



Special Edition  
Catholic Schools Week

JANUARY 2021

Living the Faith Together

FREE

## Zooming to Action

**E**xtending wishes and prayers for joy and wellness in the new year! **Wellness in work**, whether on the job, in search of a career or in school. **Wellness in relationships**, with family, friends, coworkers and those with whom we have differences. **Wellness in engagement**, in family, parish, civic, social, volunteer activities. **Wellness in spirituality**, in prayer life, in returning safely to Church and the Sacraments, and in Christian service to others. **Wellness in Health**, in preventing or overcoming illnesses of body and mind. Lord, make us well!



Chuck Short

We welcome two new, "mid-year" Pastors, Fr Brian Jordan, OFM, at St Camillus in Silver Spring and Msgr. Charles Antonicelli, at Our Lady of Mercy in Potomac. Both are experienced and accomplished pastoral leaders who promote parish engagement and have deep commitments to the community's most vulnerable and poor. Franciscan Fr. Jordan is no stranger to Montgomery County or St Camillus. He was ordained in the parish in 1983 and was its pastor from 1990 to 1996. He has quite literally written the book (actually two) on parish ministry. Msgr. Antonicelli brings experience and joy to his new role at Mercy. Previously he was a pastor at St Patrick's in Rockville and the Moderator of

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## We'll Be Fine

**M**ost of the time we'll be fine. Things around us might not be going the way we think they should, and people will hurt and disappoint us. Tragedy will sneak up on us when we are least prepared for it. But, we can face the reality of our situations and still hang on, especially if we have faith and if we are graced with at least one other person who stands beside us, unafraid of our pain. If we allow God to be God, and accept that, while He expects us to do our part and do it well, God is ultimately in charge of things, we are free to focus our energy on building a life.

Our country is in a mess right now. We are fighting an unknown enemy in this virus



Patricia McGann

*Continued on page 8*

## Virtual Choir Recordings Bring Transcendent Music to Parish during the Pandemic

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

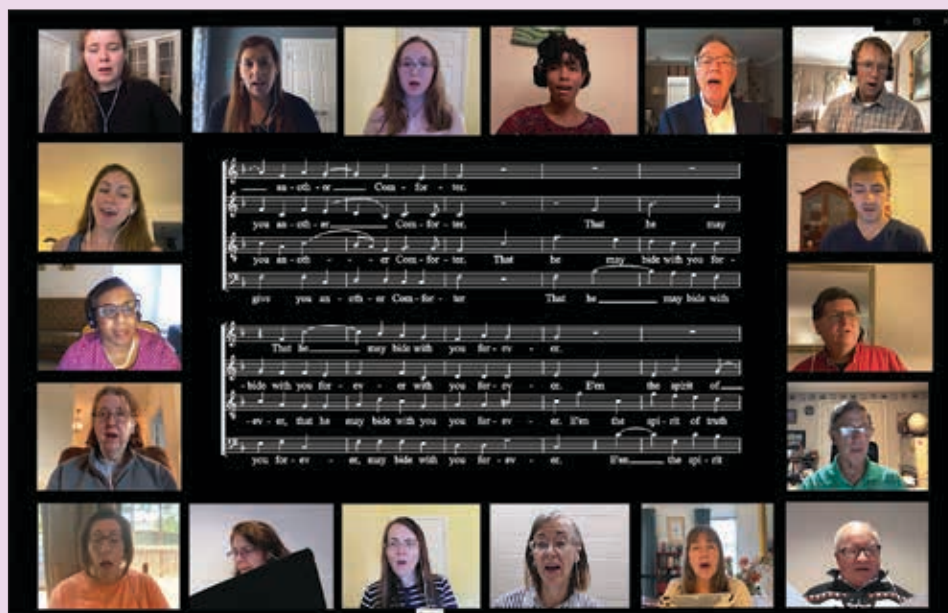
**W**hen Fr. John Dillon sent the parish's music director a clip of a virtual choir performing last spring, Janet Pate was unsure of what to do next. Her computer lacked the processing power needed. She did not have the software. And she had never compiled a virtual choir recording.

Sharing the idea with Adult Choir Director Leslie MacKnight, the longtime musicians and directors of sacred choral music started working. Ten months later, the ladies have produced nine virtual choir recordings and are secure in their knowledge of compiling more.

"It's painstaking work," MacKnight said. "But so worth it when it finally all comes together."

The process of compiling a virtual choir recording could not be more different than

*Continued on page 10*



Members of St. Francis of Assisi's Parish Choir are pictured in a virtual choir recording of "If Ye Love Me," composed by Thomas Tallis.

## Pro-life Presence at Late-Term Abortion Facility



Challenging the Democratic Party's commitment to abortion

**C**atholics from several Montgomery County parishes joined the Democrats for Life Maryland chapter to provide a "Pro-life Counter-Presence" in front of the Wildwood Medical Building at 10401 Old Georgetown Road in Bethesda, during a "Pro-Choice Drive-By" which had been promoted by a Walter Johnson student on the Next Door blog. Some of the pro-lifers prayed the rosary before a framed image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is sometimes known as Patroness of the Unborn, in honor of her feast day, and others carried signs promoting an end to late-term abortion in Bethesda and respect for human life.

Democrats for Life members Dan Wagner (State Chapter Director) and Kathy Kelly

*Continued on page 18*

## Whom Shall I Send? Sr. Claudia Joins OLOL Parish Family

**O**ur Lady of Lourdes parish recently welcomed Sister Claudia Ruvalca, a Domician sister of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary. Sr. Claudia is from Mexico, and before she arrived in the area, she served as a missionary in South Korea, Mexico and south Texas. She is currently a Pastoral Associate at Our Lady of Lourdes helping Fr. James Morrison with the faith formation of the parishioners and working closely with the Hispanic Community.

It was during Adoration at a parish youth retreat when Sr. Claudia, still a teenager, heard God's calling. "Whom shall I send?"

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Lourdes Parish Staff, from left to right: Sister Claudia Ruvalcaba, Mrs. Claire Toms, Father Rob Walsh, Father James Morrison, Ms. Sheri Golden, Mrs. Lacy Prebula



# Pull a Thread and See Where it Leads...

## Colette McNickle: A life well lived

By Kate Droegge, Program and Development Assistant with Catholic Coalition for Special Education

The Catholic Coalition for Special Education (CCSE) recently received several memorial gifts in

honor of Mrs. Colette M. McNickle, who passed away on August 22, 2020 at the age of 91. Kate Droegge, long-time family friend and CCSE's Program & Development Assistant shares her tribute to Colette and

her family. Kate notes during these uncertain times it is especially helpful to remember we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

I first met Mrs. Colette McNickle and the extended McNickle clan when I was in high school. Marilyn McNickle Whitney and I became fast friends as classmates at Immaculata Preparatory School Class of '83. I was amazed at how much Colette McNickle accomplished as a working mother. A Montgomery County school nurse, Colette kept her house and the car-pools running smoothly. She was an all-around booster and sports fan who somehow found time to attend all her kids' school events. Colette was a steadfast volunteer of the Christ Child Society sodality. She was instrumental in the Montgomery County Special Olympics and in the formation of ARC, a Montgomery County non-profit that connects people of all ages and abilities with their communities to build inclusive and fulfilling lives.

Devout Catholics, Colette and her husband, John McNickle, made a great team in creating a faith-based home. They were passionate about



Colette McNickle

their faith, family, and friends. The McNickles were extremely proud that they were able to provide a Catholic school education for five of their six children. Johnny, their second child, was born with Down syndrome, and at that time was not

able to attend Catholic school. CCSE did not exist in the late '60s / early '70s and the doors to our Catholic schools were not open to those with disabilities.

The McNickles were tireless advocates for Johnny and other kids like him. Colette and a couple of friends decided to form a religious education class for children with special needs, the only one of its kind at that time. Johnny was the first person with Down syndrome to receive the sacrament of Confirmation in the Archdiocese of Washington. It was a proud moment for the entire community.

### A Big Life

Easily, Johnny had the most active social life of anyone in the McNickle family. He never turned down an invitation and was always up for some fun. He loved dancing and bowling and cheering on his home teams. He was always treated just like anybody else in the McNickle family with a few doses of extra attention thrown in for good measure. Colette passed her love of crafting to Johnny. He made countless latch hook rugs, pillows,

*Continued on page 8*

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## Watch the March for Life Live

The protection of all of those who participate in the annual March, as well as the many law enforcement personnel and others who work tirelessly each year to ensure a safe and peaceful event, is a top priority of the March for Life. Because we are in the midst of a pandemic and in view of the heightened pressures that law enforcement officers and others are currently facing in and around the Capitol, this year's March for Life will look different.

The annual rally will take place virtually and all would-be participants are asked to stay home and to join the March virtually. A small group of pro-life leaders from across the country have been invited to march in Washington, DC this year. These leaders will represent pro-life Americans everywhere who, each in their own unique ways, work to make abortion unthinkable and



build a culture where every human life is valued and protected.

The March for Life organizers are profoundly grateful for the countless women, men, and families who sacrifice to come out in such great numbers each year to witness for life and look forward to being together in person next year.

This year all are invited to watch

the livestream of the March for Life on January 29 beginning at 11 a.m. ET. The live broadcast will include inspiring speeches from pro-life leaders, information on how to stay involved in the pro-life movement all year long, and a performance by Christian singer and songwriter Matthew West. RSVP to watch live at: <https://p2a.co/Bla5nXt>.

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## Justice and Advocacy Council

# The Persistent Challenge of Racism: Four Parishes Respond

By Carmela Cowgill and Bill Beard

The celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day offers a timely and urgent opportunity to consider grave pitfalls in our nation's efforts toward racial justice and equality. Events in 2020 jarred us all to confront some ugly racial realities. Members of the Justice and Advocacy Council of Montgomery County are particularly concerned that racism persists in our own communities. Observers of history know all too well that barriers to overcoming racism include denial of its existence and resis-

tance to doing the work necessary to confront it. For these reasons, the Justice and Advocacy Council is encouraged by and pleased to bring attention to the work of four Catholic parishes to raise awareness and help respond to racism.

Shortly after the police-involved killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, parishioners at St. John the Baptist, St. Camillus, St. Patrick's, and Church of the Resurrection organized a listening forum to hear from parishioners about the unsettling events. The forum and ensuing sessions were

the latest offerings of the "Living the Gospel" adult formation program. A spotlight on the alarming effects of systemic racism and what Catholics are called to do about it fit neatly within that program.

### Getting Started

The June 2020 listening forum was an initial step toward healing. More than 70 parishioners participated in the first ever "virtual" Living the Gospel session, led prayerfully by L.J. Milone, faith formation director at St. John the Baptist and Deacon David Suley

of St. Patrick's. The following assumptions guided the session to provide a safe space for parishioners to openly express thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to issues of racial discrimination: 1) as Catholics we are agents of transformation through the Holy Spirit; 2) all would feel heard; 3) participants would be comfortable to share without shame or fear of argument or rebuttal.

Participants were especially horrified and angry about the social injustices African Americans suffer. They expressed frustration that

racism in the U.S. persists—in our families, churches, and communities—despite what some perceived as "progress." Many expressed a need for improved cultural awareness, continued education about the history of racism in the U.S., acknowledgement that white privilege disproportionately opens the door to preferential treatment and opportunities, and a growing curiosity about how to develop a more just policing model.

An anti-racism series was born. It was readily obvious that the

*Continued on page 32*

## Biden and Harris Promulgate the Big One

### Called out by Church Leader

By Kathleen and Lawrence Hamm, independent liberal Catholics

In an affront to all who, informed by science and religion, recognize the unborn as biogenetically unique human beings, President Biden and Vice President Harris marked the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, which overturned all limiting restrictions on abortion across the nation, by calling the decision an advancement of women's rights and

health. The big lie continues.

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities rebuked them:

"It is deeply disturbing and tragic that any President would praise and commit to codifying a Supreme Court ruling that denies unborn children their most basic human and civil right, the right to life, under the

euphemistic disguise of a health service. I take this opportunity to remind all Catholics that the Catechism states, 'Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable.' Public officials are responsible for not only their personal beliefs, but also the effects of their public actions. Roe's elevation of

abortion to the status of a protected right and its elimination of state restrictions paved the way for the violent deaths of more than 62 million innocent unborn children and for countless women who experience the heartache of loss, abandonment, and violence.

"We strongly urge the President to reject abortion and promote life-affirming aid to women and communities in need."

A political party that promotes policies that deny the right to life to a class of fellow humans – the unwanted unborn – is not liberal.

We cannot drive by the abortion clinic on Old Georgetown Road without trembling.

Acquiescence is accommodation. Accommodation is acceptance. Acceptance is evil. "Deliver us from evil." Be not afraid. Resist.

*See page 40.*



## Maryland Bishops Commemorate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

By Maryland Catholic Conference

As we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day today, we do so with heavy hearts, yet also with hope.

The racism, strife, violence, and inequity that have marked our nation over the past year sadly show that we still are a nation divided. We have not yet achieved the promise of unity and peace envisioned by Rev. King and longed for by so many throughout our nation's history.

This must change. We must continue to work for unity, dignity, and respect for every person no matter who they are. We must truly listen to each other, to seek to understand the experiences and the pain suffered by our brothers and sisters and to commit to understanding and to change. We must see Christ in every person and be Christ in our own actions.

The promise of Christ's love makes this possible. Our nation can be united if we work together. As we reflect upon the life of Martin

Luther King and look ahead, as a nation, to the inauguration of a new President, let each of us commit to work toward a world of unity, peace, and hope.

In the words spoken by Archbishop of Washington Patrick O'Boyle as he stood with Rev. King at the 1963 March on Washington:

"May we be sensitive to our duties toward others as we demand from them our rights. May we move forward without bitterness, even when confronted with prejudice and discrimination. May we shun violence, knowing that the meek shall inherit the earth. But may this meekness of manner be joined with courage and strength so that with Your help, O heavenly Father, and following the teachings of Christ, Your Son, we shall now and in the days to come live together as brothers in dignity, justice, charity and peace."

See also the Maryland Bishops' letter on racial justice, Building Bridges of Understanding and Hope at [www.mdcatholic.org/racialjusticeletter](http://www.mdcatholic.org/racialjusticeletter).

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## St. Jane De Chantal Men's Group Grows Closer to Christ Through Fellowship

*Parish Men's Group Share Coffee, Donuts, and Faith Monthly*

By Tim Gleeson

Since the fall of 2014, a men's ministry has been active at St. Jane De Chantal's parish. The ministry originally started with the weekly "That Man is You!" program targeted at actively parenting fathers. When it became apparent that there was significant interest in the men's group from many who were not actively parenting fathers, the scope of the ministry was widened to include all men of the parish.

The name of the minis-



St. Jane De Chantal Mens Group's most recent speaker was parishioner, author, and professional speaker Rob Clark who spoke about his new book *Everyday Resilience for Everyday Heroes*.

try was then changed to the First Saturday Fellowship to reflect a switch to monthly meetings held on the first Saturday of each month from September through June. The meeting time is intentionally structured to not interfere with the participants' personal time for work, home, or family responsibilities. On the Saturday meeting day, St. Jane De Chantal's Caulfield Hall's doors open at 6:30am with coffee, donuts, and an

opportunity for fellowship. Then at 7:00am there is either a brief talk or a video presentation followed by small group discussion until 8:00am.

In addition to the monthly meetings, an annual men's retreat has been held at the parish. These one-day retreats have each had a theme related either to the topic of that year's program or to the needs of the group such as

*Continued on page 10*

## St. Jane de Chantal Parishioners Use Online Learning to Help Increase Their Faith

By Kim Williamson

How does St. Jane de Chantal's parish maintain a church community in a COVID world? Fr. Giese and the parish's Evangelization Committee have embraced online learning and found *Formed.org* as a way to help. While they can't replace person-to-person contact, Catholic websites such as *Formed.org* have helped facilitate discipleship both as individuals and within the de Chantal parish community. The website is a project of



Above: The *Formed* Website uses beautiful paintings like *St. Paul Writing* by Pier Francesco Sacchi from the 1500s to help users in its weekly scripture reflections.

At left: Parishioners can find the link for *Formed.org* on St. Jane de Chantal church's website and sign up easily.



es of their faith journey. The *Formed* site contains a wide range of online programs, including videos and audio as well as downloadable books that can be accessed through a parish or individual sub-

scription.

St. Jane Frances de Chantal parish has subscribed since July 2020 and parishioners have been enjoying the various programs. The most

*Continued on page 7*

Augustine Institute, which was started as a private Catholic graduate school of theology in Denver, CO in 2005. It has expanded to provide online content for Catholics at all stag-

## DeChantal's School Receives Recognition for Outstanding Distance Learning

*School wins Well Deserved Award for its Teaching During COVID and Looks Forward to The Second Half of the School Year*

By Catherine Tomsbeck

The teachers, students and families of St. Jane de Chantal School were honored by Bethesda Magazine in January 2021. De Chantal was featured for receiving the most votes for "Best Job In Distance Learning – Private Schools". This well-deserved recognition and award are the result of hard work by our school community. Over the last nine months, teachers spent countless hours learning how to teach remotely, integrating traditional teaching



DeChantal Won Most Votes for Best Distance Learning from Bethesda Magazine's Annual Awards

methods with new digital methods, and striving to assure the needs of every student are fulfilled. Parents continued to support their children's "at home learning" while balancing their own work responsibilities.

Most importantly, the students of St. Jane de Chantal successfully shifted to this new way of learning, accepted new restrictions, and adjusted to school day changes. During the last several months, living

*Continued on page 7*



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# Our Lady of Mercy School News

## Virtual Open Houses

Mercy will be holding a series of Virtual Open House sessions during Catholic Schools Week. Each session will be focused on a specific age group, to better customize the information for prospective parents. The schedule for the zoom sessions will be: PreK - Monday, Feb 1 at 8:30 am; K - Monday, Feb 1 at 9:45 am; 1-2 Grades - **Tuesday, Feb 2 at 8:30 am**; 3-4 Grades - **Wednesday, Feb 3 at 8:30 am**; 5-8 Grades - **Thursday, Feb 4 at 8:30 am**. A registration link can be found on the home page of the school website: [www.schoololom.org](http://www.schoololom.org).

## Catholic Schools Week Program

Mercy students and staff have a wonderful program of activities planned for 2021 Catholic Schools Week! On Student Day, our Student Council will greet students with pom poms, posters, and bells at carpool dropoff. Then our NJHS students will lead a round of Bingo during lunch. Spirit and Community Day will consist of a service project called "Souper Bowl". Students will collect cans of soup for St. Martin's Pantry. Students and staff will wear Mercy blue and white, and everyone will receive a Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati bookmark. On Parent Day, students will write notes to parents, and there will be no homework assigned. The MPTO will be re-launched with new leadership. Closing out the week, teachers will share with students why they decided to teach in



At left, a screen shot captures one scene during Mercy's beautiful and memorable virtual Christmas Pageant show.

