



ST. JOSEPH PARISH

NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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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

FEBRUARY 2022



The Sacristans Ministry

Ensuring that *All* May Enter into a *Deep Faith Experience* at Mass

It might come as a surprise to learn how much happens behind the scenes to ensure that everything is prepared for Mass. Someone must keep things clean and orderly so that Fr. Tim can easily find what he needs. Candles must be ordered and Holy Water always needs to be replenished. Quietly attending to all of these details are the sacristans. At Nativity Church, we have three Sacristans — Cindy Miller, and Kathy and John Rokasy.

“I consider being a sacristan an honor,” Cindy says. “It is an honor to serve God, the celebrant, and my church community by keeping God’s temple here on earth clean and efficiently running.”

Cindy and Kathy alternate the months that they serve as sacristans. Their duties include keeping the altar and surrounding area clean, making sure that the priest has the vestments he needs and that they are the correct colors for the liturgical season, keeping the incense and Holy Water available, and ensuring that the candles, linens, and baptismal gowns are ready to go. If there is a visiting priest, the sacristan makes sure he has everything he needs.



Cindy Miller

“Assisting the priest with what he may need to celebrate the Mass or administer the sacraments makes his commitment to God, and us, a lot smoother,” Cindy says. “Having everything run smoothly, beautifully and with reverence makes your faithful experience lovely and deep.”

Cindy has found that working closely with everything required for the liturgy, caring for the environment, and assisting

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How Can We *Model the Faith* for Our Children?

The Church has made it clear that parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual and cognitive development of their children in matters of the faith. As the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, states, “Husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children” (Chapter 4, Section 35). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* further emphasizes this vocation, by pointing out that the moral education and spiritual formation of children is not only the right, but the responsibility, of their parents: “The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable... Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children” (CCC 2221, 2223).

But how can we as parents create an environment in the home conducive to spiritual and moral development? As busy adults, how are we to disseminate the knowledge and understanding of the tenets of the faith to our children in the way that a trained and experienced catechist can? Furthermore, how do we strike a balance between teaching our children in the home and not interfering with the faith formation and sacramental preparation they are currently receiving through their parish school or religious education program?

The answer to all of these questions is stewardship.

Indeed, we must reinforce the lessons that our children learn in school and at religious education classes by talking to them about the faith, reading Sacred Scripture with them, and spending time in family prayer. And there are several authoritative resources online that can help parents in this task, including Catholic Parents OnLine — www.catholic-parents.org — which links parents to numerous websites and documents that can help them in talking to their children about the faith.

But the best way that we can teach our children is by serving as a living example to them of how to live as disciples of Christ. If we want our children to grow up as strong Catholics and to display a lifelong commitment to their faith,

then we ourselves must live a committed faith life. This includes an ongoing commitment to our own faith formation as adults and active participation in the sacraments. It also includes the giving back of our time, talent, and treasure in service of our community in thanksgiving for the gifts that God has given us.

Parenting can be a tough vocation, and children deal with many influences in their lives that exist in stark contrast to the values that their parents often hope to instill within them. Fortunately for parents, the stewardship way of life provides a simple and effective model for teaching our children in matters of the faith. By living as stewards of God’s gifts and reaping the spiritual rewards that accompany this lifestyle, we are tangibly showing our children that sharing of our gifts and talents leads to a life of happiness and spiritual fulfillment. In doing this, we give them a good opportunity to follow in our footsteps and make their faith a top priority for the rest of their lives.



A Letter from Our Pastor

The Word of God: How Do We Hear It? And How Do We Respond to It?



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

A few short weeks ago, we completed our Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time — but before long, we will begin Lent. This is one of those rare years when Ash Wednesday is in March — so, Lent does not, of course, begin in February this year.

The Gospel of John begins with the statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word in the Church. As most of you are aware, the first part of our Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. What does that mean to us?

Basically, there are four parts of our celebration of Mass: Introductory Rites; Liturgy of the Word; Liturgy of the Eucharist; and Concluding Rites. My focus in this reflection is that second part — the Liturgy of the Word. The main parts of that are a First Reading, a

Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, the Gospel, and a Homily.

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider that these readings are about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. Thus, our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then, do we respond in our lives? All of those should be facets of how we approach the Word of God.

For us, the Word of God is the living Word. God is speaking to us as a community, and He asks us to be faithful to His Word. If we pay attention and truly listen, God can nourish our spirit, and Christ can be more real and present to us. The Homily, the Responsorial Psalm, the Profession of

Faith, and the Intercessions develop the Word further and complete it. The Profession of Faith is our acceptance of God’s Word.

