

THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT



FAIRFIELD COUNTY CATHOLIC

DECEMBER 2017 | VOLUME 34, NUMBER 11 | CHRISTMAS ISSUE

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Merry Christmas

‘A Christmas Carol’



Tiny Tim, Bob Cratchit, Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Past came to life recently on the Trinity Catholic High School auditorium stage when the Crusader Players starred in three performances of Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol.”

Last year, the Trinity theater program was nominated for a record 16 Halo awards for best high school theater, winning two of them for its production of “Fiddler on the Roof.” Congratulations to the cast and directors for a moving and memorable production about the importance of a “change of heart” at Christmas time.

“God bless us, every one!”

(PHOTOS BY AMY MORTENSEN)



Celebrating the Coming of Christ

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What a wonderful and blessed season!

The heart of Advent is a celebration of the three comings of Christ into our lives: the central spiritual focus is the need to spiritually prepare for the feast of Christmas that commemorates the birth of the Lord as Savior and Redeemer. Equally important is the need to ready our lives for the Second Coming of the Lord, when Christ will return in glory and power to judge all creation at the end of time. Finally, each day we celebrate the coming of Christ in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the gift of the Eucharist.

The Advent season is our invitation to prepare for a new year of grace. The question that you and I need to ask ourselves is whether we are ready, here and now, to receive all these gifts?

Given the fact that Christmas will be celebrated on a Monday, this year’s celebration of Advent, already well underway, is only 21 days long—the shortest length possible. For this reason, we must attend to its spiritual meaning and challenge in an intentional way in order to experience the benefits and blessings this great season can give us.

As we move toward Christmas and its great message of hope for the world, there is still plenty of time to immerse ourselves in the journey of Advent and the Paschal mystery.

I pray that my brothers and sisters throughout the diocese experience the true joy and peace of the season, and that the Light of Christmas shines upon you and your family.

**Have Iaggiano*

Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano,
Bishop of Bridgeport

ON THE COVER

Children from St. Andrew Academy in Bridgeport participate in last year’s Nativity play for parents and members of the community. Thousands throughout the diocese are enjoying Christmas concerts and pageants held in schools and parishes to celebrate the birth of Our Lord.

(PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN)

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Latest News

Foundations names three to Board of Trustees

BRIDGEPORT—Foundations in Education is pleased to announce the appointment of three new members to its Board of Trustees. Joining the board, effective December 11, are George Coleman of Newtown; Andrea Maldon of Fairfield; and Sister Mary Grace Walsh, ASCJ, of New Britain.

"Our new trustees embody the spirit of community and bring talent and energy to the board. They are joining a dedicated and mission-driven governing body, and we are very fortunate to have their expertise as we continue to strengthen and transform Catholic Education," said Holly Doherty-Lemoine, executive director of Foundations in Education.

George Coleman currently serves as an early childhood system development specialist at Cooperative Educational Services (CES) and holds graduate degrees in early childhood education and curriculum and instruction from Teacher's College at Columbia University.

Prior to serving at CES, Coleman spent his 24-year career with the Connecticut State Department of Education, where



GEORGE COLEMAN

he was twice named acting commissioner of education. Coleman is credited with helping to establish the state's rationale for full-day kindergarten investment and with procuring the first state grant to support full-day kindergarten. Coleman also drafted the school readiness legislation and funding-level commitments, which now exceed \$200,000,000.

Andrea Maldon, CPA, currently serves on the Foundations in Education Audit Committee and recently retired after nineteen years at Lone Pine Capital, LLC, a privately owned hedge fund in Greenwich. Maldon joined Lone Pine in 1998 as controller,



ANDREA MALDON

became chief financial officer and most recently served as managing director of internal investor services. Maldon graduated magna cum laude from Fordham University in 1993 with a bachelor of science degree.

Prior to Lone Pine, Maldon worked at Bowman Capital Management as an accounting manager. Earlier, she served as an auditor at Ernst & Young, LLP, for three years.

Sister Mary Grace Walsh, ASCJ, Ph.D., currently serves on the Innovation and Leadership Grants Committee at Foundations in Education and is transitioning to the Board of Trustees. At pres-



SISTER MARY GRACE WALSH, ASCJ

ent, Sister Mary Grace is the provost for education, evangelization and catechesis and the president of Saint Thomas Seminary in the Archdiocese of Hartford. She is an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and holds a B.A. in English from Albertus Magnus College, an M.A. in educational administration and supervision from Saint Louis University and a Ph.D. in educational administration/church leadership from Fordham University.

Prior to serving the Archdiocese of Hartford, Sister Mary Grace was superintendent and secretary of Catholic Education and Faith Formation in the Diocese of

Bridgeport. She has also served as an elementary and secondary school teacher and administrator in seven dioceses and archdioceses throughout the country.

Foundations in Education is Bishop Frank J. Caggiano's vision to assist the Diocese of Bridgeport's ongoing mission to advance Catholic education in Fairfield County. The primary purpose of this non-profit initiative is to support Catholic education by providing tuition assistance, grants that promote classroom innovation and professional leadership development and other education-based programs.

The three new members join the existing Board of Trustees: Bishop Caggiano, David Cappiello, Robert Dilenschneider, R. Bradford Evans, Michael Hanlon, Lawrence Kudlow, Daniel McCarthy, Anne McCrory, Tom McInerney, Julia McNamara, Joseph Purcell, Bernard Reidy, Gerard Robilotti, Robert Scinto, Michael Shea, and Holly Doherty-Lemoine.

(For more information about Foundations in Education, visit www.foundationsineducation.org.)

St. Matthew Parish drives to Texas

NORWALK—By the time Hurricane Harvey passed, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish outside of Houston had suffered incalculable damage. The Brazos River, which Spanish explorers once called Rio de los Brazos de Dios or "River of the Arms of God," had risen 100 feet beyond its banks.

In some places, up to 60 inches of rain had fallen, and hundreds of homes in the rural community were flooded. It was the second storm in a year to ravage the area, which had not fully recovered from the first, and relief agencies were overwhelmed by the extent of the damage. So the parish prayed and looked for a sign of hope.

Even before the flood waters receded, Father Lee Flores got a phone call. It wasn't FEMA. It wasn't a government agency. It was a fellow priest 1,700 miles away who said he wanted to



VOLUNTEERS from St. Matthew Parish put the Gospel into action.

help. Now. He was prepared to drive 23 hours with supplies, food and prayers.

The priest was Msgr. Walter Orlowski, pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Norwalk, a man who believes we're called to put the Gospel into action—and sometimes we're called to act fast.

Msgr. Orlowski began phon-

ing churches in the Houston area as soon as he saw the headlines, and someone told him Our Lady of Guadalupe, a predominantly Hispanic parish with many immigrant families, needed the most help, so he reached out and organized a relief effort with churches and groups in Fairfield County that collected more than

\$40,000 in donations, in addition to canned food, disinfectant and cleaning supplies.

Soon after, on September 4, he began the long journey, driving the first of three 26-foot rental trucks to Rosenberg, Texas. He had done the same thing five years before, after Superstorm Sandy devastated the East Coast, when he initiated an effort for churches in Staten Island and New York.

"We have to be ready to put the Gospel in action," said Msgr. Orlowski, admitting that sometimes you have to circumvent the bureaucracy, roll up your sleeves and get down to business.

After he returned, he wrote in the bulletin, "Thank you for the privilege of bringing your donations to Texas. As God has loved us so much, we have that same love for each other."

In October, nine parishioners made a second trip to help

reconstruct homes at Our Lady of Guadalupe, which St. Matthew's has adopted as a sister parish.

Before the end of the year, another team will go there, and in the spring, members of the St. Matthew youth group and others plan to help repaint the homes, Msgr. Orlowski said.

Jim Weeks, vice president of Information Services for Yale New Haven Health, was among the nine volunteers who flew to Rosenberg as part of the St. Matthew reconstruction team, along with parochial vicar Father Sunil Pereira. The group included men and women from diverse backgrounds—finance, health-care, homemaking, construction and real estate—all drawn together by the common purpose of putting Christ's love into action.

"I've been going to this church a long time and Monsignor speaks from the heart," Weeks said.

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 19

McGivney Center, Bridgeport

Cone pitches 'Family and Community'

STRATFORD—McGivney Center launched its first Celebrity Breakfast in a winning style with pitching great David Cone on the mound and more than 350 enthusiastic fans at Vazzano's Four Winds restaurant in Stratford.

The recent event, sponsored by Aquarion Water Company, raised over \$60,000 to benefit the diocesan-sponsored community center that provides after-school and evening learning and recreational programs to youth.

The five-time All-Star and Cy Young Award winner in 1994 thanked all those present for their commitment to creating a community for the youth in the Bridgeport area.

Cone also shared his appreciation for the McGivney Center, speaking on the importance of the sense of community and family that the center creates for the students they serve. Cone went

on to share his experiences in the Yankee clubhouse, including stories about his time with catcher Joe Girardi, Mike Mussina, and Joe Torre.

Before Cone took the podium, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano delivered the invocation and reflected on the value of a neighborhood in the life of a child. "In a world where many are guarded or do not feel safe, we must create real neighborhoods where young people are respected, cared for, and loved. That is precisely what the McGivney Center does each and every day, and for that, I am deeply grateful," said the bishop.

Youth speaker Briana Johnson won the hearts of the gathering with her thoughts on the role that McGivney Center plays in her life. She shared that in the future, she wants to be a nurse so that she can give back to the center that has meant so much to her.



BASEBALL GREAT—David Cone, former N.Y. Mets and N.Y. Yankees pitcher, got the start for the first McGivney Center Celebrity Breakfast held recently at Vazzano's Four Season's Restaurant in Stratford.

Bob Matthews, president of the board of the McGivney Center, handled the welcome, while Terry O'Connor, executive director, served as master of ceremonies. Board members Ken Martin and Sean Rabinowitz served as event co-chairs.

The McGivney Community

Center was founded in 1992 to create an educational "safe haven" by providing youth with after-school and evening programs, as well as summer camp. Its mission is to provide stimulating and enriching programs that foster academic success and self-esteem.

Programs include homework assistance, enrichment activities, Friday club, cooking classes, computers, recreation, holiday events, school vacation programs, youth council tutorial services, and summer camp.

The McGivney Center was named for Father Michael McGivney, a priest from New Haven who worked tirelessly for the poor and founded the Knights of Columbus to serve as a mutual aid and fraternal insurance organization, particularly for immigrants and their families. In March 2008, Pope Benedict XVI declared McGivney "Venerable" in recognition of his "heroic virtue."

(The McGivney Center is located at 338 Stillman Street on the campus of St. Charles Borromeo Parish in Bridgeport. For more information, phone 203.333.2789 or visit www.mcgivney.org.)

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NCYC 17 Recap

‘With Jesus, there is nothing you can’t face’

By JOHN T. GROSSO

Just over 24,000 Catholic youth from throughout the country gathered in Indianapolis for a three day conference and celebration of faith. Participants in the National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC), held November 16-18, came from as far as Alaska and Hawaii, and as close as our very own Diocese of Bridgeport, which sent a contingent of 30 youth and chaperones.

Starting their 14 hour bus journey late on Wednesday night, the youth kept up a spirit of joyful anticipation, arriving at the Indianapolis Convention Center the following afternoon. Their patience and perseverance were immediately rewarded, as they stepped off the bus to an atmosphere of contagious excitement that permeated throughout the building. Youth from across the country were trading hats and trinkets, coming up to complete strangers to share in conversation, and identify with others about their common Catholic faith.

Vendors and exhibitors from across the country were present in the massive exhibit hall, which reflected a celebration of different parts of the country. One of the exhibitors, the ‘Face of Prayer,’ was manned by a dedicated team of volunteers from the Diocese of Bridgeport. Youth were constantly surrounding the booth, filming questions about their faith and prayer life to be answered in the new Face of Prayer 2.0

campaign, which was formally launched by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano later in the conference. The goal of the campaign is to create a video catechism, using questions asked by young people and answers provided by theologians from around the country.

Youth from the Diocese of Bridgeport gathered together each day for the morning and evening sessions, held in Lucas Oil Stadium. Youth from St. Philip Parish and St. Andrew Parish participated in prayer, Catholic concerts, Adoration and Holy

Mass, and listened to speakers each day with great attention.

Among those who helped lead prayer throughout the conference was Bishop Caggiano, taking the stage at Lucas Oil Stadium on Saturday morning. In his reflection, he discussed some of the challenges that young people face and how they can find their way through anything they might face with the help of Jesus and his Blessed Mother.

“With Jesus, there is nothing you can’t face” he said to a standing ovation.



SPREAD THE GOSPEL—a contingent of 30 diocesan youth and chaperones participated in the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis. The Face of Prayer 2.0 campaign was formally launched by Bishop Caggiano during the conference.

Bishop Caggiano also gave a breakout session to youth ministers on Friday afternoon, and joined the NCYC staff on the official livestream of the event that evening.

As the conference wound down on Saturday afternoon, the Diocese of Bridgeport contingent

gathered for a final time to thank Evan Psencik, the coordinator of youth and young adult ministry, who led the pilgrimage. After a beautiful closing Mass celebrated by Archbishop Gomez, the youth were sent forth into the world to spread the Gospel by the way they lived their lives. ■

Hitting the right notes for charity

BRIDGEPORT—The 26th Annual Fall Benefit for the Inner-City Foundation for Charity & Education raised \$682,000 to support struggling and needy families

in Fairfield County.

The event, held on November 16 at the Hyatt Regency in Greenwich, had supporters of the Inner-City Foundation up

on their feet by the end of the evening, swinging to the sounds of the legendary New Orleans Preservation Hall Jazz Band

Founded in 1992, the Inner-City Foundation has provided more than \$29 million to about 200 local organizations. It awards grants to organizations providing education, food, clothing, shelter and counseling.

Master of Ceremonies, comedienne and master storyteller Bonnie Levison kept the evening moving with her humor and quick wit, introducing the band as well as several speakers, including Msgr. Thomas Powers, vicar general of the Diocese of Bridgeport; Dick Matteis and Helen FitzPatrick of the Inner-City Foundation, both from

Greenwich; and Mitch Barns, CEO of Nielsen and the event’s corporate chair.

Jennifer Barnum was this year’s winner of the foundation’s Tim Russert Making A Difference Award. Two beneficiaries of programs supported by the Inner-City Foundation, Leidy Garcia of Stamford and Brianna Hopkins of Bridgeport also spoke.

Garcia said the Exchange Club Parenting Skills Center in Stamford provided critical guidance to her when she found herself pregnant at 14, with nowhere to turn. Remarkably, she was able to graduate on time with her high school class—“Amazing, right?!”

➤ **CONTINUED ON PAGE 17**



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St. George, Bridgeport

Renovating for the future

By PAT HENNESSY

A church is a building where people gather to worship God.

A church is also the people of God who gather in that building. At St. George Church in Bridgeport, both the building and the people proudly recognize over a hundred years of history. Both, too—people and building alike—are busy working toward another century of worship.

“We have parishioners from nine different countries worshipping here,” said Father Elio Sosa, IVE, pastor. A recent parish census counted more than 900 people at weekend Masses.

Founded by immigrant Lithuanians in 1907, the parish is currently home to a mostly Spanish-speaking community, encompassing newly-arrived families and those from a second or third generation in this country. Families from Lithuanian background still have a presence in the parish, along with parishioners who have a special place for Ireland in their hearts. “Everything we do here is bilingual,” said Father Sosa. “We are one family, no matter what our background.”

They were one family in a leaky home, though. Water was infiltrating through the aged roof

of the bell tower and appearing by the stained glass windows of the main church.

“There’s a simplicity to the bell tower at St. George that’s absolutely fabulous,” said Rick Rapice, project manager for the diocesan Real Estate and Construction Office. “It’s a perfect square. It’s really beautiful; the proportions are terrific.”

Because of the building’s age, Father Sosa had already worked with the Real Estate Office to correct structural problems around the property. “I think that experience gave Father Elio and his parish team the reassurance to see us as a resource and come to us with this new problem,” said Rapice.

“Our parishioners want to see the church restored,” said Father Sosa. “So I followed the diocesan policy. I spoke to the bishop, and he put me in touch with the correct office. Richard was my right hand. He helped me a lot.”

Renovation projects are daunting, and parishes lack the ability to deal with them alone. That’s where the background, knowledge and skill of the Real Estate and Construction Office come into play. Over the past year, Rapice and Andrew Schulz, director of real estate, inspected the building and presented restoration drawings to Father Sosa and the parish council. During the summer, Schulz and Anne McCrory, chief legal real estate officer, researched restoration companies. Diocesan policy requires proposals from three different sources before accepting a contract.

Due to the age of the church, it was important to choose someone who had experience restoring buildings from that era. They chose Arthur Vincent Co. in Nyack, N.Y., who had worked on a Congregational Church in Bridgeport.

“The diocese knows him very well,” said Father Sosa. “Andrew Vincent, the son, came with Richard and Andrew to present final plans and financial estimates to the parish.”

In October, a scaffold and netting was erected around the venerable tower. Before the month ended, they were replacing the crumbling, spalling masonry and had started to replace the roof



NEW LIFE IN OLDER PARISH—Father Elio Sosa, pastor of St. George Parish, has breathed new life into the parish on the edge of downtown Bridgeport. With the help of the Diocesan Real Estate Office, he’s leading the effort to restore the steeple of the historic church founded by the Lithuanian community and now home to many Spanish-speaking families.

with a copper skin.

The intricate European stained-glass windows, almost a hundred years beautiful, are now safe from water damage.

Next up: re-pointing and re-facing the brick façade. A third item will be to replace the front steps, which have shifted over time. The pace of these items will depend on uncertain winter weather.

The pace of spiritual life at St. George continues with no pause; no winter winds can dim the glow of energetic faith. Worshippers gather early for daily Mass in the inviting chapel. First Friday Mass and Eucharistic Adoration bring standing room only.

Nearly 300 children participate in religious education programs. On Tuesdays and Fridays, school children can come to the building to be part of the Oratorio of St. John Bosco, a mix of homework, conversation, games and life skills. “Our kids, we know them all,” said Father Sosa. “We know if they are happy or feeling sad, and we have time to talk to

them.”

