



# ST. JOSEPH PARISH

## NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

### Inside

2 Music Ministry Sharing Talents and Fostering Prayerful Worship During Christmas Season

3 A Letter from Our Pastor

4 The Feast of the Immaculate Conception  
*A Lesson in Catholic Stewardship*

6 The El Salvador Missions  
*Building Christ's Church Physically and Spiritually*

8 Holy Day and Holiday Mass Schedule

9 Illness  
*By NATHAN FRANKART, Seminarian*

**St. Joseph Parish**  
200 Saint Joseph Drive  
Amherst, OH 44001  
(440) 988-2848  
stjosephamherst.com

**Nativity of the BVM Parish**  
333 South Lake Street  
South Amherst, OH 44001  
(440) 986-7011

DEC 2023

## Altar Servers Return to Liturgy

### *Servers of All Ages Are Once Again Welcome to Share Time and Talents*

Altar servers are an integral part of the celebration of the sacrifice of the Mass. They assist the priest by preparing the altar and increase the reverence of our worship by ensuring that each part of the liturgy is performed seamlessly.

At the beginning of 2023, we finally welcomed the altar servers back to Mass from the pandemic hiatus. Parishioner Kathy Loos was essential in coordinating the return of our altar servers and continues to coordinate the altar server schedule.

"I received a lot of positive feedback from parishioners when the altar servers returned," Kathy says. "Many were filled with happiness and joy at the sight of the altar servers walking down the aisle at the entrance procession of Mass."

At St. Joseph, adults and children in fifth grade and up are encouraged to be altar servers. Before the pandemic, several adult servers served alongside the middle school and high school servers. The hope is to build back up a strong group of children and adults to serve at each Mass and other liturgical functions like Eucharistic Adoration and funeral Masses.



*Middle school servers gather for a training session.*

All altar servers are trained by Fr. Tim before they assist at Mass.

"Father is a master teacher," Kathy says. "When I attended the middle school training, I learned a lot of things as Father explained why we do things the way we do during Mass."

As Kathy notes, the middle school altar servers also serve at the Friday school Masses.

*continued on page 5*



## Music Ministry Sharing Talents and Fostering Prayerful Worship During Christmas Season

**T**he Music Ministry at St. Joseph Parish is busy preparing for the music it will present during our Christmas Liturgies, as well as for the Annual Christmas Concert set for 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 29 in the church sanctuary.

“The concert will have all the members of the Music Ministry together when I blend the youth and adult choirs,” says Christina Dupre, Worship and Liturgy Coordinator. “There will be some surprises in the program!”

Another project that is underway is the recording of Christmas and seasonal music for a CD.

“I will have information coming out soon for those who would like to order a CD,” Christina says.

Members of the ministry include the Youth Choir that is made up of third-to-eighth-grade students at St. Joseph School. Older students and adults sing in the Adult Choir. The instrumentalists include guitarists, a flutist, violinists, and keyboard players.

“All our Liturgies have a group or ensembles and we blend them together,” Christina says.

Those serving in the Music Ministry are fully engaged in stewardship.

“That is one of the things we do,” Christina says. “I do try to get the parish fully involved, and the ministry members really practice hard on Wednesdays for about two hours. As we get closer to the Christmas concert, we sometimes rehearse twice a week. They are giving up their time so we can have a better Liturgy and worship in the parish. They are

giving of their talents. In stewardship, you are giving your time and talent — your gifts — and they definitely fall into that. They are really dedicated. It makes it easier for me.”

Not only do the members have the opportunity to live in stewardship, but they also are able to grow closer to Christ through their work.

“When we begin rehearsal, we begin with a prayer and we try to select music to fit the Scriptures each week,” Christina says. “We are very worship-oriented as far as our selections. It definitely brings them and the congregation closer to Christ. We make sure the music is presented properly. This leads to better worship with the well-prepared homily Fr. Tim always gives.”

In addition to the Music Ministry, Christina is working to develop a media ministry.

