

Parishioner: Carrying out Lord's work requires muscle

Neal Kopasek takes the idea of building up the body of Christ quite literally.

He would like to see parishioners throughout the archdiocese healthy and fit so they're ready to carry out whatever work the Lord calls them to do.

"He needs to have us in good shape to do the tasks he puts before us," said Mr. Kopasek, a parishioner at St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea.

A personal trainer at the Maryland Athletic Club, Mr. Kopasek has guided fitness initiatives at his parish. Twice he's conducted "Spring into Shape," a six-week program of exercises and walking for interested parishioners. He began those sessions with a prayer.

"We always ask the Lord to be present - it's more important to have our souls in shape," he said.

Mr. Kopasek ran track and played soccer in high school, and he continued to run even after he was working in the warehouse industry.

"I always felt blessed I was able to exercise and be disciplined about it," he said. Although he liked his job, fitness was his love, so he prayed about it and began to earn the necessary certification to be a personal trainer.

"Even at that point I didn't imagine I would quit my job to work full time in the fitness industry," he said. "But the Lord led me right to where he wanted me to be."

In addition to his work at the MAC, Mr. Kopasek also works four days a week as a trainer at The Catholic High School of Baltimore. Initially, he planned to work with athletes in the preseason, to get them in shape and prevent injuries. But students who weren't on teams approached him, too, so he added them to his program as well.

He also teaches stretching and the proper warm-ups to the Mercy High School cross

country team, where his daughter Katie runs. He's a volunteer coach of the St. Michael cross country team, where his daughter Casey attends school.

When planning workouts, he likes to incorporate a contemporary song of worship and praise.

Mr. Kopasek recalled planning warm-up exercises for runners in the Cardinal Cup, a 5K that started at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland. He asked the director if he could use a religious song for the warm-up. Her reply delighted him: "You're standing in front of a cathedral. I think it will be OK."

"Of course we need to exercise our souls and prayer life," he said.

His favorite time - and a chance to work both body and soul - is when he runs while listening to an iPod filled with praise and worship music.

"I'm doing the two things I love the most," he said.