In November, the parish began a novena in honor of Our Lady of Juquila, a popular devotion from the Mexican highlands. It ended just before the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. Another huge Marian feast followed—Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Hard on the heels of these celebrations, St. George will celebrate Kucios, the traditional Lithuanian Christmas Eve feast. “All one family,” Father Sosa repeated with pride.

Meantime, Children’s Choir is practicing for Christmas Mass. A Christmas play will delight children and parents alike. Christmas Mass will be stuffed to the gills.

Whatever the weather, Three Kings Day will see the parish hall brimming with food, flooded with music and laughter, and happy with toys for the little ones.

They will be happy and warm—and dry. St. George, both the people and the building, are looking forward to another century of worship. ■



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5th Anniversary

Sandy Hook remembered

NEWTOWN—Five years after the tragedy of Sandy Hook Elementary School, a priest still looks for healing and for hope, but it has been a difficult, often anguished path.

Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish, vividly remembers the days, weeks and months after a young man took the lives of 20 children and six adults shortly before Christmas.

Eight children and one adult were from his parish. They were children he had baptized, and some were preparing for First Holy Communion. Suddenly, it was his responsibility to bury them.

"There's still a great deal of pain, there's still a great deal of anger," he said. "The path to healing and forgiveness has not been an easy one. On the fifth anniversary, some people still don't want to talk about it."

The morning of December 14, he was among the first clergy to arrive at the school with the Newtown police. Later that day, he would accompany them to inform parents their children had died.

He remembers keeping vigil at the volunteer fire station as parents paced nervously throughout the afternoon and then collapsed in grief when Governor Malloy announced there were no more survivors.

"The parents knew in their hearts the children were gone," Msgr. Weiss said. "As broken as they were, the love in the room was phenomenal even after such a great loss."

That evening, more than 750 grief-stricken mourners crowded into St. Rose for a Vigil Mass. Outside 1,000 more stood praying in the cold.

After midnight, Msgr. Weiss went with police to visit families who lost children. By the time he got home, it was 3 a.m. The day left him emotionally devastated. The musical "Carousel" was on TV, and Claramae Turner was singing, "You'll Never Walk Alone." The moment affected him deeply.

"To me, that was God putting his hand on my shoulder," he recalled. "That was God telling me he would send help." And he did.

"I put it in God's hands and relied on his grace," he said. "To be honest, it was how I kept

myself together." His doctor wanted to prescribe medication, but he refused because he knew he had to be alert and a source of strength.

One parishioner described him as a light in the darkness.

"The Lord and the people carried me through," he said. "I had eight funerals in five days, in addition to all the wakes."

The children from St. Rose of Lima Parish who died at Sandy Hook School were: Daniel Barden, 7; Olivia Engel, 6; Josephine Gay, 7; Catherine Hubbard, 6; James Mattioli, 6; Grace McDonnell, 7; Caroline Previdi, 6; and Jessica Rekos, 6.

During that week, priests from the diocese rallied to Msgr. Weiss's side, with as many as ten priests and deacons on the altar. He remembers assisting the grieving families into the church, embracing the parents at the Kiss of Peace, sprinkling holy water on the coffins and commending the children to their final rest. In his homilies, he talked about light and darkness.

"This is darkness, and darkness is not going to conquer the Light," he said. "It was the season of Advent and Hanukkah, and everywhere people were try-

ing to remind themselves of the Light conquering darkness. There were Christmas trees with hundreds of lights and candles."

His staff and two parochial vicars, Father Ignacio Ortigas and Father Luke Suarez, were "outstanding and very protective." Wherever he went, three parishioners accompanied him. "We were able to bring consolation and hope to a lot of people."

"The press was amazed by the role of the Church in the lives of the community," he recalled. "We showed the world the importance of faith. The houses of worship became the centers where people gathered. They were open 24-7. We also showed them the value of family. It reminded us of what is truly important in life."

Day and night, people kept a constant vigil at St. Rose. They prayed and lit candles at shrines on the grounds, adorning them with flowers, photos, Santas and stuffed animals. They came to pray, to publicly mourn and to let the families who lost a child know their grief was shared.

"The way the parish and the community rallied was absolutely phenomenal, including support from Catholic Charities and staff



ST. ROSE OF LIMA PASTOR MSGR. ROBERT WEISS buried eight children from the parish in late December, 2012, after the Sandy Hook School shootings. His deeply pastoral and comforting presence started the healing process for many people and also became a symbol of the power of faith across the United States. In reflecting on the difficulty of dealing with the tragedy and ongoing trauma, Msgr. Weiss says, "I put it in God's hands and relied on His grace." (PHOTO BY MICHELLE BABYAK)

of the Catholic center, along with efforts by the Knights of Columbus, the youth groups and parish groups," Msgr. Weiss said. He broke up as he recalled their commitment and expressions of love for one another.

Within days, the community began to receive hundreds of thousands of letters, contributions and packages containing Christmas cookies, hams, prayer cards, hand-crafted gifts and books. Msgr. Weiss served on a committee that managed their distribution.

"I had people coming in on two-hour shifts because emotionally that was as long as they could handle it," he said.

He often felt alone as he confronted his emotional turmoil

and that of countless people who came to him with their grief. His assistant priests eventually received transfers, which compounded his pain.

"A lot of people asked if I was considering a transfer, but when I saw what so many people were going through, it confirmed the need to stay."

He began suffering from symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and spent several weeks at a Catholic facility for counseling and rehabilitation.

"I still break down a lot," he says. "My vision and hearing were affected. These are the after-effects. I have difficulty sleeping, and my whole lifestyle radically changed. I have terrible anxiety

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St. Augustine Cathedral Parish

Feast of the Vietnamese Martyrs

BRIDGEPORT—In a word, JOY was the predominant theme for the celebration of the feast of the Holy Vietnamese Martyrs held at St. Augustine Cathedral on November 19. The martyrs are the patrons of the Vietnamese Catholic community in the Diocese of Bridgeport, which makes the cathedral its home parish.

There was a great excitement throughout the event. Bishop Frank J. Caggiano was the principal celebrant and homilist. About 15 priests concelebrated, including Father Thomas Thorne, pastor of the Church of the Assumption in Westport, and Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Parish in Newtown.

The cathedral was packed, with standing room only. Vietnamese families, many of whom traveled a great distance, were joined by American guests and many religious Brothers and Sisters. Honor guards from the Knights of Columbus lent added dignity to the occasion. Lively and beautiful songs singing by the Vietnamese choir and colorful uniforms of the boys and girls and different ministries added to the overall effect.

The day started with the skit of the Vietnamese Martyrs, then a lively dance by young ladies in



CENTURIES OF FAITH—The heroic dedication of the Vietnamese Martyrs was honored during a Mass held at St. Augustine Cathedral, home to the Vietnamese Catholic community in this diocese. (PHOTOS BY MICHELLE BABYAK)

colorful Vietnamese traditional dress honoring the martyrs, followed by veneration of the first class relics of the martyrs.

To fill in the historical background, it's important to recognize that Christianity in Vietnam dates back a solid 500 years. The Catholic population flourished, particularly after the arrival of the Jesuits in the early 1600s. Persecution, always a threat, grew more ominous as regimes welcomed or rejected the Christians in their midst.

While slightly more than a hundred martyrs are known by name, entire families and whole

villages were destroyed during several persecutions. The Vatican estimates that possibly as many as 3,000 Vietnamese have died for their faith in Jesus. For that reason, Vietnamese Catholics who died for their faith from 1533 to the present day were canonized on June 19, 1988, by St. John Paul II under the title "Vietnamese Martyrs."

The faith of Vietnamese Catholics never faltered. Vietnam has the fifth largest Catholic population in Asia, with nearly six million Catholics in Vietnam today, representing 6.87 percent of the total population.

Today, even with the lack of religious tolerance, Catholicism in Vietnam is still growing.

The Cathedral Mass, celebrated in both English and Vietnamese, was enthusiastically embraced by the parishioners. Bishop Caggiano, as always, captured the congregation's focus.

Vietnamese Community. Now a parochial vicar at Assumption Parish, Father Nguyen presented gifts to his pastor, Father Thomas Thorne, for his generosity and support of allowing Father Nguyen to also administer to the Vietnamese Community. He also gave Bishop Caggiano a beautiful



During his homily, he pointed out two lessons they could draw from the Vietnamese Martyrs. The first, simply and clearly, was "Do not be afraid, and go out into the world making a difference." He ended his homily by emphasizing that the martyrs did not die alone, but with their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

After Mass, Father Augustine Nguyen thanked all the people present on behalf of the

picture of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary with a first class relic of the Vietnamese Martyrs.

The congregation was then invited over to the Kolbe Gym for a reception to celebrate the feast day. There was plenty of food and great music performed by the young people in the community. Bishop Caggiano, along with most of the people, stayed until the very end enjoying the wonderful time together. ■

Service Corps helps Al's Angels pack meals

BRIDGEPORT—On November 11, hundreds of volunteers gathered at the Gault Stone Warehouse on Seaview Avenue in Bridgeport to pack 1,600 Al's Angels Thanksgiving



meal bins for families in need. This is an annual event for Al's Angels, a charitable organization founded by Catholic entrepreneur Al DiGuido in 2004 as an outreach to thousands of

children with cancer, rare blood diseases and financial hardship.

Among the volunteers gathered to assemble the bins, comprised of pantry staples as well as all the fixings for a Thanksgiving meal, were members of the Diocese of Bridgeport's Catholic Service Corps. The Catholic Service Corps calls on young people to be the face of Christ in service to others and unites them in service opportunities while connecting these to their Catholic faith. Al's Angels has partnered with the Catholic Service Corps for the past two years for the Thanksgiving and Christmas bin packing events, as well as for the toy drive, in which over 12,000 new toys will be collected for children in area hospitals.

This event was the perfect opportunity for the Catholic Service Corps to come together. Young people from various parishes and schools took part in the day, along with Confirmation candidates from St. Pius X Parish in Fairfield, students from Fairfield Prep, Notre Dame High School, St. Joseph High School and area youth groups, including ones from St. Mark Parish in Stratford, Assumption in Westport and St. Francis in Weston.

The youth of the Catholic Service Corps were also joined by four religious Sisters from the Council of Religious, led by Sister Nancy Stirillacci, ASCJ.

That experience behind them, the Catholic Service Corps vol-



unteers eagerly looked forward to the next Al's Angels event, the Christmas meal bin packing on December 9.

(Youth and families wishing to

connect to service opportunities can learn more by visiting www.catholicservicecorps.org or contacting CSC coordinator Jessica Nayden: jnayden@diobpt.org. ■

Father Rolando Torres

The priest's goal is to serve and not to be served

BRIDGEPORT—When he was 15, Father Rolando Torres met a young woman who was in the same Catholic youth movement in Puerto Rico. Years later, in desperation, she emailed the now-pastor of St. Mary Parish in Bridgeport and asked for help. She and her husband and two sons were homeless. They lost everything in Hurricane Maria, one of the most devastating storms ever to hit Puerto Rico. Could Father help them?

He wasted no time, and shortly afterward arranged for the family's flight from San Juan to America, where an apartment was waiting for them in Bridgeport with two months paid rent. It was only one of many efforts on the part of the priest and the predominantly Puerto Rican parish to help people from their native island, whose lives have been destroyed by the storm that hit on September 20.

He said his goal as a priest is to serve and not to be served. His spiritual mentor, one of the holiest priests he ever met, told him that should be his purpose. They are Christ's own words.

Since he was named pastor in 2015, Father Torres said his goals have been twofold: to advance the spiritual lives of his parishioners and to implement social programs for the parish and community, most recently through charitable activities and relief efforts for victims of the hurricane.

Father Torres had wanted to return to Puerto Rico because he has family members and friends there, but his plans were thwarted when a flight he booked was cancelled. Since then, the parish has sent regular shipments of food and provisions there, with the shipping being paid for by an anonymous Greenwich donor. The parish also raised \$4,000 through a diocesan collection that was given to Catholic Charities for its relief effort.

In addition, a special donation is being made to Our Lady of the Angels parish in Utuado, whose pastor, Father Miguel Mercado, was the rector of the minor seminary that Father Torres attended.

"He was the priest who told me that we live to serve," he recalled. "He once said, 'If you want to be a good priest, you start by cleaning.' I have been blessed to know very holy and humble priests."

Working with Rosa Correa, coordinator of the Puerto Rico Relief Center in Bridgeport, Father Torres has assisted other

families who came here after the hurricane.

Often lacking a support system in America, they were welcomed

by St. Mary's and invited to attend the parish's Thanksgiving dinner and the observance of the feast of Our Lady of Providence, patroness of Puerto Rico, for whom Father Torres and the parish have a special devotion. Father Torres speaks often about Providence in his own life and the life of the Church.

"Rosa Correa sent people our way," he said. "It was in the Providence of God that we already had everything in place to help them."

As part of their efforts, parishioners serve meals every second Friday at the Thomas Merton Center, and prepare breakfast in the church hall after Mass. St. Mary's has close to 1,000 families who attend three Masses in Spanish and one in English.

Father Torres recently had an Adoration Chapel built, where daily Mass is celebrated, along with Eucharistic Adoration, Monday to Friday from 8 am to 10 pm.

In addition, more than 100 people gather in the church hall for weekly classes in Bible study and Church history, which he teaches. He also has an Internet radio program twice a week titled

"Alpha and Omega" at www.lavozdemariaradio.com.

For Father Torres, serving at St. Mary's is somewhat of a homecoming. His family attended Mass in the old church, which was demolished in the early 1980s. It was there that Father Torres was baptized in 1978 by Msgr. Peter Cullen, who years later vested him for his ordination.

The youngest of nine children, he and his family left the East Side and returned to Puerto Rico when he was barely a year old. As a teenager, he felt called to the priesthood and entered a minor seminary. He later received his bachelor's degree in philosophy from the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico and studied theology in San Juan.

In 2002, he returned to Bridgeport. By then, however, he had left the seminary and was working odd jobs for a cleaning service and dentist's office. Even though he didn't know what the future had in store, God did. One day after Mass at St. James Parish in Stratford, Father Thomas Lynch, St. James' pastor, asked to pray over him and said, "God has a plan for you. Don't let the devil hold up that plan. May the Lord make you come back to him."

That prayer was quickly answered. A few days later, he met with Msgr. Chris Walsh, then director of priestly vocations. "We talked for two hours," Father Torres recalled, "and he convinced me to come back. I told him my English was bad, and he said, 'God will take care of you.'"

He resumed his studies at St. Joseph's Seminary and College in Dunwoodie, N.Y., and graduated in 2006. He was ordained on May 19, 2007, and assigned to St. Mary Parish in Greenwich, where he served for several years, followed by St. Mary's in Stamford and briefly at St. Joseph's in Shelton.

On May 19, 2015, he was appointed pastor of St. Mary's in Bridgeport. It was the anniversary of his ordination. For Our Lady of Providence, there are no coincidences.



NO COINCIDENCES—Father Rolando Torres is now pastor of St. Mary Parish in Bridgeport, where he was baptized as an infant. Because he grew up in Puerto Rico, he was ideally placed to offer assistance to families from that island after the destruction of Hurricane Maria.

SCRIPTURE SEARCH®

Gospel for December 24, 2017
Luke 1:26-28

Following is a word search based on the Gospel for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle B: the visit of Gabriel to the town of Nazareth. The words can be found in all directions in the puzzle.

ANGEL
VIRGIN
GREETING
GREAT
JACOB
THE CHILD
BARREN

GABRIEL
JOSEPH
BEAR A SON
MOST HIGH
FOREVER
ELIZABETH
NOTHING

NAZARETH
DAVID
JESUS
THRONE
POWER
OLD AGE
IMPOSSIBLE

ANGEL GREETING

H	J	G	K	W	L	E	I	R	B	A	G
T	T	R	O	N	E	D	D	N	A	N	R
H	P	E	S	O	J	I	N	E	I	D	E
M	O	A	R	S	V	I	L	H	H	N	E
O	W	T	L	A	G	I	T	K	O	T	T
S	E	T	D	R	Z	O	H	R	L	H	I
T	R	Y	I	A	N	A	H	O	D	E	N
H	J	V	B	E	I	T	N	H	A	C	G
I	D	E	R	B	G	H	O	G	G	H	V
G	T	R	E	V	E	R	O	F	E	I	Z
H	A	I	M	P	O	S	S	I	B	L	E
B	O	C	A	J	E	S	U	S	F	D	E

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EDITORIAL

A Mother's Faith

In December 2012, Fairfield County Catholic received this extraordinary letter from Jenny Hubbard, mother of six-year old Catherine Hubbard, who lost her life in the shootings at Sandy Hook School on December 14 of that year. The depth of her faith and strength of her love were a gift to all those struggling with the shootings.

The Hubbards have since honored Catherine's life through the creation of the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary in Newtown (cvhfoundation.org). Other families have gone on work for gun violence prevention and establish initiatives that celebrate the lives of their children by helping others.

As we prepare for Christmas and the celebration of a child whose life changed the entire world, we solemnly remember the children of Newtown and their families who continue to struggle with the loss. (See interview with Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima on page 7). On the 5th anniversary of this tragedy that shook the diocese and the entire nation, we are honored to re-print Jennifer Hubbard's letter:

When I close my eyes I see Catherine cradled in the palm of His hand. I see her softly giggling. She is opening her arms to all the animals. She is sending us comfort in ways that only God's angels could know how. She is with God, she is at peace.

When I could not find her, I felt a calm fill my heart and I knew in that moment she was with God. I knew that she was safe, safer than I could ever make her. I miss her. There will be a hole in my heart that widens each time I remember something so simple that was so Catherine. Each time I feel that my tears will not stop, I am pulled back to a place of peace and find comfort that Catherine was called to a job much bigger than I can even fathom. I know that God has a specific purpose for us and while I may not understand right now how I will muster the strength to fulfill His purpose, I must remain centered on His face. He will provide what I need to move forward. He will provide the soft nudges to help me feel confident that I am doing what He intended.

