunch at that same restaurant most weeks of the study year.

Our members are our best evangelizers and continue to spread the good news of Cornerstone! We love how willingly they share their enthusiasm! We also have a very active prayer ministry led by our member, Sally Landy. All prayer requests are sent to Sally who forwards them to our members who wish to receive these requests.

Confidentiality is always honored if requested. Many non-Cornerstone members marvel at the blessings of answered prayers our prayer warriors receive and request our prayers as well. We are so truly blessed by our Gracious God.

Our gratitude to the Shepherding Board and our continued prayers for all the Cornerstone Members.

Ann Boyce - BF

Ave Maria Branch (Iowa City, IA)

We had several new members that began and then left due to commitment required. Overall, we retained approximately 5 new members. We are looking forward to the study of St. Matthew back at St. Mary's

In January, our founding BF Sue Derdeyn moved to VA. I was appointed BF at that time. Our socials were great!

Each small group hosted one, and they were fabulous. We had a new member join in the fall who gave a wonderful focus in January. Some of the members we lost plan to return for the study of St. Matthew.

Looking forward to the CMC and the study of St. Matthew.

Rosemary Fiagle - BF

The Bethany Branch (United States Disciplinary Barracks, Leavenworth, KS)

Our Branch began the Tuesday after Easter for the Welcome night of Prophets. There were 16 inmates signed up for the study and twelve attended the study on a consistent basis. Two outside team members joined the study from the Magnificat Branch in Leavenworth. The Bethany Branch has a Branch Facilitator, Branch Coordinator (from the Magnificat Branch), 4 small group facilitators and a Music Minister. We begin with a song, proclamation and a focus from one of the members. We then move into our small group and begin with shared prayer using the ACTS prayer, going around the small group sharing Adoration first, then Contrition, then Thanksgiving and Supplication. Praying the ACTS prayer this way helps keep us focused and decreases the stress of shared prayer. This year there were 4 inmates who wrote Spiritual Reflections that were sent to The Reflection Review Committee for approval. These Spiritual Reflections were outstanding, full of insight and personal testimonies. This study has filled a need for these men in a special way. They are making “time in the Word of God” a priority in their lives. They are learning how to connect with scripture and relate what they learn to their daily lives. The USDB thanks the Cornerstone scripture study for their support and prayers throughout the year. A special Thank you to those who gave permission to share their recorded Spiritual Reflections each week. They have been such a blessing to our study.

Maureen Hernandez - BF

Holy Trinity Branch (Springfield, MO)

Holy Trinity Church and Parish Center underwent many facilities changes during the year. Our main meeting space for the general membership received new lighting, an upgraded sound system, in-depth cleaning, and new paint. A couple of the rooms for Small Groups received a new HVAC system as well. The sanctuary had (and is still undergoing) a major remodel and Mass was held in the gym for months. Each week we were never certain as to the availability of our meeting spaces so, our Branch understood that we were all going to need to “go with the flow.”

Thus, out of necessity the theme of our Ministry Team Training Day for our study of The Prophets also became our mantra for the year...K.I.S.S. (Keep It Super Simple). During training a “pearl” of wisdom from the CMC was highlighted and a reminder Hershey kiss was shared with each SG Form reviewed.

Keeping things simpler, we were actually able to “recycle” and divide some old Reflections into new Focuses as the study of The Prophets was a repeat study for some of us. This helped to lift the burden of trying to have members sign-up to give a Focus.

We closed the year with a combined and very enjoyable Share Day/Retreat.

Ann Bumberry & Diane Hoy – BF’s

Magnificat Branch Update (KS)

Ministry Team Members Magnificat

Branch Facilitator - Suzanne O'Neil

Branch Coordinator- Maria Minchew

Small Group Facilitators -

Group 1 Facilitator: Mary Jo Simonis

Alternate: Maria Minchew

Group 2 Facilitator: Jeff Swanson

Alternate: Suzanne O'Neil/Mike Cordes

Treasurer – Mike Cordes

Hospitality & Welcoming Ministers – Susie Eiche Potluck Coordinator

Proclamation Minister – Jeannine Edmonds

Music Minister - Jeff Swanson

Focus Minister - Maureen Hernandez

Zoom Minister – Maureen Hernandez

Current Number of Members – Started with three groups and ended with two groups. Twenty-eight members at the beginning, twenty-one consistently attended throughout the year. Our members come from three local parishes.

