



Parish Times

Special Edition
Catholic Schools Week

JANUARY 2024

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Who Are Our Neighbors

Happy New Year to all! I am praying for your health, joy, and spiritual fulfillment during 2024.

Let's celebrate Sister Nancy Downing CND (Congregation of Notre Dame) upon her appointment as Chief Executive Officer of St Ann's Center. She succeeds Sr. Mary Bader, a Visitation grad, who served hundreds of young women, mothers, and babies in that position for seventeen years.



Chuck Short

Continued on page 12

A Lesson for Our Children

Wouldn't it be nice if parents got a cheat sheet when their children were born? What if we got a checklist that identified all the lessons children need to learn before they head out into the world? We could just go down the list, check off the things we taught and move on. Of course, we'd have to periodically assess to make sure the lessons stuck—but still, it would save parents and kids a lot of unhappiness and embarrassment if we knew what was expected.



Patricia McGann

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Our Lenten Challenge in a Divided World

As we started the new year and as we now approach an early beginning to Lent, I've reflected on my hopes and dreams for myself, our parishes, and our country. One concern that keeps coming to mind is how divided we are, not just politically, but even in our Church.



Fr. John Enzler

This Lent, maybe we can all work on being more attentive to each other's ideas, more

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St. Jane de Chantal Choir Sings for Pope Francis in Rome

After months of preparation, the school choir's trip to the Holy City was an incredible success.

By Elizabeth Hamilton, Principal

As members of the International Federation of *Pueri Cantores*, the de Chantal School Choir spent their week between Christmas and New Years in Rome. The choir, along with parents and teachers arrived in Rome on December 27. That evening, the de Chantal choir gathered at the Paul the VI Center for the *Pueri Cantores Opening Ceremony*, which included choral music and parade of flags from many nations. There were thousands of children, parents and teachers gathered to begin the week of choral music. During the week, the choir toured Rome and sang in a variety of locations. Each day began at 6:00am and ended as the buses returned to the hotel for dinner. The children walked cobblestone sidewalks, ancient Roman pathways, and visited the Colosseum, Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain. The children sang the Mass at the Paul Out-Side the Walls Cathedral. The de Chantal Choir Group enjoyed an evening tour of the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel, a very unique way to enjoy the magnificence of the building, the

Continued on page 6



25 de Chantal students flew to Rome to celebrate the Christmas season along with thousands of other international children choristers.

Holy Child CYO Basketball Tournament: A Time Honored Tradition

The gym at Holy Child was alive with excitement and cheers as the 15th Annual CYO tournament unfolded over Martin Luther King Jr. weekend. Across three days of fierce competition, 16 teams, divided into Junior Varsity and Varsity divisions, vied for the coveted championship titles. The tournament showcased the talents of over 150 athletes, including six middle-school students from Holy Child representing their Parish teams.

As teams battled for a spot in the finals, only four emerged to compete in the ultimate showdown on Monday evening. Not even snow could stop the crowds from coming out to watch as Holy Redeemer secured the Junior Varsity title in a hard-fought victory against Our Lady of Good Counsel, while St. Elizabeth's emerged triumphant over Holy Redeemer to claim the Varsity title.

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Congrats to the MVP for the Varsity division, Taylor Pemberton of St. Elizabeth's



Congrats to the MVP for the JV division, Maddy Burke of Holy Redeemer.

Mass for All God's Children Features Gifts People with Special Needs Bring to the Liturgy

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

Before the last Mass for the Feast of the Epiphany, the altar servers huddled to discuss their roles. The pianist took her place at her instrument. And the Joyful Greeters held open the front doors of St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, bulletin in hand and a smile on their faces.

It was an ordinary scene, but an extraordinary liturgy. For nearly every liturgical role at the parish's Mass for All God's Children on January 7 was filled by a person with special needs or learning differences — from the ushers, gift bearers, and readers of the Prayers of the Faithful to the choir members, lectors, and interpreter of American Sign Language (ASL) on the altar.

St. Francis parishioner Meghan Jones, who served at the altar and interpreted parts of the Mass in ASL, said the Mass celebrating the gifts of people with special needs and learning differences is special to her because of what it represents to her and her community.

"We want everyone to be inclusive," said Meghan Jones, one of 35 young people who served at the liturgy. "We want everyone to feel welcome in this parish."



At St. Francis of Assisi Parish's Mass for All God's Children on January 7, individuals with special needs and learning differences gathered for a photo at the conclusion of the liturgy. Three hundred nineteen people attended the liturgy celebrating the gifts of people with special needs, who filled almost all liturgical roles during the Mass.

St. Francis of Assisi Parish began celebrating the Mass for All God's Children in 2013, when Permanent Deacon Dan Finn and parishioner Sylvia Jones approached then-pastor Fr. David Beaubien about starting a Mass for the special needs population after Sylvia attended

one at St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Rockville.

"It's opening doors," said Sylvia, coordinator of the Special Events Ministry at St. Francis and mother to Meghan. "The more you see [people with special needs and learning differences], the more comfortable

you are if you haven't engaged with this population before."

One special facet of the Mass is the assistance both individuals and ministries at St. Francis extend to help participants take part. Members of the Knights of Columbus Council 2323 and Youth

Ministry helped mentor the ushers. Parishioners John and Kelly Tomon helped readers of the Prayers of the Faithful line up at the altar and prompted them if they needed help reading. Parishioners stood lovingly, as vocalizations occasionally rose above celebrant Fr. John Dillon's voice during the liturgy.

During his homily, Fr. John said that the three gifts brought by the Magi to baby Jesus had great meaning — gold, indicating that he was God; frankincense, indicating that he was a king; and myrrh, showing that he would die for our sins.

"He made a way for all of us — all of us have a way to the Father," Fr. John said. "There are no exceptions. All we have to do is ask for it."

During a reception following the Mass, new St. Francis parishioner Brenda Orille sat next to her 11-year-old daughter Isabella Mae Orille, who has autism. Describing herself as "touched" that people with special needs served in all the liturgical roles, Brenda said she hopes Isabella can have a role next year. "It's a good feeling that something like this exists," she said.

These Masses do, in fact, take place throughout the archdiocese, according to Rachel Chung, coordi-

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Georgetown Prep and the Great Ignatian Challenge

By Bonnie Bai and Brian Dybicz

The Great Ignatian Challenge is an annual Thanksgiving Food Drive competition intended to raise students' awareness of hunger and inspire them to take action by working to fill their local food banks and community centers with thousands of pounds of much-needed provisions. This friendly but spirited competition ran from October 19 through November 24. Twenty-two Catholic high schools participated from 12 states — New York, Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, New Jersey,

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Students Nick White '25 and Tyler Butler '26 organize the food donations.

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Centro Tepeyac: The Fruit of Our Mission

By Julie Kilmer, Executive Director

The majority of the women who seek our services find themselves in situations where they feel compelled to choose abortion due to financial strain and pressure from family. Most have never experienced a nurturing, loving environment in their personal relationships, be it romantic, familial, or otherwise. They are often trapped in cycles of abuse and neglect that have been passed down from generation to generation. We realized that a visit to Centro Tepeyac is more than a free pregnancy test to them; it's an opportunity to encounter the love of Christ.

To begin the New Year, we'd like to share a recent client story with you on "A Journey of Loss and Resilience: Navigating Motherhood with Centro Tepeyac's Support"

"I visited Centro Tepeyac during my pregnancy with my daughter, Gianna. They assisted me in applying for health insurance and



Executive Director Julie Kilmer pictured with the seventh grade, had the great privilege of visiting St. Jude's recently to thank the students for their support and share more about the impact of their generous hearts. It was a pleasure to speak with the students and we hope to visit again in the near future!

supported me throughout my prenatal care. As I learned I would be a mother to two girls, the counselors maintained frequent contact. When I expressed concerns about reduced fetal movement, they advised me to

go to the nearest hospital promptly. It was then that I discovered one of my babies had a health issue, and sadly, one of them did not survive. Despite the heartbreaking loss, one baby survived. I spent over 12 weeks in the hospital to ensure her survival. Throughout this challenging time, Centro Tepeyac continued to offer support through phone calls, encouragement, and prayers when I needed them the most." -Joseline (Name changed for privacy)

How to Assist Us in Our Mission

The bread you store up belongs to the hungry; the cloak that lies in your chest belongs to the naked; the gold you have hidden in the ground belongs to the poor." - St. Basil the Great. Educating children on the significance of taking action to support mothers in need is a crucial step in fostering compassion for the unborn. By instilling a sense of responsibility at a young age, we empower the next generation

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A beautiful new family within the Centro Tepeyac community.



A new father and his precious newborn.



Fifth-grade students at St. Jude's showed their enthusiasm in helping Centro Tepeyac in their mission!



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Phone 301-706-9684

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PUBLISHED IN ALTERNATE MONTHS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR.

Don Bosco Cristo Rey Celebrates College Acceptance Success

The Don Bosco Cristo Rey community is proud to celebrate David M., a senior who is Johns Hopkins bound. He is the first DBCR student to commit to the prestigious university.

David's acceptance is connected to the fact that he won the Questbridge National College Scholarship. QuestBridge is a "leading nonprofit that connects the nation's most exceptional, low-income youth with leading colleges and opportunities". Don Bosco's DBCR's College Success & Alumni Persistence team provided tireless support throughout the application process.

This incredible feat means he will attend Johns Hopkins on a full ride; amounting to a scholarship valued at over



David celebrates his acceptance to Johns Hopkins. Go Blue Jays!

\$200,000. He opened the email sharing the news surrounded by friends and family.

Johns Hopkins will bring David one step closer to his dream of becoming a doctor. His mother shared, "I work in a clinic with a lot of great doctors who went to Johns Hopkins. Now my son is going there. Isn't that great?"

David has had exceptional success at Don Bosco Cristo Rey, exemplified by his grades, SAT scores, and AP transcript. His academic achievements, coupled with his Corporate Work Study experience working at MedStar Ambulatory Services, qualified him for the Questbridge Scholarship program. David is also a valued Youth Ministry leader.

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Quiz Bowl Team Launched

By Austin Darke and Ashley Osuri, seventh-grade students

Have you ever wanted to appear on Jeopardy? Nine lucky St. Patrick's students recently participated in something quite similar, The Quiz Bowl Club. It is coached by our very own Mrs. McKelvey, mom of Raymond (Grade 7) and Ellie (Grade 6). Recently The McKelveys and seven other students in sixth and seventh grade traveled to Burleigh Manor Middle School in Ellicott City and put their well-trained brains to work at their first ever Quiz Bowl Tournament. Students from fifteen other schools showed up with their best and brightest. Teams of three and four students went head-to-head in round-robin competitions.

This club came to fruition this past summer because of Mrs. McKelvey's confidence in academic competitions. It is her belief that through competing, students develop valuable life skills such as critical thinking, self-confidence, teamwork, reasoning skills, and active listening. Mrs. McKelvey has had



St. Patrick's inaugural Quiz Bowl Team.

a great deal of fun working with students as their coach. She said, "I love having fun with them, seeing them challenge themselves and seeing their pride when they get an answer right." Mrs. McKelvey is incredibly proud of all the progress the team has made. She recalled, "When we started most of them had never ever seen an academic competition. They know so much more now than they did at the beginning." Overall, Mrs. McKelvey is exceptionally proud of the effort put in by the students and that St. Patrick's now has a veteran Quiz Bowl team.

When Quiz Bowl arrived at St. Patrick's as an afterschool activity, it was immediately embraced by fourteen middle school students. Participants have many positive feelings toward this new club. Jackson Lloyd said, "I didn't realize how fun it would be." He added his favorite part was getting to compete in the Quiz Bowl tournament. As a whole, Mrs. McKelvey and all the players were proud of not only themselves but of each other and their team too.

OPT



Thursdays are a sea of pink at St. Patrick's!

Wearing Pink with Love

By Juliette Stone, eighth-grade student

For the past several weeks, our St. Patrick's community has been wearing pink on Thursdays. It started when we sadly found out that our beloved Mrs. Schmidtlein was diagnosed with cancer, so to support her, we are wearing pink. The school community continues to hold her in our prayers each day. Feli, an eighth grader, says, "I love pink days. I think that it's a great way to show the Schmidtlein family our support

and it shows how united we are as a St. Patrick's community."

The school body has demonstrated great participation with a sea of pink every Thursday. Even our teachers participate! Every Thursday, all of our teachers have something pink on like Miss. Jenkins' awesome pink pants. Maggie, an eighth grader, commented, "It shows so much love and support toward the Schmidtleins. It is so amazing to see the entire school support one cause all together."

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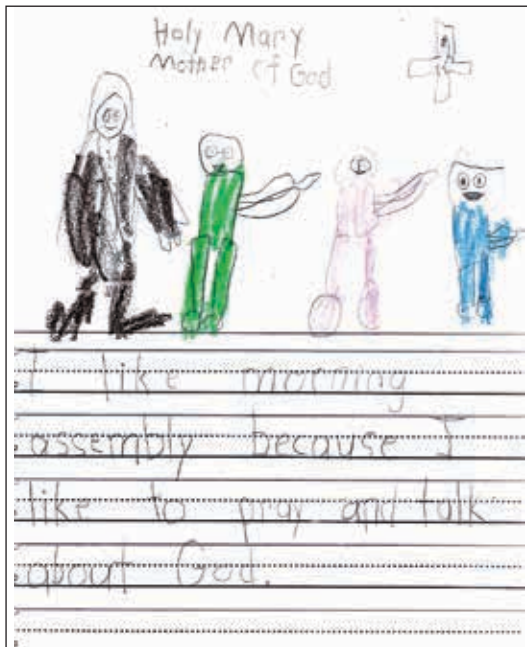
Celebrating Catholic Schools Week!

As we prepare to commemorate Catholic Schools Week, we reflect on the reasons why families choose Catholic schools for their education. St. Patrick's takes pride in fostering faith, service, and academic excellence, evident the moment you step through our doors. Throughout this special

week, we not only acknowledge the many contributors within our community, but also engage in acts of giving back. Our students will be collecting cans of soup for nearby shelters as well as making Valentine's Day cards for So Others Might Eat (SOME). Additionally, we will take the time to express gratitude to our

clergy, our exceptional teachers, and the parents who contribute to the creation of this wonderful community. It's a week for us to unite, recognizing and appreciating the individuals who make a positive impact every day in our school – an eagerly anticipated tradition each year!

OPT



St. Patrick's students know the importance of praying together as a school.



Student artwork highlights one of the best part of St. Patrick's – the faculty!



In December, the fifth-grade class shared a meaningful afternoon visiting the residents of Grace House, an assisted living residence in Silver Spring. Engaging in games, singing festive Christmas carols, and forming connections with the residents, our students created an atmosphere filled with Christmas joy.

The fifth-grade class embarked on an adventure to the White House, where they marveled at the magical Christmas decorations adorning the historic halls. The students explored the festive displays, soaking in the holiday spirit and creating lasting memories. This special visit added to their holiday season, offering a unique glimpse into the festive traditions of the White House.



Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Feast Day

By Joan Gerard

Mother Seton Parish is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year. Many events throughout the year are being planned to celebrate our Golden Jubilee. Of course, we wanted to first bring honor to our Patron, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton.

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Monica Stohlman venerating the relic of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

Pen Pal Project Connects Third Graders

By Erin Pant

Right before Christmas break, Saint Peter's third graders were busy reading and replying to the latest letters from their pen pals. With each letter that arrives, they learn a little more about their pen pals, who are third grade students at St. Elizabeth School in Rockville.

Saint Peter's third grade teachers, Ms. Deoudes and Mrs. Bieberich introduced the pen pal project last year when Ms. Deoudes, who previously taught at St. Elizabeth School, saw an oppor-



Letter-writing is such a fun way to hone our writing skills.

tunity to keep in touch with former students while providing an engaging way for the stu-

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ROME

Con't from page 1

rooms and Vatican art collection.

On December 30, the Choir and their parents participated in a Papal Audience with Pope Francis at the Paul VI Center. The Pope was greeted by cheers and singing in languages from around the world. It was a thrilling moment to hear and see the excitement. The children and adults were overcome with emotions of being in close proximity to His Holiness. His spirituality was ever present as he reached out to children and made eye contact with adults and children alike. During this audience, the Pope spoke directly to the children. He thanked them for singing and bringing joy. He gave the children three words to reflect upon when singing: Joy, Prayer and Humility. His departing comments were, "There are many of you here, yet when you were singing just now, you seemed to be one and this is truly beautiful. That did not happen by chance; it was because you studied the parts, you rehearsed, and you worked hard. This too is an important message for everyone. Singing together well requires effort, just as living together well requires effort. With the harmony of your performances, the light in your eyes and the beauty of your voices, you help us to understand the effort is worth it."

A special day trip to Assisi was truly memorable. The de



The de Chantal Choir trip to Rome was organized by the de Chantal Choir Director, Mrs. Olga Morales and included 25 choristers and their parents and grandparents, a total of 97 members shown here in Assisi.

Chantal group attended Mass in the Cathedral and once again, the children filled the space with beautiful music. Following Mass, the remainder of the day included touring, visiting, shopping and walking the hilly streets that St. Francis once walked. The evening bus-ride back to Rome was quiet as everyone remembered this special day in beautiful and peaceful Assisi.

On January 1, 2024 the de Chantal Choir and their parents joined

thousands of people at St. Peter's Basilica. Pope Francis offered Mass and the de Chantal Choir sang with all the Pueri Cantores Choirs on this glorious occasion. Many of the de Chantal choir children told stories of touching the Pope's hand or chair as he processed through St. Peter's. Following Mass, the choir children and their parents joined thousands outside the Vatican in St. Peter's Square and joined in as the Pope prayed the Angeles from his

window. He asked all to remember Mary and be humble and silent, just as she was.

New Year's night was a time to celebrate with dinner and dancing at the hotel. Return trip packing was done quickly as everyone prepared for an early departure on January 2. The de Chantal Choir trip to Rome was organized by the de Chantal Choir Director, Mrs. Olga Morales. While the 2024 trip was her third time bringing the Choir to

Rome, with 25 choristers and their parents and grandparents, a total of 97 members, this was the largest group. Everyone is very grateful to Mrs. Morales for teaching the children pages and pages of music often in different languages as they prepared to join other choirs. This special experience in Rome will live as a blessed memory in the minds of all the children and adults who were part of the de Chantal Choir Trip to Rome.