“The video screens are there to enhance a better worship experience,” she says. “This will help the people to get closer to Christ and prayer.”

Anyone interested in joining the Music Ministry is welcome to come to the rehearsals.

“Anyone can join now if they want,” Christina says. “We do practice hard!”

**To join, come to a rehearsal, held at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays in the music room at the church.**

*A Letter from Our Pastor*

## ADVENT: Receiving Gratefully and Sharing Generously as His Disciples



Dear Members of St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes,

**A** few weeks ago, we changed our clocks from Daylight Savings Time to Standard Time. For us, that meant moving our clocks back an hour on a Saturday night before going to bed. Though we now have light earlier in the day, each day we are losing some more daylight.

As we live through these darkest days of the year, our Church also celebrates Advent and Christmas this month. Advent is a time of hopeful anticipation of what is to come: the Second Coming of Christ and the celebration of His birth. As Advent moves us to the darkest day of the year, we embrace the themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. As the amount of light in each day begins to grow, we celebrate that the Light entered into its creation in the birth of Jesus.

Each Sunday is an opportunity, as we light a new candle on the Advent Wreath, to reflect on how these four themes are lived out in our lives as disciples:

**HOPE** — No matter what comes in our life, can we live in a spirit of hope in our Lord who is always with us? Can our confidence in God's amazing and generous love sustain us even in the darkest moments of life?

**PEACE** — So many things can try to rob us of peace: war and conflict in our world, the death of a loved one, job loss, busyness and economic uncertainty, to name a few.

Can we trust the Prince of Peace enough to know that we are not alone, that both God and His people are with us in all times?

**JOY** — This Advent, instead of looking for external sources of joy, can we give time to our Lord in prayer, forming a deeper relationship with Christ and allowing Him to become our fountain of joy?

**LOVE** — Can we take time during this Advent to savor the many loving relationships of our life, especially

our relationships with Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, the saints, our parish communities, and our loved ones?

Embracing this love will help us to look forward with joyful anticipation to the fullness of the Kingdom of God that awaits us.

God did not make us for darkness but rather for His Light. May this Advent and Christmas fill us with Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love such that we live every day as children of God's Light with a renewed spirit, receiving gratefully and sharing generously as disciples of Jesus.

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor".

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,  
Pastor



# The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

## *A Lesson in Catholic Stewardship*

**T**he Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated on December 8, holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics worldwide. It commemorates our belief that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was conceived without original sin. Beyond its theological significance, this feast offers essential lessons on Catholic stewardship and discipleship.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was preserved from original sin from the very moment of her conception. This means that Mary's soul was without blemish, making her the perfect vessel to carry and nurture the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception underscores Mary's unique role in the salvation of humanity and her exceptional purity, highlighting her as a model of discipleship.

### **Stewardship of God's Grace:**

Catholic stewardship is about recognizing that everything we have, including our talents, time, and resources, is a gift from God. Mary's Immaculate Conception is a reminder that we are called to be stewards of God's grace. Just as Mary's purity was a divine gift, so are the talents and resources we possess. Stewardship encourages us to use these gifts for the greater good, just as Mary used her life to serve God's plan.

**Imitating Mary's Fiat:** One of the most significant aspects of the Immaculate Conception story is Mary's fiat, her "yes" to God's plan. When the angel Gabriel announced that she would become the Mother of the Savior, Mary replied, "Let it be done to me according to your word."



This act of surrender exemplifies the essence of discipleship. As Catholic disciples, we are called to emulate Mary's obedience, saying "yes" to God's will in our lives.

**The Call to Holiness:** The Immaculate Conception reminds us of the call to holiness in our daily lives. Mary's exceptional purity points to the possibility of leading a life free from sin. While this may seem unattainable, it emphasizes the importance of continuous conversion and striving for holiness as part of our discipleship journey. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception invites us to make choices that align with our faith and values, drawing us closer to God.

