



ST. JOSEPH PARISH & NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

Inside

- 2 Celebrating the Sacrament of Confirmation
- 3 Celebrating Christ's Resurrection
- 4 Catholic Schools Week at St. Joseph School Celebrating the Important Work of Growing Students and Disciples
- 6 A Whole New Kind of Holy Week
By NATHAN FRANKART
- 7 Meet Parishioners Melanie and Randy Birchfield: *Keeping the Faith Vibrant*

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APRIL 2021

BULK MAILING MINISTRY *Helps "Get the Word Out" While Sharing in Fellowship and Discipleship*

The Bulk Mailing Ministry serving both St. Joseph and Nativity is a group of 60 to 90 members who make sure this very newsletter finds its way to your mailbox! And while pandemic restrictions have cut back on their duties, for the time being, this dedicated group of workers is looking forward to gathering again.

Tillie Sroka manages the call list when ministry members are needed. One of the tasks several members have been doing is stuffing inserts in the weekly bulletins.

"The ladies miss it," Tillie says of the monthly mailing work that also includes the annual stewardship renewal mailing.

When the ministry members gather to prepare the mailings, they are more than church volunteers — they have become friends who visit and chat as they work. Hailing from both St. Joseph and Nativity, they enjoy the fellowship as they serve in discipleship that benefits us all.



"I grew up in Amherst," Tillie says. "I went to St. Joseph School, and then I left and was gone for 30 years, living in Columbus. When I retired, I came home. In this ministry, I made new friends and was able to reconnect with school friends and old neighbors."

Tillie had previously been involved in a parish ministry that served local nursing homes. When she was asked to help the Bulk Mailing Ministry, she started as a newsletter folder worker. Pam Belskis, the Bulk Mailing Ministry coordinator, then asked Tillie to take over the phone duties.

Serving in the Bulk Mailing Ministry has led to growth in Tillie's faith as she takes part in doing something for the church.

continued on back cover

Celebrating the

Sacrament of Confirmation

We **congratulate** all our students who received the Sacrament of Confirmation on February 28th with Bishop Martin Amos.



A Letter from Our Pastor

Celebrating Christ's Resurrection

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



How did you feel at the end of the Palm Sunday Mass? You may not have noticed, but there was an abrupt shift of tone in that liturgy. It began with great joy, as we celebrated Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to the acclamation of the crowds. But then the mood shifted to sorrow, even despair, when the Passion Gospel was read, for we heard the shouts of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" from those same crowds a few days later.

Palm Sunday, of course, was the beginning of Holy Week, the most important week in the Christian year. The confusion of conflicting moods is spread through the week, especially during the Easter Triduum — from sundown Holy Thursday to sundown Easter Sunday.

Holy Thursday offers us the glorious Mass of the Lord's Supper celebrating the institution of the Eucharist and the Priesthood before we pass to the sadness of the betrayal and arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The next day brings us the Good Friday Liturgy of the Passion with our recognition of what our sins did to the Incarnate Son of God. Then, after a day of waiting as we mourn Jesus' burial and repose in the tomb, we celebrate His victory over sin, Satan, and death at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night and the Masses on Easter Sunday. If we have participated in all the main services of the Triduum, we arrive at Sunday evening exhausted but joyful.

This year, Palm Sunday fell on the final Sunday of March, and we observe Holy Week and Easter Sunday early in April. That means we will spend most of April in the Easter Season, a period filled with joy and thanksgiving. Our gladness comes not only because Christ rose from the dead, but also because we benefit from it. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (§654) puts it, "The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by His death, Christ liberates us from sin; by His Resurrection, He opens for us the way to a new life."

In other words, Christ's Resurrection is the source of our own future resurrection. St. Paul wrote about it to the Romans in the following words (Rom 6:5): "For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the resurrection."

Eternal life in union with Christ — a hope for a new life beginning now and extending on into heaven — is the result of Jesus' Resurrection. What greater grounds for thanksgiving can there be than this Easter hope? We should sing with joy about this promise from God!

What's more, Paul also wrote (Col 3:1-2): "If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth."

Jesus' Resurrection and His promise of a new life for us mean that we need to live in conformity with our status as adopted children of God.