OPT



ENZLER

Con't from page 1

accepting of the fact that we're going to differ, and more willing to be kind and loving to those who might have a different perspective than our own.

As a parish priest and now chaplain at St. John's College High School, I hear varying opinions about women's ordination, celibacy, politics, and Church issues that some might call liberal while others might be thought of as conservative. Where it saddens me is when we start to exclude or become angry with people whose views are different than our own. I just don't believe Jesus wants this of us as a community of faith.

It's not that I don't think we should ever disagree. Disagreements have been around forever. It's more that we now seem to see those with whom we disagree as enemies instead of our brothers and sisters in Christ that we should listen to, care for, and love.

I've seen some difficult circumstances in marriages where opinions have become so strong that spouses are at odds. I've seen it in prayer groups. I see it on Sundays as some people find ways to criticize priests and others performing important roles in the Church.

One of my hopes is that we use the upcoming Lenten season, which begins in just three weeks, to work diligently to be more accepting of each other and less judgmental about those with different views. To be kinder to those who are part of our family, parish, and community, and more prayerful about loving those with whom we don't always agree.

We are called in Lent to spend time in prayer, almsgiving, fasting and penance. We can fast from being overly judgmental and critical of others. We can pray for those we disagree with and ask God to help us be more open at least to our fellow human beings if not the ideas themselves. And almsgiving can be acting charitably to those we differ with, or supporting groups that we believe are spreading the Gospel message of faith, hope and love.

Our Lenten reflections can be good opportunities to examine the ways we deal with and accept those around us. We may not even be aware that we have such strong opinions and convictions, that we get angry with our family members, neighbors, coworkers, or fellow parishioners who see things differently.

We can consider how well our thoughts and actions match what Jesus would say and do, and how well they promote the Gospel message of love and service.

I'll be working on that this Lent, and I invite you to also accept the challenge to be more welcoming, open, and loving amid our differences. Jesus calls us to be people of love in all situations, even in a world that's too often divided and torn apart by the differences at hand.

The ultimate reaction to disagreement is war, and we are dealing with two major wars in our world today – one in Ukraine and another in the Middle East. Please, God, help us find a way to put down our weapons of war and soften our anger, and help us to find ways in all circumstances to live in peace, love, and cooperation with those around us.

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Brian Woodland is SMS Volunteer of the Year

By Rochi Cajigal

At the end of every year, we gratefully recognize a parent who has gone above and beyond in their service to the school. This year, we had the very special honor of presenting Coach Brian Woodland with the Volunteer of the Year award. His exceptional contributions to our community have led to the growth of CYO sports here at St. Martin's School.

Coach Woodland, whose children are Nia in seventh grade and BJ in eighth grade, started coaching basketball in 2018 to get his 60 volunteer hours. But for him, who has had a love for basketball his entire life, it was really a no-brainer. He had told his son BJ that once he started playing, he would start coaching and that for as long as he plays, he will coach. Beyond that, though, basketball has been an integral part of Brian's life since he was younger, whether he was playing the game himself or coaching or refereeing for teams playing for the City of Gaithersburg.

The addition of track and field and soccer has always been part of Coach Woodland's plan. For him, having a strong sports program is crucial in providing youngsters with that balance that everyone needs; while academics are important, of course, extra-curricular activities are also. Championing soccer shows how well Brian knows his community – he saw how strong the inter-



Brian Woodland (back row, left) is recognized as Volunteer of the Year for his efforts to grow the St. Martin of Tours CYO Sports Program. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School.

est in the sport was amongst the kids and realized it was time to provide our students with an opportunity to nurture that interest. Coach made the right play, as our 12U soccer team went on to the semi-finals in their

opening season this past autumn!

When asked what his coaching style is, Brian says that he really likes to focus on the fundamentals of the game. He proudly recounts the times that athletes have come

back to thank him for planting in them the seeds that have bloomed into a true love of the game. To that, Coach Woodland happily chimes, "That's pretty cool! There's nothing better than someone just coming to say 'hi'... not even 'thank you'."

Coach Woodland wants nothing more than the competitive spirit, the sense of camaraderie, and the spirit of participation to be carried forward by the parents who will eventually take over his role. "I am always screaming at the top of my head and having such a great time. I have kids who are friends now because of sports. The competitive spirit shines because they are enjoying themselves. It's very humbling."

Although Coach Woodland has become the face of St. Martin's CYO sports, he doesn't fail to humbly mention that he has always had the support of other parent volunteers and that SMS sports would not be where they are without them. He has also had a lot of support from his family to whom he would like to say, "I have to send a special thank you to my wife, Nekiera, my children, BJ and Nia, and all the CYO volunteers who sacrifice as hard as I do to make sure your kids have a safe and fun place to enjoy the games we play." And to his athletes – and to all Crusaders, really – he would like to say, "Get up, get out, and play. Work hard and play hard."

OPT

St. Martin's School Enjoys a Busy Christmas Season

By Rochi Cajigal

There was no shortage of excitement at St. Martin's School in December. Our Crusaders were very busy celebrating Advent and preparing for Christmas. The halls were decked with festive artwork, from gingerbread houses to nutcrackers, and Christmas songs could be heard in the halls as students, with the help of music teacher Ms. Trabelsi, perfected their songs for the Winter Show.

We officially kicked off the holiday season with our annual Breakfast with Santa. This year's theme was The Nutcracker, and guests were delighted to see larger-than-life nutcrackers courtesy of the artistic fifth grade parents; a candy table where bags could be filled with gumdrops and other



First graders at St. Martin's School perform a live nativity. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School.

sweets; and, of course, a visit by the man-of-the-hour himself, Santa! Then, on December 6, the Feast

of St. Nicholas, excited Crusaders dressed in red and green and found that a special visitor had left candy

canes in their shoes.

The week of the Winter Show kept everyone busy with multiple



Students at St. Martin's School enjoy class Christmas parties before their much-deserved break. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School.

rounds of on-stage rehearsals for each grade. The eighth grade worked extra hard, either acting in the play or working as crew on sound or lighting. Our gym was filled to capacity with families eager to hear our Crusaders sing well-known classics like "Do You Hear What I Hear" and tunes like "Oseh Shalom" that are especially relevant and appropriate for these times. As always, it was a beautiful night enjoyed by all!

Then, on our last day at school in 2023, we watched the first graders in a live nativity. It was the perfect – and most adorable – way to remind everyone the true meaning of Christmas before our class parties and before heading into a much-deserved break.

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Parishioners from St. Martin of Tours walk with Mary through the streets of DC once again in the Archdiocesan Annual Celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Photo courtesy of St. Martin's Parish.



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Contemporary Ensemble Music Group Envelops Members with Welcome, Inclusiveness of a Family

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

During the 17 years when St. Francis parishioner Kara Phillips sat down to play the piano during the Sunday Mass at 11:15 a.m., she could turn around and spy her four young sons sitting next to her husband, Pete, in the pews. Over the years, her son, Peter, often played his trumpet a few feet from her. And on Christmas and Easter, sons Kurt, Keanan, and Penn would often join the Mass' musicians on their tuba and cello.

Such is the family-grounded ministry that is St. Francis of Assisi Parish's Contemporary Ensemble, the musical group focused on bringing folk-based and spirit-filled music to the church's 11:15 a.m. liturgy for nearly 26 and a half years. Currently, 10 of the group's members have participated or are now singing and playing with members of their family and 19 such family units have been part of the group throughout its history. This includes a family of seven who joined the group last year.

Contemporary Ensemble Co-Director Sue Madison said the family focus has seeded the ministry from its genesis. When she and co-directors John Ryan and Patrick Farrell approached then-Music Director Amy Roberts in September 1997 about starting a folk group



Members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish's Contemporary Ensemble gather on the altar after the 11:15 a.m. Mass on January 14. Founded in 1997 as a way for the ministry's leaders to keep their own children connected to church, the Contemporary Ensemble has offered at least 19 families a way to serve their church alongside members of their family.

at the church, they had some self-serving motivations related to their then-teenaged children.

"We started it to try to keep our kids in church," Madison said. "We wanted to keep them connected."

The desire on the part of the Contemporary Ensemble's leaders to keep families close has influenced the culture they have cultivated in their group. The ensemble

welcomes children as young as nine to join their group and many are accompanied by parents or siblings. Members need not have years of professional musical training nor possess technically perfect vocals. Singing and playing an instrument "well enough" and being willing to represent the parish well with one's talents and actions in the church and community are desired quali-

ties of members.

Most important is that a person has a generous heart, a love for the Lord, and a tolerance for the people around them, Madison said.

"It's a huge part of why it works," Madison said. "Because, if it's all about you, it's probably not going to work in our group."

Phillips, who has played the piano and flute since she was eight,

describes the group's informality and standard of being just good enough as part of its appeal.

"You just have to be willing to sing and do your best. You don't have to be a gifted musician," Phillips said. "We're all just doing the best we can. We're using whatever talent we have to enhance the Mass."

The Contemporary Ensemble's selections draw from diverse styles of liturgical music, from Latin chant to hymns composed by the St. Louis Jesuits and Marty Haugen. Its two dozen members include 15 female singers, five male singers, and six musicians – a pianist, two guitarists, a flutist, bassist, and drum player – some of whom play and sing. Favorite songs that uplift the parish include, "All Are Welcome," "Go Make a Difference," and "Gather Us In," all from the Ritual Songbook.

While the group can be found practicing in the church every Tuesday, the Madisons and Ryans have infused their ministry with a family atmosphere. They schedule a Holiday-Sing Along at a senior center during the Christmas holidays and celebrate Christmas parties at different members' homes. For many years, they would gather at John Ryan's home for a Sunrise Easter service. And members often

Continued on page 30

St. Francis' Spanish Speaking Community Begins Its Own Christmas Traditions at Parish

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

In a faith community already steeped in welcome and fellowship, the Spanish speaking and bilingual members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish deepened their ties with their new church home and each other in establishing two Christmas traditions commemorated in their native countries.

Scarcely a year after establishing the church's Mass in Spanish, ministry leaders coordinated celebrations of Las Posadas (The Lodging) and Los Tres Reyes Magos (The Three Wise Men) to bookend the Christmas season at the parish. Respectively, these celebrations commemorate St. Joseph and Mary seeking a place where the baby Jesus could be born and the Three



Two children in St. Francis of Assisi Parish's Spanish speaking community dress up as St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother during the community's celebration of Las Posadas ("The Lodging") during December 14-22.

Wise Men who visited him after his birth.

With permission from Fr. Grzegorz Okulewicz and help from Spanish-speaking parishioners, Deacon Will Garcia and his wife Lourdes sought to organize celebrations typically commemorated in Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries to deepen the sense of community Mass attendees have forged at the weekly liturgy.

"The whole purpose is to build a sense of community so when parishioners come to St. Francis, this is their home," Deacon Will Garcia said. "This is to build their sense of ownership. I also want to build a sense of ownership for the children and teens – it builds a foundation for their lives."

From December 14-22, the Spanish-speaking community celebrated Las Posadas by going to nine parishioners' homes each night. Led by two children dressed as St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother, one group would stand outside the home, asking the group inside if they could "stay" in their home. The sheltered group would sing back that they had no room. Once the group of unsheltered people were "permitted" inside, the celebration would continue with a novena prayer, songs, food, and fellowship.

On January 7, the Feast of the Epiphany, the Spanish speaking community celebrated Los Tres Reyes Magos with a visit at the end of the Mass in Spanish from the

three costumed Wise Men. After the Magi paid homage to the baby Jesus at the Nativity on the altar, Fr. Okulewicz gamely led a question and answer session between the three foreign visitors and the children attending the Mass. This culminated with the Three Kings distributing about 50 gifts to children under the age of 13 after Mass.

Lourdes Garcia said she was pleased the Spanish-speaking community successfully coordinated the events and especially continued traditions members had started at their former church home at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Olney.

"I wanted people to know that, if they want to do something at St. Francis, we can try it," she said.

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Led by Director of Adult Faith Formation and Social Concerns Director Tony Bosnick (at far left), candidates and catechumens in St. Francis of Assisi Parish's Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults program stand with their sponsors and some family members after the Rite of Acceptance and Welcoming celebrated at the 11:15 a.m. Mass on January 14, 2024. At the Easter Vigil this spring, 10 candidates and catechumens are slated to receive their Sacraments of Initiation, allowing them to enter the church as full-fledged members.



Mother of God School Honors the Birth of Christ with a Pageant and Music

Written by: Principal, Melissa Furman Sloan

As Catholics, we attempt to withstand the conformity of the secular society and really live and wait in the season of Advent. We wait to decorate, we wait to say Merry Christmas, and we wait, knowing that Christmas only begins on December 25. At Mother of God School, that reverence towards Advent is alive and well, but preparation for the big event begins long before Advent.

Christmas hymns of praise could be heard from the music room in the fall under the direction of a gifted music teacher, Mrs. Elizabeth Breslin. Students practiced and learned motions, harmonies, and even a three-part Canon of *Dona Nobis Pacem*. Beauty and brilliance filled the halls.

As time approached the big

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ABOVE: Mary and Joseph in adoration with 6th graders singing *Dona Nobis Pacem* in a cannon.



RIGHT: Pre-Kindergarten student sings *Happy Birthday Jesus*.



LEFT: Angel Gabriel appears to Mary in Mother of God School's Christmas Pageant

BELOW: Kindergarten students perform *Silent Night*.



Nicolas, a fifth grader competes for St. Raphael House.



Two kindergartners make signs to support their houses.



Mother of God School Fly-Off winners. From left to right: SJ, Joey, Izzy

Mother of God School Houses Compete in the Annual Fly-Off Competition

By Melissa Furman Sloan, Principal

Every year, Mother of God School competes in a Fly-Off. The school has incorporated a house competition element and a unit for the middle school's Project Based Learning program. Both have increased excitement and notability for the event.

Mother of God School is split into three houses: St. Gabriel House, St. Michael House, and St. Raphael House. The houses compete throughout the year through service, academics, and house competitions. The Fly-Off has become one of the anchor school-wide activities. Students line the gym to cheer on their housemates who fly their paper

airplanes.

Weekly, the middle school students participate in Project-Based Learning. During the Fly-Off unit, students learn about the engineering and the aerodynamics required to build an effective paper airplane. Students design and build their planes. The following week students test their planes and adjust their designs to fix any flaws. Then, the students participate in a qualifying round to select two students in each grade from each house to fly their plane at the Fly-Off. Eighth-grade students then teach the fourth and fifth-grade students what they have learned and select finalists to participate in the Fly-Off from those grades.

Pre-Kindergarten through

eighth-grade students make signs and cheer for their respective houses. It gets loud in the gym, but an emphasis on good sportsmanship. Supporting all of our classmates is a priority. This year, our top three winners happened to be from three different houses. In third place, we had sixth grader Izzy from St. Raphael's House. In second place, we had Joey, an eighth grader from St. Gabriel's House, and in first place, winning our second anchor competition of the year, we had SJ, a seventh grader from St. Michael's House. All students did an incredible job working hard, supporting their houses, and competing in a Christ-like way.

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Kindergartners receive a blessing.

Deacon Davy Blesses Mother of God School and its Students

By Melissa Furman Sloan, Principal

Before the Christmas Break, Mother of God School received a beautiful gift. Deacon Mike Davy, who serves at St. John Neumann Parish, is a longtime Mother of God Community member and is closely connected to the school. He is also married

to the amazing second-grade para-educator and religion teacher, Mrs. K.C. Davy. He is the father to Father Andy Davy, a Marian priest who was the keynote speaker on the Eucharist for the employees of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Washington at the Spring Collaboration Day. Deacon Davy and K.C. have four other children, and one is Mr. Paul Davy, an excep-

Continued on page 26



Deacon Davy spends his morning blessing Mother of God School buildings, students, and teachers.

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Soup, Saints, and Stations will anchor St. Jane de Chantal's Lenten Preparations

A simple dinner, reflections on saints, and stations of the cross help parishioners prepare for Good Friday and the Easter Celebration

By Michelle Flynn

The St. Jane de Chantal Parish has always offered ways to keep Lent holy for its community. For years, they have reenacted the Stations of the Cross every Friday night during Lent. For the past few years, the parish has added to this community gathering, a saint reflection and simple meatless soup dinner: *Soup, Saints, & Stations*.

Dozens of parishioners, young and old, come each Friday in Lent to Caulfield Hall with a hungry soul seeking nourishment of mind, hearts, and bellies. De Chantal's pastor Fr. Giese, the parochial vicar, and the wonderful Dominican brothers share in the duties of giving a talk that highlights a saint. Each week, one gives a talk on the life and a simple reflection of a saint as the audience enjoys soup and bread. After the dinner and talk, everyone moves upstairs to the church for the Stations of the Cross, usually completing the version according to St. Alphonsus Liguori. The parish's High School Youth Group practices for weeks and performs a living Stations of the Cross the Friday before Good Friday. This version brings a lot of families to church and is a wonderful way to start the Holy Week.



Teenagers from the de Chantal parish practice for weeks to reenact Christ's death on the cross.

Please consider joining the parish on Fridays during Lent. The simple soup dinner starts at 6:00pm, the talk is at 6:30 and the Stations of the Cross is at 7:00. This is a free event for everyone and all are invited to participate.

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Win or lose de Chantal Dukes always have a smile after the game!

Basketball season kicks off for the de Chantal Dukes

Dukes' hoops focus on sportsmanship teamwork and fun all for the glory of God

By Matt Wilkerson

As the days have gotten colder, the sweet sound of the basketball swish has echoed throughout the St. Jane de Chantal campus in Bethesda. Last November, St. Jane de Chantal Dukes kicked off another basketball season in the Archdiocese of Washington's (ADW) Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) league. de Chantal's basketball program includes an instructional clinic for kindergarteners through second

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OPT Editor

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Catholic Business Network Honors Holy Redeemer Parishioners

By Patty Rehfield

"For we must always cherish the words of the Lord Jesus, who taught, 'Giving brings a far greater blessing than receiving.'" Acts 20:35. To give of oneself. Simple acts of service that bring to life the teachings of Christ. Each year the Catholic Business Network of Montgomery County (CBN-MC) recognizes individuals who have selflessly contributed to the Catholic community. At the annual CBN-MC Gala, held on December 1, 2023, parishioners of Holy Redeemer in Kensington were honored for their

Continued on page 32



Holy Redeemer parishioners celebrate Lisa Donnelly (fourth from right)

Bridging the Gap between Science and Technology: A STEM Adventure

By Marianne T. Green & Goggle Bard

In a vibrant display of collaborative learning, two separate STEM activities buzzed with creative energy across grade levels. In one corner, eighth graders, armed with rulers and brightly colored markers, huddled over blueprints for their bridge-building competition. Their challenge: design a bridge sturdy enough to hold a staggering 100 pennies, all while meticulously color-coding an Ozobot, their pint-sized robotic companion, to navigate across its span. The air crackled with focused discussion as calculations were scribbled down and materials were carefully chosen, each student determined to engineer the most impressive and functional bridge.