Ministry Team Meetings – Monday nights from 6:00-6:45 pm in person.

Branch Facilitator – Same BF for three years who was the BC for the previous four years.

Branch Coordinator – Same BC for three years who has been a member of the group since the 2020-2021 study.

Large Group Meetings – Monday nights 7:00-8:30pm, in person and via virtual Zoom meetings. We opened our Large Group Meetings by singing three verses of “Gather Us In” by Marty Haugen.

Spiritual Reflections & Branch Reflectors – We used the pre-recorded Spiritual Reflections from The Cornerstone website. We did have two branch members present a Spiritual Reflection. We have one possible new Spiritual Reflector. We did the Spiritual Reflection videos in the small groups after the small group time was complete. This enabled the virtual members to hear the video better in Group 1 which was a hybrid group of in-person and virtual via Zoom. The groups each had a laptop on which to show the Reflection video.

Small Group Facilitators – We had two SGFs per group signed up when the study began but had to drop out the second semester. We had an alternate SGF that would help whenever the main SGF was not able to attend the study night. We will work on getting two for each group again for next year.

Focus Presenters – Twelve members wrote a Focus. Many of these did two Focuses.

Shared Prayer – Shared prayer was done at the beginning of the small group time so that it was not rushed and everyone felt they had time to truly share their prayers. Most people participated in the Shared Prayer.

Fellowship – We had a potluck and rosary in December as the last meeting of 2023 and another potluck and Lesson 20 in April 2024 for our last study night. We also had a sign-up sheet for snacks during our meetings. Everyone seemed to enjoy this and it was not a burden on the Ministry Team. We served water with the snacks.

Timeliness – Maureen, the Zoom Minister, always started us on time and we always ended on time. If we had technical difficulties, we ended 5-10 minutes late, which only occurred once or twice.

Technology - We have two technology ministers. One who manages the scheduling and running of the Zoom meetings and one who manages Flocknote communication and the meeting power point.

- We want to thank the Shepherding Board for sponsoring our Zoom and Flocknote subscription for the year!
- We used Flocknote to stay connected. It helped with meeting announcements/cancellations and distribution of lesson materials so that members had links to the lessons right in their email.
- We used a PowerPoint presentation for the meeting. The BF updated this for each meeting for the Focus and Spiritual Reflection. Members did not have to look through the folder for the opening song and prayer. It also assisted in guiding new members through the meetings.
- The computer with the Zoom group was focused on the power point screen and we had a microphone for this computer for better sound

for the song, prayer, and Focus. Then the Zoom computer was brought to a separate small room for the hybrid small group time.

Technology Challenges – Zoom worked really well for a virtual meeting platform. Maureen ran the Zoom for the study nights and also handled technical issues with those trying to get into the meeting, sorting out sound issues, etc.

Technology Benefits – Zoom enabled members to participate who otherwise would not have been able to attend. We had group members join us via Zoom who had moved out of state, out of state family members, and members who did not drive at night all able to be part of our study this year.

Hybrid Model – We used a hybrid virtual and in-person model for large group meetings.

Staying Connected – During our summer break we are looking at praying a virtual weekly rosary via Zoom on Monday nights from 7:00-7:30pm again. This keeps the group praying together and also keeps Monday nights from being booked by other ministries for our members.

Growing the Branch – We added 10 new members that stayed with us the entire year. We will be present at our host church ministry fair.

Suzanne O'Neil - BF

Mary Queen of Peace Branch (MO)

Our meetings were led by Teresa Johnson and Jan Roselman. We had 37 men and women participate in our Thursday evening study. We met in a large group in the cafeteria; then broke out to Board Room, Holy Family Room and café for our 3 small groups. We had 2 mixed men and women groups and one all women group. Our First meeting was Sept 14, 2023. We had great personal Focus givers, and wonderful Reflections. We shared reflectors with Annunciata's group. The first semester ended with a Mass and an in-person Thanksgiving party. Food and soft drinks were enjoyed by 30+ people. Games included Thank You notes and songs of good will.