However, the question for us is, how do we respond to the Word? Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the conversion necessary to live lives of stewardship and service? It is not easy, I know. Being able to listen, to hear, and then to act requires time, practice, commitment, and a desire to fulfill all of this. That is one of my prayers for us — that we can hear the Word, and that we can bring it to life in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Gratefully in Christ,

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

Fr. Timothy J. O’Connor,
Pastor



Meet Nativity Parishioner Tom Russo

Continuing a Family Legacy of Stewardship and Service

We would all love to leave a legacy for our families and friends when we pass away.

Of course, we want people to remember us fondly and think about the impact we had on our parish and community. Victoria Russo passed away on Sept. 26, 2020, at the age of 102. Her son, Tom, wants to do everything he can to carry his mother's legacy. Victoria and her late husband, James (who passed away in 2013), were charter members of Nativity.

"Mom went to church every morning until she was about 98 years old," Tom says.

Losing Victoria has been difficult for Tom. He spends a lot of time at church and in Mass. When he's at Nativity, he feels her presence all around him.

"I look for my mom every day," he says. "When I go to Mass, I find her."

When Tom isn't at Mass, he might be found assisting with the Landscape Ministry and mowing the lawn. He also serves as an usher and spends time in the Eucharistic Adoration Chapel. Previously, he served on the Parish Council. Tom is now retired, having worked as a Medical Sales Representative. All of this ties in with his goal of helping people.

Prior to Victoria's passing, Tom moved in to help. On Thursday evenings, she would go to Nativity to straighten the books for weekend Mass. At first, Tom sat outside — but

he soon noticed how happy it made her when he came in to join her. It became a weekly ritual.

"She just wanted everything at Nativity to be perfect for Mass," Tom says. "She loved having me help her with that. I loved how happy it made her when I helped."

Tom continues to give of his time and treasure to Nativity because it's a special place to him and his family. He supported the new lights and was involved in setting up the new sound system. His family also helped with the organ.

"Every move I make now, I first stop and think, 'What would my mother do?'" Tom says. "That's the best way I can honor her memory and carry on who she was. Everybody loved her and my father. I was very lucky to have them as parents."

In the future, Tom hopes to be even more involved at Nativity. He knows that being involved is necessary to the life of our parishes. It also brings him closer to people, and he finds so much joy.

"When you are involved in stewardship, it brings you closer to your faith community, and you become more aware of the needs of others," Tom says. "You also see what others are doing, and it motivates you to do more."

Along with straightening the books, Victoria was involved in the Altar and Rosary Society, ironed linens, helped at



Tom Russo has been a member at Nativity his whole life.

funerals, regularly attended Eucharistic Adoration, and cleaned at Nativity. Tom admits that he has some large shoes to fill, in terms of stewardship!

"I strive to be the son my parents want me to be," he says. "Fr. Tim helps guide me, too. I learn something new each time I listen to him."

In his free time, Tom loves gardening, landscaping, and walking. He'd like to travel more in the future.

Tom invites all parishioners to consider how they might give their time, talent, and treasure to support Nativity or St. Joseph. He encourages everyone to share with no fear.

"It is so rewarding to give," he says. "What you give comes back to you tenfold. It expands your world when you get involved."

VALENTINE'S DAY

The Feast of a *Christian Martyr*

Candy, flowers, romantic dinners, and excuses for wooing are the common traditions we associate with the once-pagan holiday known as Valentine's Day.

Dangling cupids, candy "message" hearts, and faux long-stemmed roses clutter every card store, waiting for that last-minute purchase.

The question is — how did this over-commercialized holiday really begin?

There are a few stories surrounding the history of Feb. 14 and St. Valentine himself, all dating back to the Roman Empire. The 14th day of February was a day set aside to honor the goddess Juno, queen of the Roman gods and goddesses. The following day, Feb. 15, began the feast of Lupercalia — a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus.

As part of the festival traditions, there was a name drawing among the young people. The names of young Roman women were written on slips of paper and placed into a jar. Each young man would draw a young woman's name from the jar, and the two would be partners for the duration of the festival. Sometimes the pairing lasted an entire year, and often, the couple would fall in love and later marry.

At the time, Emperor Claudius II was involved in many bloody and unpopular campaigns, and he was having a difficult time recruiting soldiers to join his military leagues. Claudius believed that soldiers were reluctant to join because they did not want to leave their loves or families.

With this in mind, Claudius decreed all marriages and engagements cancelled in Rome. During this time, St. Valentine was a priest in Rome, and he and St. Marius secretly married young couples. For this, St. Valentine was apprehended and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who sentenced him to be beaten and then executed by beheading. He suffered this martyrdom on Feb. 14, around the year 270 AD.

Before his death, it is said that St. Valentine left a note for the jailer's daughter, who had become his friend, and signed

it "From Your Valentine." Although the truth behind the St. Valentine's legend is murky, the stories certainly emphasize his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and, most importantly, romantic figure. It is no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

Over time, Feb. 14 became a time for lovers to exchange sweet messages, making St. Valentine the patron saint of lovers. The date was often commemorated with the sending of poems and simple gifts. During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that Feb. 14 was the beginning of the mating season for birds, which added to the idea that the middle of February — Valentine's Day — should be a day for romance.



