



ST. JOSEPH PARISH

NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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JANUARY 2023

MEET PARISHIONER

KELLY HARDWICK

"I Love Being Involved, It's a Way of Life"

We've all heard the saying, "God never gives you more than you can handle." St. Joseph's parishioner Kelly Hardwick has found this to be absolutely true. Raising three kids with her husband, Jason, and working full-time as an x-ray technician, you would think she doesn't have much time left. She fills much of that remaining time by volunteering — first at the parish and now at St. Joseph School.

Kelly has been a member of St. Joseph's her whole life. Jason entered into the Catholic faith in 2012 when their oldest daughter, Brooklyn, was baptized. The couple has two other children, Aaron, 5, and Kaitlyn, 2.

As her children have started school, Kelly has moved from volunteering at the church to the school. Previously, she served as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and on the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) team. She was also part of the Renewal Team and helped plan the Reverse Raffle event. Kelly also was involved with planning a Women's Retreat at St. Joseph's in 2012.



Kelly Hardwick and family

Now, she serves as the Vice President of the Parent Club. She helped plan the Trunk or Treat event and helped with setup at the Design Studio.

"I love being involved," she says. "It's a way of life for me."

She also has helped plan the Father-Daughter Dance and decorates the float for the Christmas parade. Christmas is a special time for Kelly and her family. She loves helping out with any church or school activities around Christmas time.

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Examining Our *New Year's Resolutions* Through the Lens of Stewardship

Every January, we all step forward into the New Year with new ideas, goals and resolutions. But after the initial sparkle of the New Year has faded, it can be easy to forget our once-fervent resolutions. However, we might find that it's a bit easier to keep our New Year's resolutions if we look a bit beyond our physical selves. By also involving our spiritual lives, as well as the lives of others, we can add a lot more meaning to our resolutions.

Renowned Catholic author Matthew Kelly says, "We're all trying to be better versions of ourselves," and that's basically what any resolution is about. Stewardship is essentially the same thing — if we embrace living a stewardship way of life, we become better versions of ourselves. We can use our time and talent to make improvements in our lives, in the lives of others, and in the life of the parish. It all comes down to one basic point — if we acknowledge that everything we have is a gift from God, then we are supposed to be good stewards of those gifts, use them for the benefit of others, and return our talents to the Lord.

One idea to help incorporate stewardship into your New Year's resolutions is to make two distinct resolutions each year — one at the beginning of the liturgical year, and one at the beginning of the calendar year.

We can think of the first Sunday of Advent as the Church New Year, and we can make our

own spiritual resolutions at this special time each year. Then, for the new calendar year, we can make resolutions for our health and well-being. In both cases, we can commit to these promises much in the same way we make our commitments during our annual Stewardship Renewal. We can make these resolutions, write them down, and share them with someone. Once you've written it down and shared it, you are now holding yourself accountable.

We are both physical and spiritual beings. Taking care of the physical side of things is a good start, but if we ignore the spiritual side, what kind of progress are we truly making? Even if you already regularly pray, you can add five more minutes to your prayer time each day to take a step forward in your faith. Even if you read the Bible once a week, you can take a spiritual leap and make it twice a week. One way to make a good resolution is to consider joining or increasing your involvement in one of the parish's prayer, faith formation or outreach ministries.

Making resolutions requires us to truly reflect on the areas in our lives that we'd like to improve, while also ensuring that our priorities are in order. Remember, there is no need to take a giant leap all at once. So, as we begin a new calendar year, remember that even the smallest steps forward in faith can go a long, long way as you continuously renew your relationship with Christ.

A Letter from Our Pastor

A New Year, New Challenges, New Opportunities

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

It is a New Year, and it is my prayer for all of you — and for myself, as well — that we can take new steps in our faith journeys and seek new ways to live out our discipleship and our stewardship.

Pope Francis once commented on his approach to life. He said, “Certainly, possessions, money and power can give a momentary thrill, the illusion of being happy. But they end up possessing us and making us always want more, never being satisfied. I have learned that the most important thing is to put Christ in your life, to place your trust in Him, and you will never be disappointed.”