The 2nd semester resumed in January 11, 2024. We were very fortunate to be able to meet in person this whole semester. We did have Zoom available in the ready if needed. Our Day of Retreat was led by Pastor Craig Holway of MQP parish; held on Feb 15, 2024; Mass and then a light supper followed by a brief reflection on the Prophets. This was held on our usual Thursday evening meeting night and 27 attendees enjoyed the evening. The Semester ended with a Mass and Pizza Party-in person again.

Tina Tlapek - BC

Mission Branch (San Juan Capistrano, MO)

Reflecting back on our study of prophets this last year, we were amazed at how those ancient words were so applicable to our world today. Also, we look forward to Matthew's Gospel next year as we will see Matthew's use of the Messianic prophecies in his writings.

Here are some highlights of this last year of study:

Leadership on the Core Team remained strong and consistent. We added Christine Humbolt as the SGF for the zoom group and 2 new ASGFs.

We had 58 registered members with a weekly attendance of about 45. We had 4 in person groups with one Zoom group. The Zoom group had 9 sign ups but only 4 remained active for the year. Chris and Rick will brainstorm ideas on how to grow this group for the 24/25 year of study.

Our members participated in many ways to the success of the study. 15 members gave focus talks with some giving 2. We had 4 members give a focus for the first time. We are blessed with wonderful reflectors in our Branch and only used two recorded reflections.

We advertised in the Parish bulletin and with a sign on the fence of the parking lot. We received several inquiries from the sign and a couple of new members came to us.

Our branch treasurer has agreed to be a part of the Cornerstone Finance Committee.

Our hospitality committee planned 3 events for the study year. On the first night they welcomed everyone with appetizers and other refreshments. We had an Advent/Christmas potluck dinner after a Sunday evening Mass. At the end of the year the committee hosted another evening of appetizers and refreshments on the last night. We eliminated the focus talk as the

focus for the evening was fellowship and then had our SR with the last part of the evening our small group sharing.

We are planning to shift our evening schedule so the small group will be last. We will have Opening, followed by the proclamation, the focus and then the hymn, followed by the SR and then dismissal to small group. We have agreed that this will be very fluid and could be revised as the year progresses. It will help to shorten our time, which will allow us to conclude our evening by 8:30.

Our parish Lenten Retreat had the theme of "Come Holy Spirit" which provided a special encounter with the Holy Spirit this year. Rick Tysdal, our retreat minister, lead the team in the planning. We had 19 team members this year. All but 6 were members of The Cornerstone. We welcomed some parish staff volunteers, and members of the Hispanic community to our team. It made for a very rich and diverse retreat experience.

We were blessed to support our sister branch at St. Kilian's through our prayers. Mary Ann went to their branch and gave 2 Spiritual Reflections. We plan to do more of that this next year with other reflectors expressing a desire to reach out.

We welcomed Jan for our mentor's visit. Always so wonderful to be given affirmation and suggestions for further growth.

Maryann Strindberg - BF

OUR LADY OF GRACE BRANCH (Coralville, IA)

Our branch grew by eight members this year, our third year at St. Thomas More Parish in Coralville, a suburb of Iowa City, Iowa, home of Caitlin Clark! They were a wonderful addition to the Our Lady of Grace Branch. This year we utilized Bible Project videos a few times. The videos helped explain when, where, and how events happened. It made it easier to understand the message the prophet was trying to convey to the people at that time in history. We received positive feedback from our members on the videos.

OLG bought a new banner for our Cornerstone branch that has our name, months we meet, and the time of the meetings. Our church has a weekend where all the commissions, groups, and events promote and recruit participation. We used our new banner at this event and several other events that highlighted bible studies and catechesis during the year. We also displayed the sign at our meetings.

Our fellowship socials were held every four to five weeks following our study on that day. Everyone brought a bag lunch, and we shared a meal together. Sometimes we had a subject to discuss and others it is just a time for fellowship. It is very well attended. For our last lunch we had a taco bar.

Our church is expanding and building a new worship space behind the current facility. We will need to find a new place to meet this coming year. Prayers are a wonderful way for all of you to help and support us. Amen and Amen.

