



## Ackerman Family Christmas Letter 2016

### *Looking back and moving forward*

As we write this family letter we do so knowing that God has so greatly blessed us over the years. This has been a year of the deaths of nine very close friends and relatives, and it has caused us to look back to the many happy memories we have had with them. Each one represents a different phase in our lives from cousins to lifelong friends, to dear friends along the way, mentors, and faithful priests and bishops. Indeed, each one of them has left an indelible mark upon our lives, but the mere thought of their faithfulness, and the joy they brought us, allows us to look forward to the hope that is promised each Christmas Season, as Christ is born anew in our hearts. Years ago, a friend of ours, a Franciscan Friar, was dying, and in his memoirs, he wrote “Dying is like going home for Christmas.”



For BISHOP KEITH - this was the big “70” year, and the family went to work quickly to make it possible to Celebrate Mass at St. Mark’s in Arlington Texas followed by a complete baseball themed party culminating in a series of baseball games on “Bishop Keith Ackerman Field” adjoining St. Mark’s. A huge firetruck arrived from “Hook and Ladder Pizza Co.” with gourmet, baked on the spot, Pizza. The family put together numerous “snow balls” from a local snow cone company, and for several innings all interested “batters” were able to swing and hit snow balls thrown by a 70-year-old pitcher! And his gift from the family - a 1965 Chevrolet Corvair Corsa Convertible - being restored by the family to look just like the one driven in Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Wisconsin days!! Bp. Keith’s life continues to be grounded in church life, nationally, internationally and locally, which includes several days per week at St. Timothy’s Church in Fort Worth where he has been Vicar for 5 years (in retirement.) This year also included several trips to the Diocese of Quincy, including the funeral of his dear friend, mentor, and predecessor, Bishop Donald J. Parsons. During another trip to the Diocese there occurred the tragic death of the brother of Bp. Keith’s successor, resulting in Bp. Keith exercising his role as Bishop Vicar of the Diocese, by presiding over the Annual Synod. You do not need to be bored by all the activities that come with his involvement, but being a bishop is not what he does - it’s what he is. AND he is a proud husband, father, and grandfather - looking forward to August 19, 2017 when he and his precious Jo celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary.

JO - has felt the pain this year of the deaths of friends and family, but she also looks forward. Looking back this year, she remembers the spectacular vacation (the first in many years) made possible by a special couple who were parishioners of ours at St. Mark's and now are at St. Timothy's. The place - Hawaii! This vacation also meant reconnecting with a priest friend on the Big Island and Bp. Keith consecrating an Altar, Chapel, and grounds of the Friary. Jo continues to share in the exciting ministry at St. Timothy's, and awakens with excitement every Sunday morning and Feast Day for the joy of being at Mass with Jesus and His friends. She loves every opportunity to have the children and grandchildren stay with her, and loves each concert, dance, gymnastic event and party that celebrates the lives of these precious gifts of God that He has entrusted to us. This has also been another year of publishing books, and the most recent books that she published are selling very well. Check out [www.theparishpress.com](http://www.theparishpress.com) to see what she continues to do!

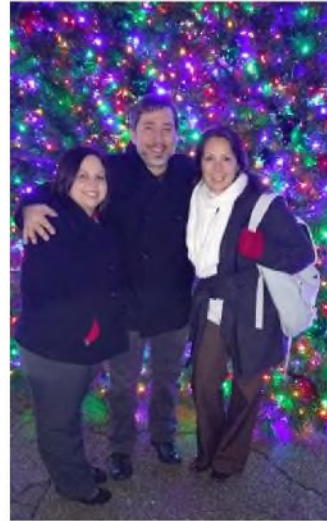
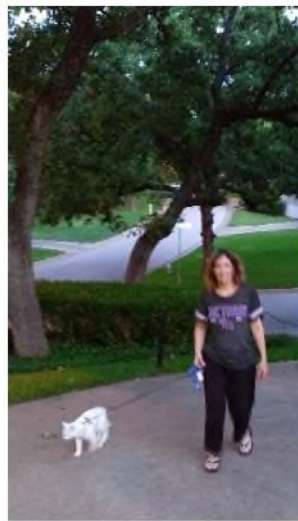