We are all put where we are for a very specific reason. My daughter, along with the victims of Sandy Hook School, brought a world to their knees in prayer. Twenty babies and six adults were able to do what some thought never possible. They have set the stage for us and we have a responsibility to continue what they started. We have a responsibility to continue to serve our children and help them be rooted in their faith. We are bound to this place and must bring our children's understanding of faith to a new level.

So many people are talking about getting back to normal. I am not sure that is really what we want. Are we willing to accept that normal includes allowing our children to not feel safe in their schools? Are we willing to say that normal is a place where first graders, teachers and administrators being brutally killed is acceptable? I pray that we do not go back to normal. I pray that we find a new normal that is restored in faith. I pray that we continue to draw on God's love and peace. I pray that the world is comforted knowing that they are wrapped in God's cloak.

This week our son asked, "How God would do this?" We told him, God didn't do this. We are human, we have free will, there are people that do not listen to God's voice and decide to take their own path. When we stop listening to our hearts, we stop listening to God's voice. We stop acknowledging that we are in this place for a very specific reason. As you celebrate the New Year and settle back into the lives you led prior to December 14th, I pray that you know that you are exactly where you need to be and that you hear God's gentle voice helping you find the words that you need to say. I pray that we find comfort and solace knowing that God loves each one of us and will wrap each one of us in His arms when the days become too much. I pray that the world returns to their faith.

A Journey of Hope

Pope Francis calls Advent a journey toward the horizon of hope. There is something about Christmas that inspires hope in everyone. At this time of the year, people hope for peace in their families. They hope for peace in our harshly divided country. They hope for peace in our ever more frightening world. As Pope Francis emphasized, "The journey is never finished."

One of the best ways to carry forward the journey started by the infant in Bethlehem is captured by the words of a popular hymn, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To Msgr. Orlowski and the parish community of St. Matthew

In union with Christ the King and the celebration of Advent, I would like to express how thankful I am to the Lord for the unity and love that is shared among us in Christ the King.

I want to express my sincere gratitude and thankfulness to Msgr. Walter and the community of St. Matthew for the help given to the flood victims of our parish, Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Rosenberg, Texas, and the surrounding communities. I was overwhelmed by your selflessness and acts of kindness and love.

The wonderful families of St. Matthew and the business community of Norwalk were a source of hope and strength to our community. The hope you brought to our community is the hope that is embodied the Advent season.

Our parish community was hit with a second flood within a year and a half. Hurricane Harvey caused much more extensive damage than we anticipated. The church was spared but as many

as 300 members of this parish community were not.

Your donations and money helped us to reach out to all those in need regardless of faith, color, rich, poor, male or female—and most importantly to children. With your help, we became a distribution center for the county.

I don't know how to thank you and how humbled I am by the bond we share as Catholics, but most of all the bond we share as humans. Jesus Christ, our King, built his Church without borders or barriers that would constrain his disciples from going out into the world and lifting up their neighbor in time of need, suffering and death.

To the men and women who came to help rebuild homes, I send you my heartfelt thanks. You are an example of what Pope Francis says, "That the Church should come out of its buildings and go out into the world and become dirty and poor and messy." This is what makes the Church the living body of Christ. The families will

never forget your sacrifice.

Msgr. Walter, you are and inspiration to me as a priest. You are an example of the good pastor who doesn't sit around but is very proactive in the proclamation of the Word.

To all the families of St. Matthew, thank you for your faith and selfless generosity. It shows the world that Jesus, our King, reigns in your heart, actions and in the very community where you live and pray. May our Lady of Guadalupe, who is the first and perfect evangelizer of all the Americas, have you in the folds of her garment and in the crossing of her arms.

May Christ King always keep us united in the bonds of love and faith we share. May this holy season of hope be our strength to move forward to a new Advent. ■

*I am your humble servant,
Father Lee A. Flores
Our Lady of Guadalupe Church
Rosenberg, Texas*



CLERGY APPOINTMENTS

The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, has made the following clergy appointments in the Diocese of Bridgeport:

DEAN

FATHER FRANCISCO GOMEZ-FRANCO, from interim Dean of the "Queen of Peace" Deanery (A), to Dean of the "Queen of Peace" Deanery (A). Effective date was November 13. Father Gomez-Franco will remain Pastor of Saint Charles Borromeo Parish, Episcopal Master of Ceremonies, and representative on the Presbyteral Council for priests ordained 0-14 years.

PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR

FATHER MICHAEL A. BOCCACCIO, to temporary Parochial Administrator of Holy Name of Jesus Parish, Stratford. Effective date was November 27. Father Boccaccio will remain Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies for the Diocese of Bridgeport.

PAROCHIAL VICAR

FATHER HARRY PRIETO, from Parochial Vicar of Saint Theresa Parish, Trumbull, to Parochial

Vicar of Saint Edward the Confessor Parish, New Fairfield. Effective date was November 20.

EPISCOPAL CHAPLAIN

FATHER JOSEPH GILL, to Episcopal Chaplain to The Catholic Academy of Stamford. Effective date is January 1, 2018. Father Gill will remain Episcopal Chaplain to Trinity Catholic High School.

*Father Joseph A. Marcello
Vicar for Clergy, December, 2017*

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Editorial



What was I thinking?

A WOMAN'S VIEW

BY DEBRA TOMASELLI

Debra Tomaselli writes from Altamonte Springs, Florida. She can be reached at dtomaselli@cfl.rr.com.

“I’m starting my Christmas shopping this weekend,” I said to a coworker recently. “So early?” she asked.

I nodded. “Last year the holidays were so stressful that I’ve decided to get the shopping done before Thanksgiving. That way there’s time for church presentations and holiday gatherings.”

“I don’t know why we do this to ourselves,” my associate said, shaking her head.

Before long, we found ourselves bemoaning the fact that Christmas had become too com-

mercialized. Did people lose the real meaning of the season? Was it all about retail sales? Why create all this stress?

“I’d rather see people give gifts throughout the year, instead of just one day,” she said. I nodded in absolute agreement.

That weekend, however, as I took my Christmas list to the stores, I changed my mind.

I realized a world without Christmas gift-giving would be very sad and cold, indeed.

Suppose there were no bell-ringers for the Salvation Army? Suppose you never heard

“Joy to the World” piped though a retail outlet? Or if school choirs didn’t visit the mall wishing us a Merry Christmas?

Suppose we weren’t prompted to consider sharing our resources, like our food, our time and our gifts, in some way, with family, friends and neighbors. What would that look like?

For a season, the spirit of Christmas surrounds us. It’s a spirit of love.

Some may measure the season by retailers’ revenues, but it’s far more than that.

It’s about the incalculable amount of love that motivates those transactions. Without the love, there would be no inflated sales.

Should we eliminate the commercialism prompted by Christmas Day? Balance what we do throughout the year and eradicate the need to mark the occasion?

That would be like having someone’s birthday pass without any special recognition. We treat

you nicely all year long, so why celebrate?

Could we really refrain from that? I couldn’t.

I want to celebrate you. I like to recognize birthdays... yours, mine... and Jesus’.

We can and should give of ourselves throughout the year. We can still be generous, create happy surprises and make someone smile... any day of the year... every day of the year!

This, precisely, is what Christmas is all about.

And the commercialism?

Many of us don’t sew, bake, hammer or build anything useful. Generations ago, you had to. Thankfully, times have changed.

Now we shop in malls. There’s Amazon. We order online.

Why should Christmas be any different?

However, it’s not about overspending. A note and a candy bar can be the sweetest gift. In God’s economy, a smile, a hug, a visit or a silent prayer are priceless presents.

So let the retail ratings soar. But don’t forget why.

Don’t forget the love of God poured out on us this Christmas Day. Ponder the birth of the One sent to open the doors of heaven to you for eternity.

That’s the gift we celebrate on

Christmas Day. And this gift is never-ending. The love of God pursues you today and all the days of your life.

You can be sure of that. You can celebrate that. Today and every day. ■

“In God’s economy, a smile, a hug, a visit or a silent prayer are priceless presents.”



Christmas is not (just) a story

A DAD'S VIEW

BY MATTHEW HENNESSEY

Matthew Hennessey and his family are parishioners of St. John the Evangelist Parish in Stamford.

There’s nothing like a little baby to make a household happy. The Hennesseys have had a run of good luck in that department—little babies landing on our doorstep at a pretty regular clip the last few years. The latest is Our Billy, a mischievous and scampering adventure pirate if ever one existed.

Billy is teething now. He moans and groans. Keeps us up all hours. Starts out in his crib, ends up in our bed. It’s exhausting. But, man, does he know how to put a smile on my face. He’s mostly all cheeks. The sight of him slaughters me.

The feeling I get gazing at him is love, I guess, but it deserves a different name. It’s bigger than love, really. Deeper than love. More.

Maybe the wind knows its name.

Even when Our Billy’s rooting around under the sink, or sneaking up the stairs, or disabling my phone with his fat fingers, or whimpering like a stranded seal at midnight, I can’t find it in me to get angry. My voice may deepen and sharpen when I do my Big Daddy Discipline routine. But it’s all for show.

Our Billy is the world. He can do no wrong. Not now. The day

may come when he strays from the path his mother and I set him on. I can’t imagine loving Our Billy any less when he does.

It’s impossible for me to think of the Christmas story without thinking of how happy the appearance of that little baby Jesus must have made his parents. It wasn’t your typical delivery-room scene. The Blessed Virgin and Saint Joseph were improvising. Their circumstances were dire; the future looked grim.

Then the baby came and all was quiet. All was bright.

A baby has a way of making a household happy. The miracle in the manger made the world happy, but first it made the Holy Family happy. It even made them a family.

A friend posted a drawing on Facebook recently of a young couple outside a 24-hour convenience store in an urban neighborhood. She’s in an advanced state of pregnancy, sitting on an out-of-order mechanical pony, 25 cents per ride. He’s on a payphone, 25 cents per call, with a phonebook open on his knee.

It’s a believable scenario, a modern couple in a tough spot. It’s after dark. A sign advertising NO VACANCY looms atop a motel in the background. Anxiety. But at their feet, almost hidden amidst the litter and decay, a tiny green flower is breaking through a crack in the pavement—a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse.

Just in case you don’t get it, the name on his work shirt is José. Her sweatshirt reads Nazareth High School. It’s Mary and Joseph, and the little baby unborn Jesus—a 25-cent Christmas Eve in Anytown, U.S.A. The spirit of the Lord rests upon them.

One night my train was delayed. I ended up spending more time in the basement of Grand Central Terminal than I’d normally prefer. Watching the commuters coming and going, to-ing and fro-ing, it was hard to shake the impression that we’re all just meat—no different than hordes of swarming insects.

Thousands of millions rushing hither and thither for no good

reason, satisfying our selfish appetites, playing with our dopey toys, and pursuing our mindless obsessions. I know I’m not the first to wonder in a moment of weakness how it’s possible that we can all be special in God’s eyes.

There are so many of us. There have been so many of us. There will be many more of us after you and I are gone. He can’t possibly know us all. He can’t know me, you, and every down-and-out José and Maria.

When I’m in these moods, it’s tempting to think that Christmas is just a convenient story.

Then I see those fat cheeks and those sky-blue eyes. I hear the moaning and groaning of our little stranded seal curled up in bed between me and my wife. Then I get the picture.

I know Our Billy. I know all of him, just as God knows all of me. Just as he knows everyone who ever lived and ever will. Just as he knows the name that’s written on the wind.

Merry Christmas from my family to yours. ■

Women Religious

Cause for jubilation

WEST HARTFORD—There was ample cause for jubilation and joy this fall as Sisters of Mercy of the Americas celebrated significant anniversaries. Among

them was Sister Marion Paul Lillis, marking 75 years of professed life. During her years of service she had taught at Sacred Heart School in Bridgeport (now

home to the Mercy Learning Center) and St. Charles Borromeo School, also in Bridgeport.

Among the group were nine women who entered from



SISTER MARION PAUL LILLIS CELEBRATED 75 years of professed life.



throughout the diocese: Sacred Heart Parish and St. Charles Borromeo Parish, both in Bridgeport; St. Joseph Parish in South Norwalk; St. Peter Parish in Danbury; St. Maurice Parish in Stamford; and St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Fairfield.

The Sisters of Mercy were the first women religious to serve in Fairfield County, arriving to establish a school at St. John the Evangelist Parish in Stamford in 1887, more than half a century before the Diocese of Bridgeport was formed.

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St. Luke celebrates 60 years

WESTPORT—The Church of St. Luke in Westport celebrated its 60th anniversary with three days of events this fall. Msgr. Andrew Varga, pastor, Father Thomas Lakra, and Sister Maureen Fleming, SSND, led the festivities.

Starting off Friday evening, parishioners had a chance to Rock Back to the Sixties. They danced to the music of DJ Remember Then, twirled with hula hoops and twisted to Chubby Checkers. A photo booth was set up, and guests feasted on a spread of typical '60s nibbles.

Saturday evening featured a 60th Anniversary Mass attended by priests who had served at St. Luke Parish in the past. Father Sam V. Scott, now pastor of St. Joseph Parish in Danbury, gave the homily. Assisting priests were Msgr. Walter Orlowski, pastor of St. Matthew Parish in Norwalk; Father Ray Petrucci, a native son of St. Luke; and Father Thomas Thorne, dean of the Deanery F (Fairfield and Westport) and pastor of Assumption Parish. A champagne reception followed the Mass.



St. Luke's children had their own party on Sunday with an ice cream and cake social after religious formation classes. Prizes were also awarded to the winners of a coloring contest, which featured a tribute to St. Luke.

The festivities included a special cake served at the Friday night event. It depicts the stained glass window in the vestibule of



the church. One side shines into the gathering space; the other side shows the window above the balcony that is visible on the way out of the church. The baker did a terrific job of depiction.

Sports

St. Joseph girls win soccer, volleyball state titles

By **DON HARRISON**

Three straight state championships. Four state titles in the past five seasons. Those are just some of the noteworthy accom-

plishments of St. Joseph High School's Girls' Soccer Team coached by Jack Nogueira.

Coaches Association (CHSCA) All-State team. "Bridget has already committed to Connecticut College," Babineau said.

St. Joseph swept its FCIAC volleyball opponents (16-0)

the match's lone goal five minutes into the second half—appropriately enough, on a pass from All-American midfielder Jessica Mazo. The latter, a junior, was voted MVP of the title game.

According to Nogueira, Mazo is the "most skillful and technically sound player we've had at St. Joe's," which speaks volumes. "We've had a lot of great players in the program, but Mazo is

Yankee United soccer club since she was 10 years old," Nogueira said. "She's very athletic, with very good soccer skills combining passing, shooting and dribbling." The Cadets' most renowned



ST. JOSEPH'S GIRLS SOCCER TEAM notched its third straight state championship this fall.



THE CADETS' GIRLS VOLLEYBALL TEAM also finished on top by winning the Class M state title.

plishments of St. Joseph High School's Girls' Soccer Team coached by Jack Nogueira.

This fall, though, another Cadet team joined the soccer squad at the pinnacle. The Girls' Volleyball Team, coached by Jeff Babineau, captured the Class M state title—its first since 1997—with a hard-earned

3-1 victory over host East Haven on November 18.

"We'd lost to Greenwich (3-0) in the FCIAC title game," Babineau pointed out, "but it was a good loss. We'd gotten a little overconfident. It woke the girls up. It got us going for the state tournament."

Junior Elena Ball, an outside hitter, rose to the challenge and was voted Most Valuable Player of the state tournament. Teammate Bridget Fatse, a senior outside hitter, was selected to the Connecticut High School

during the fall season and finished 25-2 overall. This championship season, Babineau noted, "Was a testament to the kids buying into the program."

In girls' soccer, Nogueira has created a dynasty across his 18 seasons at St. Joe's, winning no fewer than six state titles in that span. His won-lost-tied record stands at 304-75-25.

"Quite simply, it's the quality of the players we have. We are blessed to have outstanding kids," explained Nogueira, who also serves as a guidance counselor at the school.

The Cadets wrapped up their third straight Class L state title with a 1-0 victory over top-seeded RHAM-Hebron on November 18 at Middletown High School. Freshman forward Maddie Fried, who was selected to the CHSCA All-State team, scored

St. Joe's concluded this championship season with a 19-1-4 won-lost-tied record. The lone loss came against FCIAC rival Ridgefield, 2-0, on October 9. However, Ridgefield went on to win the Class LL state title with a 2-1 verdict over Staples.

Mazo. She has the heart of a lion, the heart of a champion."

Mazo and Fried shared the Cadets' scoring lead this season with 21 goals apiece, and were joined on the All-State team by senior Tory Bike.

"Maddie has played for my

player thus far, Jenna Bike, was a four-time All-State selection and the National Soccer Coaches Association of America's 2015 National Player of the Year. She just completed an outstanding sophomore season at Boston College.

"Quite simply, it's the quality of the players we have. We are blessed to have outstanding kids."

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Obituaries

Deacon Salvatore Clarizio

Dr. Salvatore M. Clarizio, Ph.D., 81, of Trumbull, passed away peacefully on December 1 at St. Vincent's Medical Center.

Born in Bridgeport in May 1936, he was a son of the late Michele and Clementine Bocchino Clarizio. Dr. Clarizio worked as a clinical psychologist for the State of CT Department of Mental Retardation, with many years of dedicated service before his retirement. A graduate of Fairfield Prep, he earned his B.A. from Catholic University, an M.A. from George Washington University, and his Ph.D. from Walden University.

In 2000, he was ordained a deacon for the Diocese of Bridgeport, serving faithfully at St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull.

"Everybody loved Sal," said Father Brian Gannon, St. Theresa's pastor. "He was the



DR. SALVATORE M. CLARIZIO

walking image of the Serenity Prayer, a quiet man, but a tremendous worker in the vineyard of the Lord."

During his diaconate, Deacon Clarizio served in prisons, hospital ministries and bereavement

ministry. "He was very devoted to those who were ill, continuing to offer a Communion Service at area nursing homes" said Father Gannon, "and he showed his great love for our Blessed Mother through his ministry as spiritual director for the Legion of Mary." He was an avid collector and jazz enthusiast.

