



Parish Times

Catholic Schools Week

JANUARY 2025

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As you will see reading this issue of *Our Parish Times*, Christmas in our parishes was joyful. Thank you to parish ministries that worked to bring inspiration, spirituality, and holiness to parish Advent and Christmas celebrations.



Chuck Short

With sincere gratitude, we wish Cardinal Gregory a healthy and satisfying retirement. We warmly welcome Cardinal Robert McElroy as new Archbishop. He has an inspiring record of devotion to the most vulnerable and a demonstrated commitment to the Church's social justice teachings.

January provides several opportunities for parishioners to learn about and apply several of these teachings to parish life. Let's reflect on these.

On January 20, the nation inaugurated a new President, and celebrated the life and service of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. There is a connection between these two events in Catholic social teaching. In fact, both provide opportunities to practice Catholic social justice.

The Bishops' social justice policy calls Catholics to Community Participation and

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Attendees at the Mass for All God's Children pose in front of the altar after the liturgy held January 5 at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Derwood. The Mass, held on the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrates the gifts people with special needs and developmental differences bring to the church; nearly all liturgical roles at this liturgy are filled by people with special needs.

Mass for All God's Children Continues when Parishioners Step in for Chief Orchestrator

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

On Sunday, January 5, the St. Francis of Assisi community culminated the Feast of the Epiphany with its Mass for All God's Children, a liturgy that highlights the gifts people with special needs

bring to the church. But with the event's chief orchestrator handling a family emergency, the liturgy might not have happened, had it not been for a group of loyal parishioners determined to see the annual Mass stay the course for the young people and their family members who look forward to

it every year.

First celebrated in 2012, the parish's Mass for All God's Children invites teens and young adults with special needs to fill most liturgical roles at the Mass as altar servers, lectors, ushers, gift bearers,

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Making the Most of the Winter Months

January and February can seem long. Cold gray days largely outnumber those with sparkling sunshine and mesmerizing snowfalls. And those snow days! Mittens and boots on and off, rosy cheeks and cold toes, hot chocolate and hot soup, snowmen and snow angels weave beautiful memories. While the excitement they create is considerable, the slush and the ice can get old pretty quickly. It can begin to feel like spring will never come as we long for the warm sun and the sight of that first crocus.

But wait! These deep winter months offer all kinds of opportunities. They provide us with chances to do things together before the doors fly open and everyone heads outdoors in all different directions.

When was the last time you played Monopoly, Clue, or Candyland with your



Patricia McGann

Continued on page 10



Members of the Scozzafava family with the Head of School, Dr. Palladino (far right), at our Founders Day Mass.

The Woods Academy Celebrates 50 Years of Excellence

This January marks the beginning of a year-long celebration of The Woods Academy's 50th anniversary.

The story of The Woods Academy began on January 29, 1975, when Our Lady of the Woods Corporation was officially recognized by the Maryland

Department of Assessments and Taxation. According to the 1976 Annual Report, "the corporation came into existence as a Maryland non-profit corporation for the purpose of conducting a private Roman Catholic school, now known as Our Lady

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Honoring Our Church Neighbors

The end of January is a time of important commemorations like the March for Life and Catholic Schools Week. Another important commemoration has unfortunately taken more of a back seat in recent years.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is January 18-25, and it would be great if we all made an effort to pray for our fellow believers and build stronger relationships with churches near our home parishes.

There is a lot of good happening among our Christian brothers and sisters, be they Methodist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Baptist, Mormon, Evangelical or many others. They are all trying to do the work of God and bring about God's presence for their congregations.

When I was at Blessed Sacrament, I had a wonderful experience of Christian unity as we held a Good Friday Stations of the



Fr. John Enzler

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The Passing of Jimmy Carter-Mattie's Hero

By Kathy Dempsey, Mattie J.T. Stepanek
Guild President

The United States' longest living president died in December, in the same year that his beloved wife Rosalynn also passed away. It is said that he did not want to enter a year that did not have her in it. Last year also was the 20th anniversary of the death of President Jimmy Carter's beloved friend, Mattie Stepanek.

They had a rare and treasured relationship. It was not one of a famous little boy and a president. They were two humble peacemakers who more importantly recognized that first they were children of God. They allowed God to work through them, for our world.

Meeting Jimmy Carter was one of Mattie's 'final wishes' in June 2001 when he was near death. Mattie did not want to just talk with President Carter. He wanted to better understand peace and make sure that he was doing it right. Thank God, Mattie lived an additional three years, had many conversations and



Mattie Stepanek at one of his meetings with President Jimmy Carter. Mattie and Carter were collaborators for peace and great friends.

emails with President Carter, and together they collaborated on a book published after Mattie's death, *Just Peace, A Message of Hope*.

Mattie saw in President Carter a man of deep faith who recognized

Christ in every person and put that belief into action. Mattie had a close relationship with God the Father who placed messages on Mattie's heart. Mattie turned these messages

Continued on page 14

San Miguel School: Forging a Brotherhood

By Amy Sapenoff Hamm

As you walk the halls of the San Miguel School, located on Georgia Avenue just over the District line, it may appear that you find yourself in a swarm of dozens of boys, grades 6-8 on their way to class and chatting with their buddies. However, despite their small stature and youthful appearance, these students are not just boys, they are "Miguel Men".

San Miguel School was founded in 2002 at the behest of the Christian Brothers at St. John's College Catholic High School down the street. They desired to establish a school in response to the fact that low-income Latino boys were an underserved population within the broader educational horizon in the Washington D.C. area. The development of San Miguel School also aligned with the Brothers' mission, in the spirit of St. John Baptist de la Salle, to educate the children of the poor and working class. To that end, San Miguel provides high-quality, tuition free education for each of its 90 students.

Everywhere you turn at San



Community moments at San Miguel often begin with a moment of prayer, recalling students to the fact that they are always in the presence of God.

Miguel is a reminder of the commitment the school has made to develop young men of outstanding character, to build a strong and lasting community, and to provide their students with a solid foundation in both academics and the faith. As Matthew (Grade 6) and Jeremy (Grade 7), two of the school's student ambassadors describe it, the school "is about building a brother-

hood".

This brotherhood is forged not only in the classroom, but on the athletic field, on camping trips, and during after school homework help. It also endures after eighth-grade graduation. Alumni often return to the school to attend college visits organized through San Miguel's

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IN MEMORIAM

Olga Fairfax 1941-2024

Longtime pro-life warrior Olga Fairfax (née Wilson) died November 21, 2024, from injuries sustained in a fire that consumed her home in Wheaton. Though a non-Catholic, she attended The Academy of the Holy Cross and then Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart (Class of 1958). She went on to George Washington University, became a Methodist minister, and founded Methodists for Life. She was predeceased by her husband Carl Fairfax.

Olga – as she was known to all – was an early activist in the pro-life movement. Committed to education, Olga understood



Olga Fairfax

that a pregnant woman's decision to reject abortion often started with her consciousness of the unique life of her unborn child. For decades, Olga was a compassionate, kindhearted consciousness raiser, counsellor, and pregnancy-aid provider – truth and love and support summed up her approach to women in crisis.

Her own search for Truth, Love, and support led her in due time to embrace the Catholic faith and the faith community at St. Catherine Labouré Church in Wheaton, Maryland, where a Mass celebrating her life was held January 21, 2025.