Sue Waterman – BF

Our Lady of Lourdes (Dunedin, FL)

Our Branch has experienced a situation the past two years which we have not dealt with in over twenty years of bringing The Cornerstone to Catholics in Pinellas County. We ended the Study with more members than we began! Let's ponder what could be the cause of this unique fact.

Could it be that we offer viewing The Chosen after The Cornerstone has ended at the same time and same place as we meet for The Cornerstone? This non-committal experience gives people an opportunity to meet familiar parishioners, as well as, some Cornerstone Ministry Team members. We sit at small tables and end each episode with discussion questions that can be shared with the large group. Possibly this format gives them a little taste of what The Cornerstone experience would be like. However, it could be the hot coffee and breakfast treats!

Yet, this phenomenon might be attributed to the fact that The Cornerstone Ministry Team meets weekly throughout the summer months. This gathering keeps us connected by learning what's going on in each other's lives, as well as praying for and with each other. Additionally, we know that we have a cadre of prayer warriors available if and when there's a need that is merely a text away.

Of course, members attending the CMC bring that Cornerstone culture back with them which is infectious. We have two Ministry Team members who are also involved in RCIA. The Cornerstone has been a natural home for new Catholics and new fully-initiated members of the parish family to flourish.

Then there's our Pastor! Fr. John enthusiastically promotes The Cornerstone in the bulletin and in the Parish announcements at the end of

weekend Masses. He pops into our meetings occasionally to greet and welcome members.

Our Branch Coordinator, Mary, generously deems every meeting a "Visitor's Day". That creates an atmosphere that is guided by the Holy Spirit and not by a schedule. Our Focus Minister, Patty, was well organized and helpful to all considering giving a Focus which led to a full schedule of live Focuses. We have a Welcome Team whose mission is to make The Cornerstone a place "where everybody knows your name!" Our Branch is blessed with five Reflectors who each have their own style and experiences which hopefully appeals to our members.

The ending record number of members may be due to the amazing speakers we have had at the last meeting, the Retreat Day. This year we had Fr. Jonathan Emery who gave an inspiring and informative overview of The Prophets. He left us with the mission and message that to be a modern day prophet means to be an evangelizer.

So, taking all those blessings into account it is obvious that the reason we have concluded our Cornerstone year leaving our members wanting more can only be the power of The Holy Spirit! He is guiding and inspiring all who want to build, strengthen and deepen a personal and loving relationship with God and His people through prayer and the study of His Word!

Meg Carey - BF

St. Anthony of Padua Day Branch (The Woodlands, Texas)

Our Branch this year implemented a deeper commitment to shared prayer each week by actually setting a timer for 10 minutes at the end of each group session. The purpose is to put into practice the beautiful statement of “The cornerstone of The Cornerstone is prayer” coupled with the mission statement to deepen a relationship with Jesus Christ. Prayer is simple, it is not easy, yet it is the best thing one will ever do. (Sherri Southers) We desire to provide a loving and secure environment for people to practice prayer and to practice being in silence with the Lord and share an intimate time with each other as we live and apply prayer to our daily lives.

Our Branch expressed an interest in having a study dedicated to Isaiah, Daniel or any major prophet only. There is a desire to dig deeper into each prophet’s verses’ themes or overview of the message of the prophets as a whole. We have had a mixed response to the questions: some enjoy “what do you think” questions and others prefer more “factual based” questions. Some expressed that there seemed to be a shortened version of questions being asked that might lean toward connection questions. Others expressed that a mix of “factual” and “what do think” questions was preferable. Most agree that one less question per day will be a good change and look forward to discovering the results of this upcoming change.

Our Branch had about 20 new individuals register to be a part of our family; however, about 14 of them remained permanently with us. Those that decided not to continue felt the study was more than they anticipated. We have 65 members registered; however, our attendance numbers declined to about 45 per week as the study progressed. An interesting fact about

our Branch is the very last day of study two women came to learn about the study; we shared the Visitor's talk with them and they already registered for next year's study. They even attended our final Mass/Social the following week. We look forward to getting to know them.

Sherri Southers - BF

St. Anthony of Padua Evening Branch (The Woodlands, TX)

The evening Branch started with over 16 participants signing up, and God blessed us with about 11 finishing the race. Thank God for a strong 5-member Core Team that makes the Monday night Branch possible.