The Pope has been called “the world’s parish priest.” As we pray for one another in this New Year, may we all ask the Lord to help us appreciate Pope Francis’ approach to life, his simple way of seeing things, and his very basic way of appreciating things. I would hope that we might see this year as a time for opportunity, a time to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ and, for that matter, with one another.

If we wish to change our lives and the lives of others, there are two solid ways to do so. We are blessed with many opportunities in our Saint Joseph and Nativity Parishes to pray, but as much as we need to take advantage of them, we also need to develop a strong personal prayer life. Recall the young Samuel, who was not quite sure what to do with



his life, or what direction to go. When he finally settled on that one important prayer, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” [1 Samuel 3: 7-11], Samuel gave us the model for what we need to do. Prayer is a two-way street, and part of that is taking the time to listen to God.

The second important way is to exude joy. Christ certainly called us to do that. Pope Francis has had much to say about joy, as well. The Holy Father says, “Joy cannot be held at heel; it must be let go. Joy is a pilgrim virtue. It is a gift that walks — walks on the path of life, that walks with Jesus... proclaiming joy, which lengthens and widens that path.” We must seek that joy and then we need to share it. That is truly our call. Joy certainly helps us to “love your neighbor as you love yourself” [cfr. Matthew 22: 37-39].

Yes, there will certainly be challenges ahead in 2023, but we must focus on the opportunities that lie before us, and then exert the effort to take hold of them. Happy New Year, everyone!

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,
Pastor



THE MEN'S GROUP: *Forming Holy and Faithful Men*

Parishioner Nick Toney knows firsthand that men need a band of brothers to grow in faith and holiness. In response to our renewal five years ago, the Men's Group was formed to create a supportive community of men who are striving to grow as disciples of Christ.

"Our group is essential for men in the parish to build relationships and live out our mission as men of Christ," Nick says. "The group helps us grow closer to one another and Christ while learning to become better husbands, fathers, and grandfathers."

The group unites men from both St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes. They meet every first and third Tuesday of the month at 7 p.m. in the St. Joseph Social Hall. Currently, they have about 15 to 20 men who regularly attend the meetings but have many more men on their email list who have participated in the past.

The Men's Group starts their meetings with an opening prayer and by sharing how God has blessed them throughout the past week. This gives each man the opportunity to reflect and see how God has been at work in his life. As a group, the men are consistently studying their faith either



through a book study or a video series. The bulk of their meetings consists of a group discussion focused on their current study. Then the meeting concludes with a closing prayer.

"Over the years we have completed many book studies and video series," Nick says. "We also have attended conferences, served meals to the homeless, and visited nursing homes — all of which allowed us to grow closer to Christ and one another."

On a personal level, Nick has experienced the fruits of the group.

"I have grown as a man of faith as a result of participating in our Men's Group," Nick says. "I have learned so much from hearing the experiences of the other men in the group. Additionally, the video series and book studies have helped me learn more about Christ and how to best serve my family."

The real strength of the Men's Group is the bonds that are created among the members. "The best part of this group is the way that the men support each other through one another's faith journey," Nick says. "We are a band of brothers that share our love for Jesus and our families. The fellowship in the group has helped me form lifelong relationships and has provided me with many spiritual mentors."

The Men's Group is open to all men! Through their study of Scripture and Church doctrine, members grow in faith and gain the confidence to share it with family as the spiritual leaders of their homes. The bonds that are created foster accountability, which encourages each man to put their faith into action through a daily practice of virtue and prayer.

An Inside Look at the USCCB's
NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC REVIVAL
A Grassroots Response to the Gift of the Eucharist

It's no coincidence that the central tenet of our Catholic faith is also the most difficult to accept. From the moment Christ taught in the Gospel of John that "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you," his followers began to walk away. Today is no different, as the Pew Research Center found that only thirty-one percent of Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Christians of all denominations generally agree that a personal relationship with Christ is crucial. As Catholics, how can this relationship grow if we deny that Christ is truly sacramentally present — Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity — with us in the Eucharist? How can this relationship deepen if the Body and Blood of Christ is received without belief in His presence?