Requiescat in Pace

OPT

Meghan Jones 1989-2025

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

On January 8, St. Francis of Assisi Parish lost one of its most well-known ambassadors following the passing of parishioner Meghan Jones, a leader in the state and local disability community and a fixture in the suburban parish.

Meghan, 35, died following a brief respiratory illness, in the presence of her family members. Born with Down Syndrome, she graduated from Colonel Zadok Magruder High School and recently completed an American Sign Language certificate program at Montgomery College. She lived independently in Rockville and worked at her local Giant Foods. She led with purpose in her church parish, serving as a longtime altar server and lector. At Masses for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, she interpreted songs and sermons and played an active role in the parish's social justice groups and other social events.



Meghan Jones, a parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, poses in July 2024 after being inducted into the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities' Self Advocate Leadership Circle.

Meghan was honored to proclaim the second reading at the Mass offered by Pope Francis during his visit to Catholic University in 2015.

Her light shone brightest as a

leader and advocate in the disability community. She served as the vice chair of the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council and as a board member for Upcounty Community Resources. She testified numerous times before the Maryland General Assembly and the U.S. Congress on legislation affecting individuals with special needs. In 2023, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington's Office of Deaf and Disabilities Ministry awarded her the Rocky Stone Award, given annually to a person or persons in an archdiocesan parish who has demonstrated leadership or advocacy on behalf of persons with disabilities.

The family will plan a celebration of Meghan's life, likely to take place this summer. We ask all in the archdiocesan Catholic community to pray for the repose of the soul of Meghan and for the Jones family in their mourning.

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50 YEARS

Con't from page 1

of the Woods Academy. The School was conceived as a continuation of the Lower School of Ursuline Academy, which had operated in Bethesda, Maryland for more than twenty years prior to its unexpected closing announcement in November 1974."

Three families, George and Pat Reese, John and Rose Scozzafava, and Robert and Jean Walsh, came together after the Ursuline Academy closure to incorporate Our Lady of the Woods, ensuring a Catholic school would continue to serve the Bethesda community.

Thanks to the dedication of these founding families, The Woods Academy has grown into a thriving institution that provides a Catholic education for boys and girls from ages 3 through Grade 8. Over the past 50 years, countless "owlvo-

cates" (individuals who dedicate their time, talent, and treasure to supporting The Woods Academy) have helped transform the lives of students.

The Woods Academy looks for-

ward to celebrating its rich history and honoring the many people who have shaped its journey. The festivities will kick off in January with a series of exciting events, including our 50th anniversary gala.

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Parish Community Services, Inc.
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Christmas Season at Christ the King

Christmas season at Christ the King was busy and vibrant this year. We prepared each week by lighting the Advent candles before Mass. The children prepared for Christmas in their religious education classes. The church was beautifully decorated. The choir sounded wonderful. The entire parish supported the Giving Tree project by donating gift cards. Around 60 families were given gift cards for groceries and to buy toys for their children.



ABOVE: The Nativity at Christ the King served as a reminder for the reason for the season.

LEFT: Communion during one of the Christmas Masses at Christ the King.



The parish also supported Cross Catholic Outreach with donations. The donated money will be sent to Haiti for housing and other needs. Thank you to the parishioners for your generosity with these projects! Thank you to the volunteers and staff and Father Steve for making this busy season so productive and meaningful for our Parish.

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The Three Kings attend Sunday Mass in anticipation of the Epiphany.

The Three Kings Visit Christ the King

On January 5, the "Three Kings" visited Christ the King Parish. Three young parishioners from the Religious Education program brought the gifts of the Magi to Sunday Mass. Their physical pres-

ence reminded everyone of the importance of the birth of Jesus. As the Christmas Season ends, we look forward to the Jubilee year of "Hope" that Pope Francis has declared.

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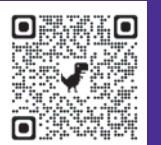
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Holy Cross Parish Celebrates Installation of Father Stephen Wyble as New Pastor

By Kathryn Harrington and
Christine Zalewski

Amid the joyful anticipation of the Advent season, on Sunday, December 15, Cardinal Archbishop Wilton Gregory formally installed Father Stephen Wyble as pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Garrett Park, Maryland. The occasion was marked by a special Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Gregory, with parishioners and Holy Cross School students and their families in attendance. Father Wyble's installation was further blessed by the presence of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Wyble, siblings and family members, Father Joseph Perkins, retired priest in-residence, as well as Permanent Deacons Matthew Konieczny and Robert Hubbard.

The congregation gathered for a reception following the mass that was organized by the school in Lewis Hall. The hall was beautifully decorated with congratulatory banners and large posters made by each grade with artwork and words of appreciation and gratitude from the school students. Handmade centerpieces adorned each table that featured photographs of Father Wyble engaging in various parish



Cardinal Archbishop Wilton Gregory and Father Stephen Wyble.



Father Wyble with his family at the reception in Lewis Hall.

and school activities.

Prior to his installation, Father Wyble served as the parish administrator for about eighteen months. During this time, he earned the admiration of the parish and school through his pastoral leadership. Described by all as cheer-

ful, approachable, optimistic, and kind, Father Wyble has brought a vibrant energy to the parish and school that has fostered a growing sense of community. Notably, under his leadership, Holy Cross Parish introduced several faith-enriching activities, including weekly topi-

cal discussions on the faith and a new Eucharistic adoration schedule. These initiatives have deepened the spiritual life of parishioners.

Fr. Wyble grew up in Kensington and attended Holy Redeemer Church and School before attending The Heights for middle and

high school. He earned a Bachelor's and Master's in Philosophy at The Catholic University of America, where he also entered seminary in 2009. Fr. Wyble then spent five years in Rome and earned two Graduate Degrees in Sacred Theology. Fr.

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CELEBRATING
Catholic Schools Week

"How we educate the mind will change with the times; how we cultivate the heart is and will remain timeless."

- Blessed Basil Moreau



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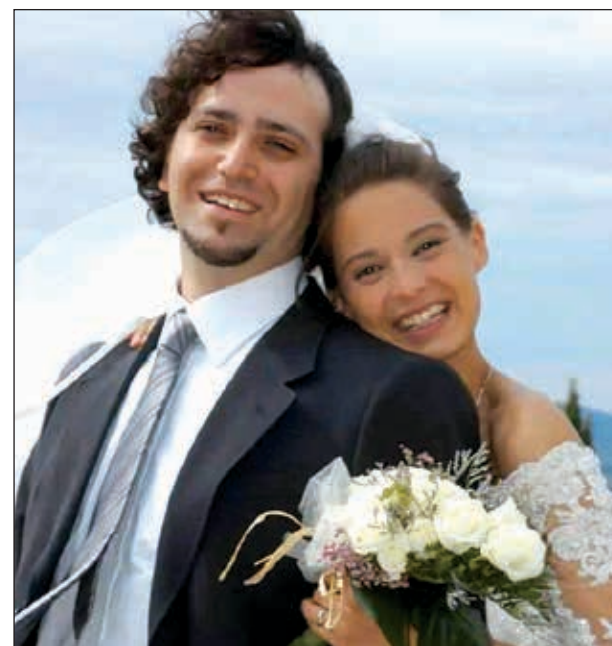
Witnessing a Mother's Heart

by Donald Neri, Director of
Religious Education

Advent is a time of hopeful expectation when we await the coming of Love incarnate. Saint Lucy's memorial during the second week of this blessed season reminds us of the divine light we pray will soon dawn in our lives. Upon this backdrop, Dr. Elisa Tinti painted a beautiful portrait of her dear friend, Servant of God Chiara Corbella during a recent visit to Holy Cross Catholic Church to provide a witness about her friend.