Students collaborate while working with their Ozobot.

Meanwhile, across the room, a different kind of ingenuity unfolded. Fourth graders, brimming with holiday spirit, meticulously constructed cardboard mazes, transforming ordinary boxes into whimsical landscapes adorned with festive cheer. Their mission: create a complex path for Sphero, the spherical robot, to navigate, weaving it through twinkling lights and under miniature candy canes. Laughter and chatter filled the air as they collaborated, brainstorming intricate routes, and adding their

Continued on page 32



STEM projects provide hands on experiences during the learning process.

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SHORT

Con't from page 1

Sr. Nancy comes to St. Ann's from Covenant House in New York. She led programs serving three-hundred vulnerable youth each day in housing and counseling programs while she was with Covenant House. Among her many talents is her creativity to establish programs that meet the changing needs of youth and the challenging conditions the organization must address. Most importantly, Sr. Nancy has, as Cardinal Gregory said in welcoming her, "the heart for young people experiencing crises." I hope all Catholic parishes and individuals will commit to supporting Sr. Nancy and the wonderful staff of St. Ann's Center in their blessed work

assisting vulnerable young women, mothers, and children.

In my last column, we reflected on the role that seeing others more deeply plays in our Christian lives. I've been practicing this recently. Hope you have, too. I can report that not only did I meet many new and lovely people, but these engagements also brought me joy at a time when conditions in the world and our nation had me feeling down. With new friends, I begin the year with warmth and optimism.

Let's continue our reflection to know others more deeply during the new year and particularly the Lenten season. So, who is our neighbor? The author and Christian mystic, Dostoevsky wrote, "He who desires to see the living God face to face should seek him not in the empty

firmament of his mind, but in human love." In Matthew's Gospel, Christ identified them as the stranger, the sick, the hungry, thirsty, naked, and imprisoned. The following local data will help our parishes better know their often-unseen neighbors.

- 88,000 of our neighbors are poor according to federal standards, 52,000 of whom are children. However, these numbers may not include all those in need within our parish communities. The Montgomery County Self-Sufficiency Standard is a practical measure of income adequacy based on the localized costs of essential needs for working families: housing, childcare, food, health care, transportation, and miscellaneous items, as well as the cost of taxes and the impact of tax

credits. Considering this adjustment, the number of people living on the margin is over 190,000. Even in the wealthier areas of Potomac, (2.6%), Rockville, (7%), and Bethesda (3.6%) there are thousands of people in need. (<https://www.montgomery-county.md.gov/HHS-Program/OCA/CommunityAction/Self-SufficiencyStandard.html>).

- 34,000 children are food insecure each day and more than 50,000 children rely on free and reduced lunches. (https://www.montgomery-county.md.gov/ofsr/Resources/Files/StrategicPlan2023_rev-9signed.pdf).
- The minimum wage in Montgomery County is \$16 per hour or \$33,000 per year. The self-sufficiency wage required for a

family of two working adults with one preschooler and one school age child is \$29.00 *each* per hour. Anything less will require a family to seek financial assistance to make ends meet or go without essential living requirements.

- During the County's 2023 Point in Time count of homeless people, 894 adults and children were identified as without homes, including 85 families. **This is a 53% increase over 2022.** Currently our communities need 24,000 *additional* rental units to assist low- and moderate-income families find a home. The prevailing rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$2,000 per month and subsidized housing waiting lists are years-long.
- 12,000 elderly neighbors live in poverty.
- 37,000 of our neighbors have severe disabilities, often requiring support.

In a data-driven world, there is risk that we focus too much on numbers and not enough on people. I remember as a youngster seeing a baseball card of the great Lou Gehrig. I was in awe of the statistics on the back of the card. Wiser now, I am now inspired by the face and life of Gehrig. Let's flip the cards over and focus on warm human faces, not cold statistics.

What more can our parishes do to address people in need in our communities? Here are a few inspiring examples of what's going on in some local parishes:

Resurrection Parish in Burtonsville provides food for 753 individuals monthly, collected three carloads of toys during the holidays, and supports immigrants by operating a used bookstore.

St. John the Baptist in Silver Spring engages in several activities in support of the parish mission: "to strive to reflect on the social mission of the Church...by providing education to parishioners in Catholic Social Teaching, reaching out in service, working for a just and peaceful world through advocacy and solidarity with the poor and vulnerable".

St. Camillus, home to the largest number of poor people in the County, supports parish committees to operate one of the largest food pantries in the County, meals on wheels, English as a second language classes, a prison ministry, and the Langley Park Catholic community.

St. Andrews in Kemp Mill supports St. Ann's Center, collects food and clothing, and is a member of the county-wide justice group, Action in Montgomery.

St. Raphael's in Rockville offers religious education programs for children with special needs, partners with other parishes in providing food and clothing, and advocates locally for the poor.

Each of these ministries brings parishioners face to face with Christ through others in need. There are thousands more unseen faces. How will our parishes answer to Jesus's judgement, when you have done it for one of the least important of the brothers of mine, you did it for me.

God Bless.

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ABOVE: Winter Snow at Saint Bernadette Church.



ABOVE: Parish families sing carols together in the Church.

LEFT: Monsignor Smith, pastor at Saint Bernadette's, and Jasmine Kuzner, the Director of Religious Education, enjoying the parish festivities.



ABOVE: The Magi presenting their gifts during the Lessons and Carols.

RIGHT: Saint Bernadette School students participate in the Lessons and Carols.



Winter Happenings at Saint Bernadette

Advent, Christmastide, and Epiphanytide, were packed with many beautiful events and celebrations at Saint Bernadette. After Mass on Gaudete Sunday, we rejoiced with our annual "Breakfast with Santa" hosted by our men's Holy Name society. In the evening, our parish came together for our third annual "Carols in the Church." Families gathered together to enjoy poetry, the singing of favorite Advent and Christmas carols, and a reception with homemade treats and warm beverages in our parish hall. The festive week ended with our school's "Lessons and Carols," a time-honored tradition led by the students of our parish school.

January will be an active time at Saint Bernadette as registration for our parish school is now open. Our school will host an Open House for prospective families on Sunday, January 28, beginning at 10:00am. Also on January 28, our visiting seminarian, David Tines, will give his third presentation in our parish Faith Formation series, entitled

"The Beauty and Meaning of Work as a Christian" in the school hall. Information about our school's open house, religious education, and other ministries at Saint Bernadette can be found on our website.

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Embracing Lives of Service: Mary of Nazareth Gives Back

Every year each class at Mary of Nazareth is challenged to complete a service project together; whether it be making sandwiches for the food shelter, sponsoring a clothing drive, or collecting old blankets and sheets for the animal shelter, students come to understand the importance of giving back to their community.

Just before the holiday break, the kindergarteners and their families handcrafted 26 blankets, aiming to bring comfort to the Nebel Street Men's Shelter in Rockville. The dedication and enthusiasm they showed to the project was inspirational.

Other students also took on the project, wrapping up vibrant



Thumbs up for a job well done. This MoN kindergartener showing off the blankets his class made before they head off to the shelter.

and colorful gifts for the Capital Area Mounted Park Police, which included treats for their equine partners. The gesture aimed not only to express gratitude to the officers

but also to acknowledge the often-unsung heroes – the horses that serve alongside them.

To add a special touch to this project, a park police officer and her partner paid a visit to the school. The students had the unique opportunity to meet the officer, learn about her role in maintaining safety in the park, and, of course, interact with the horse that stood by her side.

Mary of Nazareth's commitment to shaping well-rounded, compassionate individuals is evident through these service initiatives. By actively engaging the surrounding community we show our students how their actions extend far beyond the school.

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Thank you bags, ready for distribution!



MoN students meeting the park mounted police officers and, of course, their horses.



We have lift off! An eighth grader glides through Mary of Nazareth on his hoverboards.

Putt'ing the E in STREAM: Mary of Nazareth's Hoverboard Project Takes Flight

Mary of Nazareth's STREAM program (Science, Technology, Religion, Engineering, Art, and Math) exemplifies a commitment to providing a comprehensive and rigorous learning experience. This unique program integrates various disciplines, fostering a holistic approach to education.

Recently, the eighth-grade students at Mary of Nazareth delved into the engineering component of STREAM with an exciting and hands-on project – building

their own hoverboards. Weeks of preparation led to an exhilarating moment when the students achieved lift-off, quite literally, on their self-designed hoverboards.

Under the guidance of their dedicated teacher, Ms. Kowansky, they learned the intricacies of creating hoverboards using unconventional materials such as plastic, plywood, and a leaf blower. This interdisciplinary project not only showcased the students' creativity but also

Continued on page 30



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ABOVE: The Magi bring presents to the baby Jesus. Photo credit Jeff Thorne Photography.

ABOVE: Children and parents, pet and take photos with the Magi's camels. Photo credit Jeff Thorne Photography.

RIGHT: MSP children ask the Magi questions about baby Jesus. Photo credit Jeff Thorne Photography.



The Three Magi follow the light of Christ to Mother Seton Parish

By Mario Espinoza

The Three Magi arrived with their camels on January 5 and were greeted with song on the steps of the parish. Young children were prepared for the visit with catechesis and by writing letters, which the Magi would bring to the newborn Christ. When the Magi arrived, they led the children to adore Jesus in the manger before sitting down with them

to tell of their journey. They reminded the children of the importance of following the light of Christ, just as they were guided by the star to pass through deserts and many obstacles.

The visit concluded with the Magi giving small gifts to the children, in whom they recognize Jesus present, and a chance to take pictures with them and their animals. Many thanks to those who organized the event.

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The Living Nativity

By Mary Beth DeLuzio

On December 4, 2023, at our usual Family Formation time, the children of Mother Seton Parish held their annual Living Nativity. The older children were our readers and the younger children acted out the parts. We invited the whole parish to attend.

We used the Gospel of Luke to tell the stories leading up to the Birth of Jesus. The final scene was the birth of Jesus. The baby who played Jesus was such a blessing and the children were in awe.

We had fun with the rehearsals, getting dressed up, and then it was time for the children to perform their pageant. They did a spectacular job. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped them prepare and get into the correct costumes and places.

This year we had a photographer and a videographer. If you would like to see our Living Nativity, you can find it on the MSP Family Faith Formation YouTube channel. Once we were finished, we all went to the Parish Center for Christmas cookies and fellowship. It was a fun time and a tradition that we will have for a long time.

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Bulletin@Mothersetonparish.org

MSP Sodalists' Annual Christmas Program in Emmitsburg

By Dorrette Paulin

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord ... As Advent and Christmas loomed, members of Mother Seton Sodality were busy with our year-end holiday projects. We sold White House ornaments to support and fund the Thanksgiving baskets and Christmas gifts for the residents of the Germantown community. We also collected gift cards and other items for the Retired Sisters in Emmitsburg. In the meantime, several children from the parish were rehearsing so that they could travel with their parents and the Sodality to Emmitsburg for their Annual Christmas Program.



Songs of Christmas fill the air in Emmitsburg.

The Sisters are always thrilled to see the Sodality, but they eagerly anticipate the children's performance, a concert that includes poetic readings of the nativity, interspersed with advent hymns and carols. The highlight of the program is Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, which never fails to amuse the Sisters. They are particularly amused by Rudolph's nose, which shines like a lightbulb and glows like a flashlight! At the end of the program the children helped with the distribution of gifts to the Sisters and visited with them while enjoying their refreshments.

OPT

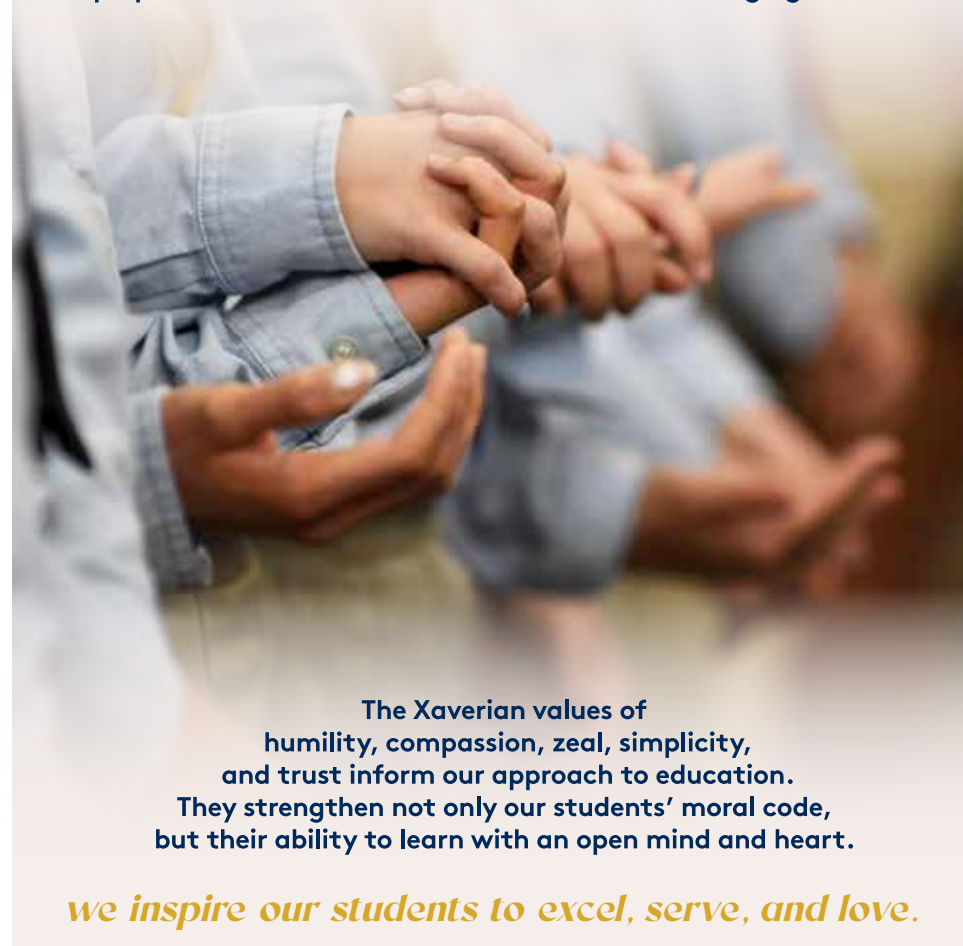
Members of the Mother Seton Sodality and children from the parish visit the Sisters of Charity for a Christmas Program.



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Mercy's Middle School Drama Club dazzled a full house with their production of *Matilda, Jr.*

Mercy's Middle School Literary Magazine Receives Award for Excellence

WINDOWS, Mercy's middle school literary magazine, has been selected to receive the rank of SUPERIOR in the 2023 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines (REALM) Contest. This year, schools in 46 states and five countries nominated 375 student magazines. Magazines from middle school, high school, and higher education were welcomed for the 2023 contest.

Principal Christine Green shares, “We celebrate Mrs. Meg Kummer, Language Arts 7-8 teacher, and Mercy students who were recognized for the art and craft of writing. We know writing a composition, essay, or research paper takes much time, patience, thoughtfulness,



(Left to Right) Meg Kummer, Caitrin Waites and Christine Green accept the NCTE REALM award for Mercy's Middle School Literary

openness, and critical thinking. Writing can be really hard work, but, as we see, the end

Continued on page 37

Educational Extensions Program Continues to Grow at Mercy!

A unique feature of Mercy's curriculum is our Educational Extension Program. This program is designed to provide an optimum school experience for all children based on their various educational strengths and needs, along with enrichment activities based on their individual interests. We had 80% of Mercy's students participate in one or more activities during the first semester! The second

semester offerings are more exciting than ever, and include: Coding Club, Science by Investigation, Hands on Science, STEM, French Enrichment, Spanish Enrichment, Homework Support, Beginner and Advanced String Group, Choir, Art Studio, Chess Club, Babysitter Certification, Indoor Soccer, Pickleball, and more! Our goal is to offer a wide variety of extended learning opportunities for students of all ages.

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Mercy Celebrates Catholic Schools Week 2024!

Mercy students and staff are planning for a fun and meaningful CSW 2024 with many traditional activities along with a few new surprises. We will kick-off CSW with an Open House event on Sunday, January 28, from 9:45 am to 12:00 pm. On Student Day, the Student Council

will greet students with pom poms, posters, and bells at carpool, followed by a parade of blue and white hats and a special surprise from each teacher. Prayer Partners will assemble toiletry packets for the homeless on Community Day and Father Joe Cwik will lead a teaching Mass. On Parent Day, parents will be recognized by the faculty and staff at carpool drop-off, followed by our school and family Mass. On Thursday, February 1, students will play BINGO at lunch with the help of Student Council, followed by the annual 8th grade vs. staff volleyball game.

Closing out the week on Friday, February 2, the MPTO will provide an omelet breakfast for teachers and staff. Members of Mercy's school choir will participate in the ADW Choral Arts Showcase at Good Counsel at 7:00 p.m.

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Potomac, MD

Fr. Charles Antonicelli, Pastor
301-365-1415

Our Lady of Mercy School
Mrs. Christine Green, Principal
301-365-4477

Gerry Burgess, OPT Editor
301-330-5676

More Our Lady of Mercy News on Page 39

St. Jude Regional Catholic School Celebrates Catholic Schools Week

St. Jude Regional Catholic School Celebrates Catholic Schools Week Beginning Jan. 27; Holds Open House on Jan. 28

The excitement is building for Catholic Schools Week (CSW) at St. Jude Regional Catholic School (SJRCs)! The week will open with Mass on Saturday, January 27, at 5:00pm followed by an Open House on Sunday, January 28, from 10:30am – 2:00pm, where tours will be given in English, Spanish, and Amharic. All are invited to



attend.