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has listened and looked at the hurt that exists in our world among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. If Christ is the balm for the wounds that have been created in individuals, families, and societies, then the Catholic Church has a gift that must be shared. With this mission in mind, they now offer us a plan for a National Eucharistic Revival that reaches parishes, dioceses, and the Church as a whole in the hope that by renewing our own faith, we will be ready to share it with others in desperate need of Christ's healing.

What does it mean for us to experience this revival? It's more than a renewal of faith, or simply accepting Church



teaching — it is a real and personal encounter with the love of Christ, waiting for us in the Eucharist. The Church gives us many ways to encounter and share this love. Eucharistic Adoration is an opportunity to cultivate one's relationship with Christ in the Eucharist through quiet prayer and presence. Eucharistic Processions — which many churches held when the Eucharistic Revival began on the Feast of Corpus Christi this past June — are a public way to show reverence and belief in the healing power of the Eucharist.

The National Eucharistic Revival will span three years. The first year is focusing on how each diocese can promote love for our Eucharistic Lord. The second year will bring this closer to home as our parishes will evaluate how to deepen our relationship with Christ in the Eucharist. The third year will bring us to the tenth National Eucharistic Congress and the National Year of Mission, when we will be prepared after our own renewal to bring the love of Christ to our families, neighbors, and communities.

The vision for the National Eucharistic Revival is long-term. Beginning with our own hearts, Christ's love has the power to bring deep and lasting healing to our world. The Catholic Church holds the unique gift of Christ's Eucharistic Presence, but this gift is for everyone. Join us as we deepen our faith and relationship with Christ individually and as a parish.

For more information and resources to grow in your faith, visit www.eucharisticrevival.org.

Catholic Schools Week

Commemorating Achievements and Celebrating a Community Rooted in Catholic Education

Catholic education is important in the upbringing of children and the building of our society. Parents are the primary educators of their children, but Catholic school education also provides children with an understanding of the Catholic faith and teachings of Christ. Each year, Catholic schools across the country take a week at the end of January to celebrate the importance of Catholic education and those who are involved in our schools.

This year, St. Joseph Parish School will participate in Catholic Schools Week, joining schools across the country, running from Jan. 29 through Feb. 4. The theme is “Celebrate Catholic Schools.”

“Catholic Schools Week is a way to show that Catholic schools are great places of academic excellence with a faith-filled mission,” says Amy Makruski, Principal at St. Joseph.

Each day of Catholic Schools Week will focus on a different aspect

of Catholic education and those involved. Sunday will be about celebrating the parish, where students lead the parish at 11 a.m. Mass, filling the liturgical roles essential to Sunday Mass. Afterward, there will be an Open House from 12 to 1:30 p.m., and parishioners are invited to attend.

“The entire parish and community are invited,” Mrs. Makruski says. “The Open House features not only our classrooms, but a craft show with all student vendors, STEM projects from the year, a student art show, and more.”

Monday will serve as a celebration of the community, as the students make cards and write letters to thank others for their service. Tuesday is about celebrating the students, who will participate in a special photo session and then a fun afternoon event to take a little break from academics. Wednesday will celebrate the nation, and the school invites community groups as well as veterans for a gratitude ceremony and prayer service. During religion class



on Thursday, students will learn more about vocations and discernment. Then, on Friday, the students will celebrate faculty and staff.

“The staff will have a day full of treats and special treatment to show them how thankful the school is for them to be teacher ministers in our building,” Mrs. Makruski says. “Our

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To learn more about St. Joseph School, please visit the school website at www.sjsamherst.org or call the school office at 440-988-4244.

Catholic Schools Week *continued from page 6*

school Mass at 9 a.m. will also feature some words of thanks for our faculty and staff.”

Parishioners are also invited to attend the Friday morning Mass. Finally, on Saturday, in celebration of the families in the school community, a family movie night will wrap up the week’s celebrations.