In the hurried pace of our modern lives, it is unlikely many of us would have taken particular notice of Servant of God Chiara or her husband Enrico Petrillo. Passing by them in the streets of Assisi shortly after their marriage in the fall of 2008, it would have been easy to detect their love for one another as twenty-something newlyweds. What might not have been as apparent, is the depth of their faith and the courage of their conviction.

Shortly after their honeymoon, the young couple discovered they were pregnant with their first child, Maria Grazia Letizia. An ultrasound taken during the pregnancy revealed little Maria had a fatal birth defect called anencephaly, which occurs when a baby's brain, skull, and scalp don't fully develop. Servant of God Chiara and Enrico chose to carry Maria until she was born in June of the following year and spent a grace-filled half hour with her before returning her



Chiara Corbella and Enrico Petrillo on their wedding day in 2008.

to the loving arms of Our Lord.

A few short months later, Servant of God Chiara and Enrico discovered they were pregnant again, this time with a little boy they named Davide Giovanni. Davide was also diagnosed with a severe malformation of his vital organs and the couple again decided to carry Davide to term. He also passed away like his sister shortly after being baptised and embraced by his parents in 2010.

During the pregnancies and even in loss, the couple lived in a spirit of peace and gratitude which profoundly affected many around them, particularly during the funeral celebrations held for their children.

The following year, Servant of God Chiara

Continued on page 15



The sixth-grade elves were ready to host our annual Breakfast with Santa.

St. Patrick's School Spreads Holiday Cheer Through Community Events

During the month of December, St. Patrick's School was filled with holiday cheer as we celebrated the season through various community events that

brought our families together in the true spirit of giving and joy.

Our school-wide participation in the

Continued on page 26



Many thanks to our grandparent volunteers who made surprise Bingo Day possible.

Holiday Fun at St. Patrick's: A Surprise Bingo Day!

Before heading off for Christmas break, St. Patrick's students were treated to a surprise Bingo Day sponsored by our Grandparents' Club. The event was filled with smiles, laughter, and plenty of holiday

cheer as grandparents came together to help make this a very special day.

Our older students joined their younger buddies for a morning of fun, competing

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Lighting the Way for Faith and Excellence: St. Patrick's Prepares to Celebrate Catholic Schools Week

As Catholic Schools Week draws near, it's a meaningful time to reflect on the profound impact of Catholic education and how we can bring light and hope to the world around us. At St. Patrick's School, our mission is rooted in fostering faith, service, and academic excellence, creating a community where students grow not only in knowledge but also in compassion and character.

This special week provides a moment to celebrate the many ways our school community shines brightly. Our students will participate in the 'Souper Bowl' by collecting cans of soup to help local families in need. Each class will compete to bring in the most cans, combining teamwork with a shared commitment to serving others.

We'll also take time to express heartfelt gratitude to the clergy, teachers, and parents

who are the foundation of our school's success. Their unwavering dedication and sup-


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Bethesda Magazine is once again a Bethesda Local Favorite!

By Christie Scango

St. Jane de Chantal School is delighted to share that, once again, they are selected as a finalist in *Bethesda Magazine's* 2025 Best of Bethesda Reader's Poll! This time they earned the "Readers' Pick, Finalist" status in the following categories: Best Private School for Academics, Best Private School with Religious Affiliation, Best Private School for Arts/Music, and Best Private School for Girls Sports. The faculty, staff, students, and parents are honored by this recognition and look forward to a new year fulfilling the school's mission of Christ-centered academic excellence.

Through proud traditions and a close, caring community, de Chantal has been educating students for more than 70 years with strong values and academic excellence. De Chantal is the school where a child will grow in spirit and mind. It is the school where your child will be known and loved. It is also the school where a parent can be involved. Join the staff for a tour of the school during one of the Open Houses; Monday, January 27 and Tuesday, March 18 and see for yourself! Register by emailing Christy Scango at cscango@dechantal.org.



De Chantal adds to its long list of accolades.

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CELEBRATING CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK 2025

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Home CYO Basketball Games Tip-Off at St. Jane de Chantal

De Chantal's Basketball Team hustle for the first time on their home court this winter

By John Matelis

Snowfall extended the Christmas break for many students but thawed out just in time for the 2025 CYO basketball season to get underway. On Saturday, January 11, de Chantal welcomed to their home court Mother of God, St. Bernadette's, St. Andrew the Apostle, and Holy Redeemer. De Chantal's CYO coordinated with the Archdiocese of Washington to host over 20 home games for the first time in many years. Christopher Hall, de Chantal's gymnasium, dubbed by beloved PE teacher Mrs. Lisa Tehan as the *Positivity Palace*, was jam-packed with young athletes excited to be playing basketball at home. Basketball fans and proud parents packed the stands to enjoy the action on the snowy day. Boys and girls aged under 12 to 14 years had the opportunity to test their fundamentals, demonstrate teamwork and



Dukes and their opponents take the first tip-off to start the basketball season on their home court.

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Bethesda, MD

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Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton
301-530-1221

Michelle D'Amour Flynn
OPT Editor

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GOOD COUNSEL 2025 SUMMER PROGRAMS



ATHLETICS

- Baseball
- Basketball
- Cheerleading
- Field Hockey
- Flag Football
- Football
- Lacrosse
- Soccer
- Softball
- Volleyball



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- Forensics
- Python Coding
- Robotics
- STEM

THE ARTS

- Culinary
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SHORT*Con't from page 1*

Responsibility. The teaching is derived from Christ's instructions to love our neighbor, and to render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's. In loving our neighbor, we are called to create beloved communities comprised of families, faith organizations, governments, and essential social institutions. Inauguration day is an appropriate time to renew our commitment to uphold the Constitution and seek just and compassionate laws at every level of community. On January 8, the Maryland General Assembly convened for its 2025 session. Important state laws will be considered, some affecting the dignity of life and preference for

the needs of the poor. Find out more at www.mdccatholic.org.

The nation remembers the courage, faith and service of Dr. King on January 20 as well. Dr King's life exemplified the first Catholic social teaching, that all people have a fundamental right to life and those things that make life truly human, food, clothing, housing, health care, education and security. Society has a responsibility to always place priority on the needs of the poor and vulnerable. It is right that we honor Dr. King's legacy of service. For inspiration, I suggest reading Dr. King's noble and courageous call to action found in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail", easily found online.

On January 24, Catholics and others will gather at the March for Life in Washington. This event is an

opportunity to bear witness to the central Catholic social teaching, the life and dignity of the human person. Participate as best you can by attending the march or through local parish commemorations.

During the last week of January, Catholics celebrate Catholic schools and Catholic education. In their social justice teaching regarding rights and responsibilities of the Catholics, Bishops specifically affirmed that Catholics have a responsibility to become educated about their faith and its role in community. It is all of our responsibility to support Catholic education.