This year's CSW theme is Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community. To show that SJRCs is united in faith and community, SJRCs students will be collecting much-needed baby sup-

plies for the local Pregnancy center, Centro Tepeyac. Founded on the faith of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Centro Tepeyac provides services to assist mothers both during pregnancy and after.

Other CSW activities include

Career Day, which will give SJRCs students the chance to learn about many different job opportunities. SJRCs is grateful for the men and women who will speak with the students about their own chosen careers, including a hairdresser, a chef, a Vet tech, a nun, a doctor, an engineer, an art therapist, and many others.

SJRS will celebrate its students and families with a family lunch and a BINGO game, and the students will have a night out to celebrate as well.

On Thursday, February 1, the annual celebration of International Day will be held as the Thaddeus Room is turned into the World. From singing to dancing to food, the students will celebrate the world and all of God's creations.

CSW closing Mass will be held on Friday, February 2, and will honor SJRCs's incredible teachers.

Please join our school community as we celebrate St. Jude Regional Catholic School and demonstrate that we are United in Faith and Community.

OPT



The Sodality induction ceremony held on December 2, 2023, was led by current sodalists and Sodality Moderator Father Robert Kosty, and welcomed five new sodalists.

St. Jude Sodality Welcomes Five New Members

By Clare Kuzma

On December 2, 2023, Our Lady of the Wayside Sodality at the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville, MD, inducted five new members: Mirna Bonilla, Erika Buevas, Ana Gomez, Fredes Pham, and Vania Soares.

While Our Lady of the Wayside Sodality

at St. Jude has been active since 1956, the history of sodality began in 1563 in Rome with a devotion to Mary with the objective "To Jesus through Mary."

The Shrine of St. Jude is happy to welcome these new sodalists, who join a vibrant community with a devotion to Our Lady.

OPT

St. Jude Parishioners Donate to Advent Giving Tree

By Jane Soberano, Shrine of St. Jude

The parishioners of the Shrine of St. Jude in Rockville outdid themselves in terms of both number and quality of gifts for the recipients of the parish Advent Giving Tree. The three organizations chosen to benefit from the gifts were: The Gabriel Project of Middle Montgomery County, which services expectant mothers and their children; Jeanne Jugan Home for the Elderly, sponsored by the Little Sisters of the Poor; and our own food pantry—the St. Stephen's Food Pantry at the Shrine of St. Jude.

In early December, parishioners took

Continued on page 39



A Giving Tree at the Shrine of St. Jude – Parishioners were very generous in providing gifts for chosen benefactors. Photo by Nick Scholz.

More Shrine of St. Jude News on Page 39

SJRCs Welcomes New English/Literature Teacher

Welcome to St. Jude Regional Catholic School, Ms. Noelia Gonzalez! Ms. Gonzalez is a graduate student at Catholic University, studying to earn her master's degree in Secondary Education, and she is a product of Catholic education, having graduated from the nearby Brookewood School. Her love for literature has inspired her passion for education, which makes her a perfect match to teach fifth-grade Literature and fifth- to eighth-grade English at SJRCs.

"I am so grateful for this opportunity to help students grow closer to God through literature, which is ultimately all about what it means to be human," commented Ms. Gonzalez. We are so happy that Ms. Gonzalez is now part of St. Jude Regional Catholic School!



Noelia Gonzalez, St. Jude Regional Catholic School's newest teacher.

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Science Fun at St. Mary's School

Academic excellence, one of the pillars of St. Mary's mission, focuses on creating an educational environment and offering a curriculum that is both exciting for students and effective for learning. Seeing the smiling faces of the engaged and attentive students in the science classroom shows just how fun learning can be.

Scientists of all ages have been enjoying opportunities for hands-on learning through various demonstrations and experiments. These opportunities not only help to teach important scientific ideas and principles, but foster collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Here's a run-down of some recent scientific endeavors.

The fifth grade has been researching various animal habitats. Students were put into different groups to create displays of the various habitats they had learned about, including deserts, oceans, and woodlands. They also wrote explanations of each habi-



Fifth graders work together to put the final touches on their rain forest display.

tat's key features and descriptions of animals that can be found there. The creativity of our fifth grade was evident, as they used all sorts of supplies to create their dioramas, everything from pipe cleaners to stuffed animals!

Our sixth-grade scientists could recently be found in the parking lot conducting a messy experiment with coke and mentos. Students observed a chemical reaction that resulted in a fountain of foam. It was a competition to see which group could generate the highest foam burst.

The seventh grade has been learning about DNA, deepening their understanding by creating candy models. This sweet activity helped students to learn about the building blocks of DNA molecules and how nucleotides are paired in each DNA strand. What a delicious way to learn science!



Students used various kinds of candy to construct their DNA molecules. There may have been a little snacking in the process too!

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Student performers in the St. Mary's Christmas Show 2023.

St. Mary's Celebrates a Beautiful Christmas Season

The Advent season was a time of prayerful preparation, joy, and festive fun as the entire St. Mary's community prepared for Christmas.

The school building full of beautiful decorations, ranging from colorful garland to Christmas trees. Thank you to all the volunteers who helped to add some sparkle to our hallways and classrooms.

Kindergartener through fourth grade participated in a "Keep Christ in Christmas" poster competition, helping to keep our focus on the true meaning of Christmas. Winners were announced for each of the grade-level and their posters were put on display for all to see.

Our annual Christmas Show was a great success. Each grade level performed all the favorite carols and classics. The students all

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 301-424-5550

St. Mary's School
Mrs. Debby Eisel, Principal
 301-762-4179

Mrs. Debby Eisel, Parish Editor
 301-762-4179

Continued on page 38

See More St. Mary - Rockville News on Page 38

Christmas Season At Christ The King

By Liz Weiss, parishioner

The Christmas Season at Christ the King Parish was very busy this year. On Sunday, December 17, the children of the Religious Education Program performed a Christmas play in the church.

During Advent, the Giving Tree in the church vestibule was adorned with hundreds of paper ornaments, each requesting donations of cash, gift cards for toys, or gift cards for food. This year, parishioners helped more families and children than ever: 67 families received money for food and 250 children received gift certificates for toys. Thank you to all the generous parishioners and the volunteers who helped with this project, especially Sue Gordon who organized it and even worked on it when she was sick with Covid.

On Christmas morning, the choir led by Froilan Manansala provided beautiful music for the con-

Continued on page 39



TOP: Religious Education students are the Three Wise Men

ABOVE: The Creche at Christ the King



RIGHT: Christmas Mass at Christ the King



Father Steve blessing Anita and Robert with their children behind them.

Life is a Journey

By Liz Weiss, parishioner

Our Church community lost Helen Costabile, a parishioner for many, many years. Helen was a retired Air Force nurse who served in Korea, Vietnam, and Alaska. She was a quiet woman who always helped in the church. She volunteered at Christ the King for years, helping wherever she was needed. She attended daily Mass until she was unable to get out. We also lost the daughter of Katie Holland, former *Our Parish Times* editor for Christ the King. Tess, only 32, died after a short illness. Last week, Father Steve had to preside over the funeral of two brothers who died from gun violence. Let us pray for all of these people and their

families.

Life is a journey; we support each other in these difficult times, and we celebrate the special times. On January 12, we celebrated the 50th wedding anniversary for Anita and Robert Lee. Their children organized the party for them.

Continued on page 39

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Jojo and Brennan with their Mother at last year's family BINGO night, held annually during Catholic Schools Week.



Tag Day and Mass for Cancer Research

Spearheaded by students Jojo R., her brother Brennan, and classmate Noelle S., the school hosted a Tag Day and

Mass to raise funds for the Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. To participate in the optional out-of-uniform day, students and teachers donate \$2 or more. Students were asked to wear the ribbon color of a cancer that has affected his or her family or lavender to represent support for research and a cure for all cancers. Inspired by their grandmothers who have or are currently battling cancer, the school also celebrated Mass in honor of those who have been afflicted by cancer while praying for a cure. At the end of Mass, Noelle and Jojo addressed the school community and thanked them for their support of the Tag Day.

OPT

A Holiday Season to Remember

By Bill and Alison Shields

As 2023 drew to a close, the St Bart's community celebrated the Christmas season with events and activities that brought cheer to students, parents, family and the parish community.

December began with the traditional Sweets with Santa event for the younger children. In addition to the sweets and hot chocolate, the kids got to tell Santa their Christmas wishes – so many that Santa had to be ready earlier than expected!

On one Friday night in December, school moms gathered with potluck snacks and drinks to decorate Christmas wreaths. Meeting new moms and connecting with longstanding friends at this new event was a wonderful way to be creative and enjoy each other's company...and provide a respite from the hustle and bustle of the season. A couple of weeks later, the St. Bart's Dad's Club held the inaugural *Santa Sprint Fun Run*, raising much appreciated funds to enhance our gym facilities – all while allowing some of the

St. Bart's students to burn off some excess energy before the holidays were fully underway. Way to go, Dads!

Whether you are a student, teacher, student or parishioner, the 2023 school Christmas pageant will remain in our memories for a long time to come. In a bow to *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the eighth grade class acted in a play masterfully written by Mr. Villar, the school's music teacher. All other classes – even pre-K! – sang beautifully while being accompanied by the sixth grade on percussion and cheered on by a standing room only audience. Following the pageant, the attendees enjoyed each other's company at a reception held in the church hall, as parents attempted to limit the number of cookies each child consumed (most were unsuccessful). Meanwhile, the room parents arranged parties in each classroom on the last day before the Christmas break. Now that we have all enjoyed time with our families we are gearing up for a wonderful 2024.

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The tiniest stars shined bright at St. Bartholomew's annual Christmas pageant, directed by school alum, Daniel Villar '91.

First Quarter: Field Trips and Fun for St. Bart's Students

Located just off River Road in Bethesda, St. Bartholomew School is just a short drive from some of the nation's most significant and interesting landmarks. The Kinders eagerly boarded the bus for the first time to accompany their first and second grade friends to the Pumpkin Patch while the third, fourth, and fifth graders traveled through time at President George Washington's historic Mount Vernon estate. Students tried their hand in the gardens and stables, while reenacting a rhythmic march on Mt. Vernon and playing games enjoyed by colonial children, like corn toss and horseshoe. The group stopped several times throughout the trip to pray at different sites, including the Slave Memorial and President's tomb.

Seventh graders were immersed into Mexico's rich history through the vibrant walls of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Columbia Heights, DC. As an added bonus, they were able to get a close up look at a special exhibit featuring ornate hand-made Madonnas – exquisitely crafted in the Baroque style by artist Susana Ramos.

First through fifth graders packed the buses and headed to the Kennedy Center to see a performance based on the book, *The Other Side*, by Jacqueline Woodson, the current Artist-in-Residence. This story, adapted to dance, explores themes of friendship,



First Graders with Hope Boykin, choreographer and Artistic Lead for the Kennedy Center Dance Lab.

communication, segregation, and responsible decision-making. Teachers and students will explore these themes in class before and after this field trip as we celebrate the work of Dr. Martin Luther King.

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OPT Editor**
301-589-1155

By John Webster

The Marriage Ministry of St. Michael the Archangel Parish continues to offer multiple programs to support Catholic marriage and family life. In October, the ministry completed its second Marriage Preparation Class of 2023. Offered in partnership with the Archdiocese of Washington Office of Family Life, these classes use the Transformed in Love (www.transformedinlove.com) program to help prepare engaged couples for receiving the Sacrament of Matrimony. The ministry helped prepare eight engaged couples for marriage in

this most recent class. The October class included a panel discussion on parenting and raising children in the Catholic Faith. This panel was well received by the engaged couples, who offered a multitude of questions for discussion.

In addition to marriage preparation, the ministry offers monthly online Gospel reflections for married and engaged couples and marriage enrichment events. For more information, please email the Marriage Ministry on smacc.marriage@gmail.com.

OPT

A New Coat (for Kids) for the New Year

By David Bludis

St. Michael's Knights of Columbus and the Sodality recently purchased 48 youth coats for the Colesville Council of Community Congregations (C-4) in Silver Spring. C-4 is an interfaith group founded in 1968 and currently consists of more than 20 member organizations representing the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faiths united in community service. C-4 has assisted and impacted thousands of individuals and families across Montgomery County through its various community programs, including the Clothes Closet, the Baby Closet, the Holiday Toy Closet, and the School Supply Program.

Grand Knight, David Bludis, delivered the coats to C-4 on Tuesday, January 2, before they opened for their clients for the first time in 2024. The Knights of Columbus have provided coats to C-4 for several years in support of the Knights of Columbus



Girls and Boys coats delivered to Colesville Council of Community Congregations.

Coats for Kids program, and they were delighted to partner with the Sodality of Mary this year. The Sodality was happy to hear of the Coats for Kids and without hesitation, the membership agreed to join the Knights in this effort. If you would like to learn more about C-4, visit their website at <https://c4clothescloset.com/>.

OPT



Residents and Guests enjoying the caroling.

Christmas Caroling at Marian Assisted Living

By: Stephen Holowenzak and David Bludis

On Tuesday, December 19, Tyzanya (Ty) Jordan, Executive Director of Marian Assisted Living in Brookeville, Maryland, welcomed the St. Michael's Knights of Columbus for its third annual Christmas caroling activity. Over 20 residents and staff members joined Grand Knight David Bludis and Knights Stephen Holowenzak, Alfonso DeJesus, and Gregory McFadden. Everyone enjoyed singing classic songs including "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," "Joy to the World," "The First Noel," and "Silent Night."

The caroling assumed a hybrid format this year, as Knight Stephen Holowenzak, a resident of the facility and sponsor of the activity, unfortunately was hospitalized a day before the activity. Stephen said, "the Christmas show must go on" and Grand Knight David Bludis adapted by setting up a Google Meet for Stephen to join in the fun from his hospital room. Despite



Grand Knight, David Bludis, holding his computer showing Knight, Stephen Holowenzak participating from his hospital room.

some initial technical difficulties with audio, the activity was a success.

The caroling filled the hearts of the residents with happiness and many memories from their past 70 to 101 years. Some attendees shared their favorite Christmas memories and stories from the past with the group. Smiling faces and warm Christmas spirits were a glow as they left the chapel to celebrate the rest of the Advent season and the birth of our Lord in the manger surrounded by his Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph.

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Jesus is the Reason

The phrase we hear at this time of the year is, "Jesus is the reason for the season." At our school, Jesus is the reason for SFIS! Our mission statement reflects this: Saint Francis International School is a Franciscan family that nurtures children to be instruments of God's peace, scholars, and global citizens.

In the last few months, we have had many activities that have helped us focus on our love of Jesus and our Catholic Faith.

We have a beautiful Lady of Guadalupe Prayer Garden. After reading the story of St. Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe, small groups of students went on a "pilgrimage" to visit it and pray.

We celebrated Los Posadas as a school. Eighth-grade students, role-playing Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and angels, went around to the different classes asking in song for a place to stay. Each time they were rejected. Then, the whole school assembled in our Camillia Room to welcome them and share

a joyful time of singing Christmas carols.

Saint Camillus held a Living Nativity on Christmas Eve which was visited by many of our school families. Our patron saint, Saint Francis of Assisi, held the first living Nativity exactly 800 years ago. Over the course of the afternoon, members of the parish and school role-played the various parts of the Nativity. One of our students was an angel.

With over 500 Christmas books in our library collection, our students had lots of opportunities to get into the Christmas spirit!

Our first day back after the break started with our weekly school Mass. Father Jean Marie, O.F.M., reminded us during his homily that Jesus asks to enter the stable of our hearts. He questioned us, "Are we ready?" He also taught us a prayer to say frequently throughout the New Year: Jesus is the Son of God!

We look forward to celebrating the gift of our Catholic Education by starting off Catholic Schools Week with our school community attending Sunday Mass and our weekly Wednesday school Mass. During the week the Friars and the Franciscan postulants will speak to the students about their vocations.

The students will write notes of appreciation, encouragement, and offers their prayers to the Friars who help us by celebrating our school Masses and the Franciscan postulants who help in the school each week.

Our February faculty retreat will center on how we can improve incorporating our Catholic Faith in our instruction.

With God's guidance, we strive to make Jesus the reason for SFIS!



FAR LEFT: Living Nativity at Saint Camillus Church

LEFT: Middle school students for Los Posadas



LEFT: Students sitting by the church Nativity.

RIGHT: Visit to Our Lady of Guadalupe Prayer Garden



BELOW: Students with library Christmas books



ABOVE: Pre-K students with Advent Wreath

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St. Francis International School

www.saintfrancisinternational.org

Sam Chapa, Principal

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Celebrating Catholic Schools Week

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Saint Francis International School is blessed to have Rachel Frey as our Campus Minister. She prepares our students to be servant leaders for the Mass, as altar servers, lectors, and gift bearers. She encourages and supports students taking on servant leadership as volunteers at school events, such as face painting at the Back-to-School picnic and helping younger students with craft activities at Breakfast with Santa. She helps our students to begin to serve in our greater community through such activities as assembling hygiene kits for SOME (So Others Might Eat) or helping to distribute items to families in need at the St. Camillus Food Pantry. She is helping to equip our students to begin to live like saints!

Already this year Ms. Frey helped organize and facilitate many opportunities for our students to pray and learn about their faith.



Rachel Frey working with a student lector.

These included our prayer service for Dia de los Muertos, our Advent Penance Service, the visit Saint Nicholas made to the classrooms, and the Posadas celebration held on the last day before Christmas break.

Ms. Frey works closely with our principal, Mr. Sam Chapa, to provide opportunities for our faculty and staff to connect and reflect on our Catholic mission at SFIS, through prayer services at the beginning and end of each semester, an annual faculty and staff retreat, and occasional prayer breakfasts to pray together for our community and personal concerns.

Ms. Frey also helps with arrival, dismissal, lunch, and recess duties. This gives her opportunities to get to know and interact with many students and families every day.

Ms. Frey's presence in our school community helps us all grow in our Catholic Faith!



Rachel Frey welcoming a student at morning arrival.