Below, a rolling cart made a surprise classroom delivery of coffee and breakfast sandwiches to Mercy teachers



Above, Father Charles Antonicelli surprised Mercy students with the closing prayer at dismissal on his first official day as Mercy's new pastor.

At right, the winner of Mercy's Blue Ribbon Yard Sign Spirit contest - a true Mercy "pride"!



Members of Mercy's Student Council and NJHS help collect and pack donated toys to be delivered to Spanish Catholic Center Sacred Heart Parish.

a Catholic school and incorporate a special activity into their lessons. Throughout the entire week, a group of Mercy NJHS students will do an Instagram takeover! They will plan, write, and post a series of fun, informative, and inspirational social media posts sharing highlights of Mercy's CSW!

## Welcome Father Charles!

Our Lady of Mercy excitedly welcomed our new Pastor, Msgr. Charles Antonicelli on January 13. Father Charles comes to us from neighboring Washington D.C. where he was pastor of St. Patrick and Vice President for Mission for Catholic Charities of

the Archdiocese of Washington. We are grateful for his leadership and know he will have a profound impact on our school community.

## Virtual Christmas Pageant

Mercy's Music Director, Mrs. Stephanie López, had to find new and creative ways to safely film the children, engage the distance

learners and create a pageant that would bring the Christmas message of hope to all. She did it! She did it by working tirelessly and refusing to give up on the value of a pageant this year. The technical skills and planning that were required for this Christmas Pageant are far beyond what normally would be expected. Beautiful backdrops were created by our art teacher Ms. Caitrin Waites, her mother, and our facilities staff. It was a labor of love! Instead of gathering in the church, our families gathered in their homes to watch the pageant, giving thanks that we did not lose this holiday tradition this year.

## Blue Ribbon Yard Sign Contest

Mercy continues to celebrate its third Blue Ribbon award by running a "Blue Ribbon Yard Sign Spirit" contest. Families submitted photos showing their Mercy spirit along with their yard sign. Teachers voted on their favorites, and the three winners were treated to special lunch deliveries. The overall winner also received tickets to the Seneca Lights Festival.

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**Our Lady of Mercy School**  
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## ONLINE

Con't from page 4

popular are the weekly reflections on the daily and Sunday readings, which are a great way to prepare for Mass. Special programming on the Saints also enriches the celebration of their feast days and provides insights into their lives as the user grows in relationship with God. Children's programming includes a video series from an underwater world starring a fish that met Jesus at the sea of Galilee and a turtle that was rescued by Noah, as well as information about the sacraments are also available and have been incorporated into de Chantal's Faith Formation classes.

This fall the parish's three scripture groups moved online for a six session Philippians bible study/discussion offered by *Formed*. In addition to videos describing the

cultural and scriptural context of St Paul's letter to the Philippians, the study included daily reflections on scripture passages to facilitate meditation and prayer. A unique feature was the inclusion of a painting each week that was related to the topic being discussed. These images were wonderfully reproduced and described in detail, providing an excellent focal point for reflection. The first was "St. Paul Writing" painted by Pier Francesco Sacchi in the 1500s, which depicts St Paul writing while gazing on a crucifix. In the background there is window showing a figure walking along a road toward a city as a reminder of Paul's travels spreading the gospel as well as our journeys toward God.

St. Jane de Chantal hopes that more of its parishioners will start to use this innovative new way to help grow closer to Christ.

OPT

## RECOGNITION

Con't from page 4

the Catholic Faith has become the glue that keeps the school together. Students were able to receive sacraments and attend Mass in small groups, planning for the Second Graders to receive the Sacraments

of Reconciliation and Eucharist are ongoing, as are daily lessons for the eighth-grade students preparing for Confirmation. Teachers and Religious staff are planning for the upcoming Lenten Season imagining new and creative ways to safely celebrate Ash Wednesday Services and Stations of the Cross.

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## Sixth-Grade Student Council Reps Initiate Class Reading Challenge

It isn't a surprise to find most middle school students spending more time on their devices or playing video games than reading. Strong evidence exists to show that reading for pleasure plays a vital role in improving learning outcomes, but did you know reading for pleasure can improve overall well-being? Recent research by The Reading Agency has found reading for pleasure increases empathy, improves relationships with others, and reduces the symptoms of depression.

With the support of their home-room teacher and Student Council moderator, Mrs. Christina Preston, two sixth grade students initiated a reading challenge for their class. It was important to stress that this was not a competition, but an effort to create a vibrant community of friends who LOVE to read, WANT to read, and SHARE book titles they've enjoyed. The class reps set an initial goal of 30 books and to earn a reward every sixth grader must read at least one book outside of assigned coursework or required reading.

While St. Bartholomew School is back in-person, a number of students attend virtually only so the class charts their progress on Google Classroom. Once the class meets



Bobcats find new connections to book and to each other.

its goal, the class will celebrate with a virtual ice cream party social and together decide on their next goal. Favorite titles include, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, *Counting by 7s*, the *Spy School* series, *Towers Falling*, and *The Misadventures of the Family Fletcher*. The challenge began in December and we suspect that by the time of this publication, the sixth graders will have earned their reward!

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## St. Bartholomew Parish

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**McGANN***Con't from page 1*

that has turned everything upside down and inside out. We don't know if we should go to restaurants or send children and teachers back to school. We find ourselves faced with experts who claim to know what we should do, and then we find out that they don't. We are fighting with one another - calling names and throwing bricks - because we don't want to hear about our own or our society's failures. The future is uncertain - for our families and for our country. I am sad and I am worried, as are

most Americans. Many of us are afraid. It is difficult to be optimistic about what will come next.

If she was here now, I am quite certain that my mother would want us all to know that we will be fine. She would warn us that we will take some hard shots over the next months — maybe years, and we will get knocked to our knees plenty of times. She would remind us that that's just where we need to be, and that we had better make the most of our time there.

My mother told me "You'll be fine" more times than I ever wanted to hear it. Sometimes it made me cry to hear those words, times when I was quite certain that I would

not be fine, and I would have preferred a hug and some sympathy. Sometimes it made me furious. It seemed that she was minimizing my struggles and my pain. She appeared to be capable of ignoring so much of what was going on - too much. As it turns out, she had to believe I would be fine, and so she did.

Her faith was strong. She believed wholeheartedly that if we prayed and we kept ourselves in touch with God, He would not abandon us. She knew what she had survived. Her husband died when she was 37. He left her with seven children to raise. The youngest was two weeks old and the oldest

was twelve. Surely, her faith was tested at that time, and surely she was afraid of the uncertain future she faced. Painfully aware that she could not change or escape what had happened to her, she decided that she had better just get on with life. She managed to tell herself over and over again that she would be fine, or at least as fine as she could be in the life she was given.

No one can tell us how this will all work out. We have to live with the uncertainty, but I don't think this is the time to sit and wait. I'm going to lean into the wind and keep going forward, believing that we'll all be fine.

**McNICKLE***Con't from page 2*

and wall hangings to showcase his favorite themes: being Irish and loving animals and all-things about The Washington Football Team. He often won Grand Champion and blue ribbons at the Montgomery County Fair for his efforts.

Johnny always had a job and was an extremely hard worker. He attended Concord School in Bethesda until he was 21 and graduated with a high school degree. While at Concord, he worked at BCC High School with the football team in a job training program, which was unique at that time. He also worked as a busboy for years at the old Shakey's Pizza on East-West Highway (where I had my first job), and at the cafeterias at Marriott headquarters and Suburban Hospital.

**OPT**

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God lights a spark within us that may flicker at first as we try to determine its meaning but eventually grows stronger and brighter making connections that sometimes take us years or even a lifetime to weave together to understand. Like a shiny silver thread, Johnny McNickle is one of those connections for which I am forever grateful. The crisscrossing of this thread which has continued throughout my life has created a rich and layered tapestry.

Marilyn and I grew up, married, and had families of our own who would both be raised in St. John the Evangelist (SJE) parish in Silver Spring, Maryland. SJE, under the leadership of the late Sr. Kathleen Lannak, IHM, was one of the first schools in the Archdiocese of Washington to start a fully inclusive resource program opening its doors in 2002. Thanks to CCSE's seed money grants given in 2007 and 2008 and ongoing technical support, the program continues to thrive today. It was my friend, Marilyn, who was hired in 2004 to be an aide to a kindergartener with special needs at SJE. The student's mom, Mary Brogan, is one of the founders of CCSE and is its current vice president. The McNickle family lost Johnny McNickle on January 1, 2011 and I started working at CCSE in February 2011. In my view it was God's hand that led me to CCSE. I will be forever grateful to the McNickle family's inspiration both in my life and in the lives of countless others.

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# Holiday and Holyday at St. Elizabeth School



Above, right, below and below right: Students donned their Santa hats, enjoyed the school Christmas decorations, and were surprised with virtual visits from Santa Claus during the month of December.



Above, left and right, more than 18,250 items were collected during St. E's 2020 Greg Gannon Food Drive. It was such a blessing to be able to supply so much food to area food banks during the Advent season.



St. Elizabeth School decked the halls during the month of December! Our students, faculty, and staff participated in many events of the season in special, reimagined ways. From Greg Gannon Food Drive and a "Carols and Cocoa" virtual Christmas concert to prayerful Advent wreath lighting ceremonies and friendly Annual Fund competitions, our hearts and classrooms swelled with joy, love, and gratitude for our St. Elizabeth School family. We look forward to the hope of a new year and the adventures 2021 will surely bring.

OPT

**St. Elizabeth Parish**  
917 Montrose Road  
Rockville, MD

**Msgr. J. Wilfrid Parent**  
Pastor  
301-881-1380

**St. Elizabeth School Principal**  
Mary Penny  
301-881-1824

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Grades 6-12 | 40-Acre D.C. Campus | [www.saintanselms.org](http://www.saintanselms.org)

At left: Happy New Year! The fourth-grade teachers welcomed students back in January with festive lights and smiles (under masks!)



At right, our parent community continued to support our faculty and staff in amazing ways during the Advent and Christmas seasons. #StEsSpirit #GratefulSaints





## Catholic Schools Week Virtual Open Houses

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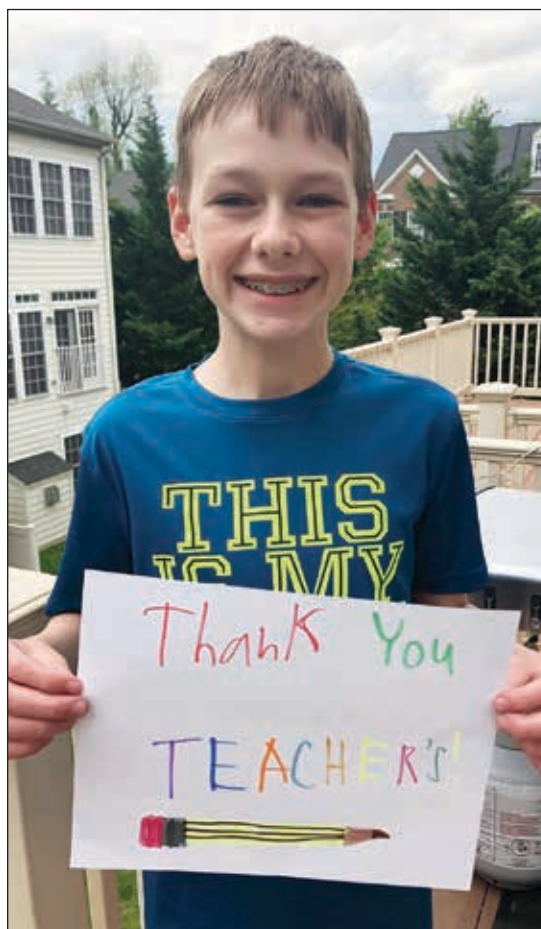
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## Thank You Teachers

As Valentine's Day approaches, on behalf of everyone here at The Hive in the Saint Bernadette community, we express our love and gratitude for our teachers. We cannot thank them enough for how they have gone above and beyond the call of duty to serve our students and their families during this unprecedented time of pandemic.



### St. Bernadette Parish

70 University Blvd., East  
Silver Spring, MD

**Rev. Msgr. K.  
Bartholomew Smith**  
Pastor  
301-593-0357

**St. Bernadette School**  
**Mr. Ted Ewanciw, Principal**  
301-593-5611

**Kate Doyle Rodgers, OPT Editor**  
301-593-5611

## VIRTUAL CHOIR

*Con't from page 1*

eliciting harmonized sound from a choir. MacKnight starts by choosing a choral piece, creating a sound file for each voice part, adding a 'click track,' or audible metronome that keeps everyone in synch, and then inserting a series of 'clicks,' which help individual members know when to begin recording their track. The 18 choir members who regularly participate then record their choral pieces from home and upload it to Adobe storage space.

The hard work then begins. Pate and MacKnight extract the audio files and open them in Audition, the Adobe sound software. From there, they must adjust the pitch of every individual choir member's track, note by note – a process that can take an hour or more per track. On a dashboard that resembles an airplane cockpit, the individual tracks are then spliced so that each one lines up with the others and can be mixed into a choir's unified sound. Then the videos must be added in Premiere Pro, Adobe's video software.

"If you're not careful with it, it can sound so sloppy," Pate said. "You really have to be precise with it to make the sound unified."

The choir's first piece, "What a Great Day It Will Be" was posted on September 28 on the parish's YouTube Channel, garnering 406 views. Over the Advent and Christmas season, Pate and MacKnight compiled six other choral pieces, including one for the church's Contemporary Ensemble musical group.

Gary Palmer, a longtime member of the parish's Adult Choir, said the process of recording an individual track was more difficult than he thought it would be. "Just one bad note, one cough, or one breath in the wrong place and I had to start over," Palmer said. "In a choir, those faults are hidden, but by yourself, small problems become big ones."

For MacKnight, the many hours she spent on her first virtual choir recording, including a few sleepless nights, were worth it, especially when the choir recorded "Veni, veni Emmanuel."

"Each verse starts with a title ascribed to the Messiah in the Old Testament," she said. "I felt driven to do it. Trying to bring the text alive to people – that's what is so gratifying to me."

Experience the parish's virtual choir recordings at [www.sfadw.org/virtual-choir](http://www.sfadw.org/virtual-choir).

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## FELLOWSHIP

*Con't from page 4*

preparation for Lent. As with the Saturday meetings, the retreats have been structured to have a minimal impact on the participants' personal time by being held on a Sunday from lunch to dinner. Each retreat starts with lunch followed by various program events including presentations, witness talks, and opportunities for quiet reflection. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is then offered followed by Mass, social time, and dinner. The retreats are a highlight of each program year with Caulfield Hall at full capacity.

The program content of the First Saturday Fellowship has typically focused on either a video series or a book that helps men to grow in their lives as Christian disciples. These videos and books have generally focused on topics such as prayer, sacraments, and personal responsibility with a particular focus on how men can grow in these areas to be modern day disciples in their families, workplaces, and the community. The meetings are led by a member of the group, one of the parish priests, or visiting clergy. Our most recent meeting on January 2, 2021 was led by Rob Clark, a member of the de Chantal community who is a professional speaker and author.

OPT



# "All in This Together"

This year's St. Mary's Annual Auction and Awards Gala will look very different, but one thing is for sure, we will live up to our theme, because we are "All in This Together!" Although we cannot gather 300 attendees in our gym, we will open bidding on some fun baskets and family adventures online.

The St. Mary's community



comes together for a silent auction during Catholic Schools Week from Wednesday, February 3 to Saturday, February 6. We welcome everyone to join us in the fun-school families, parishioners, friends of St. Mary's, and family members far and wide.

More information about sponsorships and bidding can be found on our gala website, <https://one.bidpal.net/smsgala2021/welcome>.

OPT

## St. Mary's Parish

520 Veirs Mill Road Rockville, MD

**Msr. Robert Amey, Pastor**

301-424-5550

## St. Mary's School

**Mrs. Debby Eisel, Principal**

301-762-4179

**Mrs. Debby Eisel, Parish Editor**

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## Follow the Testimony

More than 2,500 bills can be introduced in a legislative session (mid-January to mid-April). The staff of the Maryland Catholic Conference reviews and tracks them and provides testimony on proposed legislation primarily related to respect for life, education, and social and economic justice.

A list of bills on which the Conference has testified, with links to the testimony, are posted online throughout the session at [www.mdccatholic.org/2021testimony](http://www.mdccatholic.org/2021testimony).

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## SR. CLAUDIA

*Con't from page 1*

He asked. She elaborated, "I felt the assurance of His faithfulness, mercy and loving presence within me. So, I joined the convent and became a Religious Sister. It has been 24 years since then, and I still hear that voice every day, even though it does not sound the same. That voice has changed throughout my life. Sometimes it is very loud when He says: 'Do not be afraid'; other times it is like a sweet whisper when He tells me: 'I am with you'; or even more He just keeps quiet. However, I know God is always with me, He has never abandoned me... He's been there during my journey."

Sr. Claudia makes the commute to Our Lady of Lourdes from her sister house located near Catholic University. Her joyful presence can often be found greeting the OLOL school children with a warm and inviting smile or sharing her musical talent at Mass or during Holy Hours. Sr. Claudia shares, "Since the first moment I arrived at Our Lady of Lourdes' parish, I have felt at home. I feel very privileged to be part of this beautiful family. I am here with open hands and heart to learn, to serve, and to be ready to walk with you as a companion on our journey to God." We are so pleased that her journey has brought her to Bethesda to share her love of God and His gifts with our parish family.

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The Youth Rally and Mass for Life will be an online only event on January 29, 2021.  
Visit: <https://youthrallyandmassforlife.org/>

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# Making it Special for Mary of Nazareth School's Class of 2021

By Katie Schultz

Students that have been at an elementary/middle school their entire lives look forward to the exciting events that eighth grade has to offer; class trips, retreat, the March for Life, cotillion, a two-day trip to New York City, and of course, graduation. The graduation class from last year was able to participate in the majority of these events--the most exciting being their car parade and virtual graduation. Although we could not be together in person, the joy and bittersweet feelings of graduation were felt by our entire community due to the coordinated, creative efforts of our dedicated staff and families.



T.J. Albero, eighth grader, showing off his NYC treat box from parents

The Class of 2021 has had to alter all of these events; however, the parents have worked diligently to ensure this last year at MoN is a special one. Most recently, parents delivered New York City themed goodie bags to each of the students at their home after students completed the High School Placement Test (HSPT) in December. Packages included a souvenir keychain and pencil, along with snacks native to NYC. The students were surprised and thankful to have some sort of celebration for completing the HSPT and are hoping for a class trip in the Spring.