Mrs. Makruski is excited for the annual celebrations and the opportunity for our school and faith community to celebrate Catholic school education.

“I always look forward to the opportunity to remind ourselves of the unique opportunities we have by teaching in a Catholic school and being able to show our faith through

our actions and have a firsthand experience with watching our students grow academically and spiritually each year,” she says.

Catholic Schools Week offers an important opportunity to commemorate Catholic education and appreciate the opportunity to daily experience the practices and values of the Catholic faith. As a whole, this Catholic education is an important part of a child’s upbringing and formation.

“The focus on the whole student and developing who they are as a person and thinking about them growing into a disciple as they prepare for the real world as we simultaneously develop academic areas is something that is

unique to Catholic education,” Mrs. Makruski says. “The small, family environment and the close relationships we have with families is a key reason to send your child to a school like St. Joseph Parish School. We strive to help parents and students become the best versions of themselves to serve each other as God intended.”



Parishioner Kelly Hardwick *continued from front cover*

Kelly also enjoys seeing fundraisers come together that support the church or school.

“Sometimes I feel like I can’t make the time for one more thing,” Kelly says. “But God helps make the time.”

In addition, Kelly is involved in the Amherst community. She is the secretary for the soccer board and is involved with Girl Scouts.

“I am never bored,” she says. “I guess I never have time to be bored.”

While Kelly fell away from the Catholic church for a few years, she is thankful to be back. When Brooklyn was born, Fr. Martello invited Jason and Kelly to attend RCIA classes and bring her with them. Kelly has been back ever since.

“It felt so good to be back with this community,” Kelly says.

For Kelly, being involved is just second nature. She enjoys the opportunity to get to know others from the parish. She’s made a lot of friends along the way through various ministries.

“When you volunteer, you get to meet people of all ages,” she says. “You get a fresh perspective. I am still meeting people after all these years. St. Joe’s is home.”

Jason keeps busy working in auto body paint and collision repair. The couple also keeps busy taking their children to various activities and events. Brooklyn plays soccer. In their free time, they enjoy having bonfires and getting together with friends.

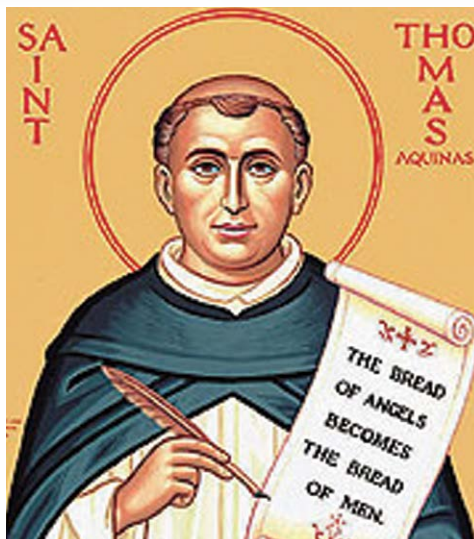


The Great Catholic Educator: **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

Before Thomas Aquinas was even born, a holy hermit told his mother he was to be more learned and holy than any other person of his time. As a young boy, he was devoted to prayer and meditation, and his intellectual gifts were quickly recognized. When he was about 11 years old, he was sent to the University of Naples, and about five years later, he became a Dominican friar.

Thomas' parents were Italian nobility and were not enthusiastic about Thomas' choice of vocation. They went so far as to have his brothers capture him while he was en route to Rome, and they held him prisoner for two years in an effort to destroy his vocation and his virtue. After the family made one particularly heinous attempt at breaking Thomas' faith and spirit, he begged God to give him integrity of mind and body, and he was miraculously given the grace of purity for the rest of his life. This gift almost certainly was essential to the remarkable clarity of his intellect.

After he regained his freedom, Thomas received the best education that was available during a time in human history that arguably represents the best the world has ever offered to scholars and philosophers. His greatest works arise from his total focus on knowing and understanding God, and revealing as clearly as possible the Truth of God to others. He showed that faith and reason are not in conflict, but exist in harmony.