OPT

Our Lady of Lourdes Christmas Concert

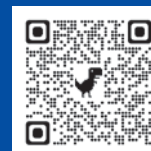
On the evening of December 15, the beautiful sounds of children's voices raised up in prayer filled the Our Lady of Lourdes Church. At the annual school Christmas concert, students in all grades shared the gift of song and scripture with their families, classmates, and parishioners. Each class shared a special Christmas song, and eighth-grade students read Gospel readings about the birth of Jesus. The school choir led the students as they entered to "O Come,

O Come, Emmanuel" and as they exited to a spirited "Joy to the World." Student musician Maria Anton Lanuza accompanied the classes on the piano and Rollins Bradford added his drumming skills to the closing song. Amid the hustle and bustle leading up to a break from school and Christmas preparations, it was a most-needed peaceful, prayerful hour for the Our Lady of Lourdes community.

OPT

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
7500 Pearl Street
Bethesda, MD
Fr. Walsh, Pastor
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Mr. David Long, Principal
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Breakfast with Santa

All photos by Katie Crandlemire Photos



ABOVE: Students in the third grade celebrate the Christmas season.



ABOVE: OLOL seventh and eighth graders who served as "elves" for the annual Breakfast with Santa celebration and Toy Drive.



LEFT: Fourth-grade girls enjoy a laugh at the Our Lady of Lourdes Breakfast with Santa celebration and Toy Drive.



Our Lady of Lourdes students in grades 4-8 who will be receiving their sacraments in the Catholic Church this year.

Twelve OLOL Students Receiving Sacraments

By Brendan Keane, Our Lady of Lourdes Religion Teacher

The Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ. Not only should Catholic schools strive to form Catholics in their faith, but it should also seek to

evangelize non-Catholics and bring them into Christ's Church.

This year at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School, our Lord has moved within the hearts of a dozen of our students. They have respond-

Continued on page 39

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Celebrating the Vow Renewals of the IHM Sisters

The St. John the Evangelist community had an extra-special celebration on the feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. The Immaculate Conception is also the feast day for the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM Sisters) who serve at St. John the Evangelist School and live in the parish convent.

Each of the sisters currently in residence at the parish reaffirmed their vows in front of the entire congregation during the Mass. The vows provided a beautiful witness to see the joy and fruitfulness of a life lived in service of Jesus, through Mary. These women are



The sisters stood to renew their vows during Mass.



Sr. Doreen, our wonderful kindergarten teacher!

such a beloved part of our Church and school family.

The IHM sisters have a long

history of serving the Church in schools, hospitals, prisons, and other places of need. Our very own

Sr. Doreen is currently a kindergarten teacher, serving some of the youngest SJE Eagles. What a happy

occasion to celebrate their feast day with them!

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St. John the Evangelist Parish

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Silver Spring, MD
301-681-7663

Rev. Joseph Galis,
Pastor

St. John the Evangelist School
Shindana Crawford,
Principal
301-681-7656

Monica M. Bradford,
OPT Editor
bradfordsm2@comcast.net

A Cloud of Witnesses: a Drama Club Masterpiece

The SJE drama club put on a saintly performance on December 6 with their show, *A Cloud of Witnesses*. The play communicated an important message, that saints are people just like us and that we are all called to be saints.

The show was truly a community effort, bringing together the talent of our actors, student directors,



ABOVE: The student actors accept the audience's generous applause for a performance well done.

RIGHT: Several of our talented student actors.

backstage helpers, costume designers and the tech crew.

A special thanks goes to Mrs. Saint Clair, who guided our saintly students through every step of the production process. It was a wonderful opportunity for each and every student involved. The SJE community looks forward to future productions from our talented Drama Club.

OPT



DEACON DAVY

Continued from page 9

tional eighth-grade teacher for the students at Mother of God School. Everyone at Mother of God would agree that the Davy family is a daily blessing to the school family.

In December, as a new liturgical year began and in preparation for a new calendar year, Deacon Davy spent an entire morning blessing the school buildings, teachers, and students. He walked around to each room in the two buildings, blessing the closets, doors, hallways, classrooms,



First graders representing their houses with their house shirts receive a blessing.

and even the bathrooms with blessed water and sacred salt. In each room he came in and spoke with the students about what it means to receive a blessing and prayed with them. Along the way, he also blessed special items and sacramentals. He blessed each corner and doorway in each room and blessed each person individually. The day was enriching for the students and teachers. Everyone is excited and grateful for the special blessing! The entire Davy family is a blessing to Mother of God School.

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McGANN

Con't from page 1

Looking around today—in the mall, or in church, at the movies or in the grocery store, on the streets or the subway—it seems that children are unsure about what constitutes basic civil behavior, and consequently they often go wrong.

Picture yourself walking to Starbucks to get your coffee, and just as you reach the door there are two teens who arrive at the same time. What are the chances that they will step back and hold the door for you? You're at a CYO basketball game. A few eight-year-olds are playing a game of tag in the hallway while they wait for their game to start. You are walking your toddler to the restroom. She gets bumped, and you are forced to step to the side because they run and chase as if you and your child were not even there. At a local restaurant you are seated next to a family with two adults and two children. The iPads and the iPhones come out. Children place their orders with a waiter—the word please never comes up. When their food is delivered no one says thank you. What is happening?

If we begin by reviewing eleven simple rules and focusing our energy on teaching, modeling, and reinforcing these rules, our children will present themselves to the world in a far better light.

Let's start with teaching the rules of standing.

- Stand up when an adult enters a

room or approaches to talk with you or your parents.

- Stand up straight and take your hands out of your pockets.
- Stand very still for just a moment and think about what you're about to do.
- Stand and give up your seat. You're young and healthy.
- Stand back and hold the door, you're not in that much of a hurry.
- Stand with the little guy, the lonely guy, the guy who gets picked on. Let's move on to looking.
- Look people in the eye when they speak and when you speak.
- Look up from screens and listen when others talk.
- Finally, get on your knees.
- Get on your knees to talk to a little child who needs help.
- Kneel down and pick up that piece of trash, those toys on the floor, your dirty clothes.
- Get on your knees every single night and say your prayers. You'll sleep much better.

These aren't so hard to do, right? The great thing about teaching your children to do these simple things is that they will develop behaviors that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. They will find themselves comfortable in any setting, and people will notice. People will recognize and appreciate the courtesy and respect that these behaviors communicate.

These aren't the only rules, but they're pretty important ones. Remember, your children want to please you and they want to know how they should act. Do this for them!

OPT



Varsity Division All-Tournament Team pictured Taylor P. of St. Elizabeth's (MVP), Katie S. of St. Elizabeth's, Charlotte M. of St. Elizabeth's, Victoria N. of St. Elizabeth's, Caitlyn M. of Holy Redeemer, Teagan W. of Holy Redeemer, Abby T. of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Emily L. of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Skylar L. of St. Jane de Chantal, Ali G. of St. Jane de Chantal, Kaitlyn G. of Mary of Nazareth, Charlotte H. of Little Flower, Elise D. of Blessed Sacrament, and Princess K. of St. Jerome's (not pictured.)



Junior Varsity Division All-Tournament Team pictured Maddy B. of Holy Redeemer (MVP), Molly W. of St. Jane de Chantal, Elle M. of St. Jane de Chantal, Ellie D. of St. Raphael, Molly G. of Little Flower, Keeley M. of Blessed Sacrament, Reagan H. of Blessed Sacrament, Claire V. of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Evelyn S. of Our Lady of Good Counsel, Barrett M. of Holy Redeemer, Libby S. of Holy Redeemer, London F. of St. Jerome's (not pictured) and Quinn R. of St. Elizabeth's (not pictured).

CYO

Con't from page 1

The tournament ended with the announcement of the All-Tournament teams for each divi-

sion, highlighting the outstanding performances of players. Athletic Director Jamie Ready summed up the significance of this weekend, stating, 'In my 15 years running the tournament, I've come to realize that this weekend is more than just basketball. It's a community

event where families return year after year to watch their kids play and reconnect with friends. It has evolved into a cherished tradition for our community and we look forward to the many years to come for this tournament.'

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2024 General Assembly Session

Protection of Vulnerable at Risk

The 446th Maryland General Assembly session opened January 10. There will be a lot of debate over the next three months around budgets, youth justice, environment, education, human composting, and more. Sadly, Maryland Governor Wes Moore and several legislators have stated that this is the year they will push hard to legalize physician assisted suicide.

Their advocacy for suicide by the elderly, ill and disabled is especially discouraging considering efforts to prevent suicide by other groups — and the position of professional organizations such as the American Medical Association, which oppose physician assisted suicide (PAS).

Fear of being a burden drives assisted suicide

Concern of being a burden to family or caregivers is a major reason people die through assisted suicide, according to data from states where it is legal. Pope Francis recently spoke about the pressure on the elderly to die by assisted suicide:

“[T]he real social evil is not so much the increase of problems, but the decrease of care...Who listens to the groaning of our isolated elderly brothers and sisters,



who, instead of being appreciated, are pushed aside under the false pretenses of a supposedly dignified and ‘sweet’ death that is more ‘salty’ than the waters of the sea?”

He later said that “life is not to be played with, neither at the beginning nor at the end...Today, for example, the lives of grandparents are erased, and when human wealth comes into play in the dialogue with grandchildren, they are erased. They are old, so are of no use. We cannot play with life.”

Things to Do Now

1. Promote the Catholic Advocacy Network in your parish.

Put your faith into action. The Maryland Catholic Advocacy Network (CAN) is the official advocacy network for our state’s (arch)dioceses. Members get issue alerts and calls-to-action. Spread the word with our outreach resources and share the sign up

link at mdcatholic.org/joincan via social media, Flocknote and other networks.

2. Join the statewide coalition.

Are you a healthcare provider, disabilities advocate, patient advocate or involved in palliative care — or do you simply care deeply about keeping physician assisted suicide out of Maryland? Join Maryland Against Physician Assisted Suicide (MAPAS). MAPAS will keep you updated and send you alerts and news during the current legislative session. Visit: stopassistedsuicidemd.org.

3. Put your own end-of-life wishes in writing.

Make sure your own healthcare plans are in order should you be unable to speak for yourself. Get guidance, resources and a downloadable (legal in Maryland) healthcare directive at mdcatholic.org/healthdirective.

Source: Maryland Catholic Conference

Free, Virtual, Six-Week Diabetes Management Program

The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services’ Public Health Services, in partnership with the Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence, will offer a free community-based Diabetes Self-Management Program (DSMP) beginning Thursday, Feb. 22. The six-week program will be held virtually from 5:30-7:30 p.m. each Thursday.

The DSMP was created at Stanford University and is a nationally recognized diabetes prevention

and management program. The program provides education on the physical aspect of managing diabetes and the emotional aspect. It is designed to improve an individual’s average blood sugar level (A1C) and reduce complications associated with diabetes.

“It is important to manage diabetes to reduce complications, and this program offers important information to help not only with the physical aspects, but the emotional

Continued on page 39

Join MoCoRec 55+ Winter Wellness Rectivities

The start of a new year is a great time to start a winter wellness program and Montgomery County Recreation is hosting a variety of wellness activities for 55+ residents now through March at locations across the County.

From tai chi and martial arts to Zumba and stretching exercises, these free activities allow participants to meet new friends, learn nutrition tips and improve in areas such as flexibility, stamina, balance, strength and more.

To learn more about 55+

Winter Wellness programs, visit ActiveMONTGOMERY at: montgomerycountymd.gov/rec/howto/registrationinformation.html

Have questions or need help with registration? Contact our customer service team at 240-777-6840.

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Annual Wedding Anniversary Mass to Celebrate the Vocation of Marriage

February 10, 2024 10:00 am

Celebrate National Marriage week! All couples, no matter how long they have been married, are invited to attend the Wedding Anniversary Mass to Celebrate the Vocation of Marriage on Saturday, February 10, 2024 at 10:00 am at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

Couples wishing to attend the Wedding Anniversary Mass and/or receive an Anniversary Certificate must call their parish office to register. This Mass will be in English and Spanish.

For more information, contact the Office of Family Life at flm@adw.org or 301-853-4546. For information in Spanish call 301-853-4499.

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Longevity Ready Maryland Initiative

Aging is changing across the country, and Maryland is no exception. Maryland's diverse 60-plus population is projected to grow faster than any other age group. By 2035, and for the first time in Maryland's history, there will be nearly 2.1 million adults 60 and over compared to 1.6 million children under the age of 19.

Living longer is good news, allowing us to focus on the potential of the older population to the social and economic fabric of our society. The Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA) believes longevity is a phenomenon that can be explored, understood, and for which we can plan.

MDOA is currently developing Longevity Ready Maryland (LRM), a plan or "roadmap", for state and local government, the public and private sector, and philanthropy and nonprofits to work together to help Maryland prepare for the opportunities and challenges of this swiftly changing demographic landscape.

Older Marylanders are increasingly diverse, residing in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural locales, and their lived experiences vary greatly depending on their race, ethnicity, income, education, disabilities, and zip codes. To plan, prepare, and serve our rapidly changing population,



we must examine local and state infrastructure and policies to determine barriers, challenges, and opportunities for coordinated action. LRM will help address structural and social factors that perpetuate disparities and inequities that impact people across the lifespan.

Through the LRM, MDOA will evaluate the effectiveness of programs, advocate for change, target resources, and formulate data-informed policy recommendations on behalf of older adults, those living with disabilities, their families and caregivers. This robust approach underscores the state's commitment to proactively adapting to and addressing the needs arising from its evolving population dynamics and regional variations.

Whole-of-Life Approach

LRM will take a whole-of-life approach. Healthy longevity requires investments in health and wellbeing at every life stage, from birth throughout the later years of life. This means creating new pathways for working, planning, saving, and healthy living over a lifetime. By optimizing each stage of life, the benefits can compound for decades, while also allowing for time to recover and mitigate the harm from disadvantages and setbacks.

For more information about the Longevity Ready Maryland initiative visit: aging.maryland.gov/Pages/LRM.aspx

Source: Maryland Department of Aging

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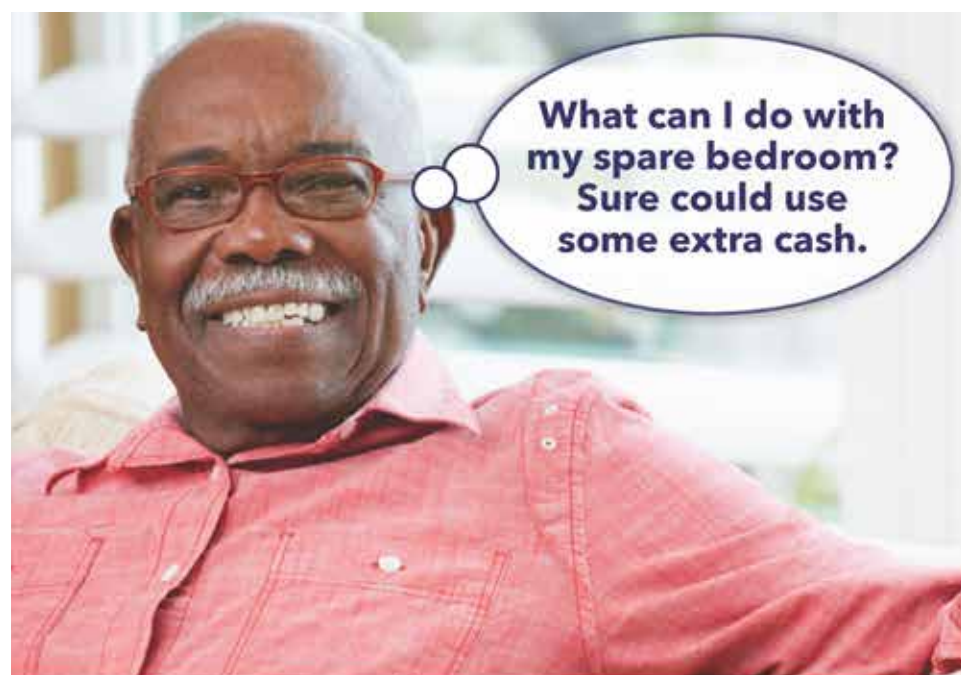
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A Great Fall and Winter at St. Raphael's

By Catherine Pulse

At St. Raphael School, we are one community remembering Jesus as the center of our school through teaching in the classroom, events, and activities, and with the parish and community in which we live. Our community celebrated Thanksgiving by showing gratitude to those that help our school remain clean and healthy: the maintenance team. It is a loving tradition to create Thanksgiving meal baskets for those who help our community. Laura Long, HSA president, facilitated the gathering of delicious food items to help create a Thanksgiving to remember for those who help our school so much. We thank them and celebrate them as a wonderful part of our community.

On November 21, students, teachers, parents, and staff celebrated a meal together in the Trumpet room. This involves a traditional Thanksgiving spread set on long, large tables to allow us to come together to thank God for all that

St. Raphael Parish St. Raphael School

1513 Dunster Road
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Each grade-level choir sang joyfully, helping us all to prepare for the birth of Jesus.



Students shared their outstanding musical talents as part of our community Christmas celebrations.



Piano accompaniment added to the beautiful Christmas carols.



The nursery school Nativity is a longstanding tradition at St. Raphael's.

He has provided for us. Families enjoyed a few days home together over the Thanksgiving holiday, which began the holiday season.

The next few weeks flew by! The sixth grade enjoyed a field

trip to the Museum of the Bible, as the third grade visited the National Children's Museum. CYO basketball teams continued to practice, and some teams had their first few games in December. Chess Club

and art club met regularly, and play practice is in full swing in preparation for the performance in March. Middle-schoolers continue to prepare for the science fair coming up this spring, as well. Students stud-

ied hard, completing schoolwork before the holiday break to come.

The traditional Twelve Days of St. Raphael Christmas was slightly different this year. The coordinators decided to put a new twist on the idea by creating a bingo card for students to check off different holiday activities. Items on the list included holiday activities such as hanging a stocking or wearing an ugly Christmas sweater, but also included some enjoyable SRS events, like caroling next door at Raphael House. The residents were pleased to listen to lovely songs by students just before Christmas break. Families also collected items to be gifted to the residents, which spread much Christmas cheer.

The annual Christmas pageants for both Nursery School and St. Raphael School took place on December 18. Students are traditionally invited to play an instrument as part of the prelude to the show, and many students showed their musical talents with the playing of the violin, piano and other instruments. Families then listen to the lovely singing from each grade presenting an enjoyable holiday performance. Songs this year included "I want a Hippopotamus for Christmas," by the first grade, "Mi Burrito Sabanero," by the third grade, and "O Come, O Come Emmanuel," by the sixth grade. The traditions continue: the Nativity presented by nursery school students and kindergarten, as well as the reciting of 'Twas Night Before Christmas by the second grade. As we listened, we remembered that we are one family in Christ and He is the reason for the season.