2023-2024 was a hybrid year for the St. Anthony's Evening Branch; normally 5 members in person and 6-8 on-line during the membership meetings. The core team meetings were one hundred percent zoom.

1) Team members were outstanding in their commitment and preparation.

Members zoomed when they were out of town from various places.

2) Many of the members went over and above researching some of the questions which was very informative and enlightening to the study.

3) It was amazing how well the membership bonded over zoom/in-person.

4) A core team member from Pittsburgh was in town and the in person get together for a lunch social was outstanding to meet a few zoomers in person.

5) We were also blessed to have a Shepherding Board member participate by zoom with the evening branch.

6) The Music Minister did an awesome job selecting weekly tunes that were aligned with the lesson.

God willing, we will continue the hybrid setup for the study of the Gospel of Matthew. A Weekly Reminder: Without GOD, our week would be:

Sinday, Mournday, Tearsday, Wasteday, Thirstday, Fightday & Shatterday.

Remember seven days WITHOUT GOD makes One WEAK!!!

Looking Forward to the study of Matthew. Jesus Loves You!!

Joe Melnyk - BF

St Clare of Assisi (O'Fallon, IL)

Although the study of the Old Testament Prophets was a challenge for many members, all will agree that the fruit of the spirit, perseverance pays off each time we attend Mass and recognize a Prophet and his mission in the first Reading.

We particularly enjoyed the social gatherings of small group with pizza and salad but even more for the Branch events of soup and salad. Attendance is always good on these dates.

We were fortunate to find a priest to celebrate Mass twice this year at the end of each 10-week session. Our Lenten Retreat on Isaiah given by Deacon Doug Boyer was so good no one wanted it to end.

Our childcare ministry is a welcome addition to the Branch. We appreciate our dedicated ministers Bonnie and Beth for caring for the children while the members enjoy fellowship and the study of God's Word.

As a group we attended only one movie together Route 60: The Biblical Highway but many attended Cabrini on their own. We had several lively discussions about the lack of any mention of her prayer life as a nun.

Our members are looking forward to the new study of Matthew in the fall of 2024.

Pat Sherbert & Kathleen DuMontier – BF's

St. Cletus Branch (MO)

The Introduction to The Prophets, wow what an interesting and challenging study. Our branch experienced many emotions regarding The Prophets, a spiritual deepening, frustration, excitement, and joy to name a few. The weaving of the Old Testament and the New Testament greatly broadened our knowledge of our faith.

Our ministry team added Glenda Obholz and Sue Huck; both are blessings for our branch. One of our founding branch members passed prior to the start of our study, Walter Leamy, he and his wife Michele have been in the branch from its beginning. Walter shared his great devotion to Our Lady through his words and his artwork, he is dearly missed.

St. Cletus Branch is small in comparison to some branches, we had 29 members this year, men and women. We welcomed two members from St. Monicas Branch who switched for location convenience. Additionally, we had two new members join The Cornerstone for the first time. Our branch seems to maintain in size from 28-34 people per year.

We held a Coffee social in both semesters along with small group lunches, these are very popular and our members express how it helps strengthens and develop friendships. Small groups are the core of The Cornerstone and having the opportunity to build this relationship is a great positive for all of us. One highlight of the semester is the mass and luncheon, Fr. Benz celebrated our December mass and St. Cletus' new pastor, Fr Chris Holtmann celebrated a mass in April. Though this year was a bit of a challenge all our members have indicated they plan to return and are very excited to begin The Cornerstone's first ever study of Matthew.

Sheila McDonough - BF

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Evening Branch (Springfield, MO)

Greetings from our SEAS Branch to all of our Cornerstone Branches!

We had another great year. The Prophets turned out to be a very rich study for us, with many wonderful focuses and reflections. We again split our reflections with our day branch at Holy Trinity, allowing us to have a variety of speakers. We are so grateful to them for partnering with us on this part of our study.

Our group continues to have consistent and growing membership in our three small groups. Our Men's small group has continued to grow as well as our Ladies' small group. And we still have our Zoom group, which included two members from out of state.