**Mary as the Advocate:** In the Catholic tradition, Mary is often venerated as the Advocate, the one who intercedes on our behalf. Her role as the Immaculate Conception reinforces her unique ability to bridge

the gap between humanity and God. In our stewardship and discipleship, we can turn to Mary as a source of inspiration and guidance. Just as she interceded at the Wedding at Cana, we can trust in her prayers as we navigate life's challenges and joys.

**Caring for God's Creation:** Catholic stewardship extends beyond our personal talents and resources; it also encompasses our responsibility to care for God's creation. Mary's purity and grace reflect the beauty and purity of the world that God has entrusted to our care. Discipleship includes protecting and preserving the environment, recognizing it as a precious gift from God.

*continued on page 5*

## The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

*continued from page 4*

**Service to Others:** Mary's life was marked by her service to others. From her humble acceptance of her role as the Mother of God to her support of Jesus throughout His ministry, Mary embodies selfless service. Catholic stewardship encourages us to follow her example by serving our communities and those in need.

In conclusion, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception holds a deep significance in the Catholic Church, serving as

a reminder of Mary's purity, her fiat, and her unique role in God's plan for humanity. It provides a powerful lesson on stewardship, prompting us to recognize and use the gifts God has given us. Mary's example of discipleship, her holiness, and her advocacy for us further strengthen our commitment to following Christ. As we celebrate this feast, let us be inspired to say "yes" to God's plan, strive for holiness, and serve others with love and humility, just as Mary did.

*The dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was preserved from original sin from the very moment of her conception. This means that Mary's soul was without blemish, making her the perfect vessel to carry and nurture the Son of God, Jesus Christ.*

## Altar Servers Return to Liturgy *continued from front cover*

"One of the now-graduated eighth-grade boys, Christian Diehl, who was an experienced altar server helped the younger students learn the ropes earlier this year," she says. "Recently, he came back to serve when his high school had no class."

For children, being an altar server fosters understanding of, and reverence for Christ in the Eucharist, the priest, and the worship of Mass.

"I have also seen how it helps the adult servers feel closer to the actions and prayer of the Mass," Kathy says.

Just as the parish was filled with a greater sense of happiness at the return of the young altar servers, the presence of the adult servers brings a unique witness to the celebration of the Mass.

"The altar servers remind us why we are there," Kathy says, noting that they serve as an example of how we ought to revere the altar and enter into the prayers of the Mass.

"Altar serving provides a unique and more intimate perspective of what is happening at Mass," she says. "It keeps the servers focused and gives them a new adoration for Christ in the Eucharist."

All are encouraged to serve with this essential ministry. St. Joseph is unique in that it allows adults to serve. Parents and children serving together could be an amazing opportunity to unify families in the faith and bring about a greater connection with one another.

Altar serving training is scheduled throughout the year when there are enough people interested in serving.

**If you are interested in becoming an altar server or would like to register your child, contact the parish office at 440-988-2848.**

# The El Salvador Missions

## *Building Christ's Church Physically and Spiritually*

**A**t the heart of any mission trip is the love of Christ. So, in 2013, St. Joseph and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary began sending missionaries to our sister parish in El Salvador. In the ten years since, there have been seven mission trips.

Nativity parishioner Carol Zellmer has been on all seven missions and was there in March with fellow parishioner Christine Gentile and four others from St. Joseph. Carol notes that while each mission has a unique

practical goal, the universal mission of sharing Christ's love with others remains.

"This year the mission was to provide shoes for the student," she says. "Our sister parish, Sts. Peter and Paul, has a growing school with many students who are in need. We measured the feet of the students and hired a local shoemaker to make custom shoes for each child in the school system.

"Another aspect of our trip was taking baby supplies to 50 single mothers with newborns who were in need and

being supported by the local crisis pregnancy center," she adds. "The people we serve don't know what they don't have and appreciate what they do have."

