

St. Agatha pastor, parishioners promote pigskin fanaticism and community building

By Father Ernie Hyndman

BAY MINETTE—"I don't know what's happened around here," Philip Kries said to me after I had been pastor of St. Agatha Parish, Bay Minette, for only 9 months. A diehard Bama fan, Kries was expressing concern that the balance of power in the parish was shifting.

"I know we've always had LSU fans around," he said. "But since you came as pastor, they've been coming out of the woodwork."

I laughed and answered, "You're right. They were always here. They just needed a leader."

Anyone who knows me, has seen my obnoxiously over-decorated "Tiger-mobile," or stared at the LSU tattoo on my upper left arm, knows I bleed purple and gold. The "Man Cave," an affectionate nickname for the den in the rectory, looks like it was decorated by LSU Coach, Les Miles, himself.

The good natured ribbing and camaraderie of the football fanatics at St. Agatha provide a laid back, friendly and unifying backdrop for life in the parish. Bama, Auburn, LSU—heck, even Tennessee—fans trash talk and tease each other as we endure the countdown to kickoff.

Last season, we had two fundraisers split down team lines. Auburn fans stepped up to purchase the most tickets in a raffle supporting the Agatha's Angels' Youth Group. The Bama faithful took on and beat all comers in a food drive for Catholic Social Services.

I jokingly tell people St. Agatha Parish is a "football club with a religion problem." Most people laugh. Those

who know us understand religion is anything but a problem for the Catholic community of Bay Minette and its environs. The people never cease to amaze and edify me with their openness, generosity and unwavering faith. Their support of and involvement in their parish and city are a profound witness. We're a great team.

Obsession with gridiron action is just one way people share in the life of the parish. The Man Cave, open Saturdays during SEC Football season, is also a popular venue for meetings, adult education classes, and is a place parishioners are welcome and encouraged to visit anytime of the year. Parents visit the playground with their children, and our people make regular use of use our bar-b-cue facilities for picnics and host parties in the parish hall.

Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete." (John 15:11)

The joy God's love gives us is most powerfully communicated through the Sacraments. Experienced in the Mass, reconciliation, as well as devotions like adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, this joy is life giving and life changing.

This is the foundation of our spiritual life of our parish. From that foundation comes the blessing of so many members willing to continue sharing the joy of God's love in many ways. From the silliness of football trash talk, to the fellowship of the weekly Sunday breakfast, to service of others by groups like the Women's Club or Knights of Columbus, the people of St. Agatha Parish are living the Gospel, in and out of "season."

GEAUX LSU TIGERS