The March for Life is another

event that eighth grade students look forward to in January. As a staff member that has been participating in this event since high school, it is definitely one of my favorite events to attend with the students; what better way to be witnesses of our faith than being with thousands of other Catholic's in Washington D.C. sharing in the same foundational belief that all life has dignity at every stage. It is incredibly powerful! This year, our eighth graders will tune in to the virtual youth rally and Mass

and then parents will provide them with a special lunch afterwards to end the day. I always felt that the youth rally was an energized, faith filled experience for our students so I know the students will enjoy watching it with their classmates.

Graduation, May Crowning, spirit day and other upcoming events are still on hold for planning since we do not know what is to come in the next few months. Knowing how dedicated our parents and staff are to our students gives me no doubt that they will make all of these events special for our class of 2021.

OPT



Gisella's picture lights up Times Square in the heart of Manhattan.

## Honoring our Veterans

By Katie Schultz

Each December on National Wreaths Across America Day, coordinated wreath-laying ceremonies take place at Arlington National Cemetery, as well as at more than 2,100 various locations in all 50 U.S. states, at sea and abroad. One of our Kindergarten students, Gisella, spent her day making sure every bow and wreath were in the most perfect place and prayed for all the souls in the cemetery.

While there, Gisella's picture was taken by the Associated Press and was placed in Times Square in New York City. What a great honor!

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Gisella at the cemetery with her dad, who is a Special Forces, Army Green Beret, veteran.

**Mary of Nazareth**  
**Roman Catholic School**  
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**OPT Editor: Katherine Schultz,**  
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LIVES OF SERVICE  
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# Family Fun Goes Virtual!

**H**oly Cross School is well known for its strong sense of community and school spirit. But how do you nurture a sense of community during these times of social distancing? The school administration and HSA have worked together to reimagine social events and create engagement opportunities for families to connect and interact in order to sustain and build the Holy Cross culture of community. One such opportunity includes hosting Virtual Family Fun Nights.

Holy Cross has held several Friday night Virtual Bingo events, by grade, to help families connect. Each starts with an ice breaker followed by several rounds of Bingo, complete with prizes donated by local businesses. Mrs. Jessica Snyder, parent of a First Grader and PK student states, "Participating in a family fun night is an excellent way to end the week and to see the other families from the class. The kids are excited to see their classmates outside of school and it's a nice way to put a face to the name on the other end of an email. We look forward to building a sense of community with our class online until it's safe to do so face-to-face."

In addition to continuing to host more virtual Bingo events, Mrs. Christine Zalewski, our Director of Development and Admissions is collaborating with Mr. Michael



Two Holy Cross students loved playing virtual BINGO with their classmates and families.

Cilano, our Middle School Social Studies teacher to implement a Middle School Family Trivia Night on February 5. It will be a perfect way to end Catholic Schools Week. Mr. Cilano states, "We're excited to host the first ever Middle School Family Trivia Night! It promises to be an event full of fun and fellowship along with a healthy dose of competition!"

OPT

## Holy Cross Parish

4900 Strathmore Avenue, Garrett Park, MD

**Fr. Robert Buchmeier, Pastor**  
301-942-1020

## Holy Cross School

**Lisa Maio Kane, Principal**  
301-949-0053

**Lurana Hogan, Parish Editor**  
l.hogan@hcross.org



A new tradition was born at Holy Cross Church this year—the blessing of nativities. Parishioners shared a beautiful array of nativities, each with a special story, along with good tidings of the Christmas season. It is living proof that the joy of the Christmas season can never be diminished whenever we gather in Jesus' name.



## Unique Nativity Blessing at Holy Cross Church

**H**oly Cross Church hosted its first ever outdoor nativity blessing. Parishioners safely gathered, mindful of social distancing and mask requirements, while admiring the precious nativity scenes around them. The cold weather was warmed by the smiling eyes

and gentle sounds of Christmas cheer!

Parishioners came with their home nativity scenes displayed in and on their cars for our pastor, Father Robert Buchmeier to bless. Nativity scenes came in all shapes and sizes, many with

*Continued on page 39*



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# Learning is Fun at Holy Redeemer School



Above left, right and at right, Kindergarten students show off their Inauguration celebration work.



Above, right and four photos below, some of our wonderful Pre-K faculty sporting their HR Spirit Wear and their student's learning about letters, numbers, and the 5 senses!



Above left and above right, fun with Google Sheets, Learning Pixel Art and coding commands for robotics in Fourth Grade



At left, second Grade coding with robotics and ramps in Technology class



## Holy Redeemer Parish

9705 Summit Avenue  
Kensington, MD

Rev. Mark Hughes, Pastor  
301-942-2333

Holy Redeemer School  
Mr. Thomas Corrigan,  
Principal  
301-942-3701



# Parish's At-Home Catechesis Model Shows Children How Faith Is Connected to Daily Life

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

Mid-way through St. Francis of Assisi Parish's experiment in forming the faith of its children at home this year, Director of Religious Education Susan Anderson seems confident that her team of catechists and parents of children have done all they can to keep the presence of Jesus Christ and the importance of prayer paramount in families' lives.

"While we've certainly been challenged in many ways, I continue to be impressed by our catechists' willingness to adapt to the roles needed to support our new program model," Anderson said. "Families have responded well, engaging in offerings and using materials."

"I truly believe that all are doing the best we can to ensure that prayer, connection with the Church and faith formation continue to be part of our daily lives."

The at-home catechesis model designed by Anderson is robust, with faith formation centered on parents leading their children through discussions and lessons found in the *Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts* series, published by Loyola Press. At the start of the school year, each family picked up a Religious Education kit



Two children take part in St. Francis of Assisi's Religious Education online family gathering during Advent from their home.

with their child's grade-level textbook, a Bible for children in third grade and up, a calendar and the initial unit materials. Subsequent material has been mailed to families' homes.

In addition to the textbook, families are also supported through either one-on-one catechist outreach or family small groups that meet monthly, parent meetings offering an overview of the next unit's materials and online fam-

ily events. These interactive prayer celebrations are focused on a liturgical season or commemoration – the Feast Day of St. Francis, All Saints Day, Advent and Christmas – and incorporate opportunities for prayer, singing, games and communal catechesis.

During the four interactive prayer gatherings held in the fall, each event on Zoom garnered 60 or more devices, with several family members often crowded into the

platform's participant video feeds. Attendance at online gatherings for middle school-aged students has also stayed strong for the first half of the year.

"I think this is a sign of strong parent support, and also an indication that our middle school students are also seeking this sense of connection with their peers, with catechists and with the Church as a whole," Anderson said.

Lauren Cronise, mother of

14-year-old Wesley, 12-year-old Emily, 10-year-old Nolan and 7-year-old Bradley, consolidates her three younger children's faith formation time at the table after watching St. Francis' virtual Sunday Mass that premieres at 10 am Sundays on the parish YouTube Channel. Using the Loyola Press' instructor guide to prompt questions, Cronise finds that discussing the materials as a family helps reinforce concepts for all three children.

"It's been a good bonding point for us," Cronise said. "It shows the kids that [religious education] is important to us and that Jesus didn't go away because of the coronavirus."

OPT

## St. Francis of Assisi Parish

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OPT Editor  
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## Millennials with Technology and Social Media Knowledge Take Leadership Roles in Ministry

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

When the pandemic closed churches in the Archdiocese last March, the celebration of public Masses at St. Francis of Assisi Parish ground to a halt and ministry life slowed. Ten months later, several ministries outside of the core offerings are operating virtually or in-person – and in several cases, it is the parish's Millennial Catholics, comfortable with technology platforms and social media – who are leading the way.

Here are profiles of some Millennials making a difference:



Katie Giganti

### Katie Giganti

In early 2018, Katie Giganti, a certified instructor in the Insanity and Core De Force workouts, could not shake the feeling that she needed to help people at her church learn to exercise.

"There's a parallel between putting yourself through something hard and resisting the temptations of the world," said Giganti, 39. "I don't know that everyone has that belief and confidence. I wanted to share that with others."

Giganti, a licensed clinical social worker, communicated with Fr. John Dillon, who connected her with the Health Ministry. In July 2018, the Saturday Morning Shape Up Ministry was born.

Pre-pandemic, the ministry's members did a high-intensity interval workout, along with mixed martial arts, at 7 am every Saturday in the Gathering Space. Giganti modified the exercise for her regulars, who included people in their 60s, 40s and 30s.

When the pandemic closed the church, Giganti switched her ministry to the Zoom platform. She has not made many changes, other than turning her music down at home so it does not wake her sleeping family members.

Giganti – a fan of Fr. Mike Schmitz's podcasts -- said she believes Millennial

Continued on page 38



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# The Epiphany of the Lord at Mother Seton Parish

**M**other Seton parish celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany, the revelation that Jesus was the Son of God. Epiphany means manifestation. Today the Church celebrates the manifestation of our Lord to the whole world; after being made known to the shepherds of Bethlehem. He is revealed to the magi who have come from the far east to adore Him.

The magi being the first fruits of the Gentiles; they lead in their way all the peoples of the earth to Jesus and thus the Epiphany is an



Above, the three Wise men recount their story to the children.



At right, Worshipping the King of Kings



The three wise men, Gaspar, Balthasar, and Melchior, who came to seek and honor the infant Jesus.

affirmation of the universal salvation. This feast is the fulfillment of all the purposes of Advent and not only marks the liturgical crown of the Advent-Christmas but also illuminates the mysteries of the season.

And on Wednesday January 6th, our parish, celebrated this important feast in a remarkable way, in a beautiful event, prepared by the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way of our parish.

Children and adults waited for the special visit of the Three Kings, who came in their camels and made their royal entrance while the children were singing, and they walked directly to the Nativity where they fell prostrate and worshipped the King of Kings, presenting Jesus gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh.

We thank the Neocatechumenal Way for organizing this event. Also, we thank our Pastor Fr. Lee for his help and collaboration.

OPT

## Mother Seton Parish

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**Fr. Lee Fangmeyer**  
Pastor

301-924-3838

**Brenda Rosado**  
OPT Editor

Bulletin@Mothersetonparish.org



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## Free Covid Testing Held at Mother Seton

**O**n Saturday, January 9, Mother Seton Parish offered free CoVid testing in our parking lot. Care for Your Health Clinic, a non-profit, non-governmental agency performed the test to the many people who attended this completely confidential and free service. Care for Your Health is run by Dr. Anna Maria Izquierdo-Porrera, MD PhD, who served on the board of the Spanish Catholic Center.

We here at Mother Seton wish to thank Dr. Izquierdo-Porrera and her team along with Bishop Mario Dorsonville who suggested Mother Seton as one of the parishes to host this service.

OPT

It pays to advertise in Our Parish Times





Mrs. Caceres, Maria Foley, Marco Foley, and Mr. Foley pose with Santa on his truck

## A Covid Christmas

By Isabella Figueroa and Charlotte Lacey, OLOL Class of 2021

Every year, the Lourdes community joins together for our annual Breakfast with Santa. Students come to school on the weekend to eat a delicious breakfast, hang out with their friends, and to meet Santa. However, like most things this year, this tradition was changed. Breakfast with Santa turned into Santa on a Truck. Due to Covid regulations, we took all safety precautions, and we had a blast! Although we had our masks, gloves, and distance we still bonded as the great community we are.

On the day of the event, eighth graders got to school early to set up everything. Santa was on a truck in front of the soccer goal, with a “fireplace” and Christmas trees surrounding him. Next to that was another table where the Toys for Tots donations were dropped off, and many people generously donated toys for kids in need. Then there was a table with candy bags that kids could

take, and another space where hot chocolate and donuts were served. Christmas trees and music added to the holiday cheer! The seventh graders escorted the families from the parking lot in groups of 20, and each family could take a picture in front of the truck with Santa behind them before going on to the other stations. Even though we couldn't have as many people here as other years, the children had friends to play with while they ate their treats.

Milo Long is a new eighth grader and he said, “this was a great way to grow my relationships with the whole class.” This event was such a great way to incorporate joy even during the changes of the pandemic. Genevieve in third grade said that her favorite part was that Santa got her a pink scooter. Miranda in first grade said her favorite part was the donuts, but her dad ate some of hers! Laughter and cheer were spread throughout the field, and our community grew closer together.

OPT



Santa and the OLOL eighth graders beside the Toys for Tots donation table

## The Season of Giving

In a year with many changes and challenges, we are called even more strongly to give to our neighbors in need. This winter, members of the school and parish of Our Lady of Lourdes participated in a Coat of Many Colors drive and a Toys for Tots collection.

The toys were collected in the weeks leading up to Christmas, with a special collection taking place at the Breakfast with Santa event. Students enjoyed picking out toys for those in need. This drive was facilitated by the OLOL eighth graders, who decorated large boxes for the collection, encouraged children in other grades to give, and orga-

nized the toys during the Breakfast with Santa event.

The Coat of Many Colors drive is an annu-

*Continued on page 18*

### Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

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Bethesda, MD

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*Psalms and Canticles*, prepared by the monks of Conception Abbey in Missouri. This refresh of our classic Catholic prayer book will delight those who receive it. With a mix of both traditional blessings and

*Continued on page 34*



Praying for life in Bethesda

## PRO-LIFE

*Con't from page 1*

(Montgomery County Chair) stood by a long Democrats for Life banner and noted that they were present to draw attention to the gruesome injuries to two women which occurred at the CARE late-term abortion facility during May 2020. They also indicated their organization wants to challenge abortion extremism in the Democratic Party, and to challenge Maryland legislators to hold more moderate positions on issues related to the value of human life.

The pro-choice drive-by attendees drove cars in several loops past the facility on Old Georgetown Road yelling pro-choice slogans and displaying signs in support of legal abortion. There were about 6 pro-choice protestors and a larger group of pro-life attendees on the public sidewalk. Maryland Democrats for Life is sending letters to state and federal legislators and to the state Attorney General to push for a rigorous investigation of the recent injuries at this facility.

OPT

## GIVING

*Con't from page 17*

al event during the wintertime at OLOL. New and gently used winter coats, hats, scarves, mittens, gloves, and new pairs of winter socks are collected. This year, generous volunteers Jill Gadwood and Magda Alarcon Lopez collected the coats and had any used items cleaned before donating them.

The fifth graders at OLOL participated in the coat drive in a special way this year. Mrs. Nan Kiyonaga and her students turned their classroom Christmas tree into a Giving Tree during Advent. As a class, students labeled ornaments with items requested from the coat drive coordinators, i.e. gloves, mittens, scarves, socks. Mrs. Kiyonaga and her class decided on the smaller items as they seem to get overlooked some years, and they felt these would be nice gifts for those in need. Each student was invited to pick an ornament from the tree, and then bring into class the item listed on their ornament. The students noted how good it felt to give back to those in need this year. They were especially excited to bring the whole class's box of donations to Mrs. Gadwood on the final day of the collection.

While typical Christmas events such as visiting those in need, singing carols, or baking goodies were not possible this year, the students and parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes surely made the most of their time and treasure this season.

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# St. Raphael's brightest season brings renewed faith and tradition

By Gabriela Herrera Gugiu

Christmas is always a special time at St. Raphael School, and this year was no different. The SRS community embraced its virtual platforms to instill new traditions that are sure to stand the test of time.

Led by our Home & School Association, a dedicated team of helpers created the 12 Days of a St. Raphael Christmas – a series of 12 different events throughout December that celebrated all that is St. Raphael and all that is Christmas. The festivities included cookie decorating, a special bedtime reading of “’Twas the Night Before Christmas” by Principal Teri Dwyer, a jolly letters for Santa drive-through, and much more as we celebrated the season as a St. Raphael family – with the parish



Santa and his elves spread holiday cheer at St. Raphael School and Nursery School's festive letters for Santa drive-through. Photos by MJ Zafis-Garcia



and Raphael House included. The festivities ended with a community-wide tour of decorated school families' homes. A mobile app guided participants from house to house,

where selfies and prizes were included.

December 16 and 17 would have been the last two days of classes before Christmas break, but Mother

Nature had other plans by sending us back-to-back Snow Days. St. Raphael returned to virtual school on January 4 and in-person classes on January 11.

For this year's Catholic Schools Week, the National Catholic Educational Association chose the

*Continued on page 36*

## St Raphael School News

### Registration is Open

St. Raphael Nursery School (preschool) enrollment for 2021-22 opened on Jan. 15. SRNS has programs for 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and 4-Plus (Pre-K).

St. Raphael School (K-8) enrollment for 2021-22 is also open. SRS—a 2019 National Blue Ribbon School—specializes in tailored academics through small-group instruction,

integrated technology (including one-to-one iPads for middle-schoolers), and differentiated learning.

### Upcoming Events

Catholic Schools Week – Feb. 1-5

MONDAY (Feb. 1): Parent Appreciation Day

TUESDAY (Feb. 2): Teacher & Staff Appreciation Day

WEDNESDAY (Feb. 3): Student Appreciation Day and Career Day

THURSDAY (Feb. 4): Clergy Appreciation Day

FRIDAY (Feb. 5): Family Fun Night

For information about these and other events, visit [www.straphaelschoolmd.org](http://www.straphaelschoolmd.org).

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### St. Raphael Parish St. Raphael School

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Rev. Michael Salah, Pastor

Teri Dwyer, Principal

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301-762-2143

[www.straphaels.org](http://www.straphaels.org)

[www.straphaelschoolmd.org](http://www.straphaelschoolmd.org)

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## St. Martin's Volunteer of the Year Makes Lifelong Impact

By Anne Gemunder

**O**ur 2020 Volunteer of the Year at St. Martin's School is a devoted alumna and dedicated school parent. Vivian Abudayeh was honored at the Catholic Business Network of Montgomery County Annual Gala in December. We are grateful to Vivian because of her years of outstanding leadership and tireless efforts in service to St. Martin's. Rarely an event goes on without her involvement in either the planning or final implementation.

Vivian's contributions began years ago when she and her three siblings attended St. Martin's and have continued to this day. Vivian was a member of the first Kindergarten class, which was housed in a rented building at the end of the school property. Some of her fondest memories were recess games, Spirit Week, and the

*Continued on page 34*



St. Martin's Volunteer of the Year for 2020 Vivian Abudayeh and her daughters, Layla and Dina. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School



Nurse Amy and Ms. Ro, faculty at St. Martin's, received their first vaccination shots for the coronavirus. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School

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## St. Martin's Celebrates Catholic Schools Week

By Catherine Cooksey and Anne Gemunder

**C**atholic Schools Week (January 31-February 5) will look a little bit different this year. But, just as we have in past years, we take time to honor contributors to our school community and celebrate what makes Catholic schools so extraordinary! Through these events, we focus on the value Catholic education provides to young people and its contributions to our church and our community.