In obedience to His Father's call, Jesus gave up a promising career as carpenter, to become Jesus the teacher. Jesus, the Principal, needed help to establish His new Catholic school. He selected others to make sacri-

lices to join His educational team. Inspired by faith in Jesus, some said "yes" to the sacrifice and became the first corps of Catholic educators. The work was difficult, sometimes risky, requiring long hours and diverse skills. The compensation was beneath their value. However, their rewards were the blessing to serve the Greatest Teacher in human history and the joy of teaching His Word. It was a human group comprised of inspired people. With Jesus as Principal, they wrote the textbooks, taught the lessons, and guided their students to establish the greatest and most enduring religious movement in history.

To sustain our faith, educating Catholic children in their faith is as essential today as the work of the first teachers was. Catholic schools are proven places where the mustard

seed of faith flourishes into strong Catholic individuals, families, and leaders. The commitment of today's teachers and staff assures the highest quality of education and faith formation. To continue, Catholic schools need parish commitment. Failure to sustain Catholic schools jeopardizes the Church's future and breaks trust with the First Teacher and hundreds of years of successful Catholic educators.

Here are three ways parishioners can act to promote Catholic schools. First, you can advocate with your parish to support its school or nearby Catholic school, as well as religious education, homeschooling, and Catholic high schools. Second, visit your parish or nearby Catholic school during Catholic Schools week to see the Holy Spirit at work and thank the teachers and staff. Finally, to learn more about Catholic schools and honor the fiftieth anniversary of the canonization of the Founder and Mother of American Catholic education, take a family trip to visit the beautiful Shrine of St Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg,

God Bless!

Chuck Short cshort5@verizon.net

McGANN*Con't from page 1*

children? Have you taught them how to play War, Old Maid, or Poker? What about Tripoli? Find that penny jar and make it interesting by giving everyone a pile of pennies to wager. There are life skills to be learned here - strategic thinking, negotiating, and risk taking.

What about CYO basketball? Those games can be exciting and entertaining, and they allow parents a chance to connect with one another. Does anyone go to a roller-skating rink or ice skating rink anymore? This is the time to do that!

Try tucking the iPads and the phones away in a drawer for a few hours and play some word games, or read a good book together. There is something about reading aloud and being read to that soothes the soul—even of an older child. Read *The Hardy Boys* or *Nancy Drew* to your fourth grader, *Bloody Jack* to your sixth grader, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* to your eighth grader.

These slow-moving months can be treasures if we just adjust our perspective a tad. Let's consider them a gift, one that we can open slowly over the next eight weeks. A gift of more time spent with one another, a gift of time to work on projects inside—teach your child to dribble with his off hand (playing ball in the house isn't nearly as bad as it's made out to be.), write a thank you note for Christmas gifts, paint a room, clean out the basement or a closet. Collect items for Amvets, make bread, bake cookies for a neighbor.

Take a few quiet minutes to consider what you love to do and share that with your children. With the slightest bit of creativity and an attitude shift, you will find that the hours you spend inside doing something new with your children will make these months brighter and warmer.

OPT

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Mercy PreK 3 students learned all about the Advent Wreath.

Mercy Celebrates Catholic Schools Week 2025!

Mercy students and staff are planning for a fun and meaningful Catholic Schools Week 2025. We will kick-off CSW on Friday evening, January 24 with our "Celebrate Mercy" parent social and fundraiser. A community-wide Open House will be held Sunday, January 26, from 9:45 to 11:00 am, followed by a special school Mass at 11:00 am. On Student Day, the Student Council will greet students with pom poms, posters, and bells at carpool, followed by a parade of blue and white hats and a special surprise from each teacher. Prayer Partners

will assemble toiletry packets for the homeless on Community Day. On Parent Day, Mercy parents will be recognized in a special way by the faculty and staff, followed by our school and family Mass. Thursday is Spirit Day and Mercy students will be treated to an exciting professional jump roping demonstration in the gym! Closing out the week on Friday, January 31, the MPTO will provide a special breakfast for teachers and staff. Many returning traditions and a few new surprises will make CSW 2025 a memorable and meaningful celebration!

OPT



Mercy students performed a beautiful re-telling of the Christmas Nativity.



Mercy's PreK and K students took a ride on the Polar Express!



Our active Mercy Moms' Club enjoyed a fun evening of Christmas wreath making and a cookie exchange!



Character development is an important element of Mercy's Middle School program.

Character Workshop for Mercy's Middle School Boys

Mercy's P.E. Teacher and Assistant Principal, Jason Knecht, along with Sergeant Major Jon Walton, U.S. Army Special Forces, and Mike Meadows, Director, MSSP & GSI Americas for Lookout met with Mercy's sixth and seventh grade boys in an initiative to promote community and character formation. During a panel discussion, the guests shared their backgrounds and specific experiences that highlighted the

values of responsibility and humility. The discussion was followed by a Q&A session with students, lunch, and a team-building activity. As we continue our intentional school focus on virtues, values, and character development, additional workshops will be presented to our students. We are certainly grateful to Jason Knecht, Jon Walton, and Mike Meadows for their openness and presence as we support Mercy middle school students.

OPT

January Open House at Our Lady of Mercy

Mercy will be kicking off Catholic Schools Week (CSW) 2025 by holding our second Open House event of the year on Sunday, January 26 from 9:45-11:00 a.m. Current and prospective families are invited to tour our school, visit classrooms, and talk with the faculty and staff. Immediately following the Open House, at 11:00 a.m., is the CSW Mass. Private tours continue to be available at any time. Interested families should contact schooloffice@olom.org or call 301-365-4477 for more information.

OPT

Our Lady of Mercy Catholic School

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SUNDAY, JANUARY 26TH

9:45 - 11:00 AM

PRE-K 3 THRU 8TH GRADE

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Open House Schedule: *Winter*

JANUARY OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, January 26th from 1-3 pm

Experience Catholic Schools Week kick off!

