

What am I?

I give you a boost when you need a lift. I open your eyes when they're clouded by untruths. I give you a break from electronic communications. I keep you informed, enlightened, inspired. What am I? The St. Sebastian Book Rack!

Pat Clark-Varga, in charge of this ministry since 1996, put it a little more elegantly when asked about its importance.

“The inspirational publications help us maintain our focus on what is really important: our relationship with Jesus Christ. They also help us find strength and encouragement to live our daily lives,” she said. “The news-oriented periodicals provide a Catholic viewpoint on current events, plus, happenings within the Church are covered from a Catholic perspective, rather than the secular one available elsewhere.”

The number of publications on the rack is limited due to space, and many of them were selected long before Pat began her service. She said they sometimes vary, however, due to requests by a parishioner, the pastor or the parochial vicar.

Besides publications offered for sale, the rack contains free prayer cards, brochures and pamphlets. The latter provide information on parish activities, such as the Musical Arts Series; retreat opportunities; even materials on Natural Family Planning and alternatives to abortion.

Pat emphasized that nothing can be placed in the rack unless or until it is approved by the parish office. The book rack is well supervised, so unauthorized materials are noted quickly and removed.

Most of the ordering and all of the money handling is done by the parish bookkeeper, so the ministry's chief work is attaching payment envelopes to publications; making sure that weekly, monthly and seasonal publications are put out in a timely manner; replacing post dated publications with new copies; keeping the rack in order; and tracking what does and does not sell and reporting that to the office. Unsold copies, Pat said, are “donated to our parish's Legion of Mary chapter, whose members distribute them when they visit the sick.”

That sounds like a lot of work, but Pat said she has two helpers, Gina Mikes and Kathryn Obringer, “who make my life easier by helping me with seasonal publications and getting payment envelopes ready.”

And although the church usually comes up short on the financing, Pat said she's “glad the parish offers this convenient opportunity for parishioners and visitors to enhance their spiritual lives and stay informed on important national, local and Church events.”

Pat can be reached at 330-873-1475 or patcv1984@yahoo.com.