THE BAPTISMAL PREPARATION MINISTRY:

Preparing Our Children for Heaven



Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church, its symbols, and why it is so significant.

“We become sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism,” Karen says. “It also frees us from the Original Sin we are born with. We talk about Godparents and how important their roles are. Both parents and Godparents need to be prepared for Baptism so they can teach the child/Godchild about the Catholic faith and help them to get to heaven. Another major goal of this ministry is to encourage families to become involved in the Church following the Baptism of their child, and continue growing in their faith.”

While Karen plans and leads the meetings, the Parish Office staff help by organizing the ministry’s paperwork and the meeting dates, as well as registering the parents and preparing the certificates.

“We start off each meeting by praying together, and then I share my faith and

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With the help of the Baptismal Preparation Ministry, parents can prepare their hearts and souls to bring their precious child into the arms of Christ and His Church, the “ark of salvation.”

“I enjoy getting to know the parents and it is extra special when I see them in Mass with their child who they have had baptized,” says Karen

Schneider, who coordinates the Baptismal Preparation Ministry classes. “When we meet, we discuss how community is so important in raising kids in the Catholic faith. We feel the Holy Spirit’s presence as we pray together, and the parents enjoy writing personal letters to their child as well.”

The ministry includes a meeting that covers the meaning of the

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— KAREN SCHNEIDER

BAPTISMAL PREPARATION MINISTRY

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prayer testimony with them and we talk about what it means to raise children in the Catholic faith,” Karen says. “Next, we watch a video on Baptism and listen to Fr. Mike Schmitz share his thoughts on why Jesus was baptized Himself.”

Overall, the Baptismal Preparation Ministry exemplifies stewardship in a uniquely powerful way, as it provides for the spiritual needs of God’s beloved children. By giving her time and talent to this ministry, volunteers like Karen feel that they are giving back to God, who has been so generous to them.

“I felt inspired to help out with this ministry because my husband and I have four children whom we have all had baptized at St. Joseph’s,” she says. “I am also motivated to keep doing it because it helps me grow in my faith.”



The Baptismal Preparation Ministry meets once a quarter at St. Joseph School. For more information on how to help with this ministry, or info on how to prepare to have your child baptized, please call the parish office at 440-988-2848.

The Sacristans Ministry *continued from front cover*

the priest has given her a deeper appreciation for the Mass. When Cindy was trained by the previous sacristan, she found that having a greater knowledge of the many details surrounding the liturgy added to her experience at Mass. Sacristans gather knowledge about the vestments and vessels, the liturgical seasons, and the requirements of the Church that most of us have never thought of.

More help is always welcome — with additional help, Cindy believes the sacristans could offer even more

service to the church. Parishioners of any age, ideally after Confirmation, who have a desire to give some of their time and talent to the parish are invited to consider becoming a sacristan.

“If you feel a calling to be part of this wonderful ministry, know that you will achieve a deeper understanding of the Mass as a whole and all our beautiful sacraments,” Cindy says. “You’ll have a sense of being even closer to the Lord and have pride in your talents.”

If you would like to learn more about becoming a sacristan, please contact Cindy Miller at 440-670-1300 (Nativity of the BVM) or Sue Cotton at 440-986-1725 (St. Joseph).



The Instituted Ministry of Acolyte

By NATHAN FRANKART, 1st Theology

Pease of Christ to you! I had mentioned previously that in my formation in theology, there would be things called the instituted ministries, which act as stepping stones of sorts progressing towards, God-willing, ordination to the priesthood. This month, I have been conferred the instituted ministry of acolyte through a Mass celebrated by Bishop Malesic.

This instituted ministry stresses to me the importance of the Eucharist, not only in the Mass but also in my own life. This is more than just becoming a “professional altar server,” but it is a call of the individual to increase their faith, love, and service in the liturgy as preparation for future ministry in the priesthood. Essentially, my call to serve and assist the priest or deacon does more than just facilitate the liturgy but stresses that I may be transformed through it in a particular way, one that is centered upon the Eucharist. To me, this is why this particular ministry is significant, as it is a statement on the importance of the Eucharist to my own spiritual life, and to my life in general.

One of the steps in this process of being conferred the ministry of acolyte is writing to the bishop a letter asking to be instituted. It expresses my devotion to the

importance of the Eucharist so well, and I would like for you to read it as well:

“My awareness of the relationship I possess with Jesus Christ first began in the Eucharist at my First Communion. From that moment on, my desire to know, love and serve God stems from that initial encounter, that I have consumed Jesus so that He may consume me. This instituted ministry will only further my devotion and piety towards our Eucharistic Lord, and further my dedication towards becoming an ordained priest of the Catholic Church.”