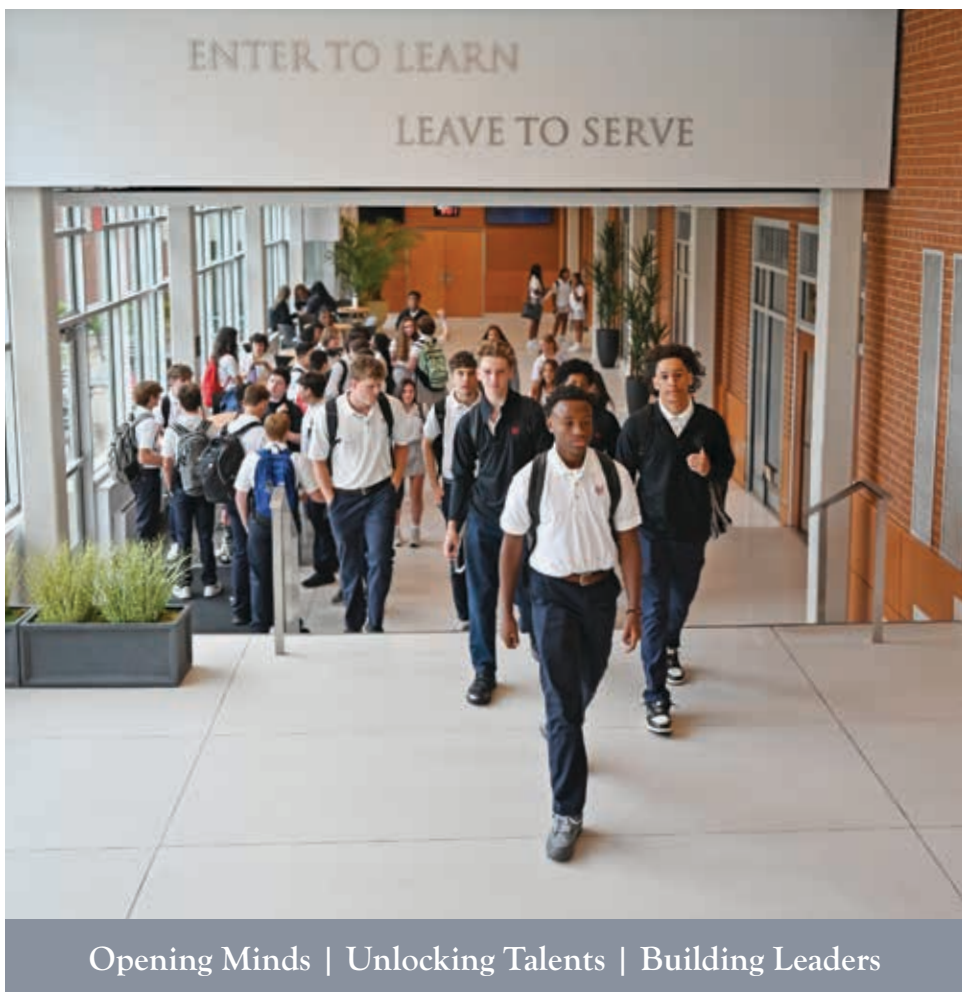


FEBRUARY OPEN HOUSE

Thursday, February 13th from 9-11am



We'd love to meet you! Register online via the QR code or at stmaryschoolrockville.org/open-houses



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It was a special moment during the all school Mass liturgy when the students, preparing to enter the Church, were recognized.



God bless the nine St. Mary's Rockville students on their journey to becoming Catholic.

St. Mary's Prepares to Welcome Students into the Church

St. Mary's School was very pleased to help guide and support nine of their current students who were baptized by Monsignor Amey, alongside their families, at their regular all-school Friday Mass on December 6, 2024.

It is not required that students be Catholic, or are baptized at all, but these children felt

ready to commit to the Catholic faith and chose this path for themselves.

Please join us in congratulating these students on receiving this beautiful sacrament as they begin their journey in the Catholic faith. St. Mary's School is so proud of them and looks forward to watching them blossom in our church.

OPT



Several of our older students were grateful to participate in one of our wonderful Christmas traditions.



St. Mary's students enjoyed the snowfall during their time off from school the week following Christmas break! Here, first-grader Amanda Pang plays in the snow at home with her mom.

St. Mary's Parish
520 Veirs Mill Road
Rockville, MD

Msgr. Robert Amey,
Pastor
301-424-5550

St. Mary's School
Mrs. Debby Eisel, Principal
301-762-4179

Mrs. Debby Eisel,
Parish Editor
301-762-4179

More St. Mary - Rockville News on Page 30

RIGHT: Mr. Lamont (right) celebrates the dedication and hard work of the families who sold the most tickets in the annual Crusader Raffle. As a token of appreciation, he presents them with a special Chick-fil-A treat during the recognition event.



LEFT: Sister Maria Belen (left) and Sister Yelitza (right) guide our eighth graders through the process of making a traditional Puerto Rican drink as part of an engaging Spanish class project, offering a hands-on cultural experience.



RIGHT: For the first time, St. Martin of Tours participated in the Girls on the Run program this year. Guided by their dedicated coaches, Ms. Taylor, Ms. Villars, and Ms. Moonzajer, the team celebrated the program's conclusion by running a 5K alongside other Montgomery County teams.



LEFT: Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus brought joy and excitement as they met with the children and helped prepare their Christmas wish lists. Countless photos were taken, preserving the special moments and festive memories.



BELOW: The first-grade students gave a heartfelt Live Nativity presentation during Mass, beautifully sharing with the congregation the true meaning of Christmas. They did an incredible job bringing the Christmas story to life.



Mark Little is St. Martin's School Volunteer of the Year

By Stephen C. Lamont, Principal

On November 22, 2024, we were honored to announce Mr. Mark Little as our Volunteer of the Year at the Catholic Business Network – Montgomery County Gala alongside other Volunteer of the Year nominees. Since enrolling his daughter, Ella, in Pre-Kindergarten 10 years ago, Mr. Little has become an invaluable member of the St. Martin's School community. His dedication to improving our school is evident in his contributions to the playground, water fountains, bathrooms, storage areas, and the transition to LED lighting. He also volunteers with Early Birds and has been a vital supporter of the Drama Program.



Photo courtesy of St. Martin's School.

In addition to his behind-the-scenes efforts, Mr. Little generously prepares annual meals for Breakfast with Santa, Grandparents Day, and Aftercare, fostering a sense of community. With his thoughtful acts of kindness, Mr. Little has quietly brightened the students' days by funding donuts, candy canes, frozen treats, and more, providing moments of joy that make a lasting impact.

Mark Little (center) is recognized as SMS Volunteer of the Year for his dedication to improving St. Martin's School. Fr. David Wells, St. Martin's Pastor, and Mr. Lamont, SMS Principal, joined him at the Catholic Business Network Gala.

Mr. Little's unwavering commitment to St. Martin's School and its families has made a lasting impact. We are deeply grateful for his selfless service and extend our sincere thanks. We deeply value the support of our parent volunteers, as they are essential to keeping our school running smoothly and enhancing the educational experience for all students. We encourage all parents to get involved and participate in the many opportunities to give back to the St. Martin's community.

OPT

St. Martin of Tours Parish

201 South Frederick Ave.
Gaithersburg, MD

Fr. David G. Wells, Pastor
301-990-3203

St. Martin School
Stephen Lamont, Principal
301-990-2441

Catherine Cooksey,
Parish Editor
240-477-8706
www.smsmd.org

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SAN MIGUEL

Con't from page 2

robust Office of Graduate Support. Through Graduate Support, the brotherhood accompanies graduates as they pursue higher education and beyond.

Each week includes a Tuesday morning meeting where a member of the faculty discusses the virtue of the week, recognizes students for their achievements in both the classroom and in terms of character, and awards House points for friendly competitions that take place throughout the year.

Everywhere you turn in the school building, from the stairwells to the hallways, you see playful artwork from Ms. Aguilar, the art teacher. Cartoon versions of many of the faculty and staff members adorn their doors. Much of the art refers to the Lasallian virtues that the school extols: gravity, silence, humility, prudence, wisdom, patience, reserve, gentleness, zeal, vigilance, piety, and generosity, reminding students what it really means to be a Miguel Man.

Matthew and Jeremy, as well as other student ambassadors, are proud to take visitors on a tour of their school. They are careful to point out each of their classrooms, describing the various projects they are working on and topics they are learning. The tour also points out each of the office spaces for various support staff and a description



Two Miguel Men on the steps of St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Silver Spring. The San Miguel community came together at St. Michael's to celebrate the annual Las Posadas just before Christmas break! The celebration began with Mass and then continued with student performances and a delicious spread of food provided by parents.

of how that person contributes to the school, emphasizing the tight-woven nature of the school community. It is clear that San Miguel employees wear many hats, each individual fills many roles for the sake of the students.