And how do we show our joy and our gratitude to God for this amazing gift He has given us? We join in worship and praise God by word and song. We share the Good News of Jesus' victory over death with our family, friends, and neighbors. And we offer back to the Lord a portion of the time, talent, and treasure He has entrusted to us. Yes, the Easter message that we share in the benefits of Christ's Resurrection is the ultimate foundation for all Christian stewardship.

Gratefully in Christ,

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

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,
Pastor

Catholic Schools Week AT ST. JOSEPH SCHOOL

Celebrating the *Important Work of Growing Students and Disciples*

Each year, the last week in January is always an exciting time for Catholic schools across the country as the annual Catholic Schools Week celebrations get underway. Our St. Joseph School students, faculty, and staff had the chance to take part in this yearly celebration during the week of Jan. 31.

Of course, this year's Catholic Schools Week celebration looked a bit different with the COVID-19 precautions in place. For instance, the annual Open House for prospective families and the student-led Mass had to be canceled. But even with these changes, Principal Amy Makruski had a great week celebrating Catholic education, along with the rest of St. Joseph School.

Mrs. Makruski believes students, faculty, and staff have much to celebrate with Catholic education.

"We each believe strongly in the foundation that is built by an education that integrates faith into daily lessons, and grows students academically and morally so they can grow to be examples of our faith in this life and beyond," she says. "We are growing students and disciples, and that is important work."

The usual school assembly service project was replaced with other pandemic-safe events and activities. Students in preschool to eighth grade made care packages



Students made care packages for frontline workers.

and signs for local hospital workers as a token of appreciation for their important work during the pandemic. On Tuesday, students were celebrated with a special photo session, and a movie and treat in the afternoon.

"This year has not permitted much of a break from routine, due to COVID-19 restrictions and safeguards, so to be able to step away from typical lessons and

continued on page 5



"We each believe strongly in the foundation that is built by an education that integrates faith into daily lessons, and grows students academically and morally so they can grow to be examples of our faith in this life and beyond. We are growing students and disciples, and that is important work." — *MRS. AMY MAKRUSKI, PRINCIPAL*

Catholic Schools Week *continued from page 4*

complete a service project, watch a movie, have a treat, or complete a special activity really had an impact,” Mrs. Makruski says. “Like with most areas of life right now, we learned to appreciate those little changes so very much.”

On Thursday, everyone played a game to learn school history.

“This was a great way to tie in the past with our present school,” Mrs. Makruski says. “It was nice for the staff to be able to reflect on the effort and advocacy that came before us that has allowed our amazing school to continue to operate and serve the community.”

On Friday, faculty and staff were honored with breakfast, donated by a school family, as well as a delicious Italian-theme lunch and raffle.

“This year has been very unique, and the faculty and staff have taken each change with courage and persistence,” Mrs. Makruski says.

Mrs. Makruski enjoyed the week and all the celebrations. Especially during a time of year that can be relentlessly cold and seemingly never-ending, the week brightened things up. The faculty and staff were so encouraged by all the kind notes, pictures, and treats during the week.

“We are happy to be here each day for our students and families, but those kind words help to inspire us to keep focused and know that what we are doing makes a difference,” Mrs. Makruski says.

Although having a designated week to celebrate is important, Mrs. Makruski believes each week of the school year is cause for celebration. She loves everyone who is a part of the school and the community members who support it.

“What we do here is special and the changes that take place each week, month, and year in this building, make a difference,” she says. “This school fills my heart with joy, and I love it.”

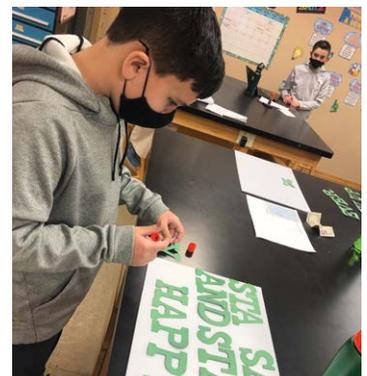
Private tours of St. Joseph School are being offered for interested families of students in preschool to eighth grade. Please call the school office at 440-988-4244 to set up an appointment. Also, check out our newly updated school website at www.sjsamherst.org to see all the happenings at St. Joseph School.



Students played a game to learn St. Joseph School history.



Students wrote "thank you" notes and drew pictures for frontline workers.



Students made signs for frontline workers.