### Crusaders Celebrate Catholic Schools Week with Whirlwind of Activities

**Sunday 1/31** – Parish Appreciation Day, In-Person Tours & Virtual Information

Session from 1:00 to 5:00 pm,  
 Family Mass at 5:00 pm

**Monday 2/1** – Community Appreciation Day, School Mass at 10:15 am, Lenten Food Drive Begins

**Tuesday 2/2** – School Appreciation Day, Children's Bingo, Tacky Tuesday, 24-Hour Day of Giving

**Wednesday 2/3** – Student Appreciation Day, Disney Trivia, In-Person Tours & Virtual Information Session from 3:00 to 6:00 pm

**Thursday 2/4** – Family Appreciation Day, Ping-Pong Tournament, Sports Dress Down

**Friday 2/5** – Teacher Appreciation Day, Spirit Wear Dress Down, Faculty & Staff Lunch

OPT

**More St. Martin of Tours News on Page 34**



# St. Michael's Welcomes Our Lady of Guadalupe Tilma

By Cecilia Flores

In preparation for Advent and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, St Michael's Pastor Monsignor Eddie Tolentino and the Sodality welcomed the Archdiocese of Washington's (ADW) replica Tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe for a week-long visit in November. The Tilma was processed to the sanctuary with the singing of the "Litany of Mary," which signaled the opening of the Prayer service and closed with the Mexican hymn "La Guadalupana," which is routinely sung around the world on the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Prayer service



Tilma is presented to the congregation. Photo by Rolando Villars

was followed by a multi-language Rosary wherein each decade was prayed in a different language: English, French, Mam (an indigenous dialect of the Mayan lan-

guage), Tagalog and Spanish. Both of these prayerful events were livestreamed to parishioners and others in the ADW community who could not participate in person.

Visiting hours were available daily and at each Mass during the week-long visit. The Tilma was also livestreamed for one hour each evening to facilitate and encourage prayer, quiet devotion and meditation. Coordination of this visit and veneration to Our Lady was successful due to the support of all ministries and communities within our parish in keeping with Mary's message to welcome the stranger seeking a home and place of rest in our Church and communities.

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Tilma Virtual Devotion 6-7 pm daily. Photo by Cecilia Flores



St. Michael the Archangel Knights of Columbus caroling at Little Sisters of the Poor and the Missionary Sisters of Charity. Photo by Steven Holowenzak

## Christmas Caroling by the Knights of Columbus

By Charles Hayes

The virus threat has been particularly sad for those unable to go outside. Some have the care of the Little Sisters of the Poor and the Missionary Sisters of Charity to bring them God's love. St. Michael the Archangel Knights of Columbus helped the sisters elevate the spirits of the cloistered and homeless by singing Christmas Carols outside their homes. Even though the virus kept them shel-

tered, the Knights wanted them to enjoy the caroling from their windows. In December, Grand Knight Mike Spraggins, led the singing with his guitar and the Knights sang happy notes of song to the sheltered. This Christmas cheer brought some joy to approximately 160 residents of the two homes run by the Sisters. Those participating were beneficiaries knowing that the first principle of the Knights – CHARITY – was being practiced.

OPT



The Three Wise Men arrived to St. Michael the Archangel by camel and bearing gifts for Jesus.



The children received a catechesis from Msgr. Tolentino about the feast of the Epiphany and why the Three Wise Men were following the star leading them to Jesus.

## The Three Wise Men Visit St. Michael

By Damien Kawakami

During the annual celebration of the Epiphany, the children of St. Michael the Archangel Parish looked on as the Three Wise Men arrived. The program began

by providing the children with an opportunity to write letters to Jesus asking for a special grace. They were encouraged to ask for something that only Jesus could give them instead of asking for the type of gift that can be found in a store.

The celebration continued with the children singing Christmas songs as they waited for the arrival of the Three Wise Men. When the Wise Men arrived by camel and bore gifts, the children and adults sprang

Continued on page 37

## St. Michael's Green Team is Caring for Creation along Sligo Creek

By Darrell Smith

The St. Michael the Archangel Green Team is partnering with the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) to care for creation along Sligo Creek. The

NWF's Sacred Grounds program is a faith-based wildlife habitat effort. The Green Team launched the program with the first of three focus groups in December, led by NWF's Dr. Mirele Goldsmith, with a discussion on how residents relate to

Sligo Creek, how they make decisions about caring for their yards, and how they think St. Michael's can inspire participation in Sacred Grounds. Two additional focus groups, one of which will be held

Continued on page 37

## St. Michael's Coming Together for Our Pastor

By Lisa Taylor

Pope Francis recounted in an essay adapted from his book "Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future," his near death experience when he was in his second year of formation for the priesthood and the wisdom it afforded him. Recently, Pope Francis suffered a virulent version of the flu and was near death. He notes that it was with the help of the doctors and nurses, who were nuns, as well as prayers and the hand of God that got him through it.

Last month, Monsignor Eddie Tolentino, our pastor at St. Michael the Archangel Church, sent a letter to the parish revealing that he had contracted COVID-19. He has since recovered completely and is in good health. His experience teaches us not only the value of life, but also the importance of prayer, community and service.

While COVID-19 is an unwanted presence today, it has shown the courage, pain, and love of many. St. Michael's parish came together in prayer and service while Monsignor was in recovery and quarantine by ensuring that he and Fr. Rodriguez received meals, our staff were safe, and our community was informed about the disease. We also worked with the Montgomery

County Health Department and the Archdiocese of Washington to ensure that we performed proper contract tracing and protected life.

Monsignor Tolentino, echoing the words of Pope Francis, states that COVID-19 reminds us of our shared humanity and the need to consider other pandemics that afflict so many in our world: the pandemics of poverty, climate change, and war. While Monsignor Tolentino has recovered from COVID, he reminds us that as Catholics we must continue to work towards a better world for us all.

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# Bishop Michael Fisher, former St. John Neumann pastor, brings message of trust, collaboration to Buffalo

By Rodney Harris

**B**ishop Michael W. Fisher, an Auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, was installed as the 15th Bishop of the Diocese of Buffalo, New York, on January 15, 2021. The installation Mass took place amid strict COVID-19 restrictions at the Cathedral of St. Joseph in Buffalo. Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, presided over the installation ceremony.

Bishop Fisher, 62, promises to bring trust and transparency to the diocese, which has been rocked by the clergy abuse crisis. In a December 10, 2020 interview with *EWTN News Nightly*, Bishop Fisher told anchor *Tracy Sabol* he is a parish priest and a pastor saying: "that is what I hope to bring, at my core as a priest, a bishop, and



Bishop Michael Fisher's installation at the Diocese of Buffalo on January 15, 2021. Photo courtesy Diocese of Buffalo

now the Shepherd of the Diocese of Buffalo" adding "we certainly have many challenges ahead of us, but we need to do it together and collaboratively."

The Diocese of Buffalo filed for bankruptcy last year after being named in hundreds of clergy abuse lawsuits following a window in the New York state statute of limitation. Bishop Richard Malone resigned from the diocese after a Vatican-

ordered investigation into Malone's leadership after a year of scandal, including a leaked diocesan document relating to the handling of claims of clergy abuse. Malone denied covering up abuse claims.

At the time of Pope Francis' appointment of Bishop Fisher, Cardinal Wilton Gregory released a statement saying Bishop Fisher is "an exceptionally compassionate

*Continued on page 34*

## O Calm, All Ye Faithful

By Larissa York

**E**very Christmas, we celebrate the Light of Christ entering our murky world. In 2020, the darkness was much more apparent. With an ongoing pandemic and political unrest, Fr. Stefan Yap made joy and peace of the Nativity the focus of his Christmas homily. When asked why, he answered, "Just knowing everything that has happened this year has caused a lot of anxiety in me, in our parish, and the world, but that is not from God. In the Nativity narrative, there is no anxiety. The only thing

you feel is peace because Christ reigns in that scene, and because he reigns - Satan doesn't."

Fr. Stefan explained how COVID-19 spread fear and inflicted isolation. While reflecting on our desperate measure to preserve health, Father spoke about God's pursuit to give us abundant and eternal lives. "Christ became human so that He could come in contact with us in our sickness, weakness, and brokenness." Father noted, "the Lord has made it very clear that even in this pandemic, He will

*Continued on page 34*



Father Stefan Yap, Parochial Vicar at Saint John Neumann, Gaithersburg. Photo by Larissa York

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# St. John the Evangelist School News

All of St. John the Evangelist students are working diligently this school year, whether they are attending school in person or are distance learners. This is particularly true about our first graders. They have been working extra hard in Reading. Students have all chosen informational books for their Paper Slides video projects and are now working on re-reading and taking notes in their books. In addition to all they have been learning through their books, their weekly activities include writing journals in which they respond to a prompt in a sentence or two. They also engage in sight word practice activities, where they practice reading, writing, and building each word with magnets, wiki sticks, and alphabet blocks.

The first-grade students also completed a host of fun activities to help practice using number lines. First, students made number lines that they taped to their desks. Then they made little penguin magnets and solved problems by hopping penguins along the number lines. On nice days, the students went outside and use a life-sized number line. Each student took a turn hopping along the number line, and students on the sidelines recorded their friends' hops on the number lines on their clipboards.

Our Confirmation candidates have also been busy. From November through the first few days of January, they sponsored a Coats of Many Colors drive to provide coats, hats, gloves and scarves to members of our local community. New and gently used coats that were clean and in good condition were collected, resulting in over 40 large bags of donations. Continuing with these Corporal Works of Mercy, the candidates also restocked the Parish Pantry by collecting food and some personal items for those in need in our parish and greater community.

When we get a little weary from the restrictions Covid-19 has placed on us all and we start to feel a little blue, we just have to look to our Junior Kindergarten students to lift our spirits. When the leave their classroom to go to recess or gym class, they don't just walk down the hall—they ride a motorcycle, take a train, or they fly! One can't help but smile as they flap their "wings" on the way to their next adventure!

Like many other area Catholic schools, we are coming up with new approaches for showcasing our school. We have always known that our students are the best testament to what is special about St. John the Evangelist. And once again, they have come through for us. If you go to our website ([www.sjte.org](http://www.sjte.org)) and click on the "Virtual Open House" button, our students will give you a tour of the school and host interviews with our teachers. Check out their enthusiasm and learn more about our school.

OPT



At left, Junior Kindergarten "flying" to their next class



At right, number lines and penguins on every desk

Below, jumping to the next number on the life-sized number line



Above, practicing sight words

At left, Wiki Sticks sight words

Below left, building sight words



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Pastor

**St. John the Evangelist School**  
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AT SETON



**Elizabeth Seton High School**  
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Catholic Schools Week

[setonhs.org](http://setonhs.org)





## Where to Get Tested for COVID-19

There are numerous ways to get tested for COVID-19 in Montgomery County. The County operates dozens of clinics most weeks and rotates the locations to make testing easily accessible for residents in all parts of the County. In addition, there are many privately operated testing programs.

Testing at County-operated clinics is free, does not require a doctor's referral and is available by

making advance appointments or on a walk-up basis.

There may be a fee at privately operated sites. Residents should check in advance on any possible cost and available times at privately operated sites.

To view the schedule of upcoming County-operated test clinics, and to make an appointment, go to [www.MoCoCOVIDtesting.org](http://www.MoCoCOVIDtesting.org).

OPT



## County Branch Public Libraries Now Closed Sundays, Offer Contactless Pickup

Montgomery County Public Libraries temporarily reduced their hours of service to 48 hours weekly beginning Sunday, Jan. 24. There will no longer be service on Sundays. All branches will be open eight hours on other days.

The branches will be open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and noon to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The Noyes Library will remain closed.

"The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic unfortunately requires us to make this decision," said MCPL Director Anita Vassallo. "I hope that we will be able to begin to restore our operating hours as the situation improves over the course

of the year."

MCPL's contactless holds pickup service "Holds to Go!" will operate during the new hours. The hours adjustments will make it possible to continue Holds to Go! at all branches.

Holds to Go users are able to place items on hold online or by phone and then make an appointment to pick them up in the library vestibule or at an outside table.

Virtual services can take place outside of the new branch hours. Digital services will continue to be available 24/7.

For more information about MCPL services, visit: [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/library/](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/library/).

OPT



## The Way Retreat

The Way is a free, 3-day guided meditation and prayer program for men and women. It is an opportunity for healing and prayer and for survivors to reflect on God's plan for their lives.

Have you experienced dread, confusion, deep hurt, betrayal or anger when you think of the abuse you have suffered?

Alternatively, maybe you are feeling nothing at all.

You have every right to these feelings. They are natural reactions to the trauma you have survived.

You may be asking yourself:

What do I do with all of this?

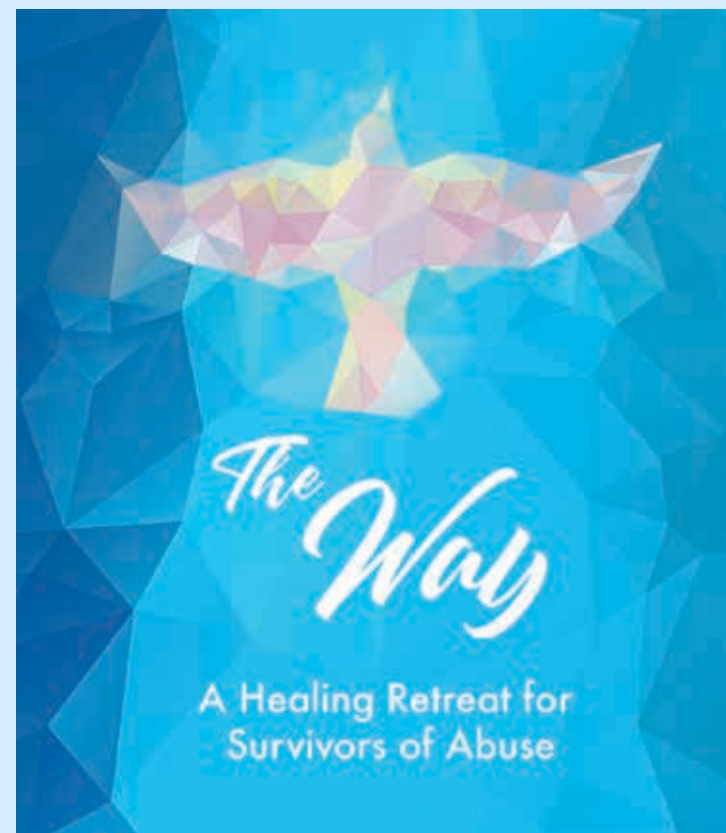
How will confronting my abuse experience affect my life?

How will I ever recover my trust in people, God, my Church again?

Does it really matter?

Do I matter?

The Way is the path to take to find answers to these and many other questions for which your heart, mind, body, and soul have been searching. This is where your healing journey begins. These three days of guided meditations and prayer crafted around the Stations of the Cross will show you the steps Christ took to overcome dread, confusion, deep hurt, betrayal and anger not only for his experience of abuse – which culminated in his death on the cross and new life in the Resurrection – but for your abuse as well. You can choose to



walk The Way with him, learn his ways, transform your pain and suffering into a new life, the life God has always wanted for you but that the sins of another has disfigured in countless ways.

### Retreat Schedule\*

#### Women's Retreat:

March 26-28, 2021

#### Men's Retreat:

April 30-May 2, 2021

To register: Please contact Deborah McDonald at [mcdonald@adw.org](mailto:mcdonald@adw.org) or 301-853-4466.

\*Due to the Covid 19 restrictions these dates are tentative and pending city and county restrictions.

OPT

Source: Archdiocese of Washington, <https://adw.org/the-way-retreat/>

## Brookewood's Catholic Identity Integral to High School Life

By Glencora Pipkin

The Catholic community of Brookewood School is an outgrowth of its rigorous curriculum and in-person interactions, in and out of the classroom.

According to junior Lupe Garvey, the study of theology is particularly unique at Brookewood. "[Our religion classes are] serious and go in depth into the faith, and they help us apply it to daily life. [We learn] Trinitarian theology but we also talk about logic, proving our faith by reason. [We] really get to understand what we've been taught. When we're having conversations with people who aren't Catholic, we're able to explain it in a way that they can understand, too."

But Catholicism, for this community, is not merely an exercise in logic; it is a way of living life to the fullest, being a cheerful, pious, and welcoming young woman. When freshman Ana Maria Pantoja Alfaro came for a



Lupe Garvey reads during daily Mass

shadow visit to Brookewood, she noticed almost immediately the kindness and attention other girls offered one another. "People all had such different personalities, but I immediately felt welcomed and accepted."

Students and teachers have also benefited from a deeply faithful community, especially in times of crisis. Last year, after Joseph McPherson, Brookewood's

founding headmaster, passed away, the school community grieved together, and they continue to pray for him. The school's deep religious bonds have helped students, teachers, and faculty process the sadness of losing Mr. McPherson, in light of our eternal hope in Christ. And especially now during the COVID-19 crisis, students find solace in Christian texts read in the classroom. According to junior Maggie Tobin, "My English class's study of Dante's *Purgatorio* helped me understand waiting through crisis. [Brookewood sophomores] read this work during Lent, but it felt particularly pertinent now, as we wait."

The community, in particular, helps reinforce what girls are learning in the classroom. "We help spread the faith by living it out with joy." According to junior Maggie Tobin, teachers and students alike are "witnesses of the faith," offering a mirror to each other of respect, dignity, humility, and virtue.

OPT





Confirmation candidates purchasing socks with parishioner donations.

## 2021 Confirmation Candidates Warm the Soles of Many!

**R**esurrection Confirmation Candidates held a sock drive and thanks to the many donations from parishioners, they assembled packets of two pairs of socks, tied a ribbon with a candidate handmade prayer and encouragement “care card.” Socks were donated and candidates went shopping for more socks with the donations of money. Over 600 pairs of socks were donated and brought with care cards to So Others Might Eat homeless shelter in Washington, DC the week of Christmas! Joy from many was given to many!

OPT



Confirmation candidates preparing packages of socks



### Special Visit from Resurrection Parishioner!

Our parish seminarian in training, Chike Egbufoama, made a visit to the Religious Education Program's Family Communion Service on January 8. Students enjoyed his talk about his call to be a holy man and the priesthood. Chike is at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary in Philadelphia. We will continue to pray for him.

**Church of the Resurrection Parish**  
3315 Greencastle Road  
Burtonsville, MD  
**Rev. John M. Barry,**  
Pastor  
301-288-4662



## Resurrection's Virtual Christmas Pageant

**F**or over 25 years, the annual Christmas Pageant has been a cherished tradition for the children of Resurrection Catholic Church. This year, however, the Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible to do a live Christmas Pageant. But that did not stop catechist Julia Shawhan and her daughter Mary, who started work on a virtual version of the pageant in November.

“When children have the opportunity to participate in the liturgy, they see themselves as an important part of the Church family,” explained Julia.