As a result of these seven mission trips and other acts of support, our parishes have built the bell tower of the local church, built and expanded the school to a two-story building that can serve hundreds of students, and raised enough

*continued on page 7*



## The El Salvador Missions *continued from page 6*

money to build over 100 simple homes for the villagers of Teotepeque, El Salvador.

These projects were funded by the generosity of the St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parishes, and many were completed by the helping hands of the villagers and missionaries.

Each mission trip lasts a week and only costs the missionary about \$1,000 to go due to the low airfare costs and modest living expenses of the area. Being a missionary is a true act of stewardship.

“It is not about the money,” Carol says. “It is about the time to become close to others and to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. It is hard to describe, but I truly receive so much more than I give. Each trip I have been on has renewed my faith.”

The hope is to continue the missions and build the Church in El Salvador. The

mission teams are purposefully kept small and include only eight to 12 people. However, since the pandemic, there has been a decrease in interested parishioners willing to go. But there is still much to do in the village of Teotepeque.

“Many people ask me, why go to El Salvador to help others when there are so many people in need here at home?”

Carol says. “My answer is that there is no support system there, they have no one else to turn to.”

With no social services that can help our faith family in El Salvador, “our assistance provides hope,” Carol notes.

All are encouraged to support the El Salvador missions. The generosity shared through donations is a great blessing that allows for the necessary infrastructure to be built and supplies to be provided. By becoming a missionary, you are further able to share your heart with God’s people in Teotepeque.



**For more information, please contact the parish office at 440-988-2848.**

## *Holy Day and Holiday Mass* Schedule

### **Feast of the Immaculate Conception Holy Day of Obligation, Dec. 8**

Mass Times:

**Thursday, Dec. 7** – 7 p.m., St. Joseph Church

**Friday, Dec. 8** – 9 a.m., St. Joseph Church

**Friday, Dec. 8** – 12 p.m., Nativity Church

This year, the Fourth of Advent falls on the same day as Christmas Eve, with Christmas on Monday. The separate obligations to attend Mass for the Fourth Sunday of Advent and Mass for Christmas remain. In order to fulfill both obligations, two Masses must be attended — i.e. it is not possible for attendance at one Mass on Sunday to fulfill both obligations.

### **Fourth Sunday of Advent Mass Schedule**

**Saturday, Dec. 23** —

Fourth Sunday of Advent

(Regular Sunday Obligation)

4 p.m. Mass at St. Joseph

5:30 p.m. Mass at Nativity

**Sunday, Dec. 24** —

Fourth Sunday of Advent

(Regular Sunday Obligation)

8:30 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

11 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

NO 5 p.m. Mass

### **CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE**

**Sunday, Dec. 24** — Christmas Eve  
(Holy Day of Obligation)

4 p.m. Mass at St. Joseph

6 p.m. Mass at Nativity

8 p.m. Mass at St. Joseph

**Monday, Dec. 25** — Christmas Day  
(Holy Day of Obligation)

8:30 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

10 a.m. Mass at Nativity

11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

Note: There will be no weekday Mass at Nativity on Tuesday, Dec. 26.

### **Weekend after Christmas Mass Schedule:**

**Saturday, Dec. 30** — the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

4 p.m. Mass at St. Joseph

5:30 p.m. Mass at Nativity

**Sunday, Dec. 31** — the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

8:30 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

11 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

NO 5 p.m. Mass

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God is on Monday, Jan. 1 and is NOT a Holy Day of Obligation this year. The Mass schedule for Jan. 1 is as follows.

**Sunday, Dec. 31** — NO Vigil Mass

**Monday, Jan. 1** — 10 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph

Note: There will be no weekday Mass at Nativity on Tuesday, Jan. 2.



## Illness

By NATHAN FRANKART, Seminarian

**P**ease of Christ to you! Perhaps I am letting my present circumstances dictate my writing this month, but sometimes you just can't help it. I am currently in bed as I am writing this article fighting through some kind of bug. I feel like there's a balloon inside of my head, there is so much congestion in there. I apologize if that is too much information, but if you hate winter illnesses as much as I do, you understand where I am coming from.