KEITH - has had a remarkable year - a year of great change for him in his professional career. After working for 13 years for Central Dallas Ministries which became CitySquare, he has moved. At CitySquare he served in a variety of positions including Vice President and COO and completing his time there as Executive Director of the Cottages at Hickory Crossing, which are 50 cottages built for the homeless in Dallas. In March, he accepted the call to be the Chief Operations Officer of the Union Gospel Mission of Tarrant County in Fort Worth. UGM is a 129-year-old organization that focuses on shelter and transitional housing for homeless men, women, and their children. The experience for

Keith has been amazing in that he has truly been given the opportunity to share his gifts of creativity and Team building with an organization that is ready to take things to the next level of client engagement. Keith was able to lead a tour through the UGM campus for two Archbishops from Africa. A book regarding some elements of UGM with one of its former residents as a center of the book, has been made into a movie that will be released in February. It is entitled *"Same Kind of Different as Me."* Renee Zellweger, Greg Kinnear, Jon Voight, Djimon Hounsou, Olivia Holt, and Ty Parker will star in this amazing movie of transformation. Spending time with his nieces and nephew is a joy for him as well as for them. The nieces and nephew even plan his birthday party every year.

DONNA - continues to raise her profile as a sought-after Project Manager in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. She has contracted with Home Depot, Fidelity, and American Airlines doing a range of project development and implementation oversight. She remains active with her animal rescue and forever home placements with her network of friends. She is very knowledgeable in the care and training of animals. She can even walk her cat! Always up for a little fun she and Keith wore matching Chuck T's to a party. At his 45<sup>th</sup> Rock and Roll family birthday party, Keith and Donna liked to yuck it up with things like the Heavy Metal finger music thing. She is an amazing cook, and each Holiday is punctuated with phenomenal foods - both ethnic and healthy - that are tantalizing. She even prepares vegetables in a way that engages her father-in-law and brothers-in-law! She is remarkable!





ETHAN - "The Bard performs a real knee slapper." This has been a great year for Ethan as an Actor. Many of you may recall that he has the goal of performing in all of Shakespeare's Plays. This year he was able to check off a few more, and as we write this he is performing in Pericles (staged reading.) That means he will be down to 9 left out of the 37, and that number could be down to 7 by May. This Summer he was able to perform as Hastings in a full production of "Richard the Third." The final battle sequence was interesting in that they used a combination of slow motion and full speed to achieve a dramatic effect. It's called "ramping" and Zach Snyder made the technique famous in the movie, "300". It worked surprisingly well on stage! The staged readings he did this year in addition to Pericles, were "Twelfth Night" (January), "King John" (February), "Hamlet" (March,) and "Richard Second" (April). Ethan had the opportunity, on Labor Day, to make his first trip to the ER, when he crashed his bicycle and tore three of his right knee ligaments along with the meniscus. This resulted in his first surgery – ever; and kept him off his right foot for six long weeks. Rehab/PT is going very well, and while the knee is strong, the range of motion is taking a while to reclaim. Ethan says, "The family was very helpful and supportive of me, especially PaPa who attended just about every PT session with me until I could drive again. I've always been thankful for my family, but I think I got to discover a new level of gratitude for Renée, NaNa, PaPa and the Cumbies. It's awful to need it, but it's wonderful to be taken care of when you do need it!"