Deacon Clarizio is survived by his wife of 57 years, Agnes, six children and 13 grandchildren. He was predeceased by his brother, Anthony.

A wake was held at St. Theresa Church on December 6. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at St. Theresa's the following morning. Bishop Frank J. Caggiano was the principal celebrant; Father Gannon delivered the homily. Interment followed in Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Trumbull. ■

Sister Caridad, 88

Sister Maria Caridad Desell (Sister Mary Caritas), RSM, of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas died peacefully on October 3 at her home in the remote rural village of Chanmagua, Guatemala. She was born in West Hartford on August 30, 1929, and entered the Sisters of Mercy in 1947, faithfully serving God's people for 70 years.

Sister Caridad excelled as a popular, dynamic elementary school teacher in Hartford and Bridgeport parochial schools. After school hours, she discovered her real passion for serving the urban poor as counselor, supporter and friend, persistently advocating for needed social change. She was a teacher at the former St. Mary School in Bridgeport when her ministry led her to Guatemala in 1971 to serve the tiny native populations of 13 mountain villages. Compelled by a heartfelt compassion, she carried in her spirit a vision of a vibrant future for the mountain natives.

She ministered unceasingly, advocating for the advancement and well-being of the Chanmaguean people, seeking new life for multiple villages in need of vital services, including bringing running water into the entire area and establishing a highly successful coffee co-op. This she did for 46 years.

Her life became her ministry; her ministry became one with her life. She chose to be buried in Chanmagua, the place she called "home."

Sister Caridad was recognized and acclaimed in her native home of Connecticut with several honors, including the 1994 St. Joseph College Heart of Life award and the 2001 Most Reverend Joseph F. Donnelly Memorial Award from the Archdiocese of Hartford Office of Urban Affairs.

A memorial Mass was celebrated for Sister Caridad on October 21 at St. Mary Home Chapel, West Hartford. ■

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DECEASED CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT: DECEMBER 17—JANUARY 20

DECEMBER

17	Rev. Kieran T. Ahearn	1997
19	Rev. Philip Morrissey	2008
21	Msgr. Constantine R. Caldas	2015
26	Rev. Vincent P. Cleary.....	1965
27	Rev. Ignatius Baraniak, OFM Conv.	1980
29	Msgr. James H. Grady.....	1967
30	Rev. M. Joseph McCarthy	2006

JANUARY

1	Rev. Michael J. Flynn, C.S.Sa.	1995
2	Rev. Joseph J. Malloy.....	2016
	Rev. Robert J. McDermott.....	1989
3	Msgr. Pierre A. Botton.....	2010
4	Msgr. Francis Medynski	2008
6	Msgr. William J. Fox.....	1962
7	Rev. Walter E. Bozek	1995
8	Rev. Mr. Edward R. Kovacs	1999
	Rev. Joseph P. Biondino.....	2001
9	Rev. Gerald T. Devore.....	2011
	Rev. Mr. Hugh Sweeney	1990
	Rev. Robert Nemeth, O.F.M. Conv.	1998
13	Rev. Daniel J. Deehan.....	1976
14	Rev. M. Joseph Joaquin.....	2013
	Msgr. Joseph A. Sullivan	2001
15	Msgr. Harry L. Hale	2003
	Msgr. G. Robert Hanover	1992
16	Rev. Thomas B. Gloster.....	1956
18	Rev. Edward J. Small, SJ.....	2010
19	Rev. Andrew L. Horvat	1973
	Rev. William D. Thompson.....	2004
20	Msgr. George D. Birge.....	2015
	Msgr. Ralph P. Buongervino.....	1994
	Msgr. Andrew T. Cusack.....	2004
	Rev. Andrew L. Farkas.....	1967
	Rev. Robert E. Onze.....	2010

Nuestra Voz

Presencia hispana en el centro de Greenwich

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

Entre 150 a 200 feligreses de origen hispano acuden frecuentemente a los servicios religiosos y comunitarios de la Iglesia de Saint Mary, que ya cumplió más de 20 años de aglutinarlos en el ministerio hispano.

En su mayor, los feligreses vienen de Stamford, Norwalk, Port Chester, N.Y., y de los vecindarios centrales de Greenwich. Y, obviamente por venir de otras iglesias no pueden tener un registro oficial de parroquianos latinos.

Aunque sí, por más de dos décadas Saint Mary es testigo de las suntuosas fiestas en honor a la virgen mexicana de Guadalupe, la Inmaculada Concepción, la Virgen de Fátima; y de los desayunos dominicales mensuales con menú latinoamericano, más el café de la tarde después de la misa en español de las 7:30PM del sábado.

El Padre Rolando Arias, vicario de la parroquia, admite que a pesar de ser el pueblo un lugar mayormente poblado de anglos con una alta tasa de ingresos económicos, sin embargo, la acogida y el acompañamiento a la comunidad hispana es de manos abiertas.

Prueba de esto, por más de veinte años se lleva a cabo la vigilia de la misa del sábado a las 7:30 pm completamente en español, varios bautizos y la educación cristiana escolar para preparar a los niños y adultos a su Primera Comunión y Confirmación.

Entre las preocupaciones de la parroquia, se encuentra el alto número de personas adultas no confirmadas por eso, este año, la rectoría decidió realizar un curso especial para preparar a tomar el Sacramento de la Confirmación dirigido a adultos que se han convertido al catolicismo o que no han tomado el sacramento.

El Padre Arias, nativo de Armenia, Colombia, tiene cuatro años de ser ordenado sacerdote en la Iglesia de Saint Mary en Bethel. Dice que sus 150 o 200 feligreses provienen de su país natal, mayoritariamente; seguido por Perú, Ecuador y de lejos: México y Guatemala.

Como parte del trabajo pastoral, el vicario admite que su cul-

tura latina le permite identificarse plenamente con sus fieles y por eso les visita frecuentemente en sus hogares, cena junto con ellos, bendice sus hogares. “Nosotros somos familiares, hospitalarios, siempre tenemos algo que brindar y siempre estamos dispuestos. Eso nos identifica y diferencia de otras culturas”, dijo el Padre Rolando.

En un pequeño sondeo realizado al momento de la entrevista, el Padre Rolando hace un mapa imaginario sobre sus feligreses y cuenta que el cien por ciento de los jefes de hogar son inmigrantes y que la primera generación de latinos nacidos en los Estados Unidos de su parroquia aun está muy pequeños. “Por eso es que vienen a Santa María, porque necesitan una palabra de aliento, necesitan de la presencia de Dios en sus hogares y necesitan trasladar su fe a sus hijos”.

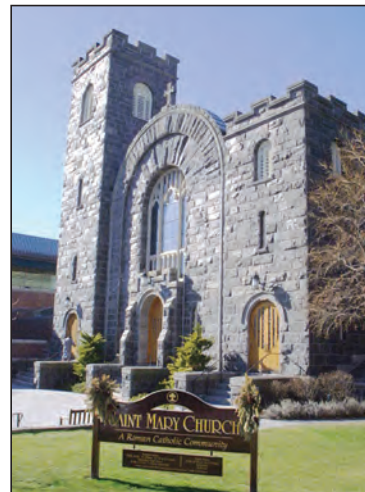
El Padre le da un sitio al grupo católico hispano que acude a la Iglesia de Santa María; “Es una población asentada en los



THE HISPANIC MINISTRY in Greenwich flourishes under the guidance of Father Rolando Arias, parochial vicar of St. Mary Parish, with the encouragement of their pastor, Father Cyprian La Pastina. Father Arias, like many of his parishioners, comes from Colombia, but the close-knit community of many nationalities collaborates closely on weekly Masses in Spanish and on special feast days.

alrededores de Greenwich, compacta, con educación superior, piadosa e inmensamente trabajadora y colaboradora”.

Aunque la mayoría no vienen de México, sin embargo, la fiesta



mente llamarlos: feligreses activos de Santa María.

Elizabeth Rodriguez, oriunda de Colombia y Alicia Condori, del Perú, tienen más de 20 años de asistir a la misa del sábado en la noche y también de colaborar en las fiestas, desayunos y encuentros pastorales de la parroquia. Ellas coinciden que pertenecer a Saint Mary es una “sabrosura” porque se conocen entre todos, colaboran y están abiertos para cualquier requerimiento de los miembros. “No tenemos jefe ni nada parecido. Quien esté más a la mano se encarga de hacer las compras para preparar el desayuno o de preparar el altar y las fiestas de Navidad o de la Virgen. Vivimos en comunidad y eso hace que nuestro comportamiento sea de colaborar en todo lo que podemos”, dijeron.

(Se celebra la Santa Misa en español cada sábado a las 7 pm. Para más información, llame a 203.869.9393.)

¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!

POR MARICARMEN GODOY

El Grupo Guadalupano de Norwalk que viene mostrando su devoción a la Virgen María en la advocación de la Guadalupana desde hace casi dos décadas, ha logrado esparcir su legado en todas las iglesias hispanas del condado, lo que ha dado lugar que en este momento en forma simultánea y masiva se festeje a la Emperatriz de América y en los Estados Unidos sea una de las tradiciones mexicanas más fuertes e importantes celebradas.

Durante la Misa dominical de Acción de Gracias y el Rosario en honor a Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, el Padre Juan Carlos Acosta, párroco de la Parroquia de San Ladislaus en Norwalk, hizo hincapié que durante el tiempo de Adviento se encuentra viviendo la Iglesia que se cumplan las escrituras: “Dios amó tanto al mundo que envió a su único el primogénito”. Esa presencia de Dios en la tierra venía con la

obediencia de la Virgen María, que decidió aceptar la voluntad de Dios de cargar en su vientre al Niño Jesús.

Por eso, acorde con el Padre Acosta, la presencia de la Virgen María es tan importante para la salvación del mundo, porque representa el símbolo de la obediencia a Dios; de ahí que la Virgen de Guadalupe ha calado tan profundamente en la comunidad mexicana y latinoamericana.

Gabina Sánchez, la madre de Ryan Pedraza, de 11 años de edad, es el reflejo de la devoción peregrina de la Virgen de Guadalupe. Ella pertenece a la parroquia de Saint Mary en Norwalk. Durante las fiestas de la Guadalupana va por las iglesias de Norwalk, “prestando” a su hijo que hace el papel del indio Santo Juan Diego llevando flores al Obispo de México, tal como cuenta la historia de las apariciones de la Virgen de Guadalupe.

La fiesta de la Guadalupana fue celebrada en la Iglesia de Saint Joseph por el Grupo Guadalupano. Don Carmelo,



ROSES IN DECEMBER SURROUND the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. Ladislaus Parish in Norwalk. They are a reminder of the roses Our Lady gave to St. Juan Diego to bring to the bishop of Mexico City as proof of her request to build a church. When he opened his tilma, a rough cloak of local fibers, her image was present on the inside. Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose feast day is December 12, has spread throughout the Americas.

cocinero del Río, un restaurante típico mexicano de Norwalk, también por las dos últimas décadas viene colaborando con el Grupo Guadalupano y desde siempre se ha encargado de donar la comida a los feligreses como parte del agasajo que hace el Grupo para los acompañantes de la Virgen Morena en sus fiestas

patronales. Este año, Carmelo y sus amigos cercanos lograron juntar más de 1.500 dólares para comprar los ingredientes de lo que fue más de 500 platos de arroz, carne, frijoles, ensalada y chile picante.

La Virgen fue también festejada en parroquias por todo el Condado de Fairfield.

Column: Thomas Hicks



Is this as good as it gets?

POTPOURRI

BY THOMAS H. HICKS

Thomas Hicks is a member of St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull.

“Who among you delights in life?”
(Psalm 34:12)

Recently Time Magazine put out a special edition titled The Science of Happiness: New Discoveries for a More Joyful Life. The following are a few of Time’s observations: Our idea of happiness changes at different stages of life. Happiness involves small adventures more than sensational experiences. It involves realizing the happiness of the moment. People are happy when working toward a goal. Research shows that heavy social-media users are less happy than others. The more people go on Facebook, the more their life satisfaction levels decline. Etc.

From other research and life experience I have a few other

observations about happiness: One is that the happiest people are simply those who are the least unhappy. Much of people’s ability to be happy is based on genetics—some people are just happier than others. Asked what was the secret of happiness, a man I know said, “Don’t grow up.” Without doubt, the happiest people have the combination of a happy marriage and a job that they love.

As Thomas Aquinas said, the best happiness is making others happy. Happiness is found in being important to somebody, privately important, feeling that somebody needs you, thinks of you, is eager to see you. There are joys which are transfigured sorrows. A foundation of happiness is forgiveness.

How often we think we have found something or someone

who offers us a ticket to happiness, only to find that we have boarded the wrong train.

The Book of Ecclesiastes says that happiness is a gift of God, who decides who should have it and should not (Eccl. 2:24-26). This idea is expressed by the Sufi writer Hafiz: “Ever since Happiness heard your name, it has been running through the streets trying to find you. And several times in the last week, God himself has even come to my door—asking me for your address.” (“Several Times in the Last Week”)

Ecclesiastes also concludes that happiness is not possible in this world except in brief snatches that should be treasured as gifts from God.

The following are my two deepest convictions about happiness. The first echoes Ecclesiastes. Happiness enough has fallen to my lot, but I’ve come to know that no happiness lasts. All happiness is perilously fragile. There’s a story everyone can tell—the story about happiness lost.

The fifth century BC Greek historian, Herodotus, wrote that the gods often bestow happiness only to uproot it. A Chinese proverb says “a flower never blooms for a hundred days, and we are never happy for

a thousand days.” Happiness is always imperiled. Sigmund Freud explained that happiness is always threatened from three directions: from our own bodies, from the external world, from our relations with other people. The trouble which comes from this last source is perhaps more destructive than any other.

My second conviction is that nothing satisfies us as we thought it would. We know something is missing. There is an ache we feel deep within for something more. As someone put it, there’s a “sigh in the soul,” a sadness. No matter how happy our lives are, this “sigh” never goes away. It connects with what Shakespeare’s Cleopatra calls our “immortal longing.” Throughout his writings, author John Updike tells of experiencing intimations of an absence at the core of things. There comes a time, Aldous Huxley wrote, “When one asks even of Shakespeare and Beethoven, ‘is this all?’”

I think everyone knows what I’m talking about, something evades us. A married woman and mother of three told me, “There are times when I simply lean my head against the wall and say, ‘Please, Lord, remind me there is more to life than this.’”

When he was 66 years old, the renowned atheist, Sigmund Freud, spoke of a “strange longing,” and thought there might be, perhaps, room for a life of quite another kind. I’m amazed at atheists who claim that the world and life here are complete and satisfactory and sufficient. For me, God is constantly placing a message on my heart that says “I made you for more.” I have adjusted downward my estimate of how much happiness I could extract from the world.

Even in our most satisfying moments we are aware of limitations. We are left with a constant feeling that something is missing. There is some kind of an immense longing that haunts us.

I think we all experience signposts that lead to knowing that nothing in the world can satisfy us fully, can give us ultimate happiness, can be the central drama of existence. We are all searching for something that the world is not giving us. The human soul is drawn to God.

The Book of Isaiah gives a wonderful metaphor for the idea that nothing finite ultimately satisfies us: “for the bed shall be too short to stretch out in, and the cover too narrow to wrap in” (Isaiah 28:20).

SANDY HOOK FROM PAGE 7

about flying and crossing bridges. When I take a trip and have to fly, it starts days ahead of time.”

Many grappled with the question of God and the existence of evil. Looking back at the media attention that thrust him into the national spotlight, he says the number one question every reporter asked is “Did I lose my faith?”

“I haven’t,” he said. “I’ve been blessed with strong faith. Without the Lord, I couldn’t have done what I had to do, although I admit my faith in humanity has been challenged. I questioned my faith in other people, but not my faith in God.”

The young people in the parish were among the first to ask where God was in such a horrific tragedy as they tried to reconcile their belief in an all-loving God with evil in the world.

“In the beginning, I never

heard the question ‘Why did God allow this to happen?’” he said. “The community identified it as evil in our midst. Eventually, though, we found that middle-school students were starting to ask the really difficult questions like ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’ and ‘How could God let this happen?’”

They are questions about free will, evil and suffering that have been raised often in the press and social media with the increase in mass shootings in places like Las Vegas and San Bernardino, and churches in Texas and South Carolina.

Msgr. Weiss says his prayer has always been that the world would learn from Sandy Hook, that the world would change, and yet whenever he reads about another shooting, he wonders how we can change as a society if we don’t recover the respect for life that has been lost.

“Something has to change,” he says. “We have to reclaim the value of human life, but the changes have to come from within each person. Unless each one of us reclaims the dignity of human life, this will continue.”

In the past five years, some people sought consolation in striving to make the world a better place through acts of kindness and compassion. At St. Rose, more ministries were created to help the community. There are six active youth groups, three men’s groups, a couples’ group and in-house retreats.

Others turned to political causes, hoping to make a difference by seeking gun-control legislation. Even though Msgr. Weiss joined fellow clergy in calling for stricter regulations, he has not lobbied in Washington nor become a vocal advocate.

After 18 years as pastor, he is facing retirement. Many in the

parish have appealed with him to stay in the area because his emotional and spiritual support is there.

Since his ordination in 1973, he has served in parishes in Bridgeport, Stamford, Monroe and Shelton, where he was pastor of St. Joseph Parish for 10 years. He grew up in a devout family and says when he was 17 on his way to school, he heard the voice of God telling him, “Be a priest.” From that moment, he knew it was meant to be his vocation.

He tries to be hopeful as he looks to the future. He has seen Christ in the suffering at Sandy Hook, and he believes Jesus shares our suffering. On his desk,

he keeps a photo that was taken in the days following the shooting. In the clouds above St. Rose of Lima School is the distinct image of a Corpus,

the Body of Christ crucified.

“I realized that was the sign of a burden placed on us,” he said. A sign that Christ was with them in

their pain and anguish.

Some tragedies seem too great for the human heart to overcome, but Msgr. Weiss believes nothing is impossible with God’s love. It can lead to healing and forgiveness and it can make the impossible possible. Sometimes the road is a long one.

“We have to reclaim the value of human life, but the changes have to come from within each person.”