Mary, a senior at Paint Branch High School, has been involved in the pageant for over 10 years. “It’s a great opportunity for kids to perform. It’s how I got my start in theater,” said Mary.

Julia wrote a new script, got permission

from pastor Fr. John Barry to proceed, and set out to find some actors. Ultimately, nine students in grades pre-K to sixth signed up. Julia delivered the costumes to the Pageant Players, who each played several roles.

With only two rehearsals, conducted over Zoom, assistance from the Pageant Players’ parents was invaluable. They were the at-home crew in charge of computers, costumes and general support for their kids. Each rehearsal began with a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to help share the story of the birth of Jesus.

After all the scenes were filmed, Mary began to edit, adding music from the Resurrection Church Choirs album Cantiques de Noel, a guitar sing-along from Fr. Barry and beautiful backgrounds. The families also

*Continued on page 37*



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# An Aging World

## Census Bureau releases interactive Story Map on population aging trends

**A**n Aging World: 2020 is a new, interactive visualization tool designed to guide users through a data-driven narrative using maps, text, and infographics about population aging.

Released recently by the U.S. Census Bureau and funded in part by National Institute on Aging, the Story Map is designed to provide information on our aging world. While we know a lot about the future dynamics of population aging, there are many issues we've yet to unravel and the story of our aging world may unfold in unexpected ways.

The evolving family institutions and social networks that provide the foundation of support for each older adult and much of the needed response from governments and policymakers to the challenges of aging are still unclear. A more comprehensive understanding of popu-



lation aging around the world can help us to anticipate and plan for future trends.

The Story Map's tools capture and display data on the aging population to help inform demography research and policy development to ensure that governments and communities are prepared to meet the opportunities and challenges of an aging population.

Story Map walks users through our aging world and explores how our world looks now and how it may change over the next 30 years. It guides users through a data-driven narrative using map series, text, and infographics. The Story Map illustrates the variation in proportion of 65 and older in all countries of the world; explains the process of population aging by a generalized model called the Demographic Transition; demonstrates changes in the main drivers of population

aging – fertility decline and mortality decline; and exhibits differences in older dependency ratio, sex ratio, and healthy life expectancy. As the story of population aging and its challenges continue to unfold throughout the world, societies will choose to respond in similar and diverse ways.

The broad institutional response of governments and policymakers to the challenges of aging is difficult to anticipate. So too are the evolving family institutions and social networks that provide the foundation of support for each older person.

The Story Map is intended to be viewed on a desktop computer and is not optimized for mobile device display. To access Story Map, visit: [www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2020/demo/aging\\_story\\_map.html](http://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2020/demo/aging_story_map.html).

OPT

# Gene therapy techniques restore vision damage from age and glaucoma in mice

**W**hile eyesight often dims with age, a novel mouse study provides intriguing evidence that innovative gene therapy techniques could someday roll back the biological clock for our vision. The research was conducted with NIA and the National Eye Institute support by a Harvard Medical School team and published recently in *Nature*.

Close up on eyes of mother and daughter with faces next to one another. The team's approach involved epigenetics, a field of science that studies heritable changes that can activate or deactivate genes without any change in the underlying DNA sequence of these genes. The word epigenetics is of Greek origin and literally means over and above (epi) the genome.

Their experiments refined a technique that won a Nobel prize in 2012. The basic idea is that by using a harmless virus to introduce just a few genes, called Yamanaka factors after the researcher who discovered them,



scientists can reprogram the DNA of mature cells of different types to transform back into young (pluripotent) stem cells. These can then regenerate function lost to age, illness, or injury. The virus' payload is turned on or off via injection of a selective inducer molecule.

This cell reprogramming method could lead to future disease therapies, but previous studies showed it is tough to safely rein in the rapid cell growth and tumor development triggered by Yamanaka factors. The Harvard

team found a way to keep the beneficial effects and weed out the dangerous ones by leaving out one of the four factor genes, called MYC, that is closely related to cancer and can shorten the lifespan of mice when it is expressed.

First working in lab cell cultures, the team was able to rejuvenate damage to retinal ganglion cells, a type of neuron found at the rear of the eye. Later in a mouse model, the same techniques seemed to protect some optic nerve cells from damage and caused others to grow fresh connections to the brain. A third experiment had similar success reversing some vision damage in a mouse model of glaucoma, a leading cause of age-related blindness in humans.

In lab tests, the glaucoma model mice who received the injection treatment gained back roughly half of their previously lost visual ability. In other experiments, middle-aged mice who received the injection scored similar to younger mice in visual tests, plus their

DNA showed expression and methylation (epigenetic patterns of common chemical groups that attach to DNA at different life stages) signatures that resembled the genetic material of younger mice. They have also found that these recovered functions require two DNA methylation enzymes that could be responsible for these epigenetic changes during the reprogramming.

While the researchers are encouraged by this progress, they caution that epigenetic reprogramming techniques are still very complex and still harbor risk of abnormal cell growth or cancer. They plan to conduct many further studies to test the gene therapy technologies in larger animals, explore how the restorative factors impact other types of cells and tissues, and verify that the youthful changes seen are not fleeting.

Reference: Lu Y, et al. Reprogramming to recover youthful epigenetic information and restore vision. *Nature* 2020;588(7836):124-129. doi:10.1038/s41586-020-2975-4

OPT

## Maryland Access Point (MAP)

### Your connection to long term services and supports

**M**AP is the gateway to long term services and supports in Maryland. MAP specialists work with caregivers, professionals, and all individuals with long term care needs to plan, identify, connect, and assist with accessing private and public resources for long term services and supports.

Long term services and supports include information on health, transportation, income, and financial aid, senior and community centers and clubs, nutrition and meals, pharmacy assistance, housing, volunteer opportunities, and more!

MAP also offers Options Counseling, a



service through which all individuals and their caregivers, plan and make informed

decisions regarding their long term care. Trained, professional Options Counselors

use a person-centered approach and support individuals with matching their needs, preferences, and values with services in their community, developing a personalized action plan, getting connected to resources, making referrals to appropriate agencies and planning for current and/or future needs.

Options Counseling is a statewide program delivered by staff at 20 local Maryland Access Point (MAP) sites. Residents of Montgomery County, call 240-777-3000.

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# Communicating Clearly While Wearing a Face Covering

**W**earing a face covering is an important part of keeping you and others healthy right now. But they can also make talking to those around you more difficult. Face coverings can muffle sound. They can also hide important clues about the speaker's message and emotions. This can make it hard to understand speech, especially for those with hearing loss.

Millions of people in the U.S. have hearing loss, including half of those older than 75. Now, more than ever, it's important to make an extra effort to communicate. Speak more clearly and louder than you normally would, without shouting. Reduce background noise when possible. Be aware that physical distance can also make hearing more difficult.

Make sure the person you're speaking with understands you. Ask and adapt if needed. You can also offer to use another

method—a smartphone, paper and pen, or whiteboard—to get your message across. When it's essential that you understand spoken details, like at a doctor's appointment, consider bringing a friend or family member to help.



Face coverings can make communication challenging for everyone. Cloth face coverings obscure facial features, disrupting speech perception and the emotion conveyed by the speaker. They also filter speech, making sounds less clear. When it is harder to understand speech—whether because of cloth face coverings, distance, or other factors—research suggests that we

have fewer cognitive resources to process information deeply. As a result, communication suffers, and feelings of stress and isolation may increase.

Speech, language, and hearing capabilities are highly individualized. These difficult times offer all of us the opportunity to be mindful about communication. It will require extra effort. Meet these challenges with patience, kindness, and a commitment to problem-solving. Speak more clearly and perhaps louder than you normally would (without shouting).

With a little extra effort and problem solving, we can all communicate clearly while staying safe.

Source: *National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders*

## 8 TIPS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WHEN WEARING A FACE COVERING

### BE AWARE

Is the person you're communicating with having trouble understanding you? Ask and adapt if needed.

### BE PATIENT

Face coverings block visual cues and muffle sounds that help us understand speech, which can make interactions frustrating.

### BE MINDFUL

Consider how physical distancing might affect your communication. As distance increases, sound levels decrease, and visual cues are more difficult to see.

### BE LOUD AND CLEAR

Speak up, but don't shout. Focus on speaking clearly. Consider wearing a clear face covering, if possible. If you're having trouble understanding, ask the person you're talking with to speak louder. If you lip-read, ask those you interact with regularly to wear a clear face covering.

### TURN DOWN THE BACKGROUND VOLUME

Background noise can make conversation especially hard. When possible, move to a quieter spot or turn down the sound.

### COMMUNICATE ANOTHER WAY

Use a smartphone talk-to-text application or writing tools (paper/pen, whiteboard) to communicate.\*

### CONFIRM THAT YOUR STATEMENT IS CLEAR

Ask if your message has been understood.

### BRING A FRIEND OR BE A FRIEND

If it's essential that you comprehend important spoken details—during a discussion with a health care provider, for example—consider bringing a friend or family member with you. Or, offer to come along to listen and take notes when a friend has an important appointment or meeting.

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov>  
<https://twitter.com/nidcd>

\*Learn more from The Hearing Loss Association of America's Face Masks and Hearing Loss: Practical Tips and Strategies.

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## Let's Talk Assisted Living.



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**Malta House**  
Hyattsville • 301-699-8600

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[www.VictoryHousing.org](http://www.VictoryHousing.org)

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# Parish Celebrates a Founder's Century of Gentle Service

Virginia Rhodes, a founding member of the parish, is approaching the age of 100. She is still active in the work of the church, sharing the life of the Gospel.

Virginia grew up in the farmland west of Damascus. Her mother died when she was 12 and her brother was seven; she remembers that everyone fussed over the little boy – “he was spoiled!” – but everyone expected her to take care of herself, independent and helpful; so that’s what she did for the next nine decades.

She attended a one-room schoolhouse on Kings Valley Road, which has since disappeared into the woods. Then she attended Damascus High School.

She married a Catholic, Edmond Rhodes, who had three children. He never pushed her to join his church;



Virginia Rhodes stands proudly in her front yard with her son Michael and Msgr. Filardi. The original church (1960) is visible behind Michael, and the new church (2002) is behind Mrs. Rhodes.

but when they had a son, she decided herself to become Catholic and raise all four kids together in the Church. She went to see Fr. Meyer at St. Martin’s in Gaithersburg for instruction, three times a week, with her husband; and they plowed through the Baltimore Catechism. “It was all so different I didn’t think I’d ever understand it,” she says. “But Fr. Meyer was wonderful.”

She was a fan of Vatican II. She never knew any Latin, and Edmond didn’t know any either; it was a struggle to understand what was going on at Mass. “It was great when that all changed!”

When the new parish started, Edmond and Virginia helped to find the land and fund the building. The first Mass at St. Paul was Christmas 1960. On Christmas Eve, she and her son John and two others spent the whole day cleaning up grime

from construction. Then she kept cleaning and decorating that church for almost six decades.

They had mishaps. “My friend was so hurry-scurry. One day, she cleaned the tabernacle, and cleaned the gilt right off the front. It looked terrible.”

Three of her children drifted away from the church over the years, and that bothered her. But during the pandemic this year, one grandson – Brian Rhodes, a professional firefighter – declared that he was “tired of not having the faith.” He went through the RCIA program with Msgr. Filardi’s help, and was received into the Church on Saturday, November 21.

Virginia, who will celebrate her 100th birthday on July 17, declares herself very happy.

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## Making Prayer Shawls Is a Rich and Simple Ministry

Among the simplest and most attractive services of St. Paul Catholic Church is the prayer shawl ministry. It includes community, service, prayer, and beauty, all in one smiling package.

For over years, a group of women from the parish have met once a week to crochet or knit together. It’s usually seven or eight people, sometimes as many as 15. Before the pandemic interfered, they met downstairs in the rectory. Now, to maintain safe social distancing, they use a larger space in the basement of the Parish Center.

So what do they do? They sit and



Doris Doonan and Sherrie Wade (socially distanced) working and praying for the sick and elderly of the parish.

knit and chat a bit. Some crochet, and pray, a bit. And in their gentle chat, they knit the parish together, a bit.

They make prayer shawls for the sick and the bereaved. It’s a simple gift, like flowers, but it lasts longer. When you wrap up in one of these shawls, it’s a soft and warm reminder that the people of the parish are thinking of you and praying for you.

When the shawls or robes are finished, the makers pray over them, asking the Lord to bless the recipients. Then the pastor or other parish ministers deliver them. The shawls aren’t the focus of a visit; they are a little gift to leave behind after a visit – a tangible and useful and attractive reminder of grace.

The women make lap robes for people living in nursing homes including Pleasant View in Mt. Airy. This is where the pandemic exploded onto the scene in

Maryland – which can catch and hold your attention, but need not. The home does in fact have a pleasant view, rolling hills, sunlight – and lap robes, quiet little gifts with a gentle human touch.

The women also make stump covers, for people who lost a leg and need something like a warm sock but bigger. These covers are also good for people with broken legs in a cast, who need something for stray chilly toes. And they make baby hats for newborns at Holy Cross Hospital in Germantown. They used to make hats for babies at Medstar in Olney (formerly Montgomery General Hospital), but there’s another group there now. And they also make some baby layettes for the National Christ Child Society.

Koinonia, diakonia, kerygma, knitted together with beauty and a smile. That’s hard to beat!

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Allyssa received her own dose of grace for holding the holy water as the pastor blessed the Bourdeaux home. Then John wrote the formulaic message over the door, a promise of welcome that he and his wife Ann and their four children made together.

## 20 + C + M + B + 21. Say what?

By John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe

To celebrate Epiphany, many Catholics commit themselves each year to welcome strangers like the three wise men. So during the week of Epiphany, Msgr. Edward Filardi visited and blessed homes around the parish, and encouraged people to write the promise over their doors: In 2021, we will welcome Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

After the blessing, per custom, the family wrote 20 + C + M + B + 21 over the door: they will welcome strangers.

The custom is a little odd. The three wise men visited the Lord: are we supposed to imitate the wise men, or the Lord? Who is visitor, and who is guest, and which one are we? It may seem odd, but actually, hosts and guests swap roles frequently, throughout Scripture.

The archetype of hospitality is Abraham welcoming three celestial visitors at Mamre. Abraham starts out as the host: he invites his celestial guests into the shade beneath his trees and showers food on them. But within a few hours, the roles are reversed: God welcomes Abraham beneath the stars of his sky and showers gifts on him.

We recall this role reversal at the Eucharist. The priest holds up the host and says that the guests at this feast should be happy. Jesus is host; we are invited guests. Our response is, we are not ready to be hosts for such a guest. Wait a moment: which is which?

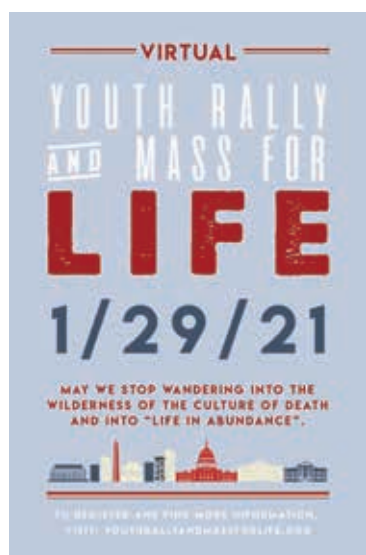
The host/guest relationship – at Mamre, at Mass, and at Epiphany – is not confused; it’s an invitation to unity. Like marriage, it’s an image of the Trinity.

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**St. Paul Catholic Church**  
9250E Damascus Road  
Damascus, Md.

**Msgr. Edward Filardi**  
Pastor  
301- 253-2027

**John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe**  
OPT Editor  
cavanaughokeefe@gmail.com





# St. Jude Regional Catholic School: Catch Our Spirit!

By Ellen Donnelly & Frank Miller;  
Photos by Rebecca Sella

**T**he St. Jude community is stronger than ever because everyone is working together to give all the children the best possible experience.

Like so many other schools, St. Jude Regional Catholic School (SJRCs) in Rockville, Maryland, struggled at the onset of the pandemic, but that didn't stop it from going virtual one week after the shutdown in the spring. Over the summer, the entire faculty worked tirelessly to prepare for a full five-day-a-week return to school. The administrative team of Dr. Glenn Benjamin, Mrs. Jeanne Donatelli, Mrs. Stephanie Hammel, and Mrs. Ellen Donnelly led all aspects of the preparation, determined to offer the option of in-person learning to the students. The school's reopening plan was accepted by the Archdiocese of Washington and Montgomery County.

School began as scheduled on August 25. Fr. Paul D. Lee, STD, Pastor of the Shrine of St. Jude, led the school in prayer at an outdoor opening Mass and has been the guiding light throughout this challenging school year. SJRCs faculty continues to teach and students continue to learn and have fun despite the hardships of COVID-19.



At left and above, Mass at St. Jude school

Challenges are welcomed at SJRCs. For example, if the school couldn't have Rosary Club on campus, Mrs. Donatelli, club leader, brought Rosary Club to the students via Zoom. The children always inspire everyone with their funny stories and devotions each week. And, COVID-19 can't stop the music at SJRCs as Mrs. White continues to conduct choir practice every Monday via Zoom.

Hosting fun—yet COVID safe—events such as Drive-in Movie Nights (“The Book

of Life,” shown the day before Halloween and “The Star,” shown before Christmas) has brought the school community together. Families are able wave to each other from their car windows, eat their own snacks, and enjoy the movie—all from the safety of their own cars. At Christmas, there was even a surprise visit from Santa!

The school continues to be grateful for the efforts of its faculty, students, parents, and guardians. The St. Jude community is

stronger than ever because everyone is working together to give all the children the best possible experience.

SJRCs will begin Catholic Schools week with an opening Mass on January 29 and will close the week with Mass on February 5. Both Masses will be live streamed, so families can safely “attend” and celebrate the gift of Catholic schools.

OPT



Rosary Club



Drive in movie night



## Pre-K at St. Jude: Enroll Now!

**T**he St. Jude Regional Catholic School (SJRCs) Pre-School is accepting applications for the 2021-2022 school year. The pre-school promotes an environment where children become independent, confident, life-long learners with a strong sense of self. It proudly offers a positive, child-centered preschool experience that fosters a love of learning in a nurturing community. Come take a virtual tour with SJRCs Principal Dr. Glenn Benjamin and see all the fun that is had.

Call or email to schedule a virtual tour: 301-946-7888 or [ellen.donnelly@stjuderockville.org](mailto:ellen.donnelly@stjuderockville.org).