Given the "all hands on deck" attitude of the faculty and staff, students at San Miguel are supported and accompanied. So are their families. As Dr. Palank, the school's president described it, "There is a level of trust between parents and the school". Parents know that each member of the fac-

ulty and staff is invested in their child, desiring to see them excel and flourish. In response, parents help with the school in whatever way they can, from providing treats for faculty appreciation to hanging whiteboards in staff offices.

St. John Baptist de la Salle once said, "Young people need the light of watchful guides to lead them on the path of salvation". San Miguel School takes this to heart, equipping the brotherhood of Miguel Men to walk with confidence down the path that God puts in front of them.

OPT

CARTER

Con't from page 2

into poetry of faith, hope and peace. Mattie especially believed that God has a purpose for every single person and that every single person has a gift given to him or her by God to share with the world. Mattie described this as a *Heartsong*, which became the name of five of his bestselling books of poetry.

Jimmy Carter and Mattie also shared their respective faiths with their congregations. President Carter held a weekly Bible study class for decades when he was in town at the Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains, Georgia. Mattie was a lector and sang in the children's choir. He also became a catechist for his parish, Most Holy Rosary in Upper Marlboro, Maryland. He taught second graders at the age nine and then taught the sixth graders.

President Carter gave the eulogy at Mattie's Funeral Mass. He noted, "I've thought a lot about Mattie's religious faith. It's all-

encompassing, to include all human beings who believe in peace and justice and humility and service and compassion and love. The exact characteristics of our Savior Jesus Christ."

President Carter concluded, "I would say that my final assessment is that Mattie was an angel... in the New Testament language, angel and messenger are the same and there's no doubt that Mattie was an angel of God, a messenger of God..."

On one occasion in January 2002, Mattie wrote to President Carter, "I just wanted to tell you that I was thinking about you and that I still love you. Sometimes... I just stop and think and my spirit feels so full, even when things seem so hard. You make me really think about things that matter in life. And I think about them in different ways.

"You know that I want to be a peacemaker and I am doing my best to help people just stop for a minute and think. Think and be for themselves and for others and for the world. ..."

OPT

CSW

Con't from page 7

port allow us to thrive as a vibrant and connected community.

Catholic Schools Week is a cherished tradition at St. Patrick's. It's

a time to honor the people who make our school extraordinary and to recommit ourselves to living out the values that define our faith-filled education. We are excited to celebrate this week with joy, gratitude, and a renewed sense of purpose.

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A Gaudete Sunday Filled with Joy at Saint Bernadette

Saint Bernadette had a joyful Advent and Christmastide beginning with Holy Name's "Breakfast with Santa" and "Carols in the Church" on Gaudete Sunday. Families began the day with delicious breakfast treats in the school hall and little ones enjoyed a visit with Santa Claus.

Later in the evening, families came back to the church to enjoy the parish's Fourth Annual "Carols in the Church." Not a concert or a pageant, "Carols in the Church" is a beautiful evening of families getting together to sing Advent and Christmas songs in happy anticipation of Jesus Christ, the infant King.

A reception with homemade treats and warm beverages followed and was enjoyed by all.

Also that weekend, our parish's Social Concerns committee held its annual "Sharing Tree Drive."

Together, parishioners donated thousands of dollars in donations to local charities, including meals for families, new coats and toys for kids, diapers and supplies for expectant mothers, and personal care items, gifts and

gift cards for local teens. In addition to the donations, many gave of their time to help with the enormous task of sorting and delivering gifts.

Prior to Gaudete Sunday, Saint Bernadette vicar Father Larry Swink

kicked off what will be a monthly reflection series that includes time for adoration, confession, and healing prayers. As fitting for the time of the liturgical year, Father Swink's reflection centered on finding joy in

Advent and throughout the year. All are invited to Father Swink's reflection series which will be held on the second Thursday of the month, beginning at 7:00 pm in the church.

OPT



TOP LEFT: Our students didn't need to travel all the way to the North Pole to give Santa their wish list. They just needed to attend our Breakfast with Santa!

ABOVE: The beautiful Nativity display outside of the church, complete with a shining Christmas star.



The Saint Bernadette's school community prepares Advent and Christmas songs for the season's celebrations.



New coats were a high demand item for Saint Bernadette's "Sharing Tree Drive."



Saint Bernadette families showed their generosity by donating many personal items for those in need.

Saint Bernadette Parish and School

70 University Blvd.,
East Silver Spring, MD

Rev. Msgr. K.
Bartholomew Smith, Pastor
301-593-0357

Saint Bernadette School
Mr. Ted Ewanciw, Principal
301-593-5611

Jasmine Kuzner
Director of Religious Education,
OPT Editor
301-593-5611

HEART

Con't from page 6

and Enrico were blessed with a third pregnancy – another son they named Francesco. Genetic testing sought at the behest of their friends and family did not reveal any potential medical concerns involving Francesco, but a week after learning of her pregnancy, a mass was detected on Servant of God Chiara's tongue, which doctors later discovered was cancerous. Guided by her faith and a mother's love, she elected to delay recommended treatment in order to give Francesco time to grow big enough to be born without danger of complications.

Francesco was born in May of 2011 in perfect health and Servant of God Chiara began receiving treatment again after his birth. In March of 2012, the couple entrusted Francesco to the Blessed Mother in Assisi. During Holy Week, Enrico learned that his wife's cancer was terminal, and shortly after sharing the news with her in front of the Blessed Sacrament, the couple renewed their marriage vows in a hospital chapel.

Servant of God Chiara Corbella returned home to the Lord on June 13, 2012, shortly after meeting with Pope Benedict XVI alongside Enrico and Francesco.

In closing, Dr. Tinti shared three letters written by Servant of God Chiara with those gathered to hear her witness, each revealing another beautiful aspect of the young mother's faith. In the first letter, she spoke of how young Davide though being so small helped to shatter "the idols" that kept her and Enrico

from accepting that God's providence does not always take the shape and form we might like or even understand. That realization finally freed her to "look beyond and follow God" without fearing who she really is.

Servant of God Chiara testified again to the strength of her hope in God in the second letter, written shortly before Francesco's birth: "Now the Lord has entrusted us with a third son, Francesco, who is well and will be born soon. At the same time, the Lord asked us to continue to trust Him despite a cancer I have and that was discovered a few weeks ago. This cancer is trying to make us afraid of the future, but we continue to believe that God will do great things this time too.

In the final letter, which Servant of God Chiara penned to young Francesco after learning of the terminal nature of her cancer, she reminds us all of the self-giving love of God to which we are all called. She wrote: "Only when you truly love, you will realize nothing really belongs to you because everything is a gift. Saint Francis says, 'The opposite of love is to possess'. We love you as we loved your sister Maria and brother Davide, knowing you didn't belong to us and you weren't created for us, the way it has to be for everything in life, what you have doesn't belong to you because it is a gift from God so that you can bring it to fruition." The letter closes: "We know you are special, and you have a great mission, the Lord has chosen you from the beginning of time and He will show you the way to follow Him if you open your heart... Trust in Him!"

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First-graders Devin Brinsfield and Reagan Bradshaw decorate gingerbread houses.



Colin Donnelly and Peter Grady at the Christmas Around the World Party.