Column: Joe Pisani



'Thank God ahead of time'

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

BY JOE PISANI

Joe Pisani has been a writer and editor for 30 years.

There was a time when I didn't pray ... unless I needed a miracle. Then, I prayed, but my faith wasn't particularly strong. To my thinking, miracles occurred in foreign countries like Lourdes, France, or past centuries when the Apostles walked the earth. Certainly not in 21st century Shelton.

On one occasion, I desperately needed a miracle because my father had been diagnosed with a malignant tumor on his larynx and was told he would lose his voice box, and his life.

The doctors at one of the finest cancer centers in the country gave him a few months to live. They were reluctant to operate and chose to do radiation therapy to shrink the tumor. Decades of smoking and drinking had led to this, although my father insisted tobacco and booze had nothing to do with it.

I went to Barnes and Noble

and scoured the shelves to learn what I had to do to get a miracle. I came upon a book titled, "Nothing Short of a Miracle," which contained accounts of 25 healings attributed to modern saints such as Padre Pio, Mother Teresa, Frances Cabrini and Pope John Paul II.

These miracles had the Church's seal of approval. They were miracles that had also been scrutinized by secular experts, many of whom believed

in the AMA more than God, which means they considered them "inexplicable."

I needed to select a saint for the miraculous intercession that would save my father, so I perused the stories until I came upon a Capuchin Franciscan named Father Solanus Casey, the sixth of 16 children born in 1870 of Irish immigrants on a Wisconsin farm.

During his early life, he worked at different jobs, includ-

ing logger, street car operator, hospital orderly and prison guard. Even though he wanted to be a diocesan priest, the seminary encouraged him to enter a religious order because he was struggling with his studies. Eventually, he was accepted by the Capuchin Franciscans and ordained in 1904.

His assignments took him to Harlem, Yonkers, Detroit and Huntington, Ind., where he usually worked as the doorman. Over the years, he met thousands of people, who recognized his sanctity and compassion and came seeking his prayers when they were troubled or sick. Father Solanus also had a special love for the poor and ran a soup kitchen during the Depression.

Throughout his life, he freely gave his time to anyone who asked, comforting and consoling and encouraging them to pray to God and Our Lady. Many healings, which included troubled pregnancies, skin diseases, tumors and injuries, were attributed to his intercession.

I started praying to him for a miracle and wore a medal that said, "Venerable Solanus Casey, Pray for Us." I prayed and prayed and prayed.

One of Father Solanus' favorite sayings was "Thank God ahead of time" for any favor you requested because it was a sign of faith that you believed God was going to deliver. I took his advice and began to thank God every time I prayed—"God, I just want to say thank you for healing my father." "God, that's terrific what you're going to do for my father and I want to thank you." "By

the way, God, many thanks."

To tell the truth, my faith was flimsy. Father Solanus had once said, "Confidence is the very soul of prayer." Well, I lacked confidence. Nevertheless, I prayed as if I had it because I once read that if you act like you trust, you'll eventually receive the grace that helps you trust.

Last month, Father Solanus Casey was beatified. More than 60,000 people gathered for the ceremony at Ford Field in Detroit, where he had been buried in St. Bonaventure Monastery. During the procession, his relics were carried by people who received favors through his intercession, among them a Panamanian woman who

was healed of a skin disease five years ago. Hers was the recognized miracle that moved Father Solanus' cause for sainthood forward to beatification, one step away from canonization.

As far as my father, when the doctors did surgery, they discovered the tumor was completely gone. They couldn't believe it. Neither could my sister, who practices medicine and teaches at a well-known medical school. To them, it was "inexplicable." To me, it was entirely explicable.

My father lived another 12 years, and he lived a different life because he knew he had been given a tremendous gift from God.

Blessed Solanus Casey, pray for us.

"Father Solanus also had a special love for the poor and ran a soup kitchen during the Depression."



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HITTING THE RIGHT NOTES FROM PAGE 5

Garcia asked the crowd—and now, 14 years later, is a married mother of four and looking to pursue her BA in human services.

Brianna Hopkins currently attends Kolbe Cathedral High School in Bridgeport with help from an Inner-City Foundation scholarship. She is an AP and Honor Roll student, and as a senior is now applying to colleges to become a physician's assistant. Brianna pointed out in her remarks that the average graduation rate at Bridgeport public schools—her alternative if she had not received an Inner-City

Foundation scholarship to Kolbe Cathedral—is about 60 percent.

The graduation rate at Kolbe is 100 percent.

"It's impossible to fail!" Brianna told the crowd with obvious enthusiasm. Kolbe Cathedral also has the impressive record of having sent 100 percent of its graduates on to college for the past several years.

The charity's fall dinner benefit is their largest and most important fundraiser of the year, according to Executive Director Richard Stone.

"People think of Fairfield

County as all very well-off, but it's not all gold coast. State and federal budget cuts have had a devastating impact on the most vulnerable members of our community. And the gap is widening—38 percent of people who live in Fairfield County are now struggling to make ends meet. Without foundations like ours, a lot of people are going to have nowhere to turn."

(For more information about the Inner-City Foundation or to donate, visit innercityfoundation.org, email info@innercityfoundation.org, or call 203.416.1496.)



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Celebrating Advent

Children pray 'Angelus'



TRUMBULL—The Parish of St. Catherine of Siena observed a very special moment on Friday, December 8, when Bishop Caggiano celebrated the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, met with students, and blessed the new four-manual Walker Technical organ, funded by a bequest from Dorothy Cotton.

At that Mass, Bishop Caggiano blessed 12 images of the Blessed Mother, which are now installed in each of the classrooms of St. Catherine of Siena School.

"Beginning this Advent, the students of St. Catherine of Siena School are praying the beautiful prayer of the Angelus each day, to recall and give thanks for the moment that Mary's "yes" to the Angel Gabriel's message made possible the Incarnation, and thereby made possible our salvation. That is the source of our rejoicing!" said Father Marcello.

(St. Catherine of Siena Parish is located at 220 Shelton Road in the Nichols area of Trumbull. On the web: www.stcathtrumbull.com.)

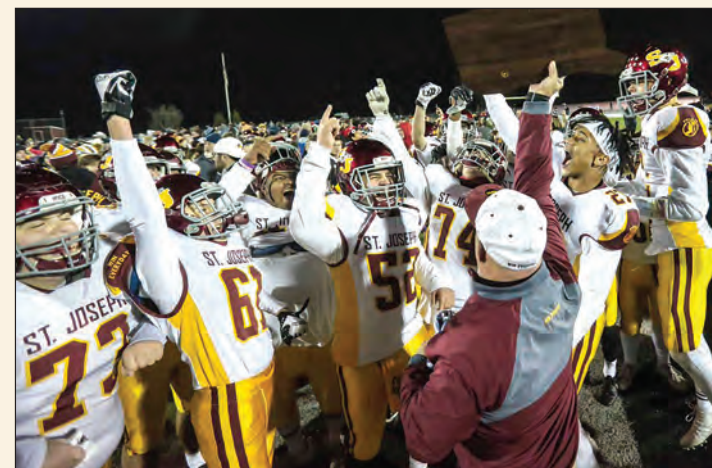


PHOTO BY JOHN VANACORE ACTION PHOTOGRAPHY.

Cadets Rally to Win State Title!

CHESHIRE—The St. Joseph High School Cadets team won their 13th State Title on Monday night, defeating the Ansonia Chargers 42-36 at the Class S Championship at Cheshire High School. The Cadets (12-1) rallied from a 3-touchdown deficit at halftime to defeat the Chargers (12-1). St. Joseph trailed 28-7 in the third quarter before scoring 28 unanswered points to take a 35-28 lead with 6:47 left on a 58-yard touchdown run by Jaden Shirden. It became the first of three touchdowns during a 52-second span. SJ quarterback David Summers threw four of his five touchdowns in the second half, but it wasn't until Ace Luzetti's second interception with 2:12 left on the clock that secured the title for the Cadets. The last time the Cadets won against the Chargers in the Class S finals was in 2010 when the Cadets were led by current-Pittsburgh Steeler, Tyler Matakevich '11.



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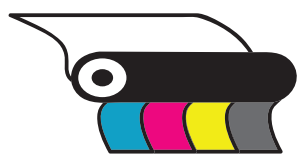
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January 27, 2018

Our Lady of Fatima

229 Danbury Road
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Optional morning Mass 8 am

Refreshments 8:30 am

Leadership Summit 9 am - 12:30 pm

Connecticut is the seventh oldest state in the country. As the population of older adults continues to increase, we must have the important conversation about how our parishes can meet the needs of our seniors and tap into the great resources and wisdom that comes with age and experience.

If you work with older adults or know that your parish community could do more to meet the needs of seniors, please join us for this important day of planning and conversation.

The day will include understanding our current reality, reporting on the diocesan survey now underway, hearing success stories from parishes and local organizations, and sharing resources available to our older adults.

Register online at formationreimagined.org or by calling the Institute office at 203-416-1670.



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Bits and Pieces

SOLEMN CHORAL VESPERS and benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament will celebrate the patronal feast at the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist, Stamford, on Wed., **Dec. 27**, a 7:30 pm. Reception follows; all are welcome. For more info, contact the parish: 203.324.1553.

JOIN IN PRAYING the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary for Persecuted Christians from your home/car/office the first Tues. of every month (**Jan. 2**) at 7 pm. How? Before 7 pm, call 877.216.5269 and type in the pin number 96869.

PRIESTLY DISCERNMENT RETREAT, a day of recollection with Bishop Frank J. Caggiano focused on the question of discerning a priestly vocation will be offered for men between the ages of 18-35 on Sat., **Jan. 13**, from 9 am-5 pm at St. John Fisher Seminary, Stamford. There are some guest rooms available for overnight, Fri., **Jan. 12**. For more info, contact Fr. John Connaughton, director of vocations: frconnaughton@diobpt.org. RSVP by Thurs., **Jan. 4**, to Amanda Day: aday@diobpt.org or 203.322.5331.

DIVORCED AND SEPARATED Catholics are invited to join "Hearts Renewed," a support group for divorced or separated men and women.

Meetings are held in Fairfield on the first and third Fri. of every month (**Jan. 5; Jan. 19**) at 7:30 pm. For more info and for directions, call Bette: 203.338.0503 or Peggy: 203.834.1287.

TRADITIONAL LATIN MASS is celebrated at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Parish, Brookfield, the first Sun. of each month (**Jan. 7**) at 4 pm. For more info, call the parish: 203.775.5117.

GOSPEL OF LIFE SOCIETY meets at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk, the second Sat. of each month (**Jan. 13**) at 10 am following the 9 am Respect Life Mass. For more info, contact John Juhasz: 203.762.3661 or juhaszjw@optonline.net.

SURVIVORS GROUP: There will be an upcoming gathering for any person who has been sexually abused as a minor to meet with the victim assistance coordinators and fellow survivors of sexual abuse, Wed., **Jan. 10**, from 12:30-2 pm at the Catholic Center, Bridgeport. If you are an adult survivor of abuse as a minor, and you would like to learn more about the Annual Mass for Survivors of Sexual Abuse, upcoming meetings and other resources that are available in our diocese, please contact one of our Victim Assistance Coordinators: Erin Neil, LCSW: 203.650.3265; eneil@diobpt.org.

org, or Michael Tintrup, LCSW: 203.241.0987; mtintrup@ccfc-ct.org.

FINANCIAL PEACE UNIVERSITY: A nine-week Christian-based money management class that teaches step by step how to create a budget, pay off debt, spend wisely, and save for the future will be offered at St. James Parish, Stratford, starting Wed., **Jan. 10**, at 7 pm. The cost of class materials is \$119. For more info, call David Zamachaj: 203.375.5887.

MASS OF HEALING AND HOPE: the Charismatic Renewal Services announces a Mass of Healing and Hope on Mon., **Jan. 15**, at 7:30 pm, at St. Lawrence Parish, Shelton, with Fr. Charles Allen. For more info, call the Charismatic Renewal Office: 203.456.5610.

MOMs+DADs prayer/support group for those with Down Syndrome, their family and friends meets the third Thurs. of every month (**Jan. 18**), at 7:30 pm at St. Mary Parish, Norwalk. For more info, contact strapostolate@optimum.net.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES!

The Diocese of Bridgeport posts career opportunities at various times during the year.

Opportunities become available in our Catholic Center, parishes, schools, and at other organizations throughout Fairfield County.

Please visit our diocese website often at:
www.bridgeportdiocese.org/human-resources/home
to view all positions

"COME AND SEE" if you are being called to a vocation in the Secular Franciscan Order. The Secular Franciscan Holy Spirit Fraternity invites everyone to St. Anthony of Padua Church, Fairfield, on Sat., **Jan. 20**, at 9:30 am to celebrate Mass with Msgr. Ernest Esposito. Social and meeting follow. For more info, call Pat Heile, OFS: 203.255.8801 or pheile5713@aol.com.

BIBLE STUDY: The Spirituality of Paul will be held at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Riverside, with eight sessions held Mon. evenings 7:30-9 pm, **Jan. 29-March 19, 2018** or Tues. mornings, **Jan. 30-March 20**,

10-11:30 am. Cost: \$30. For more info, go to www.stcath.org or call: 203.637.3661.

SIGHT AND SOUND THEATER in Lancaster, PA, will present "Jesus," the musical stage adventure about the most famous person ever to walk the earth, on Tues.-Wed., **March 20-21, 2018**. Chartered bus leaves Christ the King Parish, Trumbull, at 7 am on the **March 20**. The trip is 2 days/1 night and includes round trip motor coach, overnight stay, tickets, breakfast and dinner. Cost: \$305. For more info and for reservations, contact Fr. Marcel: 203.434.7208 or marcelsaintjean@gmail.com. ■

Speaking to Sparrows

TRIUMBULL—Join us on Wednesday, January 10, or Thursday, January 18 at 7 pm at St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Trumbull, for a free screening of the documentary film *Speaking to Sparrows*.

The Marian Community of Reconciliation and the Leadership Institute are co-sponsoring the two screenings. The evening will include screening the film followed by refreshments and small-group, age-appropriate discussion.

Speaking to Sparrows is a documentary film about women finding courage to confront the uncomfortable. The film brings to light the issues facing women in today's world and creates space for the difficult conversations.

The film serves to invite each woman to see themselves as beloved daughters of God. It is incredibly powerful for women to know that they are not alone and that their worth is determined by much more than the size of their waist or their relationship status.

Speaking to Sparrows fearlessly confronts issues such as body image, the pressure to be perfect and successful, dating, isolation, father wounds, abuse, eating disorders, lust and pornography.

Speaking to Sparrows is a film that can be used as a launchpad for authentic conversation in homes, small groups and schools. Further, the film provides this healing space for women across all generations. Regardless of age, women struggle with the same issues and will benefit from *Speaking to Sparrows* whether they are 16 or 60.

The event is free, but a free will offering is requested.

(The film is appropriate for ages 16+. For more info, visit the film's website: speakingtosparrows.com/about.) ■

ST. MATTHEW DRIVES TO TEXAS FROM PAGE 3

"When this appened, he was reaching out to see how we could help. He asked us about reconstructing homes, and I felt compelled to go. FEMA was overwhelmed. They needed us." At 64 years old, Weeks said it's been a while since he restored an entire house, but he was up to the challenge.

"We got to Texas, went to the parish and met the team," Weeks recalled. "They explained what needed to be done." The next day, they rose at 5 am to begin the reconstruction and drove to the first of three houses that had sustained four feet of flooding and needed extensive repairs.

"Everybody wanted to do as much as they could," he said. "One woman was wearing a boot because she had injured her leg, but that didn't stop her from kneeling on the pile of sheet rock and cutting piece after piece so we could nail them up."

"Even though this family had no money, they spent the entire day cooking for us and served us dinner," he said. "They were so proud to do that. It was a humbling experience because they had lost everything."

The parish honored the

volunteers at Mass, and they received rosaries and pecans from the family's trees.

"At work, I talked with people from different faiths, and everybody said Harvey was terrible, but nobody was doing anything," Weeks said. "I credit Msgr. Walter with taking the initiative. He was driven to do this and I wanted to be part of it because as Christians we're called to help other human beings."

In the aftermath of Harvey, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish reached out to the wider community and led the relief effort in the county through donations from Connecticut and elsewhere, Father Flores said.

"We had a full medical clinic that treated 1,000 people of every faith with emergency room doctors and nurses and a pharmacy," he said. "We made their services available to everybody. We also gave out food, medical supplies and cleaning supplies. I told the parish that if people are generous to us, we have to be generous to others. There is no distinction here. We are all one people."

Father Flores said the two storms were extreme hardships for the parish, which has 3,000 families, 60 percent of whom are immigrants. Just as they were rebuilding, they

lost everything again.

"I went to visit families the second time and as they told me their stories, they asked, 'How could this happen twice?'" he recalled. "Many were depressed and hurt and struggling to understand."

The priest, who has been pastor for 12 years and rebuilt the church barely over two years ago, has a special devotion to Our Lady. He told the parish, "We have to look at our pain through Mary's eyes."

The church has a beautiful statue of Our Lady of Sorrows and part of a prayer to her contains the words, "Mary, give us your eyes so that we can see beyond our suffering and pain to the glory of Christ's Resurrection." He told them that's what they had to do.

In their suffering, God provided hope, he said.

"The generosity of Msgr. Walter, St. Matthew's and the business people of Connecticut really gave us a lot of hope because we realized there are people who care and know what the Gospel is all about. I couldn't believe they drove all the way from Connecticut to help us. I thank them all and I am humbled by their generosity." ■



Merry Christmas

As we celebrate the many blessings in our lives, St. Vincent's extends our best wishes to you and your family for a joyous Christmas season and a New Year filled with peace, prosperity and good health.

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ASCENSION



The Knights of Columbus

Christmas around the World

NEW HAVEN—The Knights of Columbus Museum opened its 13th annual Christmas exhibition on November 18 with more than 65 Nativity scenes on display. Peace on Earth: Crèches of the World continues through February 19, 2018.

St. Francis of Assisi, in the 13th century, popularized the representation of Jesus' birth at Bethlehem, and for centuries artists have depicted the biblical account of that event in various forms. The crèche or Nativity scene, far more than a decoration, is one of many visual representations of this historic event.

