



# AuthenticLIFE



news for December 2010

## LIFE Latest:

**MERRY CHRISTMAS** to all Authentic Lifers. We hope you have a blessed and safe holiday season and are able to grow closer to friends and family throughout this time!

### Thomas Merton Series:

The fall 2010 Thomas Merton finishes Dec. 15. Thanks to all those who contributed to the fall series. For more information on the future Lent series or to get involved email Ron at mrrondavis@gmail.com.

### Bible Study:

Tom Mark has started an Authentic Life bible study. It will be bi-weekly at his apartment in Naperville. Meetings will continue in January. Come to hang out and learn more about the book of our faith! For more information email Tom at thomasjmark@gmail.com.

### Thanksgiving Service Project

#### Follow-Ups:

Grace would like to thank all those who contributed to the Turkey Drive. Because of your help nine families in need were able to have a turkey for their Thanksgiving dinner.

## The Lead

### A History of Authentic Life with Susan Francesconi



**AL:** Hi Susan, can you tell our readers some background information about yourself?

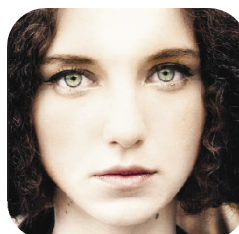
**Susan:** Certainly. I am married and live in Naperville with my wonderful husband. We have two daughters in college who are 20 and 18. I grew up in Fairport, New York (near Rochester). I started college at Le Moyne University in Syracuse, New York but I ended up eventually finishing with an art degree from Long Island University. After college, I started working for the Hearst Corporation in New York as a magazine designer and was married when I was 23. After having my daughters I opened my own drapery business out of my home. We all moved to Naperville in 1999 where I started a floral design business. Design has always been a passion of mine.

**AL:** Great stuff! The members of Authentic Life are all beneficiaries of your design skill with our logo which I believe you designed. Can you tell us more about the logo?

**Susan:** Yes! I was really happy with how the logo turned out. I wanted something that stood out, looked welcoming, and would appeal to a diverse crowd.

**AL:** I especially like the "intense girl" (to the right).

**Susan:** Yea, she is great isn't she!



*We took the opportunity to interview Susan Francesconi who, along with Kevin Pranaitis, were the co-founders of Authentic Life in February, 2009. Susan continues to serve at St. Thomas Parish in Naperville as the Director of Communications and Welcoming. She offers some history of the group as well as inspiration for young adults.*

**AL:** How would you describe your faith when you were a young adult?

**Susan:** Well I was involved in religious ed in high school but after starting college I drifted and struggled to get my faith beyond the surface level. It was really after my daughters were born when I was around 30 that I really felt a strong calling back.

**AL:** Now your faith is clearly an integral part of your everyday life with your job at St. Thomas.

**Susan:** Yes. I currently work as the Director of Communications and Welcoming and I absolutely love it. I am very passionate about working with parishioners helping them to feel at home. Being involved this way really helps me fill my spiritual needs and my needs to feel useful and to belong. I am also working part time on a master's in pastoral studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Hyde Park. I hope to finish it in the next 20 years – ha ha. It is great though. I am learning so much.

**AL:** Tell us about how the Authentic Life group started.

**Susan:** It indirectly started when my daughters went on a weekend diocese retreat. Just in the process of picking up my daughters after the retreat I met Paul Jarzembowski who is the Director of Young Adult Ministry for the diocese. We stayed in touch and I really began to feel there was a young adult spiritual need in the diocese that needed to be addressed. *(continued on pg 2)*

## Famous Christians: Iron Nun



*Sometimes it is easy to forget that there are others in the world that strive to live their faith. The words and actions of these men and women can be an inspiration to us.*

Sister Madonna Bruder is a Catholic nun from Spokane, Washington. After beginning to run at age 48 for relaxation and calmness at the encouragement of a priest she has proceeded to compete in more than 340 triathlons, including over 40 Ironmans. She has broke her own record as the oldest woman to ever complete an Ironman triathlon several times, most recently in 2009 at age 79. She still works as a nun and does not train full time. She has combined her passions by using her racing as a way to raise money for various causes and dedicates each race to a specific person. She recently wrote a book "The Grace to Race" and is quoted as saying "The only failure is not to try, because putting forth the effort is success in itself."



*(continued from pg 1)*

Kevin Pranaitis at St. Thomas got interested as well. When it came down to it, it all happened very quickly. Kevin and I decided we wanted to start something for Lent in 2009. We had a two hour meeting one week, I made posters and pew cards by the end of that week, and I think it was the next week we had our first group meeting. We were also able to get a grant from the diocese initially that helped as well.

**AL:** How did you come up with the name?

**Susan:** "Authentic" resonates as the process of finding yourself but "Life" also incorporates service and relationship with others. We wanted this combination of inward and outward looking.

**AL:** That is great. Do you have any messages for young adults today?

## Member Profile: Heather Brown

*Get to know you fellow Authentic Lifers! This section will help you get to know a member of the group.*

Heather is 26 and lives in Naperville. She got involved with Authentic Life in summer 2009. She is also involved at St. Thomas Parish as an adult advisor with the program Teens for Character.

**Background:** From Buffalo, NY

**School:** Clemson University (Isn't orange a great color?), University of Illinois

**Job:** Veterinarian

**Interests:** Clemson football, orange, softball, swimming, college football, spaying and neutering pets, hanging out with my cute niece

### **Memorable life**

**moment:** Going to Italy with my family and seeing Rome.

**Quote to live by:**  
"Opportunity is often missed because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work."  
–Thomas Edison

**Cool story:** In vet school I helped take care of a red tailed hawk that fell out of its nest. We were able to rehab it and release it back into the wild.



**Susan:** Well I am 49 but honestly I still feel very much like I am 29. As I have aged I have become more experienced, but I certainly don't feel like I am old or I know even close to everything. Spiritual life is the same way – a never ending quest. I think spiritual life is something you continue to explore in a way that goes way beyond church rules and regulations. I am also profoundly touched by the depth of faith of many young adults today.

**AL:** Thank you very much Susan, especially for seeing a need to start Authentic Life!



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Feel free to pass this newsletter along to a friend.

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