Waiting and Preparing for Emmanuel

by Ann Enkiri

The Season of Advent was filled with joyful anticipation at Holy Redeemer School. Each classroom was adorned with

an Advent wreath and the candles were 'lit' weekly with paper flames as our students observed this special time of preparing to celebrate the birth of our Holy Redeemer.

Faculty focused on the spiritual journey of Advent at an afternoon retreat on the "O Antiphons", led by Father John Winslow. December's

Continued on page 36

HR Cardinals' Christmas Concert and Pageant Ring with Joy

by Ann Enkiri

Jeannie Breitenbach, school music teacher, dedicated Advent to our students getting ready to offer a preview of Christmas joy at the Holy Redeemer School

Christmas Concert and Pageant, held in the church sanctuary on December 20. Every grade learned a different Christmas hymn to perform for parents and extended family. Dressed in their 'Christmas best',

proud students took their places on the altar steps to offer their gift of song to the Christ Child. Students in the school choir, led



The school choir lifts their voices in praise.

by Mrs. Breitenbach, lifted their beautiful voices and the audience's spirits with "Light of the World"

Continued on page 30

HR Community: Ever Mindful of the Needs of Others

by Kathleen Seiler Neary

Holy Redeemer students filled dozens of shoeboxes with essentials such as toothpaste, socks and gloves for the holiday collection at SOME (So Others Might Eat) in Washington, D.C. On December 11, a

Continued on page 22



Seventh-graders Keeley Davis and Maddie Burke collect apples for SOME

Holy Redeemer Parish

9705 Summit Avenue
Kensington, MD

Rev. Mark Hughes, Pastor
301-942-2333

Holy Redeemer School
Mr. Thomas Corrigan, Principal
301-942-3701

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Our Lady of Lourdes Rock Bands perform "Sweet Child of Mine" at the Winter Music Showcase.

Rock 'n' Roll at OLOL

Guns N' Roses, Ozzy Osbourne, the Clash, and Crowded House all made a special comeback at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School on December 13 for the OLOL Winter Music Showcase.

Thanks to Mr. Long, OLOL's principal, and Mr. Bradford, head of the school's music program, The OLOL Rock Band was established in early 2023. This is the second year the band program has expanded to selections outside the typical "Hot Cross Buns."

As a musician himself, Mr. Bradford found that many students were interested in music, yet they had not found the time or opportunity to actualize their potential. He and Mr. Long began the Rock Band with thirty students last year, and the number has grown to forty-nine in 2024.

On the afternoon of Friday, December 13, the five Rock Bands and the Symphonic Band, under the direction of new band teacher, Mr. Cutter, held their first performance of the year for a parent and student audience. Songs such as "Sweet Child o' Mine," "Crazy Train," and "Don't Dream It's Over" were featured. Students, parents, and teachers alike were blown away by the result of the students' hard work and dedication. Several students had just picked up an instrument for the first time this school year!

The afternoon was exhilarating and brought many teachers and parents back to their school days. We are all excited to see the progress the bands continue to make under the direction of Mr. Bradford and Mr. Cutter.

OPT



The OLOL eighth grade students pose with the gifts they selected for Toys for Tots.

Giving Back at Christmas

The Christmas season is full of excitement and anticipation, but it is also full of opportunities to be generous and considerate of others. Throughout Advent, the students and parishioners at Our Lady of Lourdes collected Christmas gifts, clothing, and baby supplies for the

Gabriel Project of Montgomery County. The Gabriel Project is an all-volunteer organization helping needy women in Montgomery County, Maryland, who are facing crisis pregnancies, and their

Continued on page 30

Singing Their Way into Christmas

On Friday night December 20, Our Lady of Lourdes' students, teachers, and families gathered in church for OLOL's Christmas concert to celebrate the season and prepare for the birth of Jesus. Each class, including the three and four year olds, stood on the altar and proclaimed the story of Jesus' birth beginning with the fifth and sixth graders beautifully singing "Do You Hear What I Hear?" and ending with the eighth graders exclaiming "Hark! The Hark the Herald Angels Sing". The show stopper was Little Group, Pre-K, and Kindergarteners singing "Away in a Manger"; they were so adorable, an encore was inevitable! Many hours of practice by the students and music teachers Mrs. Toms and Mr. Bradford through-

out December, along with some homeroom practice, had everyone in perfect harmony all night. The memorable evening ended with the school singing "Joy to the World" as everyone made their way out of church to begin Christmas break and continue their Christmas celebration.

OPT

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish

7500 Pearl Street
Bethesda, MD

Fr. Walsh, Pastor
301-654-1287

Mr. David Long, Principal
301-654-5376

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9:30 - 11:30 am & 1:00 - 2:30 pm

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Mom of a “Future Saint” visits Mother of God

Starting in September of 2023, Mother of God School adopted the Virtue curriculum written and promoted by the Mattie Stepanek Guild. Taken directly from the Guild’s website, www.mattiematters.org, “The mission of the Guild is to gather, organize, and share information and testimony about the life, virtues, writings, ministry, and inspiration of the late teen poet and peace ambassador Mattie J.T. Stepanek to advance his possible Cause of Canonization in the Catholic Church.” The virtues curriculum highlights one virtue per month using Scripture, saints, and the life and writings of Mattie. During the school year 2023-2024, Mother of God students met monthly as Mrs. Sloan, their principal, guided them through the curriculum. Homeroom and



Mother of Mattie J.T. Stepanek, Dr. Jeni, visited students at Mother of God School. Pictured: L-R Front row: Valeria Grade 4, Alyssa Grade 3, Morghan Grade 4, Gianna Grade 4. Back row- Kathy Dempsey, Guild member, Lorene Moutanabbih; Guild member and teacher, Dr. Jeni Stepanek, Mattie’s mom, and Melissa Sloan principal.

religion teachers supported the study of virtue in their classes.

Finding value in the curriculum, Mother of God School continued with the curriculum for a second year. This year, students win awards when they are caught being virtuous or exemplifying the month’s virtue. The school still meets monthly to create community, grow together, and dive more deeply into each virtue.

Mattie’s mother, Dr. Jeni Stepanek, visited the students at Mother of God in November. The students were split into two groups, third through eighth grade and pre-kindergarten through second grade. This allowed Dr. Jeni

Continued on page 24

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Fr. Martin Bagley of St. John Neumann comes out to race for Catholic Education!

Racing to Make Catholic Education a Reality for Families

By Melissa Furman Sloan, Principal

Every year, Mother of God students lace up their sneakers, grab their water bottles, put on their House spirit shirts, and line up in the school parking lot. The day begins in prayer, and

the race begins at 9:00 am on the dot. The first lap is always one of the most exciting as the preschool students run it with their third through fifth-grade buddies. Those same preschool students continue running

Continued on page 38

Remembering Christ at Christmas

By Melissa Furman Sloan, Principal

When allowing children to participate in a live performance, the unexpected is expected to happen. Sometimes, it is a wave to a parent during the performance, an impromptu dance, or Pre-kindergarten animals jumping right up on stage to be closer to baby Jesus. This might be concerning to perfectionists, but to those who are used to being around children, it brings nothing short of delight and awe at the innocence and beauty of their little hearts.

Mother of God students work hard to create a full musical pageant of the Christmas story every year. Eighth graders lead the audience through the story of the birth of Jesus by fulfilling the important roles of the narrator, Mary, Joseph, Angel Gabriel, and



PreK animals jump on stage to meet baby Jesus.

all other cast members. This makes for a reverent rendition of this transformational story.