The museum has featured crèche displays yearly, centered on the artistic expression of particular countries or regions of the globe. Each show celebrates the diversity of culture and the history of Christianity in an area of the world.

This year's exhibition features crèches from across the map. Items on display are from the museum's own collection, including its popular 120-square-foot Neapolitan diorama, along with recent acquisitions of Polish

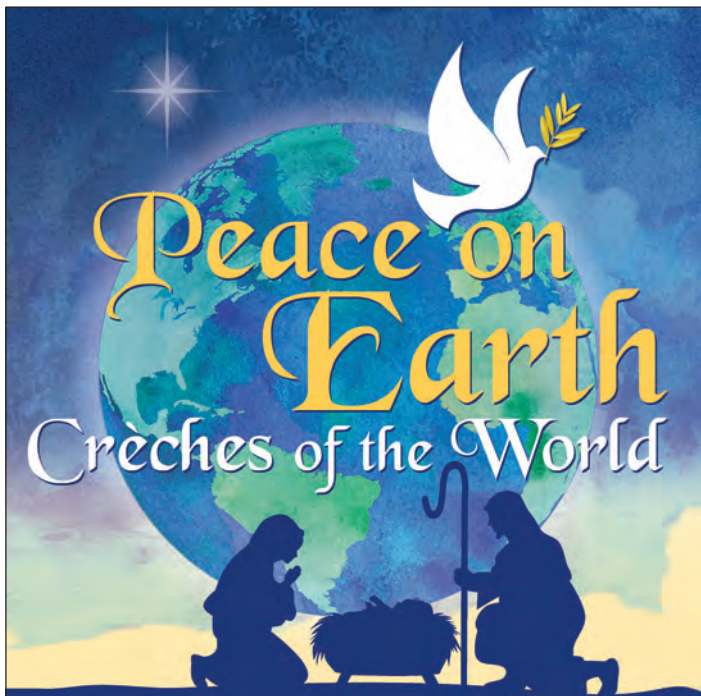
popular display of two dozen Christmas trees showcases the imagination and talent of Connecticut Catholic elementary schoolchildren, who create handmade ornaments and trim in their classrooms then travel

to the museum to tour the Christmas exhibition and decorate the trees. The festival opened Saturday, December 2. The event included children's crafts and live music by the Yuletide Carolers. The show continues through January 28, 2018, and visitors are invited to vote for the "People's Choice" Christmas tree.

A Christmas-time Family Day takes place December 31 from noon to 3 pm, with crafts and live music from Joyful Noise.

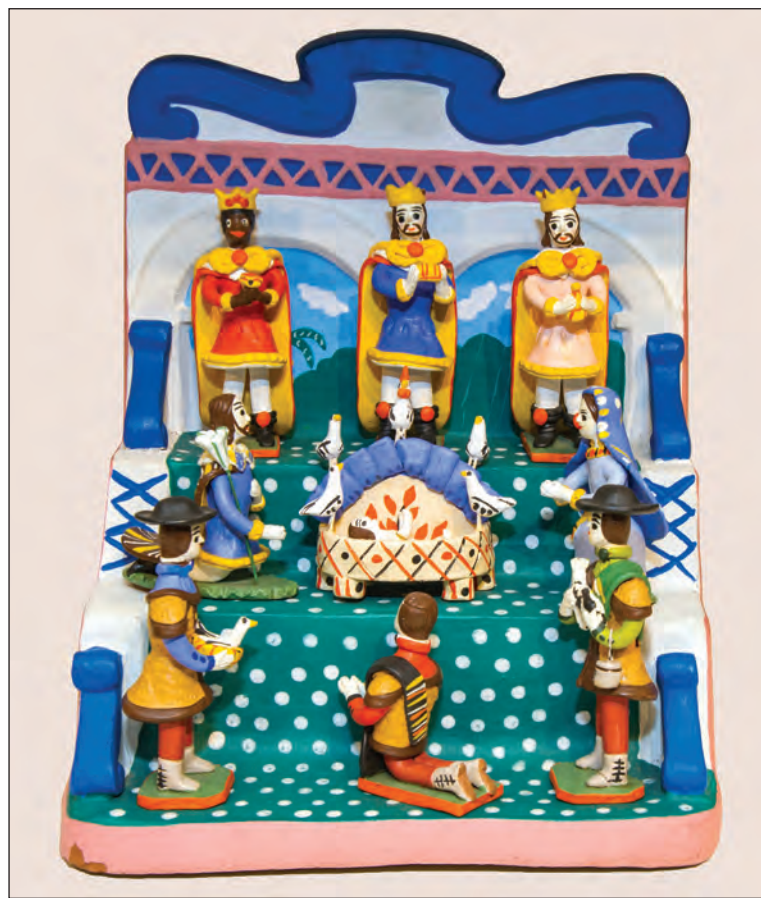
The museum's popular historical exhibition, World War I: Beyond the Front Lines, is also on view throughout the Christmas season. The show commemorates the 100th anniversary of America's entrance into the "Great War."

(*The Knights of Columbus Museum, 1 State St., New Haven, is open 10 am-5 pm daily with free admission and parking. More information is available at 203.865.0400 or kofcmuseum.org.*)



szopki, stone sculptures from Zimbabwe, and Hummel figurines. Also included are crèches on loan from the Glencairn Museum in Bryn Athyn, Pa.; the International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, Ohio; the Loyola University Museum of Art in Chicago; and St. Joseph Oratory on Mount Royal in Montreal, Canada.

Also a part of the museum's Christmas tradition is its annual Christmas Tree Festival. This



Youth Choir Christmas Concert

Arise and Shine!

BRIDGEPORT—The Diocesan Youth Choir Christmas Concert will be held at the Regina A. Quick Center for the Arts of Fairfield University on Sunday, December 17, at 7 pm.

This will be the third Christmas Concert for the youth choir formed by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano. It has become one of the most joyous and inspiring events of the year in the diocese. The 100-member youth choir, under the direction of Mary Bozzuti Higgins of Wilton, will

perform a challenging program of Christmas songs and chants from different ages and cultures.

The evening will include some Christmas Concert favorites including "Arise and Shine," "Gaudete," "Festival Sanctus" and "Siyahamba!" The choir will also introduce some new music and surprises including "Let There Be Peace on Earth" and "Calypso Lullabye" featuring soloist Gospel singer Adrienne Reedy.

Supporting the choir will be accompanist Clay Zambo;

flute, Dr. Jessica Raposo; oboe, Dr. Ralph Kirmser; trumpet, Nicholas Loafman; and percussion, Don O'Keefe

This year Scripture readings in between songs will be done in Vietnamese, Ukrainian and Spanish. The Diocesan Youth Choir recently recorded a Christmas Special for Shalom World Catholic Channel, to be aired Christmastime.

(Tickets are \$20. Order tickets online at quickcenter.fairfield.edu or call the box office: 203.254.4010.)



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Father Philip G. Bochanski, *In Residence*
Deacon Patrick Toole, *Parish Deacon*

CHRISTMAS 2017 MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas Eve: Sunday, December 24

4:00 pm in the McClinch Family Center
Prelude music begins at 3:45 pm

6:00 pm in the Church, especially for families with younger children
The Parish Children's Choir will sing
Prelude music begins at 5:45 pm

12:00 Midnight The Midnight Mass of Christmas
Prelude music by the Parish Choir, soloists and instrumentalists begins at 11:30 pm

Christmas Day: Monday, December 25

8:00 am, 10:00 am & 12:00 noon

Festive Mass with Choir and Instrumentalists at 10am

The Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God
Monday, January 1, 2018 (New Year's Day)

New Year's Day: 10:30 am

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Advent/Christmas

A Christmas Revelation

By JOHN J. FLYNN

Forty-five years ago my only son, John, was eight years old and he wanted to be a Cub Scout. "All my friends are Cub Scouts, I want to be one too" he said.

So I took him to the Cub Scout meeting at the public school in Pound Ridge, N.Y., where we lived at the time, and I spoke to one of the den mothers.

She replied, "Of course your son is welcome. But Mr. Flynn, you must realize we can't run this program without the parents' participation. We need a Cub Master."

I knew nothing about scouting and didn't know if I could be a Cub Master. She assured me that there were no other obligations.

A week later, she called to ask me if I had a Santa Claus suit!

She continued, "The Cub Master is always the Santa at our holiday party."

After recovering from the shock, I agreed and purchased a Santa Claus outfit. The night of the holiday party I was ensconced in a velvet chair behind the curtain on the stage of the public school auditorium.

The children sang "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," "Frosty the Snowman" and several other holiday songs that every eight-year-old knows until finally the curtain opened and the first group of five children filed up to the stage to receive a gift from the grab-bag barrel.

Cub dens have a maximum of five children, as they have found that six is critical mass. There were eleven dens present that night, and they proceeded to

storm the stage. Immediately one of them took my hat and passed it around as they circled me. I attempted to retrieve my hat as they overturned the gift barrel and grabbed at my beard, hat and coat. I was helpless to defend myself as fifty-five boys circled me like wild Indians. They yelled, "You're not Santa Claus, you're Mr. Flynn! You're a phony!"

I was holding my hair and beard on as they plucked at it, and looking out into the audience for assistance, I was astonished to find the entire audience of some 250 family members in hysterics, literally rolling on the floor with laughter as they watched their darling children terrorizing Santa Claus.

Finally, the den mothers retrieved their charges, and I was

➤ *CONTINUED ON PAGE 25*



SYMBOLIC DRESS—For John Flynn, putting on the garb of Santa Claus is a way of putting on the crucified Christ. This interior awareness produces astonishing results.



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CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE

SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION:

Thursday, December 21: 11:30am-12:00noon
Friday, December 22: 11:30am-12:00noon
Saturday, December 23: 3:00-4:30pm

CHRISTMAS EVE MASSES:

11:00pm Rosary by the Crèche
11:30pm Christmas Carols
12:00noon Solemn Midnight Mass

CHRISTMAS DAY MASSES:

Monday, December 25: 8:00am,

9:30am (Solemn Mass), 11:30am (Sung Mass),
1:15pm (Sung Mass in Spanish)

SOLEMNITY OF MARY/ OCTAVE DAY OF CHRISTMAS MASSES:

Monday, January 1:
10:00am Sung Mass
(Missa Cantata)



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Thursday 2:45-3:45pm | Closed Friday and holidays

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St. Theresa Parish, Trumbull

Simple gifts bring joy overseas

By PAT HENNESSY

"Every kid is familiar with getting Christmas presents," said Karen Lannigan, director of Confirmation preparation at St. Theresa Parish in Trumbull. "Once you suggest it to them, what kid isn't going to want to pack a toy for another kid?"

Sharing the Christmas joy, youngsters in the Confirmation program at St. Theresa's, grades seven through nine, have joined with Cross Catholic Outreach in the Box of Joy project to pack boxes of gifts for youngsters overseas.

"Part of the faith formation process is to perform the Corporal Works of Mercy, which are essential to the Catholic faith," says Father Brian Gannon, St. Theresa's pastor. "We are people who are seeking intimacy

with Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish, we use our personal gifts and graces to bring his presence into the world."

Through Box of Joy, the Confirmation students have the opportunity to spread the joy of Christ's coming to children who rarely have much to celebrate. Cross Catholic works globally to increase the self-sufficiency of the poor. The ministry provides food, shelter, medical care, water and other essential needs to the poorest of the poor in dioceses around the world in the name of Christ.

While they provide humanitarian aid to the communities they serve, Cross Catholic is aware of the emotional wants of children in these communities. Through this program, groups here can deliver a Box of Joy to a child overseas who would otherwise

receive nothing this Christmas.

Lannigan had learned about the Box of Joy project through Rose Talbot-Babey, diocesan coordinator of Faith Formation, and Jessica Nayden, director of the Catholic Service Corps. "We wanted to get the kids starting to think outside themselves," said Lannigan. "This way, they're giving a kid hope where before they had none. They are the arms and hands of Jesus in the world."

For the Box of Joy project, the St. Theresa kids chose a child to buy gifts for, picking a girl or boy from toddlers to young teens. For many of them, it was eye-opening to discover what a child in a poor area thought of as a wonderful gift. "It's toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoo, socks—things we take for granted here," said Lannigan. "Of course, our kids bought and put in a few toys, too,



because they like to get toys themselves."

"Our trip to Target to fill just this one box was so meaningful," said Kelly Csizmadia, whose son Colin took part in the project. "I watched my son anticipate what a boy aged 5-9 might NEED, and then also watched him excitedly choose items that same boy might WANT. From soap, toothpaste, and a Spiderman toothbrush, to Matchbox cars, rubber dinosaurs, lollipops, a coloring book and crayons, this was more than a service project."

"Putting this together makes me so grateful for all I have. God gave us his son at Christmas, so this is our chance to give to others," said eighth-grade Confirmation candidate Abigail Clark. "It's really fun to imagine this little girl's reaction when she sees what's inside!"

Several of the St. Theresa youngsters chose to fill more than one box. In all, the parish youth sent 173 boxes to Cross Catholic.

"Some of the kids asked us, 'This will help them for a little while, but what happens when the toothpaste and soap run



NECESSITIES AND TOYS selected with love—Abigail Clark and Colin Csizmadia carefully pack their Box of Joy presents for youngsters overseas. The project encourages students in the St. Theresa, Trumbull, Confirmation program to become the caring hands of Christ in the world.

out? What do they do then?" Lannigan said.

She explained to them that, of the \$9 per box that is sent along, Cross Catholic reserves \$2 for local development projects. From the St. Theresa youth alone, the project has added \$346 to support long-term needs in this community.

"Each one of our kids has made a child happy on Christmas day, and each one of them has helped that community grow stronger. At a young age, they have already made a difference. They can tell the world, 'We did this!' That's pretty cool!"

CHRISTMAS

Parish Guide

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 December 25th, Christmas Day: **8 am, 9:30 am** in Italian, **11 am**

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Masses: Mon-Sat **8:15am**, Sat Vigil **4pm**, Sunday **8, 9:30** (Italian), **11am**
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Advent/Christmas

Knights support St. Catherine Academy

FAIRFIELD—The Knights of Columbus St. Pius X Council #16347 in Fairfield recently presented a large check to Helen Burland, executive director of the St. Catherine Academy, a diocesan school for special needs children. Since its opening in 1999, St. Catherine Academy has served students of all faiths who are impacted with autism, as well as intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Through a well-rounded pro-



gram that combines academics with vocational training and social and independent living skills, St. Catherine Academy continues its mission of helping each student

achieve their highest level of independence.

In support of St. Catherine's dedication to their students, the St. Pius X Knights of Columbus Council #16347 held a Tootsie Roll/Candy fundraising drive in which \$962 in donations were received. The check presented by the Knights represents the funds raised at the drive, which was held at the annual St Pius X Parish Festival.

(l-r) Thomas Kelty, Sr.; Charles Chiusano, who also serves as chair of the academy's Board of Directors; Helen Burland; Ralph Burke, Council Grand Knight; and Art Wolf. The men are wearing the apron worn when conducting the drive and awarding tootsie rolls to donors.

Trinity Catholic fights hunger

STAMFORD—Bags of donated food lined the gym as the annual food drive run by the Trinity Catholic High School Student Council exceeded their goals again this year. Non-perishable goods were collected over two weeks and were combined with turkeys collected on November 21.

The entire donation was blessed at the annual Thanksgiving Mass and then donated to the Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County, which provides food to over 100 non-profit agencies and programs in Stamford, Norwalk, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan and Wilton.

Goals for each grade level were set and exceeded. Freshman goal: 810 lbs., donated 820 lbs.; Sophomore goal: 910 lbs., donated 1,030 lbs.; Junior goal: 1,060 lbs., donated 2,032 lbs. and Senior goal: 820 lbs., donated 1,411 lbs.

A grand total of 5,293 lbs. of food were loaded on to the Food Bank's truck for distribution to various agencies.



A CHRISTMAS REVELATION FROM PAGE 23

allowed to escape out the back door of the stage.

Sitting in my car I said to myself, "I am never doing this again. I HAVE NEVER BEEN SO HUMILIATED."

A voice within the car said to me, "YES YOU WILL, BECAUSE IT PLEASES ME".

I was stunned out of my mind.

The voice continued, "You sat there in your red suit while I was covered in my own blood. They said you're not Santa Claus—and you are not Santa Claus. But I AM who I said I AM. They took your hat and taunted you with it. They took all my clothes. They didn't want your grab-bag gifts, and they didn't want my gifts either. I wanted to grant them eternal life.

"They pulled your beard and it snapped back on its rubber band. Mine came out by the roots.

"You will be Santa Claus again because it pleases me. Don't you know you have been given a grace? You have been allowed to experience a small

portion of my humiliation."

I was breathless, in shock. It was a long time before I could calm down enough to drive home. On the way I kept thinking, Was that a prediction? Or was that a command? I assumed it was a command.

For forty-five years since, I have been Santa Claus. Not at Cub Scout meetings, but on the streets of Manhattan, visiting my clients during the holiday season.

Last year, as I was taking the Santa suit out of the closet, I heard the voice again. "Put on the Crucified Christ!"

I thought to myself, what a knucklehead I had been all these years. The suit had a symbolic meaning: red for the blood of Christ, a hat instead of a crown of thorns and various other comparisons. So when I put on the suit, I was mindful of what it meant. I put on the crucified Christ.

The results were astonishing. Miraculous.

When I got out of my car on Fifth Avenue, the traffic came to

an abrupt halt as people left their vehicles to have their pictures taken with Santa. The traffic backed up for several blocks. The commotion caused people within the building to come down to the lobby; word had gotten out that Santa was in the neighborhood.

When I got to visit my friend, the superintendent of the building, he was in tears. He said to me, "How can I thank you, John? Last night I had a crisis of faith, and I told God that I didn't believe in him anymore. He had never done anything for me. And then you showed up. I'll never forget this."

Astonishing. Miraculous. I am looking forward to the coming season with anticipation and some trepidation, but I will go again, as long as it pleases him. God knows what will happen.