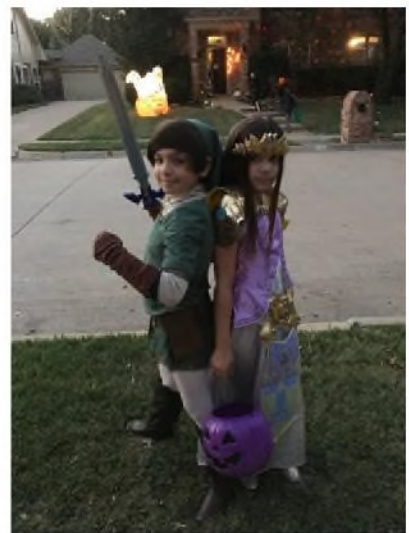
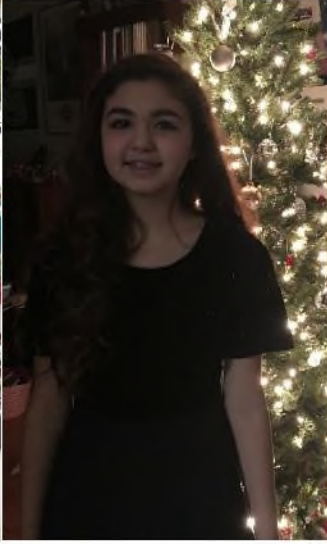
RENEE - "Lights, camera, action." Last year - "West Side Story" and this year "Damn Yankees." It may sound like a remarkable shift, but Renée analyzes her students' talents and gifts and voila! This year's production promises to be a Home Run! Haltom High School's "West Side Story" was nominated for numerous Betty Buckley Awards, this year, including "Best Musical." Renée loved the Christmas/ New Year's Cruise with Jane, Gary, Steve, Elizabeth and Mason Cumbie. Renée and Ellie did the food tour, and Renée and Ethan and Dominic were able to enjoy swimming with dolphins. Another fun break was a "Reading Retreat" with Ellie in Granbury near Camp Crucis. Renée also loved being with Dominic and Benny Drummond at Jellystone Park, where she reports "And they never ditched me! I was even included in Pokémon Go! Adventures." A Student trip to New York this summer is something

she does for her students to give them a good introduction to Theater in NYC. Renée loves collaborations with Keith and Lynne and planning Dad's 70th was one of them. BUT she really loved the Pennsylvania trip with them, where the best part was Sunday morning Mass at St. Mary's and being with cousins (of several generations) and aunts and uncles - from the Swedish and Italian sides of her family! Renée loves memories - but she is excited about making new ones too. She has now been teaching for 20 years, and still wakes up every Monday morning excited to start the week and create art with great students and colleagues. Renée especially wishes to thank family and friends for all they did during Ethan's injury and recovery, especially Steve Cumbie and Sarah Drummond for constantly checking in and helping. "Our lives are blessed daily by our family, and I have to thank Mom, Dad, Jane, and Gary for providing so much love and support to our little Norris family. I can't imagine 2016 without their availability and attention. I'll spend all of 2017 appreciating it."

ELLIE (12) - Little Miss Ellie (now as tall as her mother) is currently a member of the first ever Watauga Middle School show choir. She is in select theatre, advanced choir and rehearsing for Shrek the Musical set to perform in January. She will be playing teen Fiona. She skillfully balances this with five pre-AP classes and sneaks in as much sleep as possible. Ellie's best friend Jillian (the ever so cute red head), who is a very talented artist, was the illustrator for the newest Parish Press book, "*Bedtime Bible Stories for children*". The book is so good even adults want to read it! Halloween each year Ellie's devises something special for the family as "Numero Uno" - the best big cousin and big sister anyone could have. This year she and her family (and friends) were the Mystery Gang (Skooobie Doo) and they turned Ethan's Wheelchair into the Mystery Machine. Ellie has become fascinated with the Pentatonix and classical singing, and has a big interest in being an elementary school teacher or a choral director. Camp Crucis and church related events continue to be a highlight. Ellie now has braces. A special "thank you" to Jane Cumbie for taking Ellie to a well-known family friend, for whom she once worked — who also provided braces for.....a famous singer.....from .....Arlington Texas .....a member of..... Pentatonix!