OPT

IGNATIAN

Con't from page 2

Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, and the District of Columbia.

The Student Government at Georgetown Preparatory School in North Bethesda, Maryland encouraged the students, parents, faculty, and alumni to donate food. The school collected 38,829 pounds (77 pounds per student) of food which was then donated to a local food bank, Manna Food Center, which strives to fight hunger in Montgomery County. Manna sent three trucks to Georgetown Prep to collect all the food!

The 22 schools participating in The Great Ignatian Challenge collected and distributed over 772,000 total pounds of food. Georgetown Prep placed 5th overall in the Challenge – the school's highest-ever finish! This is also the second consecutive year that Prep won the award for "most improved donations."

Over the past eight years, The Great Ignatian Challenge has collected and distributed over **1.8 million** pounds of food! The majority of these schools are sponsored by



Students Jack Sullivan '24, Connor Jacobs '27 and Kwaku Asamoah '24 prepare for the Manna Food Center pick up.

the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The Challenge derives its name from the 16th-century saint, Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, who taught, "Love consists of sharing what one has and what one is with those one loves. Love ought to show itself in deeds more than in words."

Student Government moderators and food drive coordinators Ms. Bonnie Bai and Mr. Brian Dybiczk thank everyone who helped make

the food drive a smashing success and said "the Prep communities generosity has helped our brothers and sisters in Montgomery County who struggle from food insecurity. Let us recall that the Gospel compels us to work for a more just and loving world. And let us strive to always carry the words of Saint Ignatius Loyola in our hearts: *Lord, teach me to be generous.*"

OPT

GROUP

Con't from page 8

attend gigs for those who play professionally in the community, go to school performances of their younger members, and sing at the weddings and funerals of members' family members.

Phillips counts the three founding leaders of the Contemporary Ensemble as three of her sons' godparents. Even though she no longer

regularly plays with the group, she fills in when needed and refers to the Madisons, Ryans, and Farrells "like a family to us."

"Even though not all of my family participated actively, it was a bonding experience because they knew the commitment our family took on. I had to be there every Tuesday night and every Sunday morning," Phillips said. "It made [my children] feel like they were a bigger part of the church and they really belonged there."

OPT

HOVERBOARD

Con't from page 14

honed their problem-solving skills and understanding of engineering principles.

The hoverboard project serves as a prime example of Mary of Nazareth's commitment to providing a well-rounded education. By incorporating elements from various disciplines, the STREAM program not only equips students with academic knowledge but also nur-

tures their creativity and critical thinking abilities rooted in faith.

Putting the E in STREAM is not just about engineering hoverboards; it's about elevating education to new heights, encouraging students to explore the intersections of different fields, and preparing them to be innovative thinkers in an ever-evolving world. Mary of Nazareth continues to inspire students to soar, both academically and creatively, breaking barriers and embracing the limitless possibilities that education offers.

OPT

Looking for “Normal” in the Montessori Classroom

By Andrea Webber,
Montessori II Teacher

Normal is such a funny word. One person's normal is another person's whacky. But in a Montessori classroom, “normalization” is the loftiest of goals. All Montessori teachers aspire to achieve normalization and start to build towards that goal from the very first day of school. And, if all is well, Montessori students tend to “normalize” sometime between November and December.

But what does this word mean? Are we expecting perfection? (No) Absolute rule following? (No) An unflinchingly quiet classroom? (That would be dreamy....but no.) The American Montessori Society defines normalization as: “A natural developmental process exhibited by a love of work or activity, concentration, self-discipline, and joy in accomplishment....A normalized child is a happy, well-adjusted child who exhibits positive social skills in the Montessori classroom.” Maria Montessori said



Montessori student working with a move

that normalization is “The most important single result of our whole work.”

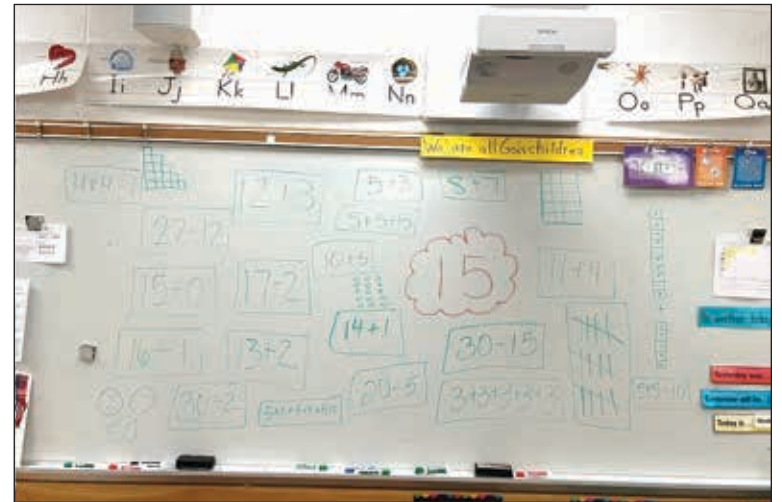
All these definitions are true. Additionally, teachers at Woods define a “normalized” classroom as an independently functioning classroom, with a happy hum, and students working meaningfully as they follow their individual pursuits. It is an important and achievable goal!

At this time of the year, you may be hearing more about what works the children are doing.

You may hear about their daily lessons and their many successes. Students are starting to self-motivate and choose works that call to them without guidance. When students choose works on their own, they are more likely to become engrossed in the lesson and then, in turn, they are more likely to cement the teachings that the work is imparting. And, even better, they are more likely to repeat works. Repetition is the key to mastery.

A normalized classroom allows a teacher to step back and become more passive. Teachers are able to observe the students and tweak their lessons. We teachers do not intend to fade into the background, but we do aspire to guide from the side and relish the “happy hum” of self-regulation, self-motivation, self-discipline, and self-affirming students. Maria Montessori summed up normalization by saying, “The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, ‘The children are now working as if I don't exist.’”

OPT



The students demonstrated different techniques to arrive at the final number of “15”.

The First 5 Minutes of Math Class

By Kristen Chrobocinski, Grade 7 Math Teacher

As we transition to the second trimester, routines and structures at the beginning of the period set the tone for the rest of the class. Studies have shown that students are the most engaged and ready to learn during the first five to ten minutes of class. In math, we usually start with a short activity that jumpstarts the thinking for the class called a warm-up.

The best warm-ups are ones with an open question that allow all students to participate in some form. One of my favorite warm-ups is called target number. In this activ-



Woods Academy students warm up with a “Target Number” activity. They create a number displayed on the board using various methods.

Continued on page 32

FLL Competition ... Season 11!

By Megan Mullally, Grade 5 and 6 Science Teacher

On Saturday, December 16, The Woods Academy Robotics teams, The Bite Sized Bakers and Clickin' Chickens 2.0, participated at the FIRST Lego League (FLL) Qualifier held at Southern Regional Technology and Recreation Complex in Fort Washington, Maryland. This is the eleventh year that students from The Woods Academy have participated in FLL Robotics.

Each year in the First Lego League competition, the teams are judged on four areas - Robot Match Score, Innovation Idea, Robot Design, and Core Values. For the theme, they are presented with a unique challenge facing today's scientists. The 2023 Masterpiece Challenge compelled teams to focus on how they can incorporate technology and the arts to make their hobby accessible to more people.

The Bite Sized Bakers, complete with chef hats, wowed the judges with their creative innovation idea. After interviewing the Montessori Owl chefs and teachers, they focused on a safety concern - kids using a grater safely. From their great minds, they created... The Cheezinator! The group built a prototype, designed a website



Woods Academy students at the 2023 FIRST Lego League (FLL) Qualifier.

to share the idea, and presented their innovation idea through a baking show skit. Judges commented that they displayed good teamwork and core values demonstrated by embracing each other's strengths and differences.

The Clickin' Chickens 2.0 placed 5th in the robot games scoring 235 points during the two-and-a-half-minute match. They successfully programmed missions including Theater Scene, 3D Cinema, Craft Creator, and Hologram Performer. This accomplishment was a result

of numerous hours using LEGO MINDSTORMS technologies to design, build, and program their autonomous robot nicknamed The Chicken.

All the students worked hard this season and should be very proud of their accomplishments. Everyone played an important role in their team's success whether coding, building the bot, showing creativity with the innovation project, or practicing impeccable teamwork. Congratulations on a wonderful season!

OPT

Celebrating Different Faiths at The Woods

By Caitlin Chalke, Director of Advancement

As a Catholic school, the faith development and character education of our children is devoted to enriching students' lives and preparing them to lead lives of significance. Lessons on faith and values anchor everyday life.

Starting in Montessori, we invite our parents and students to share family experiences, customs, food, language, and artifacts with our curious students, and enjoy celebrating the many faiths here at The Woods Academy. In Grade 1, formal religion classes begin. Students explore a range of topics, from the foundations of Catholic theology to the traditions and faiths of other religions. Students learn the value of inclusiveness, as they celebrate the heritage of other faiths.

We teach our students about different faith traditions for a variety of reasons, including:

- Educational Enrichment: It can inspire a lifelong curiosity about the world and its various cultures.
- Global Awareness: It prepares children to be global citizens with a more comprehensive understanding of the world.
- Cultural Understanding: It fosters respect for people of various backgrounds and beliefs,



A parent reading a book about Diwali to Montessori students during their reading circle.

reducing stereotypes and prejudice.

- Tolerance and Respect: It encourages empathy and understanding, promoting a more inclusive and harmonious soci-

Continued on page 32

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St. Elizabeth School had a great turn out for the Greg Gannon Food Drive! The entire school community – alumni, parents, students, teachers—came together for a worthy cause! A big thank you to the HAS and middle school students, for organizing this cherished tradition. The school collected nearly 12,000 cans for local food pantries!



St. E's students are ready to welcome the new year!



A balloon drop is a great way to ring in 2024!



Students fill the sanctuary for the first all-school mass in 2024.

St. E's Students Celebrate the Start of 2024

St. Elizabeth's students are ready to start 2024 with a lot of joy and enthusiasm.

The St. Elizabeth Junior Kindergarten celebrated 2024 and the New Year together with their very own balloon drop. The stu-

dents held a countdown, watched balloons drop from the ceiling, and cheered for the new year. Their future looks bright!

The rest of the St. Elizabeth's community was able to come together to celebrate Mass after the

return from Christmas break. It was wonderful for everyone to start off 2024 in Mass together. It is such a blessing to be able to celebrate together. We hope 2024 is filled with God's peace and abundant joy!

OPT

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CLASS

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ity, I simply put a number on the board and all students are tasked with coming up with ways to create this number. This allows students to get involved right away, show me what they know and extend their understanding if they can. During the last week before Thanksgiving, I used this warm-up in a first-grade class and then in a seventh-grade class. It is clear that this activity works well with all grade levels. In first grade, we used the number 15 and many students created addition and subtraction equations. However, some students also drew

diagrams to represent the number using cubes, tallies, and squares. It was also amazing to see that some students already had a basic understanding of multiplication.

Then I brought the same idea to seventh grade. Here I gave the students a negative number since we are working on this skill. Some students stuck to basic adding and subtracting expressions while others used exponents, factorials, absolute value, and fractions. Everyone was engaged as they challenged each other to create different expressions. These types of activities are great ways to start class and allow students to work on thinking flexibly. They also love being able to write on their desks.

OPT

CBN

Con't from page 11

support and dedication to both their parish and the Catholic community at large.

Like all Catholic schools, Holy Redeemer Catholic School relies on parent volunteers. From classroom aides to Home & School Association (HSA) volunteers, parents work with administrators and faculty to help the day-to-day activities run smoothly. One such parent is Lisa Donnelly. Ask any parent or faculty member and they will say that Mrs. Donnelly can be found daily at Holy Redeemer. As the fearless leader of the hot lunch program, Mrs. Donnelly is present for each lunch shift to ensure things run smoothly and that each child receives their order. And yet she does not do this work alone. She is accompanied by her youngest child, asleep in a front pack carrier or playfully watching all the activity from his stroller. Mrs. Donnelly's tireless dedication to Holy Redeemer did not go unnoticed and she was



Dennis and Anne Sullivan, Business Persons of the Year

recognized at the Gala as the 2023 Volunteer of the Year.

The Catholic Business Network honors not only parent volunteers, but also business persons who improve their local community. At the Gala, Holy Redeemer parishioners Dennis and Anne Sullivan were recognized as the 2023 Business Persons of the Year. Active members of Holy Redeemer parish since 1992, Dennis and Anne Sullivan's three children attended Holy Redeemer Catholic School. Their two sons then attended

Gonzaga College High School and their daughter to Holy Cross High School. Through the years, Dennis coached soccer and basketball while Anne was a Eucharistic Minister. During this time the Sullivan's also grew the business Dennis started with his brother, George. FCN, Inc., a global service provider/integrator of proven hardware, software, and SDN technologies, became a significant supporter of Catholic education throughout the Washington Metropolitan area. Additionally, Anne and Dennis were able to provide volunteer and financial support to the local Catholic schools and Catholic agencies that mean so much to them.

So much in life is dependent on the kindness of others. From coaching our children's sports teams, to volunteering at school, to providing financial support for our Catholic community, the teachings of Christ tell us that it is better to give than to receive. Mrs. Donnelly and the Sullivan's gave of their time and effort for the better of Holy Redeemer and our Catholic community. They indeed live by the teachings of Christ.

OPT

FAITHS

Con't from page 31

- ety.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** It helps develop strong interpersonal skills, as they learn to communicate effectively with individuals who may hold different beliefs.
- **Open-mindedness:** It helps children appreciate the richness and complexity of human belief systems, promoting open dialogue and acceptance.
- **Conflict Resolution:** It teaches children to navigate and resolve differences peacefully, promoting harmony in both personal and societal relationships.
- **Personal Growth:** It may help children develop a stronger sense of their own beliefs and values in the context of a larger, multicultural world.

At The Woods Academy, we celebrate different faiths throughout the year, including:

Hanukkah in the Montessori classroom, inviting parents to share

a story, light the Menorah and more.

Diwali is celebrated in Montessori where students participate in activities and learn more about this celebration through reading.

Grade 1 and 2 students learn about how Christmas is celebrated around the world through a morning of lessons and hands-on activities.

Upper School religion classes study the Old Testament and discover how the early Christian Church has deep roots in Judaism.

World Language classes incorporate lessons and activities about Dia de los Muertos, Dia de los Reyes Magos, Carnival, and Mardi Gras, celebrations based on religious beliefs of Spanish-speaking and French-speaking cultures.

Students explore these celebrations and traditions in all their classes, not just in their religious studies. They find the root of the celebrations and faiths meaningful, and we encourage them to discuss their own faith traditions openly and proudly.

OPT

ADVENTURE

Con't from page 11

own personal touches to their miniature worlds. Each maze became a unique masterpiece, a testament to their creativity and problem-solving skills.

In both corners, the boundaries between Computer Science and Science dissolved, replaced by a seamless fusion of disciplines. Students learned to apply their knowledge of coding and robotics to real-world challenges, fostering an appreciation for the interconnectedness of STEM fields. As the Ozobots zipped across their bridges and the Spheros navigated the intricate mazes, a sense of accomplish-



A bridge in progress!



Even Santa got involved with the STEM challenges.

ment and pride washed over the young minds. These STEM activities had ignited a spark, not only in their understanding of science and technology, but also in their ability to collaborate, problem-solve, and think creatively. The day belonged to innovation, teamwork, and the boundless potential of young minds united by STEM.

OPT

Christmas Eve Pageant Mass: A Beloved Holy Cross Tradition

By Yvie Killian, Pageant Director at HC

For unto us a child is born... And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. —Isaiah 9:6

On Christmas Eve, more than thirty-five children from the Holy Cross Church and School community came together to share the story of Christ's birth at our annual Christmas Pageant Mass. Many of the costumes, still in use today, were handmade by parishioners from simple materials, such as cotton sheets, sturdy cardboard, and Christmas garland. Pieces have been added through the years, including updated wise men costumes hand sewn by Yvie Killian this year and sweet little sheep hats knitted by former parishioner, Esther Rodriguez's knitting circle. Each piece tells its own story within the pageant, as a living legacy of those who have participated over the decades. When offered to have new costumes purchased for the parish, the offer was kindly declined, with Ms. Killian noting, "there is something so quintessentially authentic to the manger story in these simple hand-sewn costumes, so lovingly made, that needs to be preserved."

This year's pageant music was especially beautiful. Dr. Mariana Mihai-Zoeter, our Parish Music



The angels model their garland adorned wings.

Director, met weekly through the month of December, to prepare a small youth choir to lead the hymns and serve as cantors. Parish children of all ages served as pageant players, readers, and choristers. Two of our parish middle schoolers, Michael Bangert and Mia Manifold, served as lecturers, reading the pageant script and Mass readings; and two parish high schoolers, Ana Bangert and Audrey Wilkerson volunteered as Junior Pageant Directors. Using the talents they developed during

their own years serving in the pageant, these two parish teens were of invaluable assistance in co-directing our youngest pageant players.

As Father Stephen Wyble reflected in his homily, we are truly grateful for all of the families who participated and attended in this very special Mass. From everyone here at Holy Cross, the light is on for each and every one of you, and we hope to see you in the New Year!

OPT



Students portraying Mary and Joseph are ready for the pageant.



One of the pageant's shepherds awaits his entrance into the Church.



The sheep in their hand knit hats.



The wise men in their regal robes ready to present their gifts to the infant Jesus.

DUKES

Con't from page 10

graders and competitive teams in divisions from third grade through twelfth grade. For the 2023-2024 season, the basketball program continues to serve a large number of de Chantal school students and parishioners. With over 220 student athletes, they are currently fielding the fourth largest number of basketball teams among the forty parishes in the ADW CYO. Our teams practice in the St. Christopher's Gym on de Chantal's campus and have games against other Catholic Schools in gyms throughout the area.