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### Shrine of St. Jude Parish

12701 Veirs Mill Road  
Rockville, MD

Fr. Paul D. Lee, STD,  
Pastor  
301-946-8200

### St. Jude Regional Catholic School

Mr. Glenn Benjamin, Principal  
301-946-7888

Maureen Martin, OPT Editor  
[MaureenCMartin@verizon.net](mailto:MaureenCMartin@verizon.net)

## HAS YOUR FAMILY PRACTICED?

### PLAN AND PRACTICE YOUR ESCAPE

- 1 Make a home escape plan so everyone in your home knows exactly what to do if the smoke alarms sound in an emergency.
- 2 Test your smoke alarms to make sure your kids know the sound and what to do.
- 3 Designate an outside meeting place. Practice your plan with a home fire drill.



#FireDrillFRIDAY





St. John Neumann

# Social Outreach Programs Sponsored During the Holidays

By Kimberley Rice

## Box of Joy

Saint John Neumann parishioners and CCD students generously contributed over 290 “blessing” boxes during the holidays; this was the second year that SJN and Knights of Columbus supported this project!

The Box of Joy ministry involves sending gifts to children in devel-

oping countries, such as Haiti, Guatemala, Dominican Republic, and many others. For many poor children, a Box of Joy filled with toys, clothing, school supplies, a rosary, and the Story of Jesus is the first Christmas gift they ever receive.

The Knights began distributing the boxes following all masses on the first weekend in November; then, the gifts were packed by fami-

lies in shoeboxes and returned to the parish for shipment two weeks later. This program is one of many offered by Cross Catholic Outreach, a Catholic non-profit organization whose mission is to mobilize the global Catholic Church to transform the poor and their communities materially and spiritually for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Overall, Cross Catholic Outreach collected and shipped over 62,000 Boxes of Joy this Christmas to children in developing countries; the Knights and SJN were proud to support this meaningful and impactful program!

## Mustard Seed Communities

SJN parishioners’ made donations to support sustainable agriculture at Mustard Seed Communities to offset the strain of the COVID pandemic caused. Jacob’s Ladder, home to over 90 adults with disabilities, is located on 150 acres in Moneague, Jamaica. The farm at Jacob’s Ladder reached self-sustainability, and SJN was a part of this accomplishment!

Fr. Garvin Augustine, the Executive Director, and Monsignor Gregory Ramkissoon, founder of Mustard Seed Communities, discovered creative ways and platforms to keep their volunteers con-



Fr. Garvin Augustine, the Executive Director of Mustard Seed Communities

nected to raise funds for medical and food supplies. They traveled and preached to raise funds and activities to maintain 12 homes across the island in Jamaica, 500 abandoned or orphaned children with various disabilities. An unexpected hold occurred in March, and

the community scrambled in the initial stage to find ways to fill the gap. Mustard Seed is well and grateful for the benefactors, who were tremendously generous over the last few months, as Father Augustine shared during his interview with EWTN.

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A photo of Msgr. Robert Panke, Pastor of Saint John Neumann and Terry Waters, State Program Director of Knights of Columbus in support of Box of Joy Ministry

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The First Holy Communicants, pictured with Fr. Jerzy in the center, are Gabriella B., Vladimir D., Kazimierz P., and David S. May God bless them and keep them safe.

## Receiving First Holy Communion in 2020

On December 5, 2020, four children received their First Holy Communion at Our Lady Queen of Poland and St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish in Silver Spring, MD. OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych, S.Chr., celebrated the special Holy Mass in which parents of the children participated in the liturgy.



OLQP Pastor Fr. Frydrych giving Holy Communion to Gabriella B.

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## Christmas Season

By Bozena Buda, ED

What would the Christmas Season be without a Nativity Play (Jaselka) and a Carols (Koledy) Concert? Even under the direst of circumstances, our Polish ancestors, parents, and grandparents were not deterred. During wars, onslaughts, persecutions, partitions, deportations, and captivity, they continued to cherish and practice their Christian heritage and traditions.

Yet, because of the Covid-19 pandemic we are also living under extra-ordinary conditions. Masking and distancing are part of the safety protocol. The situation is so different from last Christmas. In spite of everything, we are blessed to have

*Continued on page 35*



Siblings Jennifer and Shon portrayed Mary and Joseph in the Nativity Play (Jaselka), presented after Mass on two consecutive Sundays in January, 2021, at Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish in Silver Spring, MD. Other participants, not pictured, are narrator Mrs. Ela Marciniak, soloists Aleksandra and Oliver, percussionist Sebastian, and OLQP organist and musical director Mr. Janusz Bilinski.



OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych, S.Chr., and Parish Council President Mrs. Izabella Macander thanked the participants of the Nativity Play (Jaselka) and Carol (Koledy) Concert and presented each with a flower.



The manger of Baby Jesus with the children's red "good deed hearts" at Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish, Silver Spring, MD, on the Feast of the Epiphany, 2021

## "Good Deed Gifts" for Baby Jesus on Epiphany

By B. Buda, ED

During Advent, parish children are encouraged to make an extra effort to perform good deeds and to keep track of them. They can cut out large paper hearts and write their good deed lists on them. On the Feast of Epiphany, they bring their "good deed hearts" to church and present them to Baby Jesus in the manger as gifts, just as the Three Kings did so long ago. This year, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, it proved to be more challenging to do so. Still, some managed even when they could not be physically present. They sent their lists to someone else who could place their good deed hearts in the manger of Baby Jesus at OLQP Parish on the feast of the Three Kings.



Artyom and Daniel, brothers and members of the Polish Scouting Organization-ZHP USA, show the lists of their good deeds, which they sent to OLQP so they could be placed in the manger of Baby Jesus on the Feast of the Epiphany.

OPT

## Knights of Columbus Council 16634 – New Memberships

The OLQP St. Maximilian Kolbe Council 16634, honored for achieving the Star Council Award, recently was commended for their participation in the "Leave No Neighbor Behind program." They are grateful to the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Poland for donating a significant amount of food to the Little Sisters of the Poor in Washington, DC.

The Knights are accepting new members. Starting now and extending through June, those who join the Knights of Columbus will have their first year's membership dues waived. There is an online free membership registration: <https://www.kofc.org/secure/en/join/join-the-knights.html>

The monthly meetings are on Zoom, because of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The next one will be in February.

For additional information,



OLQP Knights of Columbus St. Maximilian Kolbe Council 16634 GK David Birely and DD Andy Michaels with the Little Sisters of the Poor after delivering donated items for distribution to those in need through the "Leave No Neighbor Behind" program.

please contact GK Dave Birely or Deputy GK Frank Morton at 707-341-9528 or Council 16634 Knights of Columbus <[kofc16634@gmail.com](mailto:kofc16634@gmail.com)>.

A member noted enthusiastically that, "This is an excellent time for prospective members to join this awesome organization!"

OPT

**Our Lady  
Queen of Poland**  
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**Rev. Jerzy Frydrych,  
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**Bozena Buda, OPT Editor**  
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**More Our Lady Queen of  
Poland News on Page 35**



# Virtual Joy at Saint Francis International School

Between author visits, Peace Club, Family Advent Prayer Services, Great Book Giveaways, Journalism and American Election elective courses, and Christmas plays and pageants, this winter has been filled with *virtual* joy! At SFIS, we have found creative and productive ways to engage students in authentic learning experiences from a distance. From online discussions to Jamboard to replayable video lessons and even virtual field trips, our students are growing in their time management skills, technological skills, and abilities to be self-regulating.

The community has come together in ways that one would think not even possible before the pandemic began last March. Each month, we have come together to strengthen our bonds to one another by learning something new or by serving others. For example, during November, we jumped on the global dance wave when our entire school community learned the “Jerusalema” dance. The sense of pride we felt when we showcased our dance video on our school website was palpable. We also kept old traditions alive by creating a virtual talent show where students showed off their cultural dances and exposed their magnificent voices. We even had some students send videos displaying their athletic prowess. In December, families came together each day to bring us video Advent devotions from their homes. It brought us together in our love of Jesus and the Christmas season. In January, our students have been busily writing cards, making crafts and assembling boxes of snacks and gifts for our service men and women in the military, which we will send off during Catholic Schools Week.

As we have experienced during this election season, now more than ever, we need to be critical thinkers



At left, SFIS student presents to his classmates about the inauguration through the internet.

Below, a SFIS student shares his report on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Above, middle school students and faculty dance the Jerusalema outside at SFIS. Below, SFIS families recorded daily video devotionals throughout Advent.



Above, a SFIS student makes thank you cards to send to our troops for Catholic Schools Week.

who know how to evaluate news articles, Internet sources and come to conclusions based on evidence. Therefore, this semester, we offered two brand new courses to help us navigate the deluge of information bombarding us. First, some students in middle school chose our Journalism class and published the first edition of *The St. Francis Times*, a website with features and

current events, interviews, editorials, photojournalism and memes and political cartoons. One student wrote a well-researched piece comparing the various ways that sports programs (NBA, MBL, NFL and NHL) were addressing social distancing, mask wearing and containing the virus. In our newly formed American Election course, students researched various legislative posi-

tions and their impact on our community's diverse population of students. For one project, they prepared a well-informed speech about the qualities that would make a good leader (you can view some of their speeches at [www.YouTube.com/sfismd](http://www.YouTube.com/sfismd)).

Lastly, we wanted to take an opportunity to thank our volunteers and programs that are continuing to

help us thrive in these strange times. Our “Saint Francis Builds” group has continued to construct durable desks for our students to have in their homes. Our School Counselor, Ms. Maldonado, has been working closely with the Little Friends for Peace program to continue to provide family peace programming and our weekly Youth Peace Club.

We are blessed to have our volunteer Franciscan postulants who are helping to teach religion and create beautiful prayer services for our students. Most significantly, we are most grateful for our librarian, Ms. Carolyn Johnson, who continues to open our community up to volunteers and benefactors. She has brought authors, storytellers, and so many other helpers via video to bring new talents and skills to our school. Her most recent project has been to create the SFIS Prayer Family. She has gathered friends, alumni (including alumni of St. Camillus and St. Mark Schools), families, faculty, and community members together to be prayer warriors for our school. Each week, she gathers our intentions and offers ideas for us to go deeper into our prayer life and continue to ask God to bring abundant blessings to our school community. If you would like to become a member of our SFIS Prayer Family, please email Ms. Johnson at [cjohnson@sfismd.org](mailto:cjohnson@sfismd.org).

OPT

## St. Francis International School

[www.saintfrancisinternational.org](http://www.saintfrancisinternational.org)

**Tobias A. Harkleroad,**  
Principal

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**St. Mark Campus**  
7501 Adelphi Road  
Hyattsville, MD 20783

## RACISM

Con't from page 3

forum was only the start of a necessary journey to examine our Christian response to racism. The Living the Gospel planning group convened virtual racial justice sessions over several months with three sessions each month, August through November 2020. The year ended with a mostly lay-led virtual anti-racism prayer service in December that included an anti-racism litany, scripture readings and silent reflection.

Among presenters who spoke at the sessions were Sister Simone

Campbell of NETWORK, Steven Schneck of the Franciscan Action Network (FAN), and Sisters Patricia Chappell and Anne-Louise Nadeau, who lead their community's national anti-racism team and offer anti-racism workshops nationally.

Sr. Simone delivered a powerful examination of the Catholic Church's complicity in racism. She reviewed church history that included the infamous Doctrine of Discovery that “established a spiritual, political, and legal justification for colonization and seizure of land not inhabited by Christians,” a justification that sustains some unfair practices today.

Steven Schneck (director of FAN)

examined racism and Catholic social teaching in light of the then-ongoing presidential election process. Sr. Patricia and Sr. Anne Louise helped to embolden participants to engage in uncomfortable conversations about race and how to challenge our own religious institutions on the issue of racism.

Over time, parishioners from the Diocese of Baltimore, Pittsburgh and outside the DC metro area became regular participants. The planning group established a supportive connection with a representative of the Archdiocese of Washington who can help guide the Living the Gospel program.

## Sustaining the work

The program will address a range of topics and issues to help parishioners respond to our Christian mandate in 2021. Many participants in the recent series plan to continue to study, build awareness, and explore ways to address subtle and overt racist practices and behaviors in our parishes and communities. Persons with questions or interest in becoming involved can contact L.J. Milone at [ljmilone@sjbssparish.org](mailto:ljmilone@sjbssparish.org).

The J&A Council remains committed to supporting these efforts and addressing all forms of injustice and inequality as its mission dictates. Dr. King stated, “the arc

of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” It is the duty, honor, and privilege of the Justice and Advocacy Council of Montgomery County to support and hasten that process until all are as equal in society as they are in God's eyes.

OPT

*Editor Note: Carmela Cowgill and Bill Beard are parishioners at Church of the Resurrection in Burtonsville, Maryland. Bill and another member of the Living the Gospel planning group also serve on the Archdiocesan Justice and Advocacy Council of Montgomery County.*



# MERRY AND BRIGHT

## Saint Peter's School (Safely) Shares Christmas Cheer

By Nancy Hopkins

**W**hat can a school do when the traditional school Christmas program, classroom celebrations and caroling are cancelled? The Saint Peter's Home and School Executive Board thought of a new way to share joy, light, and community, by organizing a "Christmas Lights Tour."

The idea for the tour came from parent Christina Shioutakon, modeled after her family's own tradition. "One of our favorite holiday traditions is driving our children around and looking at Christmas lights. We thought it would be fun to share this with the school community and to get people excited, we decided to add in a competition element," said Shioutakon.

Interested families registered their homes to be included on the tour; then set to stringing lights, hanging wreaths, and inflating characters. Event planners created and shared routes of participating homes. The full route included 40 homes, a 72-mile journey estimated to take approximately 3 hours and 45 minutes. Homes were also divided up into a northern and southern route for those that could not complete the full journey.

On Friday, December 18, families were encouraged to pile into their cars, turn up the Christmas



Above, spirited decor illuminated the night.

At left, a beautiful nativity scene on display during Saint Peter's Christmas Light tour

Below, forty families signed up to share their decoration with the school community.



music, and follow the roadmap of homes included in the tour. A Christmas Joy sign was included in each home's display to confirm the correct house was being viewed amidst many neighbors also decorated for the season. Families were asked to vote for their favorite displays on one or both routes and top winners from each route were selected for a cash prize.

"The Christmas light tour was something my family wanted to join the moment it was announced.

Expanding our home's decorations to help provide cheer to the community was something that lifted our hearts," said Elizabeth McAndrew-Benavides. "Taking the tour and seeing everyone else's displays was also so much fun. We drank hot cocoa and listened to holiday music while seeking out the houses. I even shared the list with neighbors who did the tour on their own." The event is sure to become a new school tradition.

OPT

## Eighth Graders Chart a New Path Towards High School

By Nancy Hopkins

**M**iddle school can be challenging for many, even in the best of circumstances. Homework becomes more complex, students rotate to different classrooms and teachers, and they encounter new social situations. For Saint Peter's eighth grade class of 2021, these normal challenges have been compounded as they have had to adapt to distance learning while preparing for their next biggest transition — high school!

The class of 2021, like many classes, has had their share of disappointments. The unexpected transition to distance learning in the Spring of 2020 meant the cancellation of cherished school events including their final ballroom dance competition and spring play. As disappointing as these missed experiences are, the students have learned to adapt to new



An eighth-grade student works on creating a tri-fold museum brochure

technical platforms, schedules, and ways to communicate with teachers and friends. They are developing critical life skills, such as flexibility, adaptability, organization, planning, self-accountability, resilience, and self-advocacy that will serve them well in high school, college and beyond.

The eighth-grade students recently completed a Museum Project, which wove multiple objectives and technologies into a rich



The project included multiple phases including writing a persuasive letter

tapestry of learning. "Students selected a nonfiction book about a person or event they were interested in," explains Mrs. Helene Redmond, middle school language arts teacher. "Then they created a tri-fold brochure that could be used in a museum exhibit on their chosen topic. Students considered design elements such as color and font choice to create a truly profession piece." The next phase of the project incorporated skills of advo-

cacy and influencing. "Students also wrote a business letter to persuade the director of a chosen museum to have the special exhibit. This project took several aspects of language arts—reading, writing, publication—to create a real-life product," continued Mrs. Redmond.

Saint Peter's continues to build a strong foundation for critical thinking and practical readiness for the road ahead. While we mourn the loss of so many aspects of middle school this year and look forward to a return to a more traditional school environment, we should recognize how virtual learning has shaped, and will continue to shape, our children in valuable ways. We hope and pray for a joyous graduation, and a return to health for our community and the globe. The class of 2021 is ready to move forward

OPT

### St. Peter's Parish

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Olney, MD

### Rev. Thomas Kalita, Pastor

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stpetersolney.org

### St. Peter's School

Mrs. Kristen Cocozzella Principal

301-774-9112

stpetersschoololney.org



## St. Martin of Tours



Above, St. Martin's students and Principal Lamont enjoy festive dress down as Christmas approaches. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School

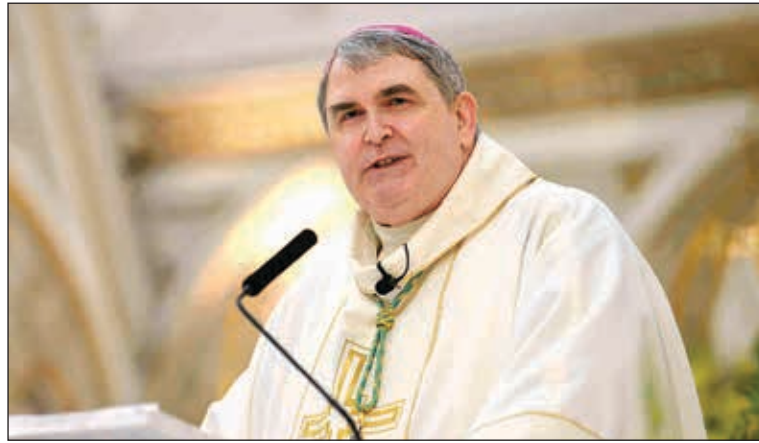
## MESSAGE

Con't from page 22

and skilled servant of the Church. His distinguished history as a pastor, Vicar for Priests, and member of our Pastoral Administration has prepared him well for his new responsibilities in that diocese."

As a gift on the occasion of Bishop Fisher's installation, St. John Neumann Catholic Parish honored its former pastor with a "spiritual bouquet." Bishop Fisher served St. John Neumann from 1999 to 2005 and left many lasting impacts on the parish, including its perpetual Adoration Chapel, which began under his pastoral leadership.

The spiritual bouquet will let Bishop Fisher know of the many



Bishop Fisher in a December 10, 2020 interview with EWTN News Nightly

offerings honored on his behalf, such as praying of rosaries, spending time in adoration, or praying a Chaplet of Divine Mercy. The

bundle sent to the Bishop also featured encouraging messages.

OPT

## FAITHFUL

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continue to work in people's lives." The Christmas celebration reminds us that "He has come and is still coming to us in the most unexpected ways."