We were again able to have a couple of small group dinners during the year and a share night to close out our study. Last Summer, we gathered for a ministry team dinner at a member's home to prepare for the year. Later in the Fall, our small group leaders Marcia and Bruce Horine organized an evening at our local Convoy of Hope headquarters. We had about 21 people, including some spouses of members, who all gathered to spend an enjoyable evening packing care packages for shipment to areas that have been hit with catastrophic events. This kind of outreach gave us a nice opportunity to give to our neighbors around the world who are in crisis.

We appreciate your prayers as we prepare for our new study of Matthew in the Fall. We will keep all the branches in our prayers as well.

We look forward to catching up with many of you at the CMC!

Bless you all,

Paula Bechtold and Mary Ellen Browne – BF & BC

St. Francis of Assisi Branch (Nixa, MO)

Our parish began a Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study on the books of Acts during the fall of 2023.

A group of 12 women met weekly to complete the questions provided by the Cornerstone Shepherding Board from St. Louis with our pastor's approval, Fr Shoby Chettiyath.

During the month of March, our Bishop Edward Rice was at our parish to preside at the week day mass in absence of our pastor.

After mass was over, I invited Bishop Rice to stop by and visit our Cornerstone Scripture Study group. We had a breakfast pastry that morning and he sat down to eat while we greeted him. I explained our study group was part of the St. Louis Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study and the Shepherding Board. Bishop Rice said he was very familiar with the Study program. He is originally from the Archdiocese of St Louis and had relatives that still live there. He mentioned one of the Cornerstone study members named Ann Allman. I shared that we were studying the book of Acts and mentioned some of the highlights that had been discussed. He added to our discussion by stating how similar the beginning of the early church is to the Catholic faith today. The early church had some problems to solve such as what food to eat (clean or unclean) and who needs to be circumcised or who did not. etc. Councils met and made decisions for the group. And the establishment of the Holy Eucharist from Jesus.

Today there are problems and disagreements. The Catholic Church still has a need for Councils and leadership to guide us today. The Catholic Church has been guided by the Holy Spirit through all these years.

Joy Steffes – BF

St. Gerard's Branch (Brooklyn Park, MN)

The study this year was certainly challenging but we felt that much was learned. We added 3 new members to our roster this year, which was very nice.

Our Ministry Team remains a group of 6 and we continue to work together to keep each other strong. Karen Thelen has taken more of a leadership role this past year. She is doing a marvelous job, and our branch is blessed to have her as part of our branch.

Our branch is very fortunate to have the strong support from the staff and from Fr. Charlie Lachowitzer of St. Gerard's Catholic Church. St. Gerard's is excited to promote The Cornerstone this Fall. This will be an additional opportunity to possibly gain some new members.

The decision was made to permanently remain a Zoom branch; this has worked so well for our current members, and it allows us to accept other members from all over the U.S. Our Zoom coordinators, Karen Thelen and Sue Dupay, with the help of Cindy Shevlin-Woodcock and Pat Montain, are a blessing to our branch. This seems to be a comfortable niche for us. It's wonderful to have several members from all over the country attending. Our members continue to enjoy shared prayer, the trust and sharing of small group, and learning more and more about God's word. Throughout all of this we are all learning more about ourselves and our individual relationships with God.

Our Cornerstone Branch at St. Gerard's is so grateful for the support and prayers from the Shepherding Board. May God bless all of you, and just as you pray for us and our branch, we pray for all of you.

May God bless all of you!

The St. Gerard Ministry Team

Karen Thelen Kathy Ruhland Lynn McNellis

Cindy Shevlin-Woodcock Gayle Chapman Pat Montain

St. Joseph Branch (Clayton, MO)

We have completed the rich study of the Prophets. Our theme this year is from was “Speak Lord, your servant is listening” from 1 Samuel 3:10. Indeed, the Lord did speak to us, and we were listening. Throughout the study, we learned over and over again that, even though God’s people chose to turn away from God, God never gave up on them. We were strengthened by the hopeful promise that when we turn to Him, God always welcomes us back into His loving embrace.

This was a hard year for the St. Joseph Branch in that we lost our leader and founding Mother, Maryann Rice. Words cannot describe what Maryann means to us. Through years of dedication and passion for scripture, she built The Cornerstone. She built our Branch and the community it serves, inspiring us and serving as spiritual adviser to many of us. Maryann taught us all that we needed to know in order to carry on in her absence. She left us prepared. And despite her absence and our sadness, we flourished.