I pray to be transformed by the liturgy in serving the priest and deacon, as I pray that you may be transformed by the Mass in your participation, by your prayer, your singing, your presence. Jesus Christ makes Himself present — Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity — when we gather to worship. By making ourselves equally present in prayerful, active participation in the Mass, we will see how the Eucharist can become a centering and powerful force for our own sanctification.

The *Significance* of the **PRESENTATION OF THE LORD**



Traditionally, the Church has set aside Feb. 2 in observance of the Presentation of the Lord — or the day in which Joseph and Mary presented Jesus to the priests and elders in the Temple.

For years, this feast — which in the United States is only formally celebrated when it falls on a Sunday — marked the end of the Christmas season. In old days, the Presentation was often referred to as “Candlemas” and was celebrated by a candle-lit procession into the church, signifying Christ as the “light of nations.”

Known originally as the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is a relatively ancient celebration. We know that the Church at Jerusalem was observing the feast as early as the first half of the fourth century, and likely earlier.

According to Jewish law, the first-born male child belonged to God, and the parents had to “buy him back” on the 40th day after his birth, by offering a sacrifice of “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:24) in the temple — thus the “presentation” of the child. On that same day, the mother would be ritually purified — thus the “purification.”

St. Mary and St. Joseph kept this law, even though, since St. Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ, she would not have had to go through ritual purification. In his Gospel, Luke (2:22-39) recounts the story.

Originally, the feast was celebrated on Feb. 14, the 40th day after Epiphany (Jan. 6), because Christmas wasn’t yet celebrated as its own feast, and so the Nativity, Epiphany, the Baptism of the Lord (Theophany), and the feast celebrating Christ’s first miracle at the wedding in Cana were all celebrated on the same day. By the last quarter of the fourth century, however, the Church at Rome had begun to celebrate the Nativity on Dec. 25, so the Feast of the Presentation was moved to Feb. 2, 40 days later.

When Christ was presented in the temple, “there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.” When St. Mary and St. Joseph brought Christ to the temple, Simeon embraced the Child and prayed the Cantic of Simeon: “Now, Master, you may

let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel” (Luke 2:29-32).

Because of the words of the cantic — “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” — by the 11th century, the custom had developed in the West of blessing candles on the Feast of the Presentation. The candles were then lit, and a procession took place through the darkened church while the Cantic of Simeon was sung. Because of this, the feast also became known as Candlemas. While the procession and blessing of the candles is not often performed in the United States today, Candlemas is still an important feast in many European countries.

THINGS TO DO:

- Hold your own candlelight procession at home, teaching your children the significance of the light as a symbol of Christ.
- Ask a priest to bless the candles you hope to use at home this year.
- Read the Gospel account of the Presentation, found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 2, verses 22 to 35.
- Pray a decade of the Rosary, focusing upon the Presentation of the Lord, the fourth Joyful Mystery.

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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

Catholic Schools Week

January 30 through February 4

Nativity Altar and Rosary Society meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 1 – 6:30 p.m. Nativity Parish Hall

SJS Blood Drive

Thursday, Feb. 3 – 4:00 p.m. In front of
St. Joseph Social hall

First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, Feb. 5 – 9:00 a.m. St Joseph Church

Parent Meeting for First Communion

Sunday, Feb. 6 – 12:00 p.m. St. Joseph Church

Parent Club Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 8 – 7:00 p.m. School MPR

Immersion 7/8 Meeting

Friday, Feb. 11 – 7:00 p.m. Convent

St. Joseph School Early Dismissal - Conferences

Thursday Feb. 17 -1:15 p.m.

No School - Conferences

Friday, Feb. 18

Catholic Charities In Pew Appeal

Saturday and Sunday at all Masses Feb. 19, 20

IMMERSION High School Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 20 – 12:00 p.m. at the Convent

No School – Presidents Day

Monday, Feb. 21

Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 22 – 7:00 p.m. School Art Room

Confirmation

Sunday, Feb. 27 – 5:00 p.m.

Vincentians Meetings

Thursday, Feb. 3 and 17 – 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room

R.C.I.A. Meetings

Mondays, Feb. 7, 14, 21, 28 – 7:00 p.m.
Nativity Parish Hall

Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesdays and Thursdays in February 9:30 a.m.
Nativity Parish Hall

Men's Group Meetings

Tuesday, Feb. 1 and 15 – 7:00 p.m.
St. Joseph Social Hall

PSR Classes

Wednesdays, Feb. 2,9,16,23 – 5:30 p.m.
St. Joseph School

Youth Choir Rehearsal

Wednesdays, Feb. 2,9,16,23 – 6:00 p.m.
St. Joseph Church

Teen and Adult Choir Rehearsal

Wednesdays, Feb. 2,9,16,23 – 7:15 p.m.
St. Joseph Church