During 2020, God used the unexpected to increase Fr. Stefan's trust. Last January, Father was on a silent retreat in the Holy Land with archdiocesan transitional deacons. There, he prayed John 21:15-19, particularly

verse 18, which continually reminds him to submit himself to the Lord's will.

From March to May, everything was uncertain. Despite prior doubts, Fr. Stefan was ordained to the priesthood on June 20th. It happened in an unanticipated way: instead of being surrounded by hundreds at the Basilica, it was at St. Catherine Labouré Church with reduced capacity. Fr. Stefan found comfort in knowing that "the Lord was saying, 'I'm not preparing you for ordination. I am preparing you for the priesthood.'"

Father commented that his ordination day was even more special because of the restrictions, saying that "it was so intimate and [the ordinandi] were able to be seated right in front of [their] parents." God has continually surpassed his expectations. "Even though I have only been a priest for almost seven months, I can definitely say that they have been the best months of my life."

Father encourages us to look for God in the unexpected as we look back on 2020. There is joy and peace to be found.

OPT

## VOLUNTEER

Con't from page 20

encouraging homilies from the parish priests. "What I remember most is the love and care I felt walking through the building, knowing this was our safe place. All the teachers, staff, and administration cared for us and loved us all as if we were their own," Vivian recalled. When the time came, it was an easy decision on where to send her own children to school.

This legacy of love and care has stayed alive in Vivian, who in 2012 opened her home and her heart to young Helton Rodriguez, a student who also attended St. Martin's and who needed a permanent home after the passing of his mother. Vivian speaks of him as her own and takes a great deal of pleasure in the accom-

plishments of all three of the young people she is raising. Currently, her youngest daughter Dina is in seventh grade at St. Martin's. Her oldest daughter Layla attended our Lady of Good Counsel High School after graduating from St. Martin's, and is now a freshman at Syracuse University. Helton also attended Good Counsel and is now a junior at the University of Notre Dame.

Vivian has worn many hats at St. Martin's, such as President of the Home and School Association (HSA), member of the School Board, CYO coach, Athletic Director, and Events Coordinator. Her current year as HSA President has required special effort and creativity in order to work around the coronavirus safety restrictions and still meet the goal of fostering a strong working relationship between parents and school

staff in support of our students. The HSA has sponsored a virtual craft fundraiser for parents and a drive-in movie for families. She has also hosted virtual HSA meetings and frequent parent "check-ins," where parents can share experiences while navigating distance and in-person learning environments for their children.

Vivian inspires others through her joyful commitment to not just a school but a family. "I volunteer so that SMS continues to thrive and to provide a wonderful educational and spiritual foundation to future students. As an alumna, it gives me joy to return and to give back to those who gave to us so many years ago," explains Vivian.

St. Martin's extends heartfelt gratitude to Vivian Abudayeh. We are pleased to honor her as our Volunteer of the Year.

OPT

## PRAYERS

Con't from page 18

prayers and newer prayers adapted to daily Christian life in the twenty-first century, this prayer book will be useful in all seasons.

Use this book to pray with family members at different moments and milestones of life:

- Share short daily prayers and the ritual of morning and evening family prayer;
- Gather for seasonal blessings that correspond to the Church's liturgical calendar; and
- Offer prayers on the occasion of special life events such as graduations, birthdays, engagements,

pregnancy and childbirth, as well as prayers for times of sickness and difficulty.

This resource also includes many intercessory prayers for the needs of the Church and the world, as well as traditional litanies to implore God's grace for all.

*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* is the perfect gift for families with children, newly married couples, and first-time parents in baptismal preparation classes. This book also makes a wonderful gift for adults in faith formation preparing for initiation into the Catholic Church! Share this seasoned book of Catholic blessings and prayers with a friend, neighbor, or loved one today!

OPT

**Don't Forget Your Pets**  
Bring them indoors

Make sure they have a warm dry place with plenty of food and water

   
weather.gov/winter



# Christmas Season at Christ the King

By Isidra Molina, Director of Religious Education

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament that anticipated the arrival of the Messiah, Emmanuel – “God with us” – to fill our lives with his love and to strengthen our hearts with his peace. Here in our Parish, “Christ the King” our Messiah, Emmanuel, continues to show us his love and his presence in different ways.

All the Christmas celebrations in the different languages were wonderful. We were able to experience the joy of everyone singing gratefully to our Savior. Even in the midst of a global pandemic and so many conflicts, our spirit remains faithful to Him, as He continues to show us that He never abandons us. The response from our “Giving Tree” for families who requested help to buy their children’s gifts and to have a Christmas dinner in their homes for their family was wonderful!

On Sunday after Christmas and as part of the Christmas celebration, we had the dedication to the Holy Family of Nazareth, and we had the opportunity to pray for all



Nativity Scene at Christ the King

the families of our community. We also celebrated on January 1, the feast of our Blessed Mother Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and as our Mother.

On Sunday, January 3rd, we had a beautiful celebration of the

Adoration of the Three Kings to the baby Jesus. During the English Mass, 3 little brothers from our catechetical program dressed as Kings dramatically enriching and adding joy to this great celebration. Likewise, at the Spanish Mass, 3



Spanish speaking community celebrate the Magi visit to Jesus

young people played the role of the Kings and at the end of the Mass, distributed toys to our children.

Our pastor, Fr. Steve Carter, thanks each and every member of this beautiful community for their contributions and their efforts to

continue building the Kingdom of GOD in this parish and beyond. Fr. Steve wishes everyone many blessings for this New Year that we have just begun.

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## Our Lady Queen of Poland

## OLQP Youth have been helping in various capacities



Basia P. recently was a lector at Mass. Jas B. helps distribute Catholic literature. Sebastian B. rings the altar bells at Holy Mass.

## The ‘Giving Tree’ Provides

By Liz Weiss, CTK Social Concerns Commission

Christ the King parishioners were quite generous this Christmas, despite the pandemic. A total of 52 families were helped with gift certificates for Christmas dinner groceries and gift certificates for presents for their children. This Christmas 2020 will be remembered by all of us as a mostly virtual experience. Even so, a total of 170 children and teens were given \$25 gift certificates for presents.

Thank you again to Pastor Fr. Steve, Ludys Mendoza (Administrative Asst.), Isidra Molina (DRE and Pastoral Asst.), Sue Gordon (Social Concerns Commission), and the other volunteers and all the generous donors who made this a happy time for all these families. As the song by David Haas states, “We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly, we are called to serve one another, to walk humbly with God.”

The Giving Tree at Christ the King Parish



OPT

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**Fr. Stephen J. Carter,**  
Pastor  
**Paul Lamoreaux,**  
OPT Editor

## CHRISTMAS

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families and youths in the parish who use their talents and gifts to present a Nativity Play and Carol

Concert. This year, everything had to be on a much smaller scale.

Polish carols are rhythmic and vivid in their descriptions. Many have been sung throughout the centuries by our predecessors, under various conditions. They can trans-

port us to another place and time, to the humble conditions of a manger, where Jesus was born. The carols and the story of Jesus’s birth and message of hope continue to evoke a sense of wonder and gratitude.

OPT



**The Youth Rally and Mass for Life will be an online only event on January 29, 2021.**  
Visit: <https://youthrallyandmassforlife.org/>





As part of the “12 Days of a St. Raphael Christmas,” SRS and SRNS families enjoy the spirit of the season by baking cookies together and sharing their masterpieces on Zoom. Photo by Natalie Coene

## St RAPHAEL

Con't from page 19

theme “Faith. Excellence. Service.” At SRS, this theme rings especially true with the abundance of lessons learned in a community bound by faith and service.

“Celebrating Catholic Schools Week helps us remember the gift of courage, resilience, and growth that this year has represented for our

school,” said Teri Dwyer, principal. “Through small acts of kindness and big acts of leadership, we continue the growth mindset we seek to develop for our students and community.”

SRS is one of 91 Catholic elementary schools, high schools, and early-childhood centers in the Archdiocese of Washington, which serves approximately 25,000 students.

OPT

## Executive Order Signed All Persons Now to Be Included in Census and Apportionment

On January 20, 2021, President Joe Biden signed an executive order requiring all U.S. residents to be counted in the U.S. census and reversed the prior administration’s unprecedented policy of excluding undocumented immigrants from the apportionment base. In addition to apportionment of congressional representatives, the decennial census impacts the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars in federal appropriations for programs designed to uphold human dignity and advance the common good.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, auxiliary bishop of Washington and chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Migration, issued the following statement:

“We welcome this return to more than a century of American precedent that ensures all residents will be counted and included in the

census and apportionment. This return to our previous policy reflects the inalienable truth that all people matter and are imbued with human dignity. In the words of Pope Francis, we are all ‘fellow travelers sharing the same flesh.’

“While the process of counting persons in the United States for the purposes of apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives has not always been free of injustice—the Three-Fifths Compromise being a noteworthy example—Wednesday’s executive order stands as a testament to the indisputable reality that immigration status does not negate the inherent value of a human life, nor should it undermine any person’s ability to contribute to the growth and wellbeing of our nation. Citizens and noncitizens alike must continue to be recognized as members of the same human family.”

The *amicus curiae* brief submitted by the USCCB in the recent Supreme Court case addressing this issue, *Trump v. New York*, is available at: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org).

OPT

# 2021 Holy Land Coordination Communiqué

Representatives of bishops’ conferences from several countries, including the United States, met for the annual Holy Land Coordination (HLC), January 16-20, 2021. Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on International Justice and Peace represented the U.S. bishops.

For over two decades the HLC has been an intentional means for bishops of several countries to coordinate their interest and involvement in the life of the Church in the Holy Land, the land Christ called home.

Because of the limitations prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the gathering was constrained to meeting virtually this year. Nevertheless, the HLC continues to call for prayer, pilgrimage, and persuasion on behalf of Christians in the region and the ongoing Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

The full communiqué can be read here:

### Holy Land Coordination 2021 Final Communiqué

This is the first time we have been prevented from meeting physically in the Holy Land. Yet we remain resolutely committed to supporting our sisters and brothers in the homeland of Christ. Over the past week we have been privileged and moved to hear from Christians across the West Bank, Gaza and Israel about

their mission, resilience and witness in these unprecedented circumstances.

Through our dialogue, it has become painfully clear that there is today less cause for optimism than at any time in recent history.

The health challenges of Covid-19, felt by the entire world, are compounded by conflict, occupation and blockade.

The absence of international pilgrims has exacerbated widespread economic hardship, increased levels of unemployment and pushed many more families into poverty.

The lack of political progress, along with relentless expansion of illegal settlements and the impact of Israel’s Nation-State law, continues to erode any prospect of a peaceful two-state solution.

Now is a critical moment for us all to strengthen our expression of solidarity with the people of the Holy Land “*not as a vague sentiment but as a ‘firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.’*”

We stress the importance of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships recommitting to direct negotiations. We call upon our own governments and political leaders urgently to renew their active participation in the search for a just peace, supporting dialogue between all sides, upholding international law, and reaffirming the plurality of Jerusalem, given its unique significance for Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Furthermore, the interna-

tional community must hold Israel accountable for its moral, legal and humanitarian responsibility to make Covid-19 vaccines accessible for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and encourage cooperation by the Palestinian Authority, heeding Pope Francis’ message that “*in the face of a challenge that knows no borders, we cannot erect walls.*”

While many of our own countries continue to face severe hardship amid the pandemic, we have a profound responsibility to support our fellow Christians in the Holy Land. Church schools, clinics, hospitals and other social projects including the work of Caritas, while under severe pressure, are models of charity, justice, and peace. These Christian institutions are vital in bringing together people from many different backgrounds to serve the common good of all.

The Christian community, though small, is an important guarantor of social cohesion and a bearer of hope for a better future. We eagerly await a time when Christians from across the world can once again make pilgrimages to the Holy Land to witness and support this firsthand. Until that point, we encourage our communities to provide any assistance that may be possible and hold all the region’s peoples in our prayers.

OPT

## Bishops Welcome New Administration’s Commitment to DACA and Immigration Reform

On the day of his inauguration, President Joe Biden issued a Memorandum preserving and fortifying the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The DACA program was implemented in 2012 and has enabled approximately 800,000 young people, who paid a fee and submitted to a background check, the opportunity to work legally, access educational opportunities and not fear deportation. It has been estimated that DACA recipients on average contribute over \$42 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, auxiliary bishop of Washington and chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Migration issued the following statement:

“We welcome the announcement preserving and fortifying DACA. For years, DACA youth have been enriching our country. They are

contributors to our economy, veterans of our military, academic standouts in our universities, and leaders in our parishes and communities. They and their families deserve certainty, compassion, generosity, and justice.

“We applaud President Biden’s restoration of the DACA program, and we also strongly encourage him and the U.S. Congress to immediately enact legislation that provides a path to citizenship for Dreamers. Permanent legislative protection that overcomes partisanship and puts the human dignity and future of Dreamers first is long overdue.

“Protection for Dreamers should only be the first step in the systematic reform of our outdated immigration laws. Now is the time to move forward in a bipartisan manner to fix our broken immigration system.

“We also welcome the President’s efforts to immediately produce an immigration reform bill and look forward to reviewing it. We con-

tinue to call for immigration reform which provides a path to citizenship for Dreamers and the undocumented, upholds family-based immigration, honors due process and the rule of law, recognizes the contributions of workers, protects the vulnerable fleeing persecution, and addresses the root causes of migration.

“We stand ready to work with President Biden and his Administration, as well as the U.S. Congress on this urgent matter of human life and dignity.”

For more information and resources on DACA, please see <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigration/daca-resource-page>.

For more information on immigration reform please visit the Justice for Immigrants website: <https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/immigration/>

OPT



The Youth Rally and Mass for Life will be an online only event on January 29, 2021. Visit: <https://youthrallyandmassforlife.org/>



# Prepare a way for the Lord



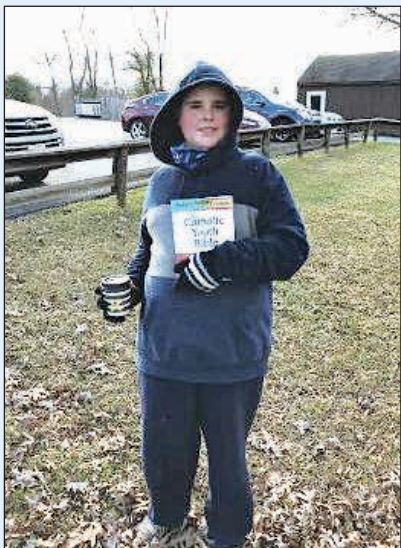
Director of Religious Education Liz Smith presents Confirmation candidates with their Bibles.

## Faith Formation

St. Mary's classes are being presented both virtually and in person. Families were offered the opportunity to select which option worked best for their children. As the year progresses families have been able to change their selection as needed. Students are actively participating within their classes.

Confirmation candidates are immersed, as safely as possible, in parish life. They usher and provide volunteer assistance to special parish events. Many baked cookies for the Sodality Bake Sale and laid wreaths at Mount Olivet Cemetery in Frederick in memory of veterans buried at that location.

Our young candidates will participate in a virtual retreat Called by Name, on January 30. Ms. Morace from the Church of the Annunciation, and staff from



Andrew Parsley receives his Bible.

parishes involved, will lead the candidates through an enriching morning as they encounter God's Call. Candidates from St. Mary's were presented with their Bibles to use during retreat at the beginning of Advent.

OPT

## WISE MEN

Con't from page 21

up to greet them with excitement.

Monsignor Eddie Tolentino provided a catechesis for the children about the feast of the Epiphany and why the Three Wise Men were following the star leading them to Jesus. As the children said fare-

well to the Wise Men, each child presented his or her letter to the visiting Magi so that they could be delivered to Jesus.

This was a remarkable event that provided a teachable moment to the children of the parish. Many of the adults were touched by the innocence and faith of the children. If only we could have the faith of a little child!

OPT

## SLIGO CREEK

Con't from page 21

in Spanish, are scheduled for later in January.

In the Spring, the program will continue with a native plant walking tour guided by NWF, followed by a gardening workshop and native plant distribution to St. Michael's parishioners. In addition, with NWF's assistance, the

Green Team will plant native plants on St. Michael's grounds. Darrell Smith of St. Michael's is leading the Green Team's effort and is a fan of native plants. "Not only are they good for attracting birds, but they are easy to care for as they are adapted to Maryland's climate and soil," says Smith. He has planted over 15 native shrubs and trees as well as native perennials since moving into his Silver Spring home three years ago.

OPT



Above, families excited to purchase some fresh made goodies.



Above, Fr. Kevin, Jack and Karen Reid provide treats to support our Haiti twinning Parish.



Below, children play in the leaves as families gather safely after mass.



Above, the faithful attend Christmas Eve mass safely outside under a tent.



Above, Joe and Brenda Murtha collect donations of toys, toiletries, and clothing gifts.

At left, Masses also offered with the walls of our beautiful Church.

St. Mary's Faith Community began their preparation for the birth of Jesus on the first Sunday of Advent. All masses were held at the outdoor altar. For Advent, the gifts for the Jesse Tree were placed in a basket and contained dozens of tags with names of needy families and patients at Springfield Hospital, Sykesville, MD. Donations were accepted for the 25 gift cards that were given this year to support the purchase of a holiday meal.

Outside and socially distanced the Pavilion was a-buzz with activities for Advent which created an environment of faith and service.

The Sodality sponsored service activities to support the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center. Donations and gently used baby items were

collected. The Annual Cookie Bake Sale proceeds also went to the Center. Cookies were prepacked in sets of six cookies for safety. The Haiti committee supported our twinning parish with Christmas Cards, Haiti Ornaments, fresh jams, eggs, and Coffee sales. Deacon David Cahoon carved beautiful ornaments of St. Mary's Church, which sold out quickly. He created more ornaments to meet the demand.

Sunday Scriptures with Fr. Kevin was offered each Tuesday morning.

We welcomed the Lord at two Christmas Eve masses at the outside altar with the addition of a large tent. The faithful huddled together as the ever-present wind, rain, and dark clouds persisted. A beautiful prelude of Christmas Hymns welcomed the soggy attend-

ees. Christmas Eve masses were also offered within the Church with appropriate spacing and safety precautions in place. It appeared pandemic, wind, nor rain could keep the faithful away!

OPT

### St. Mary's Parish

18230 Barnesville Road  
Barnesville, MD 20838

Rev. Kevin O'Reilly,  
Pastor

(301) 972-8660  
www.stmaryonline.com

## PAGEANT

Con't from page 25

filmed their children dancing in their costumes for the closing cred-

its dance number. The result, posted on the Resurrection YouTube channel, was a beautiful video (which there have been more than 400 views to date) that reached much farther than the traditional pageant.

"We knew that the virtual space offered us several exciting opportunities to make it special for everyone involved," said Julia. "We feel truly blessed."

