**Your Link in the Unbroken Chain**

A dozen years ago, my family traveled to Vatican City where we visited the Scavi. Scavi is the Italian word for excavation. And, true to its name, the Scavi is an archaeological site located beneath St. Peter’s Basilica.

We entered the Scavi at ground level. Our guide led us lower and lower under St. Peters by a series of stairways that grew ever more narrow…each level growing colder and darker than the one before.

When we reached the lowest level of the dig, the guide gathered us close around him. When the group quieted down, he aimed his laser pointer at a space about the size of a rollaboard suitcase which had been carved into the stone wall.

With a heavy Italian accent and with a tiny red light dancing into the small excavated space, he said, “There is the place where St. Peter is buried. Pilgrims like you have been visiting this site for nearly 2000 years.”

When we had climbed back to the main level of the church, I realized that the Scavi was directly beneath the main papal altar.

This spot, I realized, has been at the literal center of our Church since the death of St. Peter.

In that instant, I felt a strange, powerful and instant connection with the wonderful institution that is our Church. I thought about my role as the latest link in the long and unbroken chain of Roman Catholic Christians who had visited the physical center of our Church.

That chain continues with us today as we celebrate the Eucharist, connecting each of us across time with Jesus and across the globe with the more than 1 billion Catholics in the world today.

And, despite our human flaws, Our Lord, working through our Church and our lives, has accomplished wonderful things here on Earth.

Think about how in so many of the Gospel stories, Jesus encounters the sick huddled together along the side of the road…uncared for by their neighbors or friends, unable to go to a hospital because no system to provide health care existed.

Over time, it was Our Church that built the modern health care system. Today, the Catholic church operates 637 hospitals in America alone; treating 1 in every 5 American patients daily.

1000 years ago, only the nobility received education. A large portion of the western world is educated today because our Church has continuously championed the concept of universal education.

And, tonight, 9 formerly homeless families will go to sleep under the roof of our local Samaritan Center, a Catholic charities agency.

The chain of service to others … Catholics acting to enhance the dignity of mankind by helping those in need … began with Jesus … the chain has continued unbroken throughout history and reaches us here today.

One Sunday each year we focus our attention at Holy Cross on our Parish Community Outreach activities.

Our largest outreach activity to date has been wonderfully successful effort to raise funds for Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Catholic mission church in Fellsmere, in northwest Indian River County. Your generosity celebrated our 25th anniversary as a parish; we raised more than $4.0 million for this effort. To date, those funds have supported a doubling of the church capacity and funded the acquisition and renovation of the Tepeyac Center.

Each day, our special link in the Catholic chain of service, provides help to some of our County’s neediest residents…helping them move forward learning English as a Second Language or preparing themselves for citizenship through classes offered by Indian River State College. Plans are being developed now to use the remaining $1.5 million dollars to create and enhance the social space on campus at OLG.

Each month we hold a second collection to raise money for our “Community Outreach Fund.” Your donations are channeled to local social service agencies who care for the skyrocketing number of needy families appearing at the door of our Parish office.

Through the parish Community Outreach Ministry, Holy Cross sponsors a variety of service opportunities: helping needy schoolchildren select new footwear, organizing donated food and clothing at Harvest Food and Outreach, brightening the day of the senior citizens at St. Francis Manor…and many, many other projects.

This year we will again be sponsoring our second Lenten Day of Service. On what we just know will be a beautiful spring day, we will work with our Parish youth in helping improve some aspect of life for the poor here in our County.

Rather than further describe what we do, today, I would like instead to challenge you to do two simple things.

First. Pick up one of our detailed information sheets from the tables at the back of Church.

Next, and most importantly, take the information sheet home and review the many opportunities for service described there. Then, ask the Lord to guide your heart and mind in making a new commitment to serving Him by serving others.

As the Holy Spirit moves you to act, you’ll be reaffirming your commitment to our Lord and his Church…you’ll renew your place in the long chain of Roman Catholic Christians beginning at cross, continuing through the Scavi and extending into our beautiful Church here today...

You can join the litany of saints… you can support the unbroken efforts of your Church that today will feed, clothe, house and nurture more people than any other institution in the history of mankind.

And, as impressive as the historic contributions of our Church have been, I just know that the greatest contributions of the Catholic church come when each one of us act in Christ’s name to live the Gospel each day by serving others…

Let’s work together to grow Christ’s love…

Let’s reinforce and extend the long and humble line that is His Church…

As we do so, let the words of St. Francis of Assisi guide us, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words!”