This year, The St. Joseph Branch in Clayton relocated to St. Clement of Rome in St. Louis County. Our new location offers a larger, more private gathering area, a larger childcare space, more parking and a parish community eager to experience the gifts of The Cornerstone.

Our total registered membership this year was 45 along with a record number of 9 kids in our childcare! We are grateful to Karen Dille and her 10 angelic volunteers that made it possible to bring the Cornerstone to young mothers.

As happens each year, we lost a few members, re-gained some returning members and most importantly, welcomed lots of new members who bring

great energy and enthusiasm to our branch. We had three small groups which we named after women in the Old Testament: Hannah, Phoebe and Deborah. The energy and enthusiasm within our branch this year was palpable.

Knowing that increasing the number of speakers adds vitality to the Branch, we expanded our number of focus-givers to 12, all of whom gave us inspiring and memorable focuses. Thanks to a reciprocal agreement with the St. Monica Branch, we were able to expand the number of Reflectors this year to 4. We could definitely feel the increase in vitality while at the same time, increased intimacy within our community. It was a beautiful experience.

We have several members who vacation away from St. Louis for long stretches of time, one member who moved and one member who was still quarantining because of COVID. We were able to accommodate them thanks to Zoom so they fully participated in weekly meetings.

Our core team consists of:

Branch Facilitators - Peggy Fonke and Jamie LaBelle

Branch Coordinators: Mary Sullivan, Suzie Weiss

Zoom Minister: Mary Sullivan

Video Minister: Julie Newman and Sarah Brown

Focus Ministers – Peggy Fonke and Jamie LaBelle

Door Minister: Kathy Krieger

Proclamation Minister: Suzie Weiss

Music Minister: Peggy Fonke

Small Group Facilitators: Amy Grzesiowski, Diane Rabenau, Sheila O'Toole, Karen Coulter, Peggy Toczykowski, Stacy Parmalee, Maura McShane, Kim Reid

Treasurer: Amy Grzesiowski

Child Care Ministry: Karen Dille

- We are immensely grateful to our host parish, St. Clement of Rome, for their welcoming hospitality and the support they have given us.
- Over the summer we will have debriefing meetings where we will review the results of the Satisfaction Study for our branch and conduct training for small group facilitators, reflectors and focus givers and plan for next year.

We know Maryann's spirit is alive and well at The Cornerstone. Indeed, as she has said, 'if it is of God, it will flourish'.

Peggy Fonke - BF

St. Kilian Branch (Mission Viejo, CA)

We completed our second year in April. What a great year it was! God was so good to provide everything that was needed to get our new branch up and running. This includes a set-up staff from the parish that prepares the room for us and will help us with whatever we need (a wonderful perk!), and a strong core team thirsting for God' word and ready to commit their time and talent.

Our branch meets on Monday morning from 9:30 to 11:30 am. We ended our year with 15 participants.

We are blessed with three excellent small group facilitators who capably lead our sharing time. Several others stepped up to fill positions of proclaiming minister, hospitality minister, and music minister. I am grateful for these wonderful people who want to serve The Cornerstone and have shown interest in returning in the fall.

During the year, our participants enthusiastically embraced the sometimes-difficult study of the prophets. I received many compliments from our members who found the focus and reflection talks that we used from the video resource to be uplifting and pertinent to their spiritual walk. Thanks to all those from The Cornerstone who prepared and recorded these presentations.

We appreciate all the fabulous help and guidance from the St. Louis Shepherding Board. You have made it so easy for us to make our second year such a great success.

Eileen Smith - BF

St Raphael Branch (Englewood, FL)

Our Branch is slowly and steadily growing. We had 36 solid participants this last year. 4 are new members who seem passionate about the Cornerstone. We are working on our parish website, this summer to update it and improve communication in our small parish. We have a special group made up of year- round residents as well as snowbirds. Our busiest time is January to April.

Zooming is an addition this year. We are thrilled to finally get Wi-Fi in our parish center, where our meetings are held. This will enable our snowbirds to attend weekly meetings, before Christmas also. Next fall should be exciting for all of us.

Another procedure we have initiated is signing ourselves with holy water before each meeting. This seems to be loved by all of us.

Linda Wiedemeier - BF