OPT



## Holy Cross



While the logistics and implementation of the 32nd annual Giving Tree at Holy Cross Church were adjusted to meet the requirements of social distancing this year, the generosity of our parish and school community was as strong as ever. Much of the effort was online, but some gifts were collected at designated times outside Holy Cross Church.

## The Giving Tree

*You gave from the heart. We see it each year.  
You spread joy and God's blessing with holiday cheer.  
We can't thank you enough, for here's what we know, Holy Cross generosity makes the world glow.  
We would like to express our gratitude to all parishioners who made this Season of Giving so special.*  
— With gratitude from the Social Concerns Committee of Holy Cross

This year, at a time when so many among us were facing a Christmas without gifts, Holy Cross Church sponsored its 32nd annual Giving Tree in a way like no other. As in the past, we partnered with eight organizations and agencies to fulfill gift requests based on their specific needs. But there was no tree, and no wrapped packages—only online links and gift cards. Yet, in an amazing outpouring of generosity and love from Holy Cross parishioners and school families, all of the gift requests—more than six hundred—were fulfilled. The agencies and individuals are truly grateful.

A representative of Catholic Charities shared the heartfelt responses from three parents who received gifts for their children. “This is a great blessing for my children. I was just laid off due to COVID this week. Thanks to you, my children will have something for Christmas,” said a father of five children. A mother of two children said, “Thank you so much! My children and I were COVID positive in September. My husband just went back to work this month. Thanks to your donations my children will have something for Christmas!” Another mother, with tears in her eyes, said, “Thank you so much for giving my children a Happy Christmas. I am not working due to COVID-19. Thank you for your generosity.”

Linkages to Learning, an initia-

tive established by the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (MCDHHS), MCPS and local public and private nonprofit agencies to support students and their families, said that Target and grocery gift cards donated by Holy Cross had a two-fold benefit. They directly benefited forty students at one school, and they also allowed the organization to more equitably supplement the contents of the holiday baskets with toys and resources from other donors for over 175 children at the school. A representative said that the gifts from Holy Cross were “a bright light in an otherwise dark 2020 for so many families.”

So Others Might Eat (S.O.M.E.) expressed their thanks and explained that Holy Cross provided gift cards for about eighty families in their program—a much better result than they had dared hope for. The Arc Montgomery County shared that Holy Cross “provided so many smiles—and much needed gifts—this season.” L’Arche of Greater Washington, D.C., residential service provider for adults with intellectual disabilities said that the generosity of the Holy Cross community “has blown us away!”

The Social Concerns Committee shares the sentiments expressed by the partner organizations and gift recipients. What an extraordinary gift it is to watch God’s love in action!

OPT

## ROLES

Con't from page 15

Catholics can offer a different interpretation of Jesus’ love for his people. Millennials’ potential, she said, is “to rebuild the social connections that are missing for people my age.”



Stephen Nahm-Tchougli

### Stephen Nahm-Tchougli

A member of St. Francis of Assisi Church his entire adult life, Stephen Nahm-Tchougli was reconnecting with his Catholic faith when he met fellow parishioner Trish Olin, who was starting a book group at the parish.

The Saturday Morning Spiritual Reading Group has since grown

to be one of the parish’s most popular small groups, tackling books, DVDs, and Scripture at 8 am Saturdays in the Assisi Room. However, when the pandemic closed the church, it appeared the book group would stop, too.

Nahm, an electrical engineer and entrepreneur, had used conferencing platforms for nearly a decade in his professional life. So, he offered the group use of his personal Zoom account to continue meeting.

“I wanted to continue feeding my spiritual thirst,” said Nahm, 34. “I learn so much from the group mostly staying quiet and listening.”

Millennials’ comfort level with technology, their availability and desire to make an impact are likely driving their increased involvement with ministry, said Nahm, a native of Togo. “Because they will lead by example in their communities, they will be able to attract most of their peers in the Church,” he said.

### Alexander Scaltrito

Several years ago, Alexander Scaltrito subscribed to an e-mail service called “Saint of the Day,” which served up a mini biography of a saint to his inbox. He observed that God called nearly every saint to action in a way that was uniquely suited to them. So, when the Brooklyn native spied a table for the Communications Ministry at the parish Ministry Fair in June 2018, he realized this might be his right fit.



Alexander Scaltrito

Scaltrito, who works in communications, is half of a two-person team that has produced a weekly virtual Mass and other special video services for the parish shortly after the onset of the pandemic. He oversaw the recording of the parish’s virtual Christmas Mass in the church and production of a virtual May Crowning service last spring.

The father of two children under the age of five, Scaltrito said he believes there is an untapped market in using social media to reach younger parishioners. “I think Pope Francis said that you have to bring the message of the gospel to people where they’re at,” said Scaltrito, 38. “Young people are online and they’re on social media.”

OPT



The image is of St. Thomas More, the patron saint of politicians, civil servants and attorneys. It was taken at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen in Baltimore.

## PRAY FOR OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Join the staff of the Maryland Catholic Conference and Catholics across our state every Monday during the legislative session (mid-January to mid-April) to pray for our state’s elected officials.

Follow along on Facebook, where a Maryland Catholic will lead us in prayer ([www.facebook.com/mdcatholic](http://www.facebook.com/mdcatholic)).

### Prayer for the General Assembly and Governor

God of power and might, wisdom and justice,  
Through You, authority is rightly administered,  
laws are enacted, and judgment is decreed.

Assist with your spirit of counsel and fortitude  
the lawmakers of the State of Maryland.

May they always seek the ways of

righteousness and mercy.

Grant that they may be enabled by your  
powerful protections to lead our State with  
honesty and integrity. Amen.

Dios de poder, sabiduría y justicia:  
a través de ti la autoridad se administra correctamente,  
se promulgan leyes y se decreta el juicio.  
Asiste con tu espíritu de consejo y fortaleza  
a los legisladores del Estado de Maryland.  
Que siempre busquen los caminos correctos,  
la justicia y la misericordia.

Concede que tu poderosa protección  
les permita liderar nuestro estado con  
honestidad e integridad. Amen.

OPT







## Get All Your Money!

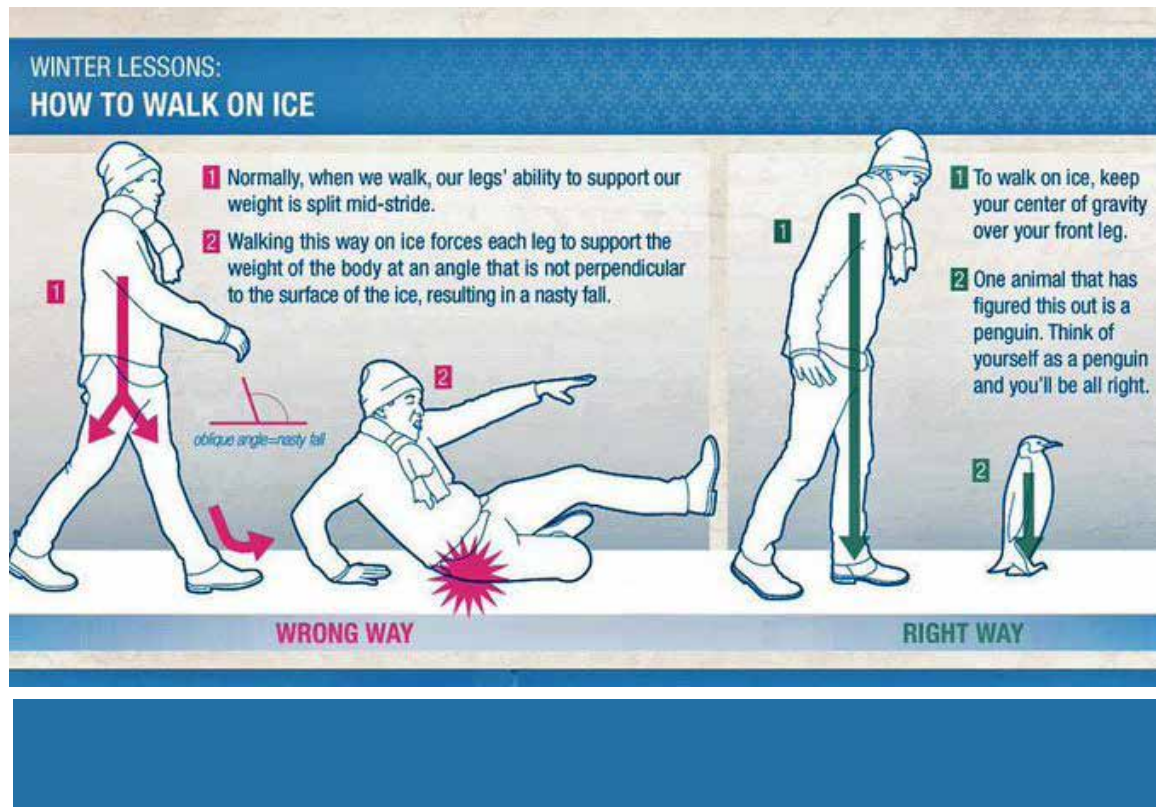
### Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

#### Virtual VITA Appointments

The Community Action Agency's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program is currently using a virtual tax preparation model during the COVID-19 emergency. Virtual VITA allows residents to use an online platform to securely upload their tax documents and have their taxes prepared for free by a certified tax preparer. No in-person contact is required, allowing for the health and safety of staff and community members to be maintained.

Montgomery County residents with household incomes of \$56,000 or less may call 240-777-1123 to schedule an appointment.

OPT



## SHORT

Con't from page 1

the Curia (sort of a Chief Operating Officer) in the Archdiocese with Cardinal Wuerl. He's a Canon lawyer. Most recently he was Vice President of Mission for Catholic Charities. Msgr. brings a unique understanding of the Archdiocese including parish life and a demonstrated love for the poor to Mercy Parish. Providentially, these two wonderful priests will lead "partner parishes" as St Camillus and Our Lady of Mercy have collaborated on parish ministries for many years. Their blessed work is sure to continue and grow.

Lest this pandemic environment confuses us, let's reflect on the simple fact that life is real, not virtual. You may have seen the story regarding the recent tragic death of Tommy Raskin, son of Sarah and Rep. Jamie Raskin. Just before he died, Tommy wrote a note to his parents apologizing for losing his battle with depression, making a final request, "Please look after each other, the animals, and the global poor for me".

As with most during the Covid pandemic, Tommy's memorial services were private and virtual. Tommy's parents asked that friends, "Please consider doing one small act of compassion in Tommy's honor". The operative phrase and our reflection this time being "to act". In response, the virtual mourners transformed into an army of real doers of good and kind deeds. A web site was created and within days hundreds, now more, signed in committing to at least one small act of kindness. What a powerful example of quick and tangible action to bring humanity's best out of the darkest circumstances.

This beautiful story and its lessons inspire our reflection. Three important activities requiring action traditionally occur in January of

each year: the March for Life; Catholic Schools Appreciation Week; and the Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration. Most events associated with these three important activities will either be curtailed and or completely virtual. Tommy Raskin's story and final request reminds us that these events are far too important to commemorate in cyberspace only. Each requires real-time action of human hearts and hands.

We may not be able to march for life this year, but we can act for life. Individuals, schools, parishes can write letters to lawmakers urging protection and respect for life including the unborn, the disabled, the sick and the elderly. While we cannot attend the Mass for life at the Capital One Arena as many have in past years, Catholic parishes can have local Masses or prayer services for life while fully complying with health guidelines. Might this be the time to form or join a parish or school pro-life committee? **Protecting life requires real-life action.**

While we likely can't visit a Catholic school during Catholic Schools Week, it's possible to thank the teachers, administrators and staffs of these schools for their extraordinary and courageous service during the pandemic. It's impossible to overstate their commitment to Catholic schools and the health of our children. One can act to assist the school by contributing to the added costs of operations during a pandemic or replacing lost revenues due to cancelled fundraising activities. For real hands-on service, how about offering to help sanitize the school and playground or serve as substitute teachers, required more often during the pandemic. **Catholic schools are communities of real people requiring tangible support.**

While we cannot attend most Martin Luther King Jr. Day events, our parish can promote activities

that advocate and engage Catholics on behalf of social justice and against any form of discrimination, hate and racism. As an inspiration for action, consider reading King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail as a family or group activity. Commit your parish to actively participating in the Justice and Advocacy Council. MLK Day was often commemorated by personal volunteer service. That's still an option. Food banks desperately need food; families are at risk of being evicted; some can't afford the internet required for on-line learning or communication with others while socially distancing; there are scores of isolated and lonely people in each parish who would benefit from a visit. **Aching hearts require the loving touch of human presence.**

I'm reminded of another story. We won't get to heaven by virtually squeezing through the eye of a needle! Entry will depend upon our answer to the questions, when did we **actually** feed the hungry, cloth the naked, or visit the sick or imprisoned. Zooming alone won't get us in.

God Bless!  
Chuck Short  
cshort5@verizon.net

OPT

## NATIVITY

Con't from page 13

different artistic and cultural influences depicting the Holy Family, shepherds, and magi. Parishioners put their creativity to work as they presented their nativity scenes from inflatables to a wreath decked out with multiple ornaments of the manger.

A special part of the event was hearing the beautiful stories behind the nativity scenes. One family brought a creche that was a present for a newly married couple's

first Christmas together. Another parishioner shared a nativity she made with her grandchildren, while another exhibited a collection generated with love over the years. We even had a live Mary cradling a baby doll as the Infant Jesus!

Holy Cross Church hopes to bring back this event next Christmas and looks forward to more parishioners sharing their nativity scenes. Thank you to all the parishioners who took the time to come and make a memorable event possible during this time of pandemic. May God bless you!

OPT

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**1/29/21**

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# President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Calls Out President Biden for his Support of Pro-Abortion Policies

**M**y prayers are with our new President and his family today.

I am praying that God grant him wisdom and courage to lead this great nation and that God help him to meet the tests of these times, to heal the wounds caused by this pandemic, to ease our intense political and cultural divisions, and to bring people together with renewed dedication to America's founding purposes, to be one nation under God committed to liberty and equality for all.

Catholic bishops are not partisan players in our nation's politics. We are pastors responsible for the souls of millions of Americans and we are advocates for the needs of all our neighbors. In every community across the country, Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals, and ministries form an essential culture of compassion and care, serving women, children, and the elderly, the poor and sick, the imprisoned, the migrant, and the marginalized, no matter what their race or religion.

When we speak on issues in American public life, we try to guide consciences, and we offer principles. These principles are rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the social teachings of his Church. Jesus Christ revealed God's plan of love for creation and revealed the truth about the human person, who is created in God's image, endowed with God-given dignity, rights and responsibilities, and called to a transcendent destiny.

Based on these truths, which are reflected in the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, the bishops and Catholic faithful carry out Christ's commandment to love God and love our neighbors by working for an America that protects human dignity, expands equality and opportunities for every person, and is open-hearted towards the suffering and weak.

For many years now, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has tried to help Catholics and others of good will in their reflections on political issues through a publication we call *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. The most recent edition addresses a wide range of concerns. Among them: abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, immigration, racism, poverty, care for the environment, criminal justice reform, economic development, and international peace.



José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

On these and other issues, our duty to love and our moral principles lead us to prudential judgments and positions that do not align neatly with the political categories of left or right or the platforms of our two major political parties. We work with every President and every Congress. On some issues we find ourselves

disagreement and strong opposition.

Working with President Biden will be unique, however, as he is our first president in 60 years to profess the Catholic faith. In a time of growing and aggressive secularism in American culture, when religious believers face many challenges, it will be refreshing

all its truth and power, in season and out of season, even when that teaching is inconvenient or when the Gospel's truths run contrary to the directions of the wider society and culture. So, I must point out that our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender. Of deep concern is the liberty of the Church and the freedom of believers to live according to their consciences.

Our commitments on issues of human sexuality and the family, as with our commitments in every other area — such as abolishing the death penalty or seeking a health care system and economy that truly serves the human person — are guided by Christ's great commandment to love and to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable.

For the nation's bishops, the continued injustice of abortion remains the "preeminent priority." Preeminent does not mean

community. It is also a matter of social justice. We cannot ignore the reality that abortion rates are much higher among the poor and minorities, and that the procedure is regularly used to eliminate children who would be born with disabilities.

Rather than impose further expansions of abortion and contraception, as he has promised, I am hopeful that the new President and his administration will work with the Church and others of good will. My hope is that we can begin a dialogue to address the complicated cultural and economic factors that are driving abortion and discouraging families. My hope, too, is that we can work together to finally put in place a coherent family policy in this country, one that acknowledges the crucial importance of strong marriages and parenting to the well-being of children and the stability of communities. If the President, with full respect for the Church's religious freedom, were to engage in this conversation, it would go a long way toward restoring the civil balance and healing our country's needs.

President Biden's call for national healing and unity is welcome on all levels. It is urgently needed as we confront the trauma in our country caused by the coronavirus pandemic and the social isolation that has only worsened the intense and long-simmering divisions among our fellow citizens.

As believers, we understand that healing is a gift that we can only receive from the hand of God. We know, too, that real reconciliation requires patient listening to those who disagree with us and a willingness to forgive and move beyond desires for reprisal. Christian love calls us to love our enemies and bless those who oppose us, and to treat others with the same compassion that we want for ourselves.

We are all under the watchful eye of God, who alone knows and can judge the intentions of our hearts. I pray that God will give our new President, and all of us, the grace to seek the common good with all sincerity.

I entrust all our hopes and anxieties in this new moment to the tender heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Christ and the patroness of this exceptional nation. May she guide us in the ways of peace and obtain for us wisdom and the grace of a true patriotism and love of country.

**“our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity ...”**

—Statement on the Inauguration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., as 46th President of the United States of America from Most Reverend José H. Gomez, Archbishop of Los Angeles, President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

more on the side of Democrats, while on others we find ourselves standing with Republicans. Our priorities are never partisan. We are Catholics first, seeking only to follow Jesus Christ faithfully and to advance his vision for human fraternity and community.

I look forward to working with President Biden and his administration, and the new Congress. As with every administration, there will be areas where we agree and work closely together and areas where we will have principled

to engage with a President who clearly understands, in a deep and personal way, the importance of religious faith and institutions. Mr. Biden's piety and personal story, his moving witness to how his faith has brought him solace in times of darkness and tragedy, his longstanding commitment to the Gospel's priority for the poor — all of this I find hopeful and inspiring.

At the same time, as pastors, the nation's bishops are given the duty of proclaiming the Gospel in

“only.” We have deep concerns about many threats to human life and dignity in our society. But as Pope Francis teaches, we cannot stay silent when nearly a million unborn lives are being cast aside in our country year after year through abortion.

Abortion is a direct attack on life that also wounds the woman and undermines the family. It is not only a private matter, it raises troubling and fundamental questions of fraternity, solidarity, and inclusion in the human