DOMINIC (9) - has become very committed to gymnastics and has an interest in being an Olympic athlete. He and his Scout friends continue to work very hard at earning their badges, and their friendships have become really important to them. They started out together at six years old, and it has been so special watching them grow up together. This summer PaPa lead them through "God and Duty" and it was an extra special experience for Dominic to help host the meetings. Dominic is in the school choir and the GATE (gifted and talented) Program. This Halloween he was "Link" from The Legends of Zelda" and was honored by Natalia who dressed as Zelda. He and Talia are good friends as well as cousins, Dom even took Talia to his Scouts Rocket Launch! Dominic crossed over to Webelos this year where PaPa, GranGary, Godfather Stephen and Mason were able to attend. Dominic loves showing love: he especially likes holding doors for NaNa and cheering her up with jokes and hugs. He also loves "PaPa time" when he and PaPa talk about thought provoking subjects of a theological and philosophical nature - but he also likes playing baseball, taking rides together, grabbing a taco and having PaPa lend an ear. He enjoys fishing and learning new things with Gran Gary, and he REALLY enjoys interactions with Uncle Keith - the fun guy!







LYNNE - is ready for the big "40!" We cannot even imagine that our "little bundle of joy" is turning 40 on December 31! Actually, as we write this letter with the "Shattuck family" section it reads like a family engaged in full time Church life! It appears that they have secular jobs in order to finance their Church life! Lynne was promoted to Assistant Principal for pre-K Partnerships in July in the Dallas School District — which means she no longer has one classroom anymore — rather she has numerous classrooms in numerous schools, and travels every day to supervise them! At the Church of the Holy Communion in Dallas, she is a member of the Daughters of the Holy Cross, she is the Sunday School Superintendent, on the Flower Guild, the Membership Development Committee, the Playground Committee, and the Women's Retreat Committee. In her spare time, she is a Girl Scout Troop Leader, and the Girl Scout Troop Cookie Manager. She tells us that the highlight of the year was the Charleroi and Pittsburgh trip that she and Keith and Renee took on Thanksgiving weekend.

ROB - was promoted to a new position and location with Fidelity in July. **And** here comes the church life: Church Choir, Membership Development, President of the St. James Brotherhood, the Vestry, and the Chair of the Communications Committee. In addition, he continues to help at Camp Crucis where



he enjoys helping his brother David, the Chef, in the kitchen. He loves managing all the Girl Scout cookies dropped off at their home!

NATALIA (9) - has really developed into quite a Gymnast! She spends three evenings a week at the Gym and has completed a successful first Season on the Team, moving to Level 2 in May. Her birthday gift this year was Mermaid Swim Lessons, and she loved every minute in her mermaid swim suit! She reached her goal this year of selling 1,500 Girl Scout Cookies, and as a result won a wonderful trip to Great Wolf Lodge. Her highlight this year was winning a trip to Savannah Georgia (and taking her Mommy) - once again - for being a champion Girl Scout Cookie salesperson! Talia is always eager to model clothes, from Dillard's, anytime she is asked by her Uncle Ethan for his Studio. Natalia enjoys being on the safety patrol at school and serves as a school Shelf Elf (assisting in the Library on Fridays.) She sings in the Church Choir, and this year she will be the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Nativity Pageant. Of course, she also loves Camp Crucis (Diocese of Fort Worth Camp) and spent two weeks there as a camper.

BETTY (4) - has earned the title "entertainer of the year" in the family. She loves her gymnastics class and the Parents Night Out events at ASI. She especially enjoys telling stories - most especially "scary" stories - which always wind up being hilarious. She is now enrolled in pre-K where she is developing more scary stories. However, she does go to a Christian Pre-School where her stories always end up with a wonderful Godly ending. For the Nativity Pageant, she is excited to be a Sheep. She told us that she has been waiting her whole life to play a sheep. She added, "Now I can be Mary's little Lamb." Big sister took her to Great Wolf Lodge. Well you know..."everywhere that Mary went the lamb was sure to go."








*May the Lord Bless you with a wonderful Christmas Season  
And  
Keep you safe and well in the New Year*

*Love from the  
Ackerman/Norris/Shattuck Families*





*Bishop Ackerman*  
TURNS 70

join our celebration on  
Saturday AUGUST 6th

*Ackerman Field*

St. Mark's Church  
2024 S. Collins St. Arlington, TX 76010

***THE END 2016***