(John J. Flynn Consulting Engineers, LLC, is a structural engineering company specializing in the maintenance and repair of high-rise buildings in Manhattan. Flynn is a member of St. John Parish in Darien.)

CHRISTMAS Parish Guide

St. James Church

2110 Main Street, Stratford, Connecticut – 203-375-5887
www.stjamesstratford.com – Rev. Thomas F. Lynch,

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Saturday, December 23 – Vigil Mass: 4:30pm

Sunday, December 24 – 7:30am, 9:15am, and 11:15am

CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

Sunday, December 24 – Vigil Masses: 4:00pm and 6:00pm

A Mass in celebration of the Lord's birth at 11:00pm

Monday, December 25 – 8:30am and 10:30am

Make a promise to your God today by making a greater commitment in 2018 to open your heart to experience God's intimate love by your consistent participation in Sunday Eucharist.

SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Sunday, December 31, Vigil Mass: 6:00pm

Holy Day Masses – Monday, January 1, 2018, 8:30am

and 10:30am – Pray a rosary on this Holy Day for greater peace in this world.

SAINT JAMES NEW YEAR'S DAY OF PRAYER

Monday, January 1, 2018

1:00-3:00pm Eucharistic Adoration in the Parish Center Chapel

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

God's Holy Word Among Us - An opportunity to come forward, reverence the Gospel book, and make or renew your commitment to love and pray with God's Holy Word in the Scripture.

Saturday, January 6 – Vigil Mass: 4:30pm

Sunday, January 7 – 7:30am, 9:15am, 11:15am, and 6:00pm

REMEMBRANCE FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE DIED

Saturday, January 13 – Vigil Mass: 4:30pm

Sunday, January 14 – 7:30am, 9:15am, 11:15am, and 6:00pm

All Masses will be dedicated to those children who have gone before us in faith. All parents are encouraged to attend and light a special candle.



Advent/Christmas

Seminarians give voice to spirit of Advent

NORWALK—Two concerts celebrated the beginning of the Advent observance throughout the diocese.

The seminarians of St. Joseph Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., presented a beautiful program of Advent and Christmas music on December 2 at the Basilica of St. John the Evangelist in Stamford, while diocesan seminarians of St. John Fisher Seminary in Stamford presented Advent Lessons & Carols in a concert at St. Mary Parish in Norwalk.

Hundreds turned out for the prayer, readings and musical programs to reflect the spirit of waiting and preparation that characterizes the Advent season. Diocesan seminarians sang in both concerts because many moved on to major seminary at St. Joseph in Yonkers after com-



pleting studies and discernment at St. John Fisher in Stamford.

Bishop Frank J. Caggiano set the tone for the beginning of Advent in the diocese with this

Facebook reflection on the meaning of Advent:

"We begin a new year of grace with the start of the Advent season. Given the fact that



Christmas will be celebrated on a Monday, this year's celebration of Advent will only be 21 days long—the shortest length possible. For this reason, we must attend to its spiritual meaning and challenge in an intentional way to avoid the rush of Christmas from distracting us and losing the benefits that this great season can give us.

"The heart of Advent is a

need for every Christian to seek a true spirit of perseverance in doing the Lord's work. There are so many challenges in life that can easily distract us from doing what we know is necessary to bear witness to Christ. Perseverance is a gift that allows us to remain faithful, even in the most challenging of times.

"Perhaps we can learn much from St. Augustine, who coun-



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CHRISTMAS 2017 Sacrament of Penance

Thursday, December 21
7:00-8:30pm

Friday, December 22
7:30-8:00am, 4:00-5:15pm; 7:00-8:00pm

Saturday, December 23
3:00-4:15pm

Masses Christmas Vigil

Sunday, December 24
4:00pm, 6:00pm and 12:00 midnight
*Christmas Concert at 11:30pm
before Christmas Eve Mass*

Christmas Day

Monday, December 25
7:30am, 10:00am and 12:00 noon

New Year's

Solemnity of Mary, The Holy Mother of God

Monday, January 1
8:00am and 12:00 noon



celebration of the three comings of Christ into our lives. The central spiritual focus is the need to spiritually prepare for the feast of Christmas that commemorates the birth of the Lord as Savior and Redeemer. Equally important is the need to ready our lives for the Second Coming of the Lord, when Christ will return in glory and power to judge all creation at the end of time. Finally, each day we celebrate the coming of Christ in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the gift of the Eucharist.

"As we pause to reflect upon this past year of grace and prepare ourselves to start the season of Advent, I am struck by the

seled the faithful to persevere in their own time. He uses the image of 'singing' to encourage them, and us, to keep on moving forward. St. Augustine wrote: 'So, then, my brothers, let us sing now, not in order to enjoy a life of leisure, but in order to lighten our labors. You should sing as wayfarers do—sing but continue your journey. Do not be lazy but sing to make your journey more enjoyable. Sing, but keep going. What do I mean by keep going? Keep on making progress... your progress is in virtue, true faith and right living.'

"My Advent resolution is to learn how to sing better each day!"

Advent/Christmas

Bishop blesses Food Pantry

NEWTOWN— Just before Thanksgiving, Bishop Frank J. Caggiano paid a visit to St. Rose of Lima Parish and school to offer his thanks to students and to the parish for housing the new FAITH Food Pantry for the area.

The bishop's day started with a visit to St. Rose School. His visit centered on the celebration of Mass, where he spoke to the children about the importance of gratitude and service and talked to them about the first Thanksgiving.

The bishop told the children that the historic moment of the first Thanksgiving teaches us "to be mindful that everything we have is a gift from God, that it is important to come together to share our gifts, and that meal times are sacred moments of giv-

ing thanks.

"Most importantly, it is the meal we share at the Eucharistic table, the presence of Jesus in his body and blood, soul and divinity, that gives us our greatest hope," the bishop said.

At the conclusion of Mass, Sister Colleen Smith, ASCJ, principal, shared with the bishop the various service projects the students of St. Rose will be doing throughout the year, including visiting nursing homes and bringing homemade lap blankets, collecting for Morning Glory breakfast program for the poor in Danbury and making sandwiches for the homeless.

After Mass, Bishop Caggiano and Dr. Steven Cheeseman, superintendent of schools, visited several classes. The children

were excited to share about all the blessings for which they are grateful.

Bishop Caggiano's visit to St. Rose then took him to the site of the groundbreaking for the new FAITH Food Pantry. On this very cold day, some of the older



students joined him for the outdoor dedication of the new food pantry now under construction on the parish grounds.

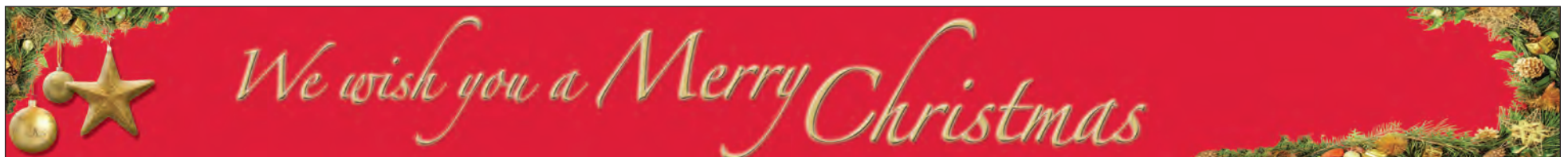
"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. We are God's co workers," the bishop said in his blessing, giving thanks for the generosity of parishioners at St. Rose.

The pantry, founded in 1984, was housed at St. John Episcopal Church until the church closed its doors last year. The new building is scheduled to

open in the spring of 2018.

Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose, said that he was proud of his parishioners for stepping forward and agreeing to provide a new home to the pantry, which feeds many needy families in the greater Newtown area.

"This parish has a very strong social conscience," Msgr. Weiss told those on hand for the blessing. "This is consistent with our mission as a parish and with the recently completed Year of Mercy." ■



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Advent/Christmas

Surprised by an Angel

By AL DiGUIDO

It was late afternoon on Thanksgiving Saturday, just before the sun was to set on a more than hectic day. I didn't notice her at first, a middle aged black woman carrying four bags bursting through their Rite Aid plastic.

The toy collection box in the front of the shop on 28 Reef Road had barely filled. Quietly amid the flow of ice cream customers, she came from the back and slowly placed four toys in the box.

"Thank you," I say, and she smiles gently, leaving the rear entrance and then making a return trip with several more dolls and toys—each making their way ever so reverently to the box up front.

Each trip, another gentle smile....

"Thank you so much for your care and love," I say. Then she surprises me with her response, "God told me to come here," the words so strong and with great purpose. "God," she said, "TOLD me to come to this store with these toys!"

What will you do with these toys? she asks. I speak of the children in our care battling cancer, rare blood diseases and severe financial hardships. She smiles once again... "NOW I understand." she says. "NOW I know why God told me to come to this place.

Finding myself speechless, I thank her again. Is there anything I can do for you?" I say. That gentle smile returns, "Oh, no. I

am fine."

She stands over the box and begins unpacking several teddy bears, showing them to me. She says the children will love these. I nod saying, "You have no idea."

Before our encounter, I had never met this woman. I move towards her and say, "My dear, I must ask, what is your name?"

She smiles and reaches out her frail hand and says, "My name is Alexandra." Struck with emotion suddenly I say, "My, my, mine... is Alexander."

Alexandra says that she lives in the area and walks by our store on Reef Road all the time. "You have never come into our store before today?" I ask.

She leaves me saying, "I don't



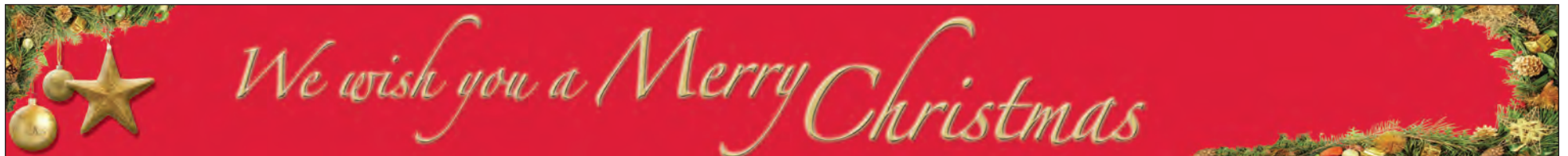
AL DiGUIDO OF WESTPORT, founder of Al's Angels, in front of Saugatuck Sweets in downtown Fairfield.


know why I haven't been here before. All I know is that God told me to come here today with these gifts for children. It seemed pretty important to him. I am just trying to do his will."

She was gone an instant later. There are angels among us... all trying to do God's will. Most times, we don't see them or know them. We are surrounded by

them. On Saturday, I met one. Her name is Alexandra.

(Al DiGuido, founder of Al's Angels and owner of Saugatuck Sweets, felt impelled to recount this emotional encounter over Thanksgiving weekend. Children suffering from cancer and other life-threatening illnesses enjoy the toys from this and other collection points and delivered by Al's Angels.)






JOYFUL

Good news from heaven the angels bring, glad tidings to the earth they sing; to us this day a child is given, to crown us with the joy of heaven.

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Thomas Merton Center

Micalizzi's puts the 'icing' on charitable giving

BRIDGEPORT—Jay Piccirillo was born and raised in Bridgeport. His father Andy ran Micalizzi's Italian Ice on Madison Avenue until he died at the early age of 38. The business was then taken over by Jay's mother, Lucille, who had to learn everything on the spot.

This year, Micalizzi's celebrated its 40th Anniversary in the heart of Bridgeport with Jay running the show.

He is focused on broadening the company brand via social media and branching out through local area restaurants, but his heart remains in Bridgeport.

An example of this could be seen the Saturday following Thanksgiving when Micalizzi's



CHRISTMAS GIVING—Jay Piccirillo (center) owner of Micalizzi's Italian Ice in Bridgeport, is thanked by Merton Center director Brian Jenkins and office manager Sabine Kuczo on a recent visit to the center, where he donated non-perishable food items collected at a charitable event he sponsors.

hosted their annual Christmas party in their parking lot right on Madison Avenue. Jay himself played Santa, handing out gifts to every child that visited. Christmas movies and music played in the background as guests enjoyed complimentary donuts and hot cocoa. Characters like Olaf and Mickey Mouse wandered around greeting the kids and taking pictures.

The event was also an opportunity to give back to the community where they are located. Since he was a young boy and a student at the former St. Patrick School, Jay remembers volunteering at the Thomas Merton Center. This is why he decided to ask everyone who attended the event to bring a non-perishable

food item to be donated to the Thomas Merton Center's food pantry. Jay himself then delivered the donation to Brian Jenkins and Sabine Kuczo at the Thomas Merton Center which is located on Madison Avenue just down the street from Micalizzi's.

According to Jay, "The Thomas Merton Center is a vital part of Bridgeport and helps those who need it the most." Jay and Sabine are old friends, as Sabine is a "long time customer" of Micalizzi's. But Jay and Brian met for the very first time, a relationship between the local business owner and soup kitchen director that they both hope will continue into the future to benefit the people of downtown Bridgeport.

We wish you a Merry Christmas

Wishing you all a Blessed Christmas

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St. Andrew Parish

Presepio gives life to the birth of the Lord

By PAT HENNESSY

The pot steams. The fire flickers. Birds chirp in the trees, a steady stream of water powers the mill, a forester trims his tree and a woman sets out fresh baked rolls as children watch with hungry eyes. This is a classic Italian presepio, an elaborate nativity scene, brought to life at St. Andrew Church by Msgr. Matthew Bernelli.

"I grew up with these all around me when I was a kid, at home and in the church," explained Msgr. Bernelli, who

the shepherds and kings, sheep, cows, donkeys, camels and other figurines that surround the stable. The wise men and their camels are described in the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 2:1-11).

The presepio goes far beyond that, portraying the everyday village life that continues, unaware and indifferent to the miracle in their midst. The genius of a presepio is in the attention given to the ordinary people whose lives and occupations would surround Jesus as he grew up.

Msgr. Bernelli constructs his presepio so that the centerpiece



the parish garage. A trip to woodlands near Guilford yielded enough moss to conceal the structure—no artificial turf here. He spent most of the first week in Advent arranging the scene, which was unveiled to parishioners on December 8, the feast of

the Immaculate Conception.

Once it was completed, Msgr. Bernelli began taking the students at St. Andrew School, one class at a time, to explore the detailed scenes while he explained the importance and meaning of the presepio.

"Most of them have something similar at home," he observed. "I want them to understand that the meaning of Christmas is here—in the birth of Jesus. Our life goes on, just like the life on display here, but Jesus has come into our world. That's what we celebrate." ■



was born in northern Italy. "I started collecting figurines when I was in the seminary in Mexico City. Little by little you learn how to put them together, and it changes every year."

St. Francis of Assisi is credited with creating the first live nativity scene in 1223 in order to bring home to parishioners the reality of the birth of Jesus. He was inspired by his own recent visit to the Holy Land, where he had been shown Jesus' traditional birthplace. Within a hundred years every church in Italy was expected to have a nativity scene at Christmastime. The popularity of nativity scenes has spread throughout the world, though few are as elaborate, or as well known, as the Italian presepio.

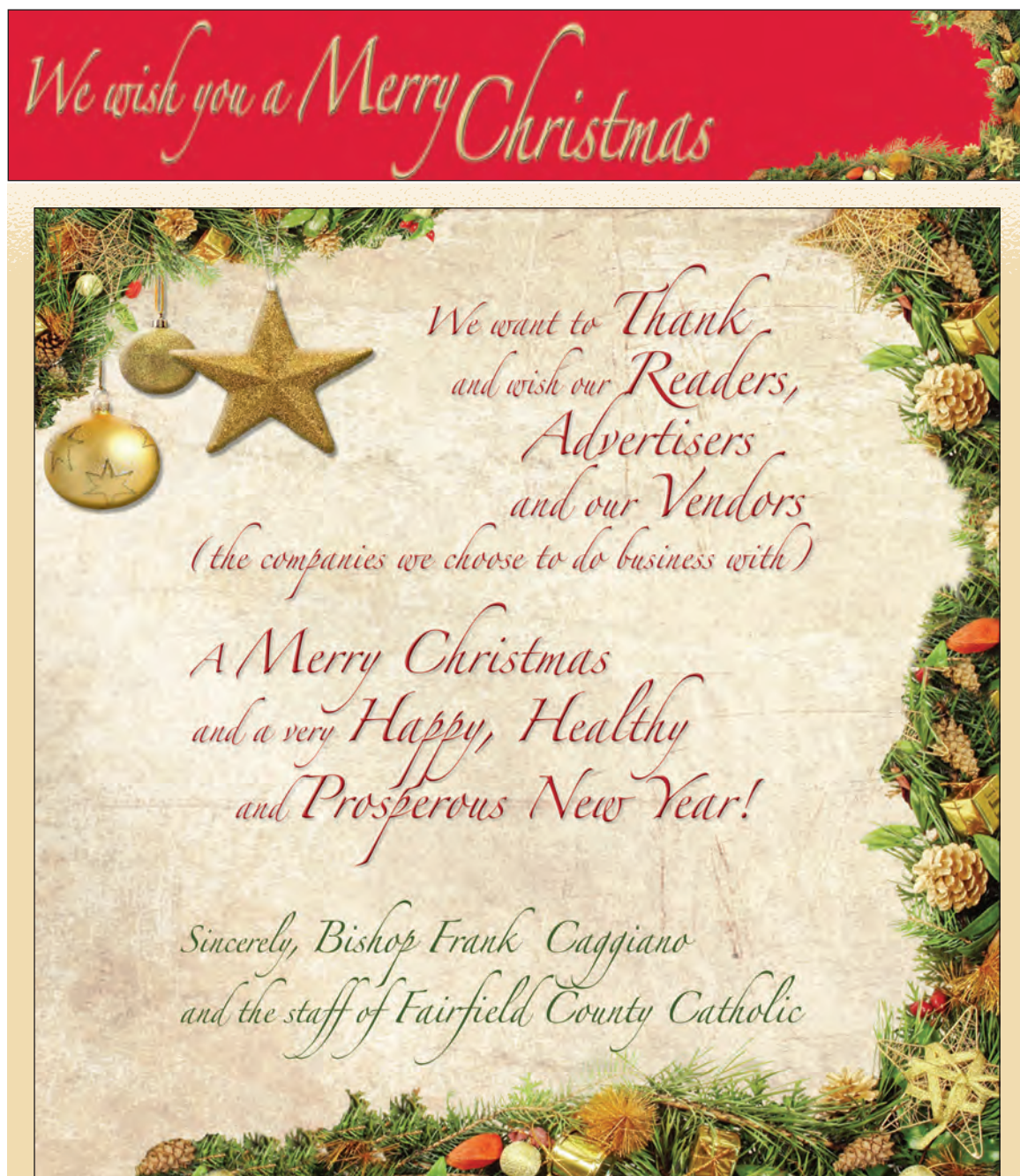
Nativity scenes, or crèches, in the United States will usually have a stable with a manger (a feeding trough for cattle filled with straw) where the homeless couple placed their newborn baby (Luke 2:1-20). Mary and Joseph kneel by the baby Jesus. Children, in particular, love

of the busy day is the stable with the Holy Family. In the scene at St. Andrew's, these figurines are larger than the rest and placed toward the front, a warm light emphasizing their importance.