Thomas' *Summa Theologica* uses philosophical principles presented in scientific form to systematically explain Christian theology. It was his last work and was left unfinished. Thomas stopped writing after he experienced an unusually long vision on Dec. 6, 1273. When he was urged to finish his *Summa*, he stated that he could no longer write, for the secrets he had been shown during his vision made all he had written "seem as straw." He died three months later.

Thomas composed more than 60 works. His powers of synthesis were truly extraordinary. He was able to sift through all that he read, distill the truth, and summarize his conclusions simply, clearly and briefly. His writing is of such genius that it transcends style and art in the beauty of its truth. His works are as relevant today as they were to the 13th century. His principles offer a remedy to such evils as socialism, communism, nihilism, as well as pantheism and spiritism.

Thomas was canonized in 1323, and was declared a Doctor of the Universal Church in 1567. In 1879, Leo XIII declared Thomas Aquinas "the prince and master of all scholastic doctors," and in 1880, Thomas was designated as patron of all Catholic universities, colleges and schools throughout the world. We celebrate St. Thomas Aquinas' feast day on Jan. 28.

Have You Remembered the Poor?

By NATHAN FRANKART

Pease of Christ to you! I had a big announcement in last month's edition and couldn't spare much in the way of season's greetings. So let me take the opportunity now to say blessings at the closing of the Christmas season. I pray that it was rejuvenating, joyful, and filled with the graces that come at the end of one year and the beginning of the next.

I hope this will not be too dramatic of a turn either, but this has been at the forefront of my prayer. One of the courses I am required to take as a part of my intellectual formation is known as Christology. It is a course that tracks the development of our understanding of the person that was Jesus the Nazarene that we came to understand as Christ, fully God and fully man. But, as the class has come to a close, our professor assigned us a modern Jesuit theologian, Fr. Jon Sobrino. For Fr. Sobrino, one of the most pressing questions regarding Jesus in His ministry and how we should come to understand Christ was that Jesus stood radically with the poor and marginalized. He

calls on the entire Church to take a similar posture as Christ, standing with the poor.

That poverty is not simply in material possession, but in mental well-being, physical health, and spiritual life. These realms of poverty reduce each person to a station beneath their dignity, subject to the victimization that poverty inflicts upon those with little wealth, poor health, or despair.

Christ came to be in our midst to unite Himself with us through experience, presence, and service. God has bounded Himself to our very lives. And yet, Jesus strove to stand with the poor in the saving process when God became man.

So, did you remember the poor this Advent and Christmas season? Amid gift-giving and celebration, did you remember to pray for those who had none of these things? Did you volunteer your time and treasure to be in solidarity with them? Don't worry if you didn't — as it says in the Gospel, "The poor will always be with us." They are waiting for Jesus, and because Christ has sent us in His name, they are waiting for us.



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& ST. JOSEPH PARISH & NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

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200 Saint Joseph Drive, Amherst, OH 44001

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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

NO School/Parish Offices Closed

Monday, Jan. 2

R.C.I.A. Meetings

Mondays Jan. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 — 7 p.m.,
Nativity Parish Hall

Men's Group

Tuesday, Jan. 3 and 17 — 7 p.m.,
St Joseph Social Hall

PSR Classes

Wednesdays, Jan. 4, 11, 18, 25 — 5:30 p.m.,
School

First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, Jan. 7 — 9 a.m.,
St. Joseph Church

Youth Group Meetings

Sundays of Jan. 8, 15, 22, 29 — 6 p.m.,
St. Joseph Social Hall

Vincentian Meeting

Thursday, Jan. 12 and 26 — 9 a.m.,
Conference Room

NO School/MLK Jr. Day

Monday, Jan. 16

Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, Jan. 24 — 7 p.m.,
School MPR

Catholic Schools Week

Jan. 29 — Feb. 3

Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesdays and Thursdays in January — 9:30 a.m.,
Nativity Parish Hall