A *Whole New Kind* of Holy Week

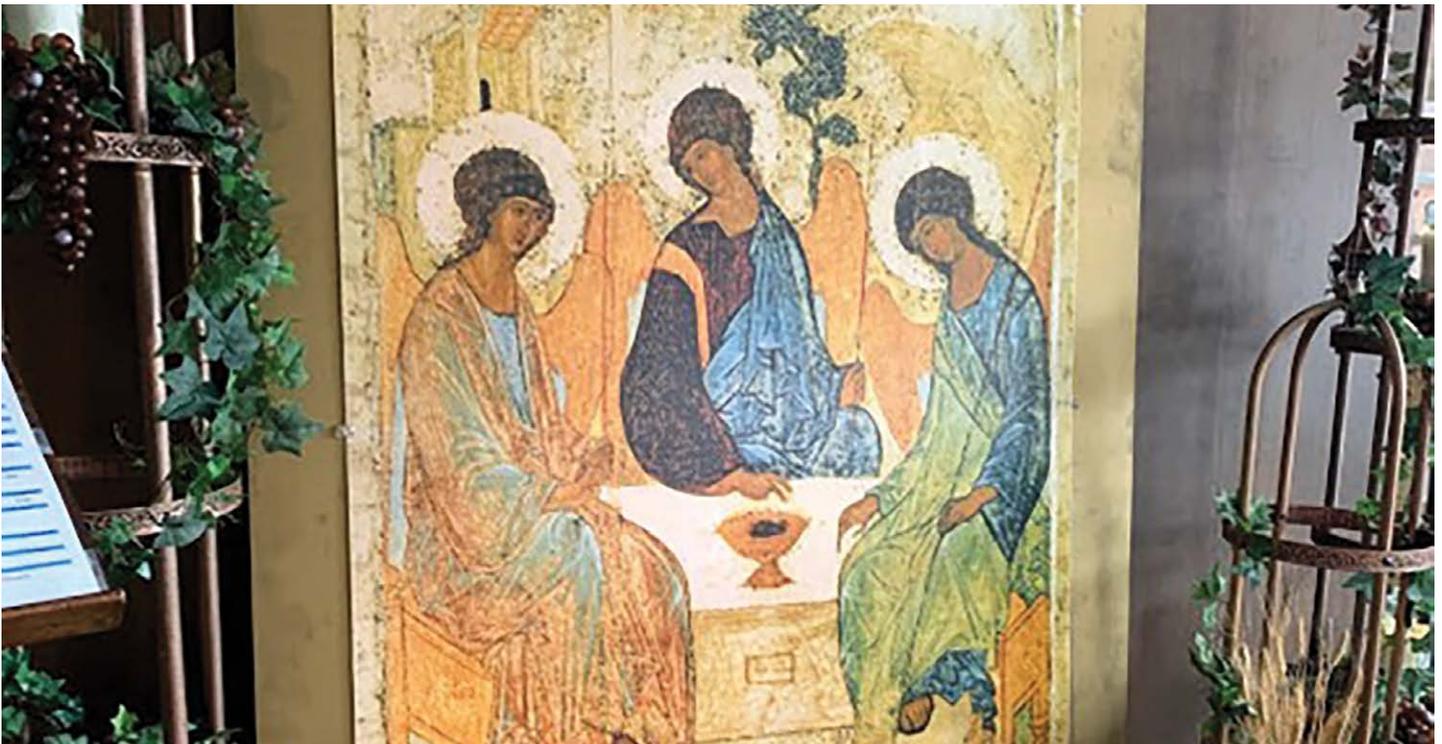
BY NATHAN FRANKART

Pease of Christ to you! At the time of writing this, I have been informed by my faculty that for this year, given all the COVID restrictions and protocols, we will be celebrating Holy Week at the seminary as opposed to in our home parishes. Yes, this is not ideal news and my desire is to be at the liturgies for St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary to celebrate this holy time of year. However, I am one who strives to make the best of an unfortunate situation, and there is much to be said regarding the celebration of the Easter season this way. By the time you are reading this,

we will be well into the Easter season, and Holy Week will have come and gone. But, reflecting on past years, I want to share a few words about one of my favorite liturgies of the year, Holy Thursday.