It always plays out this way, doesn't it? We never appreciate how great it is to be healthy until it is suddenly taken away from us. When it becomes abundantly apparent when we are sick, whether it's a passing, seasonal cold or something more serious, it's so hard to appreciate the time when we were fully capable. If I was healed this moment, I would have so much gratitude for a few hours, maybe a few days, but then go back to the same expectation of good health, with no gratitude at all.

I'm no psychologist, but my guess is this comes from the faulty belief that we can control our health. We expect to be healthy because we are the ones in charge. If we want to stay in gratitude, it requires a humbling of oneself. We can't pretend to have everything within our own power. True gratitude comes from understanding the gifts that are freely given to us, knowing that it can't be manufactured or controlled by us. I have a true thankfulness for my health, my friends, my family, my faith, everything, when I realize that I received it not because of my actions, but from other people's love.

That should dictate our Christmas celebration this year. Nothing we did or ever will do will compare to the gift of Jesus Christ descending from the right hand of the Father and becoming man. We didn't control it, dictate it, or deserve it. And if we aren't careful in acknowledging this, we risk being ungrateful. Don't wait until you are spiritually sick to rejoice in the Incarnation of Jesus.

*Nothing we did or ever will do will compare to the gift of Jesus Christ descending from the right hand of the Father and becoming man. We didn't control it, dictate it, or deserve it. And if we aren't careful in acknowledging this, we risk being ungrateful.*



AD SPACE

AD SPACE

This newsletter brought to you by the Catholic Communities of:

# & ST. JOSEPH PARISH & NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

NON PROFIT  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT 58  
AMHERST OH

200 Saint Joseph Drive, Amherst, OH 44001

Address Service Requested

**Fr. Tim O'Connor Serving Both Parishes**

**Mass:**

Monday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*  
Tuesday, 8:00 a.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*  
Thursday, 7:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*  
Friday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*  
Saturday, 4:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*  
5:30 p.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*  
Sunday, 8:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

**Confession at St. Joseph:**

*Thursday* - Individual Reconciliation 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.  
*Saturday* - Individual Reconciliation 11:00 a.m. - noon

**Eucharistic Adoration (Chapel) at Nativity of the BVM:**

Monday-Friday 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

## Upcoming Activities and Events

**First Saturday Rosary**

Saturday, Dec. 2 – 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Church

**Hospitality Tuesday**

Tuesday, Dec. 5 – Following the 8 a.m.  
Mass, NBVM Church and Hall

**Parent Club Meeting**

Tuesday, Dec. 5 – 7 p.m., School MPR

**First Reconciliation**

Saturday, Dec. 9 – 1 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Church

**Wonderful Women**

Tuesday, Dec. 12 – 7 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall South

**Pre-Baptism Class**

Wednesday, Dec. 13 – 7 p.m., School

**Vincentians Meeting**

Thursday, Dec. 14 – 9 a.m.,  
St. Joseph Conference Room

**School Christmas Concert**

Friday, Dec. 15 – Time TBD,  
St. Joseph Church

**St. Joseph Choir Christmas Concert**

Friday, Dec. 29 – 7:30 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Church

**PSR classes**

Wednesday, Dec. 6, 13 – 5:30 p.m.,  
St. Joseph School  
(no class on Dec. 20, 27, and Jan. 2)

**Holy Ground Youth Group**

Sunday, Dec. 3, 10, 17 – 6 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Social Hall (join us for  
5 p.m. Mass before the meeting)

**Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes**

Tuesdays and Thursdays in December  
– 9:30 a.m., Nativity Parish Hall

**No School Christmas Break**

Dec. 20, 2023 – Jan. 2, 2024

**Parish Offices Closed**

Dec. 25 – Merry Christmas!

**No PSR Classes Christmas Break**

Dec. 20, 2023 – Jan. 3, 2024