With a half season under their belts, de Chantal students have enjoyed developing their basketball skills, such as the pick and roll in the third grade division and, at higher grade divisions, the motion offense and full court press. Players enjoy making baskets, but just as much enjoy making the pass so their teammate can score. "One of my favorite plays is drawing the double team on a drive and finding the open player for an assist", says de Chantal fifth grader Mia Gandolfo. Teamwork, unselfish play, and good sportsmanship are hallmarks of de Chantal's Basketball program, taught through their coaches. "We aim to have every player score throughout the season. When the least experienced player scores that bucket, I will tell you the entire team, coaches included, feels like they

won the championship and shares in that team success", exclaimed coach Jeff Trilling. The players also enjoy competing on the court against other local Catholic School students and parishioners. "I really like playing against other schools in the CYO and getting a chance to play in different school gyms", says de Chantal third grader Brendan Flynn.

Entirely volunteer run, the de Chantal basketball program is led by basketball co-commissioners John Matelis and Matt Wilkerson, and directed by de Chantal CYO President Steve Gaenzler and Pastor Fr. Giese. Short game recaps and photos are shared through de Chantal newsletters and Instagram @dechantedukescyo, enabling all family members to cheer on de Chantal athletes. The de Chantal CYO, players and parents are enormously thankful for the volunteer coaches who teach the both fundamentals of the game to the student athletes and the intangibles – sportsmanship, teamwork, effort, and discipline. The de Chantal CYO program is also thankful for the ADW CYO leadership in providing an outstanding league for student athletes in our school and parish. All together, the experience of playing on a CYO basketball team at St. Jane de Chantal contributes in many ways to our students' education and character development, while making positive memories they will carry with them for years to

OPT

Holy Cross at the Catholic Business Network Gala

Congratulations to Ms. Peggy Tresky, Holy Cross School's Volunteer of the Year, and Kenny Klanga, our Business Partner of the Year who were both recognized on Friday, December 1 at the Catholic Business Network Gala.

Ms. Margaret Stuntz Tresky, our CBN Volunteer of the Year, volunteers tirelessly as the HSA Communications Chair, chair of numerous events, room parent, Parent Ambassador, Buddy Family, Open House speaker and guide, and member of the School Advisory Board. Ms. Tresky has held these positions for the past seven years and continues to volunteer at all school events, in the office, and with CYO – all while working full time and raising her daughter. Ms. Tresky is dedicated to Holy Cross School and Holy Cross School could not run as smoothly without her dedication!

Kenny Klanga of Advantage Security, Inc. was recognized as our Business Partner of the Year. Mr. Klanga and his team designed camera surveillance, door monitoring, keyless entry, and alarm systems to meet the needs of our busy school. His attention to detail and willingness to accommodate a challenging schedule was sincerely appreciated.



Volunteer of the Year, Ms. Peggy Tresky, right, is pictured with Holy Cross Principal, Mrs. Lisa Kane, left, at the Catholic Business Network Gala.



Kenny Klanga of Advantage Security, Inc., Business Partner of the Year, poses at the CBN Gala after receiving recognition for his work for Holy Cross School.

Holy Cross could not navigate these difficult times without knowing our students, faculty, and staff are protected and monitored. Mr. Klanga from Advantage Security, Inc. determined what was needed and seamlessly installed the necessary devices.

We would like to thank the Catholic Business Network for giving us the opportunity to recognize these two wonderful people at their Gala. We are grateful to their dedication to and support of Catholic schools.

OPT

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From this picture, it is hard to tell who is having more fun, Bernadette or the child. It also shows some of the new nursery space.

Let the Little Ones Come

By Bernadette Smith

Have you ever had trouble focusing at Mass due to the needs of your younger children? If so, Our Lady of the Visitation Parish started a nursery in September of 2023. The nursery provides a safe, dependable, secure, and nurturing place for children 6 months old to 3 years old. The nursery is available on Sunday during the 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. Masses. It is located downstairs in Founders Hall.

The nursery is staffed by two adult volunteers and teen volunteers are welcome to assist as well. Every adult must be in compliance with the Archdiocesan requirements regarding Virtus training, fingerprinting, and background checks.

When parents drop off their children, they receive a pager in the event they are needed during Mass. So far, they have not been needed. After the children leave, all items

played with are sanitized and returned to their appropriate place.

The nursery is already popular with both the young attendees as well as the grateful parents. Nick and Marilinda Schmitz shared “we appreciate the nursery as it allows us parents to focus on the service and prayer without distraction or worry about our baby making noise or trying to crawl under the pew.” Michael Jamison added, “The nursery and staff create a family friendly parish that enables the parents to focus on the heart of the Mass.”

We are always seeking volunteers to help in the nursery. If you are available, there is a sign-in genius on the OLVP website, www.olvp.org. The website also includes guidelines for the volunteers, as well as guidelines for the parents. If you have any questions, please contact the Nursery Director, Bernadette Smith, at bsmith@olvp.org.

OPT



Annelise expresses her enthusiasm for the Nursery.



The Bereavement Ministry Team at OLVP (missing: Allison Linnell and Ann Dodelin).

Bereavement Ministry at Our Lady of the Visitation Parish

By Elizabeth Verzariu

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

Jesus not only taught this beatitude, He also lived it. He wept and mourned the death of His friend Lazarus and supported Lazarus’s family in their grief.

Mindful of Jesus’s teaching and aware that losing a loved one is one of life’s most difficult experiences, Father Greg Shaffer established a Bereavement Ministry at Our Lady of the Visitation to provide comfort and support to grieving families and honor the deceased. The ministry, coordinated by parishioner Elizabeth Verzariu, consists of two teams: the Bereavement team and the Arimathean team.

The Bereavement team, consisting of Carol and Mark Abrams, Allison Linnell, Barb Moschella, Pompiliu Verzariu, Rosie Waugh, and Meredith Williams, reaches out to the family as soon as it receives notification of a parishioner’s death. The team offer condolences, support, and assistance leading up to the funeral. On the day of the funeral, they are present at

the church to welcome family and guests, answer any questions, and provide help where needed. They also serve as communion ushers and liturgical readers, when necessary, and coordinate post-funeral receptions held at the Church. The Bereavement team continues to offer ongoing support by providing reading materials and programs to help families navigate through their grief and maintaining contact throughout the year.

The Arimathean team, consisting of Ann Dodelin, Pat Dolan, Diana and John Hurley, Joyce Kral, Mike McAllister, and Bernadette Smith, is inspired by Joseph of Arimathea who cared for and prepared Jesus’s body for burial. The team works closely with Father Greg or another priest celebrant to ensure that everything needed at the funeral Mass is in place and fulfills several roles during the Mass, such as cross bearer, book bearer, bells ringer, incense carrier, holy water carrier, and Eucharistic Minister. The presence of the Arimathean team, whether serving at the Mass or simply attending to honor a deceased parishioner, brings great comfort to the bereaved.

The Bereavement Ministry at Our Lady of the Visitation is a valuable and compassionate service to parishioners during their time of loss. If you are interested in joining the ministry or would like more information, please reach out to Father Greg Shaffer at gshaffer@olvp.org or ministry coordinator Elizabeth Verzariu at e.verzariu@gmail.com.

OPT

Sing and Make Music from Your Heart – the OLVP Children’s Choir

By Diana Hurley

The monthly Children’s Liturgy at Our Lady of the Visitation focuses on engaging the youth of the parish in active participation and ministry during the mass. When Father Greg Shaffer hired Dr. Jyoti Hench, Director of Music, in June of 2022, one of his goals was establishing a Children’s Choir that would serve at this Liturgy. This plan has become a fruitful reality.

For the 2023-24 school year, rehearsals for the Children’s Choir began on September 26. Rehearsals are held twice a month on Tuesday evenings.

Singers in the OLVP Children’s Choir include youth in third to eighth grades from various local public, private and parochial schools. No previous choral experience is required, and for several of the youth, this is their first time singing in a choir. Participants have access to rehearsal tracks so that they can learn the music more easily. They display a love for their Catholic faith as they serve reverently and respectfully as music ministers during Mass.

The role of a music minister



The Children’s Choir leads the Faith Formation students in song during Christmas Pageant rehearsal.

incorporates more than just singing in a choir. Dr. Hench takes time to teach the youth about the differences. For example, a music minister is not performing but leading the congregation in song. They are actively serving the Lord using the gifts they have been given. Their service also gives them a deeper experience of the Mass. Ava Collins, a fifth-grade chorister commented, “It has been an amazing experience for me to see how the choir has

grown from day one until now. I love having the feeling I have during Mass that I’m singing for God and that I’m worshipping God in a way that brings out the best in me. It’s an honor being in choir.”

December was a busy month for the Children’s Choir. They served at the monthly Children’s Liturgy which was during Advent, they also sang as part of the parish Faith Formation Christmas Pageant and finally, ministered at the 4:00pm Christmas Eve Liturgy. Dr. Hench was thrilled with their dedication and how they learned so many different pieces of music. The Children’s Choir was especially poised during the standing room only crowd at the Christmas Eve Liturgy, displaying how much they had learned in their few months of experience.

The Children’s Choir is aided by the assistant director, Barb Moschella. Dr. Hench stated, “I couldn’t do it without her.” As an experienced music minister herself, Mrs. Moschella provides insight in choral balancing and helpful suggestions to the youth.



The Children’s Choir shows their enthusiasm to serve at the Christmas Pageant.

OPT

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Norris Chapel Repairs Completed

By John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe

When St. Paul Catholic Church was founded, the community built a simple wooden barn-like structure, seating 200 people comfortably. When that was replaced by the towering edifice on top of the hill, seating 600, the old church stayed in use – the Norris Chapel and Norris Hall. But the chapel deteriorated slowly, until the Catholic Daughters intervened, pressing for renovation. Repairs were, of course, much more complicated than they looked at the beginning, but at long last they are complete.*

The floor was the major issue, but there were several smaller repairs first. The Catholic Daughters replaced the padding on the kneelers, removing the raggedy stringy old covers. Megan McFarland got the walls painted. And a determinedly anonymous worker cleaned up the front doors, which had gotten black and cracked and spooky.

The decision to undertake the floor repairs was made by Msgr. Filardi, orally, just before he took a leave of absence: “Just go ahead and do it.” Fr. Fangmeyer, interim pastoral administrator, agreed to continue the work when teachers showed him nails sticking up where kids in the Atrium program often get down on the floor to do their



The original Church structure, what would eventually become the Norris Chapel.

work. Nails, kids: easy decision.

The floor project was overseen by Catholic Daughters Regent, Kathy Grapski, together with competent and omnipresent Barbara Zellers. Who's responsible? Each points to the other respectfully.

The Catholic Daughters paid for the flooring. CDA treasurer, Terrie Butler, knows building material, and she got the flooring. Lindsay

Lugo (choir, soprano) and her husband own a building company (concrete), and they provided the labor at no cost to the church.

Montgomery County inspectors required some costly changes to the project, including asbestos remediation. This was a delay and also a huge new unforeseen expense. And before the remediation experts in their moon suits could get to work,

all the pews had to be removed – not shoved from one side to another and then back, but taken out and hauled away and stored somewhere else for some months, then replaced – yet another expensive step. Carol Lombardo organized that.

Parish operating funds covered the asbestos remediation. Other new expenses were covered by new volunteers responding to announce-

ments in the bulletin; it turns out that people do read it.

Most of the floor was flat, and strong enough to stay put. But there was some structural damage underneath, that required “sistering” several long beams, and then raising some floor slightly, to prevent a dramatic collapse.

A startlingly complicated detail was replacing the thresholds for four doors. The concrete foundation walls are pretty level, but when the new floor reached the edges – at the doors – the slight imperfections became obvious. “Pretty level” isn't really level, and really isn't pretty. You don't notice the threshold unless it's off by half an inch and people start sprawling there on a regular basis, busting their noses and caterwauling at the beginning of Mass. That didn't happen, and won't happen, because Dan Thorpe (PGK, Knights of Columbus) took on the task of preventing accidents, engineering a humble and unobtrusive threshold over a slightly irregular wavy-top concrete wall. After a rough way is made straight, no one ever notices again; but it was an important service.

So the Norris Chapel is back – attractive and warm and safe, thanks to the Catholic Daughters.

* “Complete except the trim in the ...” Oh, please be quiet! Complete!

OPT



New Pastor Coming

During the year waiting for the return of our pastor, parishioners met to pray, asking for God's guidance and support. When the announcement was finally made that we would have a new pastor in January – Fr. Mark Cusick, who is moving from the southern tip of the archdiocese to the northernmost parish – parishioners gathered again, to give thanks. Fr. Larry Swink, the eleventh priest who came to help out, led the prayer with benediction.

FEAST DAY

Con't from page 5

On her Feast Day on January 4, a Memorial Mass was held for her. After the Mass, parishioners were invited to venerate her relic. A reception in the Parish Center followed, complete with carolers



Father Lee Fangmeyer and Sister Betty Ann McNeil. Photo credit Jeff Thorne Photography.



The French Choir of Mother Seton Parish.

dressed in period costume, and entertainment by our French Choir.

On Sunday, January 7, Sister Betty Ann McNeil, a Daughter of Charity from Emmitsburg, gave a beautiful talk about Saint Elizabeth Ann titled “Seton Cameos”, which highlighted Mother Seton as seeker, servant, and saint. Her talk served as an inspiration to all, hearing how she consistently rose above

her many trials and diversity, ever trusting in God.

A fabulous exhibit of Saint Elizabeth's life on 12 incredible posters was displayed for all to learn through words and pictures more about her life as wife, teacher, leader, and servant, and how she became a “mother” to all, as well as her own children.

OPT

Hope for Kids, Catechists, and the Church

At St. Paul's, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) program is now preparing children for First Communion for the 34th year. But it remains a startling revolution.

The Baltimore Catechism used by previous generations was clear about sacraments: a sacrament is a sign instituted by Christ to give grace. That's true and clear and good – but perhaps inaccessible. The CGS takes a different approach: The Good Shepherd calls each of us by name, and feeds us.

How does he feed us? Does he give us grass? “No!” responds a child. “Macaroni and cheese!” Okay, we have some work to do, but it starts with what is accessible, experiencing details of God's love.

A century ago, St. Pius X initiated a huge change in the way Catholics approached the Eucharist. He invited children aged seven to receive, insisting that “a full and perfect knowledge of Christian doctrine is not necessary either for First Confession or for First Communion.” His decision was announced in the decree “Quam Singulari,” which means “How Special!” How special, he wrote, is the love for children that the Lord showed when he was on earth! It was his delight to be in their midst!

According to Luann Flynn, who has been coordinating the parish program for eight years as the liaison with the religious education office, the Lord's delight with kids is shared by the catechists, who find that they

are fed by the kids. It's good being with God and His munchkins. It's a constant joy watching the “ah-ha moments” and the growing faith.

The parish has seven classes meeting now – three ages 3-6, two ages 6-9, and two ages 9-12. There are a dozen trained catechists now, with two more in training, and some aides.

Some parishes have switched the whole catechetical program to CGS, but that's a hard decision. The obstacle to expanding the program is the time it takes to train catechists. Training takes nine months for level one (ages 3-6) and another nine months for levels two and three (ages 6-9 and 9-12). The parish generally picks up the cost, \$700 to \$900 each year, depending on where you go.

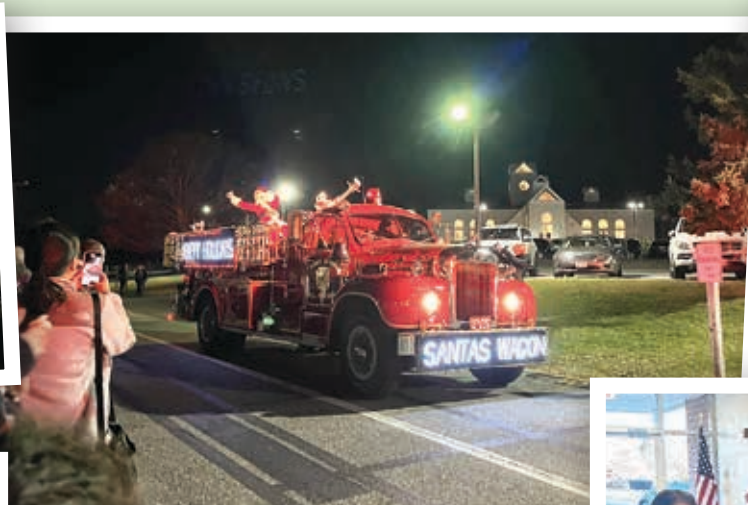
According to Kim Morrison, a catechist, the time and labor are more than rewarded. “It feeds the soul. The kids are ripe to hear. They are born in a relationship with God, but we don't usually focus on that. But during those two hours a week, that's the focus: strengthening that relationship. And you get to see it happen.”

OPT

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Celebrating the Christmas Season at Saint Peter's



TOP LEFT: The school community kicked off the holiday season on December 8 with the annual Christmas tree lighting and Christmas Light Tour

ABOVE: Members of Saint Peter's Parish participated in Wreaths Across America at Arlington National Cemetery

RIGHT: The Saint Peter's community enjoyed the annual Breakfast with Saint Nick and Christmas Bazaar.



ABOVE: A special guest delighted the crowd with a surprise appearance at the Christmas Tree Lighting.



TOP RIGHT: Saint Peter's School partnered with St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth, and Families, in Hyattsville, Maryland to collect Christmas gifts for the 16 families, including 20 children who currently live there. St. Ann's provides homes for women and children and helps them to overcome crisis and achieve independence and stability. Our school community was blessed to have the joy of giving back to our community and helping to provide the St. Ann's families a very Merry Christmas this year.

ABOVE: On January 5, Father Raymond, Father Magro, and several fifth-grade students led a procession to celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany. They visited each classroom for a special blessing and to "chalk" each door. Students wrote down the gifts they would be working on to give Jesus this year and gave them to our visitors to add to their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

New Year, New Summer Program

Jesus has commissioned us to spread the Gospel and to share with all the world what he has taught us. Here in Olney, we have made a concerted effort to share Jesus' message through many ministries for adults, teens, and children. We have discerned that the Lord wills for us to start a new child and youth ministry program. We hope to open our new Saint Peter's Summer Program in June 2024!

Summer Program will run for seven weeks and will be open to children ages 4-14 years. The camp will provide spiritual enrichment, educational adventures, recreational fun, and community building. A

variety of age-appropriate camps will be offered each week. A special camp Mass will be offered every week in addition to a weekly Family Mass in the evening.

Fun is the main event of our Summer Program! Our youngsters and the staff leading them will laugh, play, create, and grow in the many activities that will be offered. Some examples of camps that may be offered include arts and crafts, outdoor sports, fun science, and more!