There is something so incredibly beautiful about the washing of the feet which is reenacted in this Mass. To see the priest, the man who acts on behalf of the people leading us in prayer and consecrating the sacrifice of the Mass in the Eucharist, bend down and be among the people as a servant nearly brings me to tears. To me, this is the image of what

the Church at heart truly is, beyond everything else. A person bending down to serve in complete humility, that's what I desire to see in the lives of all Catholics and all Christians as well. If Jesus Christ Himself revoked social status and broke societal norms, all to teach His disciples what it truly means to love and to serve, we are called to imitate this exact action, not just on Holy Thursday, but every day. To me, it captures the whole mission of preaching the Gospel. Go out, wash the feet of those in need of God's love, and propagate the message of Jesus Christ.



MEET PARISHIONERS

MELANIE AND RANDY **Birchfield:**

Keeping the Faith Vibrant

Melanie Birchfield had always wanted to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. So, last year, she took that step and experienced a revitalization of her faith.

“My faith is something that is very deep within me, but you also really have to work to keep your faith and your parish vibrant,” Melanie says. “Since becoming a minister, even as I wait in the pew, I am much more in tune with the Holy Mass.”

Melanie and her husband, Randy, joined Nativity in 1985 when they moved to the area.

“I joined Nativity the first time I walked in there and thought how it was such a lovely little church,” Melanie says. “It felt very welcoming and kind of intimate.”

Over the years, Melanie became more involved with faith formation as first her son and then her grandchildren grew older. Now, she plans her grandchildren’s summer visits around Vacation Bible School at St. Joseph.

“I started volunteering with PSR when my son was in second grade preparing for First Communion, and then enjoyed doing the Confirmation retreat with the students when he was in eighth grade,” says Melanie.

In 2013, when Melanie retired, there was a notice in the bulletin at St. Joseph for a PSR teacher, and she volunteered and actually helped her students understand Church transitions when Pope Benedict XVI voluntarily stepped down from the papacy.

“I remember talking to the children about how unusual this was and what a historic moment it was for the Church,” Melanie says. “I’m glad I was there at that time to talk with them and have those conversations.”



Melanie and Randy Birchfield with their grandchildren — (from left) Kelly (6), Rachel (10) and Carly (8)

Melanie and Randy have been involved in different ways at both Nativity and St. Joseph’s. Melanie particularly enjoyed being part of the Resurrection Choir, which brings parishioners from both parishes together. She hopes the choir will be reinstated after the pandemic.

At the same time, during the pandemic, Melanie has developed a special relationship with her Bible, particularly because missalettes weren’t readily available in the pews.

“The pandemic forced me to look up the readings in my Bible, and I started reading them before Mass,” says Melanie. “This re-ingrained what the message

was, and I’d try to remember a sentence or two to think about during the week. From last week I’ve been thinking, ‘You are no longer sons of men but are sons of God.’”

For Melanie, our local parishes form a community of parishes, and she regularly attends Mass at either Nativity or St. Joseph, as well as at Sacred Heart and sometimes St. Patrick’s.

“I look at my weekend and plan ahead where to attend Mass,” Melanie says. “One time I didn’t remember that St. Joe’s Mass actually started a half hour before I thought it did, and I Googled Mass times quickly and went to St. Peter’s. I like all of our parishes!”

Melanie is so grateful for different opportunities to be involved in our faith communities and for Fr. Tim’s kindness and ongoing leadership.

“I remember going to Sunday morning Mass with my grandparents, and so being involved is a continuation of something I always had in my life,” Melanie says. “It’s very fulfilling, and I hope I can keep serving.”

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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.

Bulk Mailing Ministry *continued from front cover*

“It’s something to help others,” she says. “And you’re making friends with the ladies — and through them, you might do something else. Some have continued in this ministry and joined other ministries. For a lot of us, we make new friends and learn other things.”

The ministry is a popular one in the parish and is made up primarily of retirees. The work is not difficult, and there are tasks for everyone’s abilities.

“We have a couple of members who are in their 90s,” Tillie says. “They enjoy getting out — we all do — and they look forward to it.”

A bonus for the members is that the setting is unlike that of an office.

“You’re in a bigger group, and we’re working in the social hall,” Tillie says. “We sit and chit chat, and in an office, you can’t sit and chat with your neighbor!”

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**Anyone interested in joining the Bulk Mailing Ministry
may call Pam Belskis at 440-985-1054, or Tillie Sroka at 440-988-3138.**