Msgr. Bernelli has been making versions of this elaborate nativity scene throughout the 53 years of his priesthood. He served as parochial vicar at St. Raphael Parish in Bridgeport, St. Joseph Parish in South Norwalk, and St. Ambrose Parish in Bridgeport. He became pastor of St. Mary Parish in Bridgeport in 1980, retiring after 36 years.

Every place he went, he built a presepio, making it more or less elaborate as space allowed. "St. Andrew's pastor, Father Gene Szantyr, had seen it at St. Mary's and asked if I would set one up here this Christmas," he said. "In front of the altar, the way it is here, is the best place. People can smell the moss and hear the water flowing."

To fit the elaborate scene into the space in front of the altar, Msgr. Bernelli spent a month forming the main platform in



Advent/Christmas

'Harvest Table' feeds the poor

By BRIAN D. WALLACE

STAMFORD—What a spectacular Harvest Table! The seventh annual Harvest Table fundraiser, held November 12 at the Hyatt Regency Greenwich, raised more than \$110,000 for New Covenant Center, one of the largest soup kitchens in the state.

"The event was a record-breaking financial success, and topped last year's attendance with over 300 supporters," said John Gutman, executive director. Harvest Table featured a silent auction offering 100 items, delicious varieties of hors d'oeuvres from their Marketplace vendors, and guest speaker Cecily Gans, who spoke about "Fighting Food Insecurity One Bite at a Time."

Gutman said the funds will be used to support NCC programs and operations throughout the year.

"Our largest expenditures are on nutritious fresh and frozen food. Our food pantry monthly shoppers have increased from 400 to 1,200 in the two and a half years in our new facility, while we are maintaining our goal of giving each individual 10 days of groceries each month," Gutman said.

"With thousands more people in our Stamford area and surrounding communities not receiving enough food each month, we have to purchase more refrigeration and freezer units, as well as renting off-site, climatized storage units to house the free and reduced donations we receive from various food banks and food

purveyors," he said.

Al Barber, chief executive officer of Catholic Charities, which sponsors New Covenant Center, said that all those who participated in the Harvest Table event have made it possible to reach out to the working poor, homeless and elderly throughout the year.

"We're very grateful for the enthusiastic and sacrificial support of so many board members, donors and volunteers. Their commitment is a particularly strong statement during the Thanksgiving holiday," Barber said.

The event was made possible through the generous support of sponsors: Mike & Diane Boyd, Bruce & Linda Koe, XL Catlin, Nils & Christine Dahl, Greg



HARVESTING FOR THE POOR—More than 300 friends of New Covenant Center in Stamford turned out for the recent Harvest Table social event that raised over \$110,000 for NCC, one of the state's largest soup kitchens.

& Sarita Hanley, Ed & Gina Kearns, Terry & Leslie Laughren, Laure Aubuchon, Clive Correia, Darien Rowayton Bank, Hyatt Regency Greenwich, Odell Mays, Narragansett Brewing Company, Pottery Barn, Holly & Dwayne Richardson, Peter & Barbara Ripp, RMS Companies, Bob & Lisa Schultz, Hearst Media Services, Moffly Media and Pepperidge Farm.

In addition to serving well over 600,000 meals a year, New Covenant Center helps guests

through life coaching, job skills training, a computer lab, immigration services and basic living needs such as haircuts and showers. It is open 365 days per year from 10 am-6 pm, providing three meals daily. It now operates one of the largest food pantries in the state and is the largest in Stamford.

(New Covenant Center is located at 174 Richmond Hill Ave., Stamford, CT 06902. For more information, phone 203.964.8228 or visit www.newcovenantcenter.org.)




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St. Jerome Parish

Youth Group 'Night in a Box'

NORWALK—On November 18 and 19, TOTAL, the youth group of St. Jerome Parish in Norwalk, participated in the fifth annual Night in a Box event. Night in a Box is a homeless awareness project that raises money and collects toiletries for the Open Door Shelter in Norwalk. Thirty-nine teens spent the day serving others. We raked leaves for our parishioners, planted tiny trees and brought donations to the clothing shed at the shelter, helped around the church, and made Christmas decorations for the shelter. We filled 60 leaf bags at one house alone!

After the service projects, we ate a simple soup-kitchen supper of chicken soup and grilled cheese sandwiches and heard from Bob



Genuario, a board member of the Open Door Shelter and long-time St. Jerome parishioner, who told us how the shelter helps the homeless in Norwalk. We then took on the persona of a homeless person, followed by a prayer

service where we thought about how we could "Multiply Love" based on the Gospel story of the Loaves and Fishes. Because the weather forecast was not good (last year the rain pounded our boxes to mush!) we set up our



cardboard shelters—our beds for the night—in the parish hall. We took a moment to remember and pray for those who do not have the option of moving inside during bad weather.

We concluded our weekend with Mass. We learned to be grateful for what we have, to know when we have enough and to be thankful that we have the choice to sleep inside. We also had a chance to express how grateful we are for our families, warm homes, schools, our opportunities and our parents.

Sometimes we have to walk a little in someone else's shoes to really appreciate how blessed we are.

Night in a Box has raised over \$10,000 and collected hundreds of toiletries to help the Open Door Shelter.

(Please remember the Open Door Shelter this Christmas season and donate to help the homeless in our neighborhood. Monetary donations, toiletries, new or gently used blankets, sheets and towels can be dropped off at St. Jerome Parish or at the Open Door Shelter, 4 Merritt Street, South Norwalk, CT 06854.)



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Merry Christmas!

Returning home for the holiday? Winter registration is open for undergraduates until December 19th. Visit fairfield.edu/wintersession for more information.



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Advent/Christmas

Garden Club of Darien brings Holiday Happiness

By ELLEN MCGINNESS

For over fifteen years, the Garden Club of Darien has put their creative floral talents to work by creating holiday arrangements for the recipients of Catholic Charities' Meals on Wheels of Lower Fairfield County (MoW) program.

As part of an annual project dubbed "The Holiday Greens Workshop," more than sixty busy elves with green thumbs get together in early December at the Darien Boy Scouts Cabin to put together the cheery arrangements. The club assembles the greenery, tiny ornaments, shimmering wire ribbon and other festive "bling" to magically produce 300 table top designs for the elderly



BRINGING CHRISTMAS BEAUTY—Garden Club of Darien members (l-r) Betsy Becker and Tracy Drippé deliver holiday arrangements for the recipients of Catholic Charities' Meals on Wheels of Lower Fairfield County program.

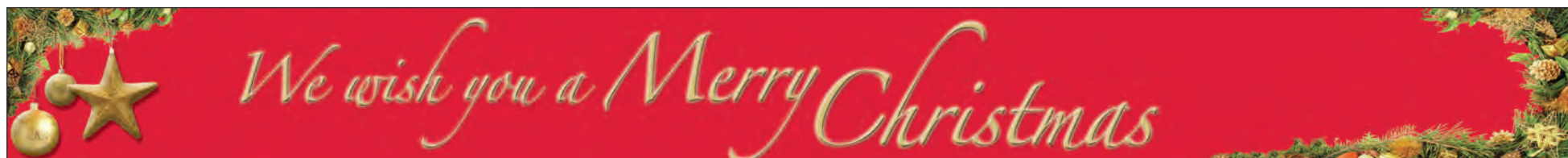
homebound. The holiday gifts are delivered the next day by the drivers of MoW.

Why do the ladies take the time and effort to do this? Betsy Becker, co-chair with Tracy Drippé of the Holiday Greens Workshop, explained it this way: "As one of our major outreach initiatives of the year, it's a gift back to our community."

A gift that's as beautiful as a partridge in a pear tree.

Catholic Charities Senior Nutrition Program (SNP) includes Meals on Wheels of Lower Fairfield County home delivery plus Community Café congregational meal sites for the elderly. The Senior Nutrition Program serves over 400 meals a day to clients.

(To donate to the program, contact Bob Donahue at 203.416.1331 or rdonahue@ccfc-ct.org.)



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St. Joseph School

Operation Christmas Child

By ANNIE OVANESSION

Students at St. Joseph School in Brookfield could barely contain themselves as they bundled up boxes of toys for their friends.

Students in kindergarten through eighth grade paired with their school buddies to fill over 65 shoeboxes with gifts and necessities. These boxes, however, were not for their school buddies, but for friends they may never meet across the globe via a partnership with Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, an international Christian relief and evangelism organization headed by Franklin Graham.

The mission of Operation Christmas Child is to demonstrate God's love in a tangible

way to children in need around the world, and together with the local church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 146 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 150 countries and territories. For many of these children, the shoebox is the first gift they have ever received.

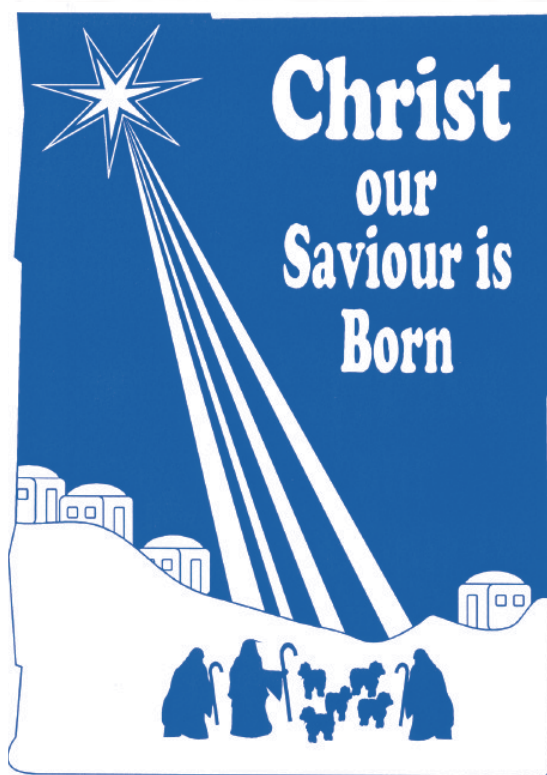
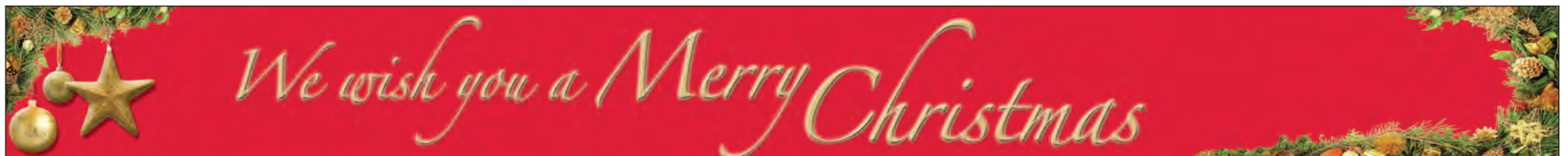
In addition to gifts and necessities, SJSB students also enclosed handwritten notes to their global buddies wishing them blessings for the coming season. Once all the boxes were filled, students gathered in the gymnasium and prayed over the boxes and for the recipients before the boxes were loaded to be shipped to the local

collection site.

"It was truly moving to see our entire school community come together and pray over these boxes," said volunteer mom Katiana Bonnefoy.

"The children sent not only gifts, but the message of God's Love. I'm so honored to have been even a small part of this service project!"

The entire SJSB community prays, as one student eloquently noted, "That the boxes arrive safely and the children receive the joy we are sending them."



*May the
angels from on
high be with
you this
Christmas
season and
bring you
health and
prosperity
during the
coming year.*

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Advent/Christmas

Epiphany of the Lord

By DR. FRANK DeSTEFANO

Reading I: Isaiah 60: 1-6

Reading II: Ephesians 3: 2-3a, 5-6

Gospel: Matthew 2: 1-12

(Magi from the east)

Epiphany is a Greek word which means manifestation or appearance. Traditionally, the story of the “Magi from the east” has been seen as a sign of the manifestation of the Lord to all nations.

Today’s first reading from the Prophet Isaiah, with its mention of caravans of camels and dromedaries bearing gold and frankincense, has from the earliest days of the Church been associated with the story of the Three Kings or Wise Men. The Gospel account from St. Matthew only tells us that “Magi from the east” followed the star “to the place where the child was.” It doesn’t say that there were three of them, or that they were kings. But tradition and art have added the familiar features to the story.

We have three kings probably because of the three gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—which are associated with royalty. In art, one of the kings is usually portrayed as an old man, another is middle aged, while the third is young and beardless. They symbolize all the ages of mankind. Tradition called them wise men because the word “magi” came to mean “magician,” or one familiar with the secrets and mysteries of nature. It is common to think of them as astronomers or astrologers because of the famous star that they followed to Bethlehem.

Although legends have embellished the story of the Magi, there is an historical core to their story. There were, after all,

“magi” in the East. The members of the ruling priestly class of the Persian Empire to the east of Palestine had for centuries been called “magi.” They would have been familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and prophecies because so many Jews had emigrated to Persia in the centuries before Christ. Their journey to Bethlehem would have been over a thousand miles, but it would have followed established and frequently traveled trade routes.

The reaction of King Herod to their news certainly fits what history has told us about that cruel despot. In those days it was common for rulers to kill anyone who might be a potential threat to their crown. Herod murdered his favorite wife—he had ten—and five of his own sons when he suspected that they were plotting against him. The Slaughter of the Innocents which St. Matthew describes a little later in this chapter is certainly in line with Herod’s character.

What is the importance of the visit of the Magi? Why is the Feast of the Epiphany one of the greatest in the Church’s calendar?

We know that even after the Resurrection of our Lord, the first converts to Christianity—even the Apostles themselves—had difficulty in understanding that the mission of our Lord was not just to the Jews. There was a great debate in the early Church in which some argued that Gentiles had to convert to Judaism before they could be Christian. In St. Paul’s epistles we see that this issue centered around the question of circumcision, that particular rite which signified one’s membership in the nation of Israel.

In fact, the very first Council of the Church was held at

Jerusalem precisely to discuss this very issue. There St. Paul, inspired by his own vision of the Lord, argued that the message of Christ was for all mankind. As he says in the Letter to the Ephesians,

“It has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that the gentiles are co-heirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

For Paul, the Messiah promised to the Jews was to be what Isaiah called “a light to all nations.” St. Peter, as observant a Jew as St. Paul, will have his own vision in which he sees that what God has created no man can call unclean.

Perhaps it is only after this question had been decided that the early Christians began to reexamine the words and life of Jesus for new meaning. He came to call sinners. He cured the Roman centurion’s servant. The Sermon on the Mount did not mention race, creed, or color. He praised the Good Samaritan and insisted that the foreigner was more a neighbor to the beaten Jewish traveler than his countrymen who passed him by on the road to Jericho.

They even discovered, and preserved in Matthew’s Gospel, an incident at the very beginning of our Lord’s earthly life which indicated that he had come as a light to all the nations. The Magi had come from the East to bring him gifts and do him homage. On the other hand, the despised ruler of the Jews had only sought to put him to death. Apparently, Herod and his advisers couldn’t even see the star that led the Magi to the child.

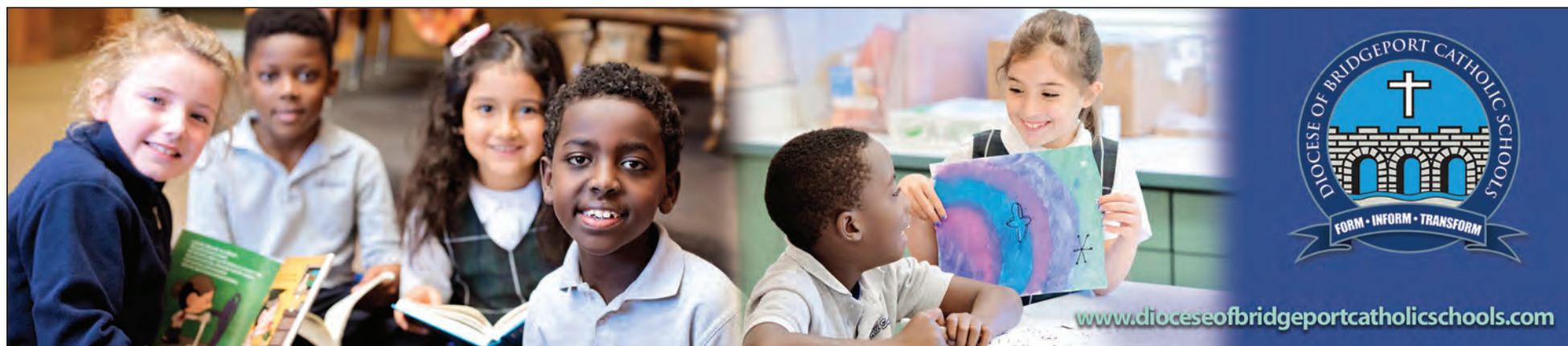
The Christmas season comes to an end with Epiphany. The



twelve days of Christmas are completed. Subsequently, we will begin to follow Jesus as he begins his public life. We will have a whole year to follow him

on his way to Jerusalem. A few years ago I found a wonderful Christmas card which said simply,

“Wise men still seek him.” ■





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