The summer program will be led by adults who are engaged in education, are devoted to young people, and who are living out their Catholic faith. They will train and form older teens and college students to create varied camps. The staff will engage in their own spiritual development by attending Mass, a theological instruction, and Eucharistic Adoration on a daily basis.

As we embark on this journey to "Let the children come" and to "Go make disciples," Saint Peter's Parish is dedicated to providing a fun, safe, and faith-filled experience for the younger members of our community. For more information: www.stpeterssummer.org.

OPT

PEN PAL

Con't from page 5

dents to enhance their writing skills.

Throughout the school year the students exchange letters with their pen pals a total of four or five times.

"The letters are usually centered around the upcoming holidays. We encourage students to ask a lot of questions, so they get to know their pen pals. We also encourage describing fun events we have here at St. Peter's," said Deoudes.

The project allows the students to practice writing skills, particularly letter writing, while also improving their communication skills.

"Letter writing opens up a dialogue between students and allows students to get to know someone they've never seen or met. Our hope is for the students to develop friendships with students at other Catholic schools," said Bieberich.

"I like being able to communicate with friends without having to go to their school. My favorite part is receiving notes because you get to learn about your pen pal and



Newly received letters, waiting for our response.

you can answer your pen pal's questions," said third grader Gabriella.

The pen pal project would not be possible without the cooperation of the third-grade teachers at St. Elizabeth, Mrs. Gardner and Ms. Haddad.

"We are very appreciative of the time and support that Mrs. Gardner and Ms. Haddad give toward this endeavor," said Deoudes.

OPT

MASS

Con't from page 2

nator of the Disabilities Ministry for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington. After attending the

Mass for All God's Children, Chung said other parishes that celebrate Masses for this population include St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Gaithersburg; St. Aloysius Catholic Church in Leonardtown; and Nativity Catholic Church in Washington DC.

"The beauty here is bringing in community – St. Francis of Assisi brings in people from all different Christian faiths," Chung said. "The fellowship is wonderful. This is what church community should be."

OPT

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Celebrating the Christmas Season at OLQP

By Bozenna Buda, ED

In celebrating the Birth of Jesus, OLQP parishioners include customs and traditions from Poland and the Polish Diaspora. One of these is the *Jaselka* Christmas Nativity Play. This year, the Play was presented on the Feast of the Epiphany by the OLQP Polish Saturday School students. Preparation for this event is a time-consuming endeavor not only for the students and teachers- Principal Ewa Chlebowska, John Armstrong, and Urszula Kolodziej- but also for parents and grandparents. The students put on a wonderful Christmas play with Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, angels, shepherds, the three kings, and others. It was a joy to watch them as they recited the story of the first Christmas to an appreciative audience. There was joyful singing of the *Koledy* (Christmas carols) during and after the performance.

Earlier in the day, during the Offertory part of the Holy Mass celebrated by Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych, S.Chr., children brought their presents to the manger for Baby Jesus on the Feast of the Three Kings. These were heart-shaped notes on which the children had hand-written the good deeds they had done during Advent.

On this day, Fr. Frydrych also blessed chalk which everyone could take home and mark their doorways in the Polish tradition.



OLQP Saturday School Principal Ewa Chlebowska, with teachers John Armstrong and Urszula Kolodziej, introduced the students in the Christmas Nativity Play.



OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych welcomed parishioners and guests to the presentation of the Nativity Play by the students of the OLQP Polish Saturday School on January 7, 2024.



After the festivities, the day concluded with a Polish Christmas dinner where parish-

ioners and friends shared *Oplatek*. The delicious meal was prepared and served by Chairperson Mrs. Iza

Macander and the Parish Council team.

It is no wonder that we look for-

FAR LEFT: The shepherds, dressed as *Gorale* (Polish mountaineers) also had an active role in the Nativity Play.

LEFT: The manger scene on the Feast of Three Kings when parish children brought gifts of their good deeds, written on cut-out paper hearts, to Baby Jesus. On the right side is a basket of envelopes containing blessed chalk for marking doorways in the traditional Polish way on the Feast of the Epiphany.

ward to the Christmas season every year.

OPT

HONORS

Con't from page 9

night, Mother of God's annual Christmas Pageant, stages were set, decorations were hung, spotlights were set, and actors began practicing their movements on stage. Despite a few wrinkles, last-minute illnesses, and deterrents, Mrs. Breslin's hard work over months prepared the students for a beautiful reenactment of our Lord Jesus' birth.

Each class sang a song. Some sang more traditional hymns, such as *O Come O Come Emmanuel*, with students playing the handbells, and some sang more modern songs of praise, such as *Star of the Morning* by Hillsong Kids.

The eighth-grade students finally had the opportunity they had been

waiting for, leading the school as the actors in the pageant part of the evening. They amazed the more than 450 family members and friends in attendance with a prayerful and reverent rendition of Christ's birth. The pageant's finale often elicits tears from parents, grandparents, and teachers. The Pre-Kindergarten students steal the show when they sing *Happy Birthday Jesus* by Carol Cybala. *Happy Birthday Jesus* is a Mother of God School tradition that gets everyone ready for Christmas and a long and deserved break with families. All 258 Mother of God School students sang the second verse together, with families and teachers joining in!

The school is grateful for the ability to evangelize this beautiful story to families who may not otherwise experience the true beauty of the season.

OPT



RIGHT: Sw. Mikolaj-On Sunday, December 3, Sw. Mikolaj (St. Nicholas) visited OLQP after Holy Mass. He was surrounded by grateful children who received presents from him that day.



LEFT: OLQP Pastor Fr. Frydrych welcomes everyone after the Bethlehem Peace Light is placed in front of the altar by ZHP Scouting Leader Bozenna Buda and Knights of Columbus Council 16634 DW Franklin Morton, SK Richard Okreglak and K Bob Dowlut.

AWARD

Con't from page 16

results can be amazing. Their work developing writing portfolios in English and reading (and other subjects) supported by all Mercy teachers does matter! Our current eighth-grade students and our 2023 graduates work is well represented in the very first volume of *Windows*. I personally know of the months of hard work and care that Mrs. Kummer put into making *Windows* outstanding- a fine representation of

Mercy! Additionally, sprinkled throughout *Windows*, from the front to the back cover, the artwork of last year's seventh and eighth-grade students is showcased- as it is- so very eye-catching! We recognize our art teacher, Miss Waites for her planning, guidance, collaboration, and direction. Mother Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy would be so proud as the publication represents one of her mottos: "Do ordinary work, extraordinarily well". Congratulations to our teachers and students!"

OPT

By Bozenna Buda, ED

The Bethlehem Peace light arrived at Our Lady Queen of Poland Parish, Silver Spring, MD, on December 17, 2023. It was brought to the altar during a procession which included Polish Scouting ZHP leader Bozenna Buda from Council *Podhale* and Knights of Columbus St. Maximilian Kolbe Council 16634 District Warden Franklin Morton, Sir Knight Richard Okreglak and Knight Bob Dowlut. OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych welcomed everyone and

celebrated the Holy Mass.

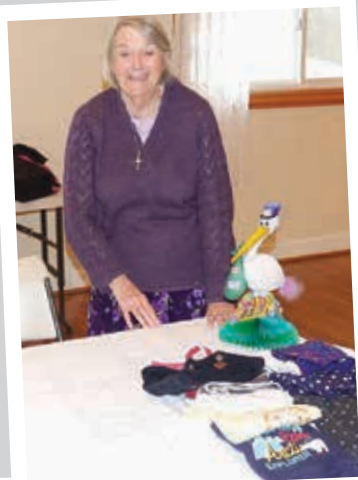
Each year, the Peace Light comes from Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. It is shared with others throughout the world in the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is "the Light of the World and the Prince of Peace." The flame is a symbol of world peace and friendship. It is a visible reminder of the mission we all share: to keep the hope of peace alive in our world, our communities, and our homes (<https://PeaceLightNorthAmerica.org>).

OPT

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LEFT: Brenda Murtha gathers donations, clothes, and baby equipment to support the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center.

BELOW: The women of the parish participated in an evening of prayer, reflection, and dinner at Advent by Candlelight.



LEFT: Dominic Sheehan reads The Word of God at Youth Sunday Mass.

BELOW: The Choir and Musicians creates an ethereal backdrop to the Christmas Eve Mass, under the direction of Choir Director Diane Yendrey.



ABOVE: Families gather for fellowship, donuts, and crafts in celebration of the beginning of Advent.



ABOVE: The children brought the Word to life with their Christmas Eve Pageant.

LEFT: Fr. Kevin and the children celebrate their beautiful performance, after the Christmas Eve children's mass.

Prepare a way for the Lord

St. Mary's Faith Community began their preparation for the birth of Jesus the first Sunday of Advent. Once a month, parish youth host a mass. For Advent, the sixth grade read the Word and

the younger children led the congregation in song from the altar. From the choir loft, St. Mary's student cantor and musicians assisted. The Jesse Tree in the Sanctuary contained dozens of tags with names of needy families and patients at Springfield Hospital, Sykesville, MD, St. Michael's in DC, and local families through WUMCO. Donations were accepted for the 25 baskets that are prepared each year.

The Pavilion was abuzz with activities for Advent that 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 and Craft Stand proceeds also went to the Center. The Haiti committee supported our twinning parish with Christmas Cards, Haiti Ornaments and Coffee sales.

The children were provided with a variety of Advent and Christmas crafts. The craft theme offered a spiritual reflection to assist the children on their path through Advent. The children had a wonderful time during these activities. Donut Sunday coincided, which are always a special treat!

The women of the parish participated in an evening of prayer, reflection, and dinner at Advent by Candlelight. The room was

lit from the glow provided by each table's unique Advent Wreath. A spiritual reflection was provided by Ann Alicea.

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

Each week during Advent each religious education class had an Advent Wreath at their Prayer Station. As the weeks progressed, all prepared for our program Pageant. The Program Pageant was performed for parents and families during the last class in December, followed by a reception. Children who were available participated in the Pageant at Christmas Eve Mass.

OPT

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SEASON

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did a wonderful job singing and looked awesome in their Christmas attire, which even included a few Santa hats! Special thanks to Mrs. Wilde for organizing such an amazing event.



ABOVE: This year's Christmas fun even included an ugly sweater contest!

LEFT: The Aftercare Kids did a fabulous job decorating their BIG Board by curling Christmas tree branches, coloring cheerful ornaments, and making paper chains.

The days leading up to Christmas break included many opportunities to show our Christmas spirit. Students, faculty, and staff participated in an ugly sweater and Christmas hat day. The fun all culminated with class parties filled with delicious treats

and various crafts.

All of the festivities throughout December were fabulous way to help the entire St. Mary's community enter more deeply into the Christmas Season, helping us to joyfully welcoming our Savior and to celebrate His birth!

OPT

St. Mary - Rockville



Students wore pink on Thursday, January 18 in memory of Kelly Christine Bula, a cherished alumna of St. Mary's Rockville. Pink was Kelly's favorite color. Seeing the flood of pink throughout the halls was a wonderful way to help keep Kelly's memory alive. Thank you all for your continued love towards Kelly Bula!

Thank you to Dale Younker, Senior Lead Operations Manager of Maryland Environmental Service and the staff from the Montgomery County Material Recovery Facility for partnering with St. Mary's School to collect over 120 coats to benefit area men, women, and children in need. The coats were delivered to a local Title 1 school and to area shelters.



Shrine of St. Jude

Retreat Offers Holistic Experience for Confirmandi

By Rick Ibanez

The recent transformative retreat orchestrated by Couples for Christ-Youth (CFC-YOUTH) at the vibrant Shrine of St. Jude was more than just an event for the Confirmation students – it was a profound journey of faith, collaboration, and self-discovery. Guided by the dedicated leadership of Mike and Ayrah Bermudo, the service team's tireless efforts from spiritual preparation to hands-on activities underscored the essence of service and collaboration.

Amidst the lively parish setting, the retreat provided not only a dynamic space for reflection but also a canvas for the participants to paint their spiritual narratives. Through engaging activities, meaningful talks on God's love, Jesus Christ, life in the Spirit, and the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, the retreat became a holistic experience that touched hearts and ignited a sense of purpose.



Confirmation retreat participants at the Shrine of St. Jude. Photo by Rick Ibanez

The well-behaved and cooperative retreatants, though initially reserved, eventually revealed the impact of the retreat as a positive and enriching experience. As the closing words of the three girls waiting for their ride home echoed, "It was alright! It was nice!" it became evident that the seeds of transformation had been planted.

This retreat was a collective journey that left an indelible mark on hearts, fostering a deeper connection with faith, community, and self.

For further information or inquiries, please contact CFC-YOUTH West Maryland at cfcywestmaryland@gmail.com.

OPT

SACRAMENTS

Con't from page 25

ed to the call of the Lord just as did the prophet Samuel: "speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." They will be receiving their sacraments and becoming full members of the Catholic Church. Truly it is a mark of the Spirit moving within their hearts.

These students are in grades four through eight. Having been exposed to the Catholic Church at school, they are eager to receive the grace of God in the sacraments. Several of the students have already been baptized and will be receiving

ing First Holy Communion and First Reconciliation. Others will be baptized with their classmates and families joining them in celebration.

Eighth grader Parker Brown will be coming into the Catholic Church and receiving his First Holy Communion this spring. He will then go on to be confirmed with his class. Seventh graders Ishaan Akolo and Rollins Bradford will be receiving their sacraments this spring.

In the sixth grade, there are five girls receiving their sacraments: Ruby Bradford, Julia Gori, Victoria Do Canto, Kalea Jerome, and Zahra-Olivya Njikam. They have each recently joined our OLOL

community and it is a blessing that they did. Praise God! Lastly, in the fourth and fifth grades, we have a few students who are receiving Baptism, First Reconciliation, and First Holy Communion: Skylar Randolph, Felipe Do Canto, and Lincoln Lawson-Smith. Fourth grader Charlotte Crandlemire just received her sacraments this past December as well.

The Our Lady of Lourdes community will be praying for these children and their families as our Lord draws them closer to Himself. We pray that they may have the grace to persevere in their faith long after they receive their sacraments.

OPT

GIVING TREE

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ornaments off the "Giving Trees," which were located around the parish. Each ornament listed a specific item needed and when they were to be brought back to the church.

For the **St. Stephen's Food Pantry**, unusual items not ordinarily donated were requested, and 2600 pounds of food was collected!

For the **Gabriel Project**, 10,200 diapers, three cases of wipes, and one case of baby formula were received. Other items were packed

in 36-gallon trash bags and included seven bags of new clothes for children, from newborn to size 14; five bags of new toys, including many books/board books; and one bag of infant formula.

For the **Jeanne Jugan Home for the Elderly**, 100 bags and boxes of toiletries and snacks were gifted.

To top it all off, parishioners were very generous with monetary donations both to the Little Sisters of the Poor and the Gabriel Project.

Many thanks to the parishioners who helped with this project: Natalie and Mike Craven, who organized the Gabriel Project items;

Andrea Vargas and Enid Diaz, who delivered the donations to the Little Sisters of the Poor in time for the Christmas party; students Hanks Meza, Danny Lemus, and Blanca Ramos, who helped organize the donated items on Sunday morning; Chris Colburn and Deacon Nick Scholz, who shepherded the items for the Food Pantry and kept an eye out for any places people may have left items to be gifted; and the office volunteers at Monday evening Faith Formation, who cut out all the ornaments and got them ready to hang on the trees.

OPT

DIABETES

Con't from page 28

aspects too," said County Executive Marc Elrich. "I urge those with diabetes or taking care of someone with diabetes to register for this free program."

The program has demonstrated proven health benefits and comple-

ments the diabetic medical management services people receive from their health care providers. Participants will enhance their ability to maintain active and fulfilling lifestyles, improve problem-solving and decision-making skills and address the challenges of living with diabetes. Workshop topics will include improving food choices, increasing physical activity and

practicing coping skills to maintain nutrition and a healthy weight.

Individuals with diabetes or caregivers of persons with diabetes can register for the DSMP workshop online at <https://forms.office.com/g/5c6PphXRxp> or by calling Kiera Abdul at 443-750-4267 or T'Kia Pearson at 240 777-1244.

OPT

Our Lady of Mercy



Mercy's Student Council raised funds to answer a request from the Christ Child Society, DC. 800 Diapers were delivered!



The PreK 3 students boarded Mercy's Polar Express for a train ride to the North Pole - complete with a conductor, hot chocolate, and pajamas!

TEPEYAC

Con't from page 3

to make a positive impact on the lives of the unborn. The initiative to donate diapers, wipes, and baby clothes during Catholic Schools Week not only provides tangible assistance to mothers facing challenges but also cultivates a culture of generosity among the students. This act of charity not only addresses immediate needs but also imparts lasting lessons on empathy, solidarity, and the transformative power of standing up for the unborn.

Would your parish be interested in hosting a drive for the mothers and children at Centro Tepeyac? Find our contact information below if you are interested!

Phone number: 301-587-9516
For Off-Hour Assistance: Call 1(800) 395- HELP.

Contact: office@ctepeyac.org or Juliekilmer@ctepeyac.org
Address: 12247 Georgia Avenue, Silver Spring, MD 20902.

Office hours: Monday through Friday from 10:00am to 3:00pm.

For more information, visit website at www.centrotepeyac.org

You can also offer material assistance by shopping our Amazon Baby registry (listed as Centro Tepeyac Silver Spring) to send donations right to our center.

Centro Tepeyac, most importantly asks for your prayers. We entrust our work to Our Lady of Guadalupe to protect the mothers who cry out for support and for their children. Our Lady of Guadalupe, pray for us!

OPT

SEASON

Con't from page 19

gregation. The church was adorned with gold banners and a wondrous Creche display.

Christ the King parishioners were all generous in donating to chil-

dren in the school San Jose Obrero, located in Soyapango, El Salvador.

The Christmas season ended on Epiphany when Three Wise Men visited Jesus. The Magi visited the 9:30am English Mass with their gifts on January 7. This was a beautiful season at Christ the King!

OPT

JOURNEY

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Anita and Robert met at the Black Teacher's College in the District of Columbia. Eventually, the Black Teacher's College and the White

Teacher's College merged to form the University of the District of Columbia, as Anita explained. More recently, Anita, has been a lector and volunteer at Christ the King for over 40 years. Congratulations Robert and Anita!

OPT



**Upcoming SPRING/SUMMER 2024
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