Throughout the narrators’ readings of scripture, each grade comes onto the stage and sings a song together to represent their contribution to that part of the Nativity. Songs range from “Betelehemu”, a Nigerian

Continued on page 38

An Exercise in Generosity

By Melissa Furman Sloan, Principal

Mother of God students focus on the virtue of generosity during the month of November. This year, the administration and student council leaders decided to create a Thanksgiving service project that goes beyond our monthly giving. Each month, on the half-day Friday, MOGS students bring non-perishable food items to support the St. John Neumann Food Pantry across the street from the school. Instead of collecting items on one half-day, a two-week service project was created to more impactfully support the food pantry.

In the second week of November, students



Student council officers running their first school-wide service project.

Continued on page 24



Three students, portraying the wisemen, carry in the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh during the annual Nativity play.

Christmas Rewind



ABOVE: The residents of Bartholomew Assisted Living enjoyed a holiday performance from St. Bart's students. RIGHT: Santa listens closely as two members of the St. Bart's community share their Christmas wishes at 2024's Sweets with Santa.



Our fearless Bobcat mascot led the student body in a quick sprint around the school just before students headed off to Christmas break.

The end of 2024 brought the traditional lineup of events to celebrate the Christmas season. December began with the annual Sweets with Santa, geared towards the younger students and parishioners. The kids participated in crafts, enjoyed hot chocolate and sweets, and told Santa their Christmas wishes. The crowd was huge, as was the fun. This is such a special event that families in the St. Bart's community enjoy as a kick off to their Christmas season each year.

The Student Choir spread some Christmas cheer over at the Bartholomew House Assisted Living Facility. Residents were delighted to hear classic Christmas hymns peppered with some upbeat tunes that had residents clapping and singing along with

the students.

As Christmas break approached and students felt the weight of last-minute assignments, pageant rehearsals, and dreary weather, the Student Council decided to inject some fun and energy into the final days of school. They organized a Santa Sprint, where the entire student body joined in a spirited run around the campus, chasing

our brave Bobcat mascot, adorned with a festive Santa hat. The event brought lots of laughs and created lasting memories, notably when the middle-school students grabbed their younger Mass buddies for a second lap around. It was the perfect way to release pent-up energy and get us one step closer to the finish line.

The Christmas Pageant was held the night before the school closed for Christmas break. This year, the eighth-grade class performed a version of *How the Grinch Found Christmas*, written and directed by Mr. Daniel Villar, the school's music teacher and alumnus. All other grades sang Christmas hymns and songs while accompanied by the sixth grade on percussion. Even the littlest Pre-K class performed a couple of songs drawing "awws" and applause from the audience. After the pageant, the attendees enjoyed a reception hosted by the HSA and held in the Church Hall. The following day was full of class parties managed by room parents. Everyone was full of joy, and sweets, when the bell signaled the start of Christmas break.

OPT

St. Bart's Celebrates Catholic Schools Week

The Bobcats are excited to celebrate national Catholic Schools Week, a time to honor the significant role Catholic schools play in our lives. This year, we are thrilled to invite all school families, parishioners, and alumni to join us for a special student-led Mass on Sunday, January 26, at 10:00 am to kick off the week. The students will be dressed in their formal uniforms, leading the congregation in prayer and song as a beautiful display of their commitment to faith.

A heartwarming tradition of this Mass is when the Student Council President addresses the parish, followed by a time of fellowship with donuts in the Church Hall. It's a wonderful opportunity for our community to come together in prayer and celebration.

Throughout the week, students will engage in a variety of activities and assemblies that reflect the values of our Catholic school. Our focus on Building Strong Minds, Hearts, and Character in Faith and Learning 365 days a year will be evident in everything from special guest speakers to fun, educational challenges. Highlights include a special Lunar New Year Celebration, a Vocation Day assembly featuring visiting sisters and seminarians, and the always-popular religion bee, where students compete in a friendly,

but fierce, contest of faith knowledge.

The week will conclude with Family Bingo Night, organized by our sixth-grade students and their families, to raise funds for the annual Outdoor Education trip. It's a highly anticipated event that brings the whole community together for a fun evening in support of our students' expanded learning experiences.

We are looking forward to a week filled with joy, learning, and celebration, and we invite everyone to join us in making Catholic Schools Week a truly memorable occasion!

OPT

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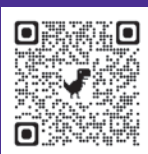
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Members of the Student Council and the SJE community with the wrapped gifts, ready to be sent to Catholic Charities for a family in need.



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Inspiring Hearts and Minds During the Christmas Season

The Advent and Christmas season was once again an opportunity to live out the mission of St. John the Evangelist School, to inspire the hearts and minds of SJE students. Students across the grades came together for several community events that helped to appreciate the joy of the seasons and to prepare for the birth of Jesus.

Our first and fifth graders met up in the library as part of the Reading Buddies program. The fifth grade presented *'Twas the Night before Christmas* and *Santa Mouse* to a captivated first grade. Once the presentations were finished, everyone enjoyed time reading one-on-one with their buddy.

Students prepared their hearts for Christmas through a schoolwide service project. The entire school



Kindergarten students met up with their seventh-grade buddies to make some special ornaments for their tree. Christmas crafts and buddies are the best!!

community donated needed contributions to the Catholic Charities Adopt a Family program. The gifts were sent off during an Advent prayer service that was led by the Student Council.

The Advent season also provided some opportunities to just have fun too. Kindergarten students worked with the seventh-grade buddies to

make Christmas ornaments. The seventh graders helped their younger buddies to cut out the many small intricate pieces that were used to assemble ornaments depicting the Nativity, complete with the Holy Family.

We look forward to the many opportunities to learn and grow in 2025!

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First and fifth grade reading buddies spread out throughout the library to enjoy some Christmas books together.

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Welcome to the Middle School Advisory Program at Mary of Nazareth!

Mary of Nazareth Catholic School is proud to offer the Middle School Advisory Program, designed to support students' academic, social, and emotional growth. This mentor-based program fosters connections between middle school students and faculty, creating a supportive network to help students thrive. The program is designed around the needs of students and promotes peer to peer problem solving, facilitated by an advisor. Kathleen Carter, School Counselor and advisory director states that, "when advisory groups were first formed, students seemed to focus more on the problems themselves, but now that we have been meeting for more than three months, they focus more on creating solutions."

In small groups of 5-8, students meet weekly with a trained faculty and staff member who serves as their dedicated advisor for the year. This group includes teachers and student support services members as well as our Principal and Vice Principal. Advisors provide a space for reflective discussions, fostering



Students gather with their fellow advisees to talk about challenges they face and potential solutions.

social awareness, empathy, and a sense of belonging. Advisors identify students who need additional support and ensure every child is connected to a trusted adult and a peer group.

Rooted in MoN's whole-child approach to education, the Advisory Program reflects our mission to prepare students for lives of service through faith-based education and holistic development. As said by Barbara Logan, Mary of

Nazareth Math Specialist and 24/25 Advisor, "in this unique role, advisors have the ability to nurture students towards the realization of the gift of ownership God has given them over their choices for healthy pursuits. As the student's dialogue with each other, they develop the knowledge and skills to appreciate their differences and rejoice in their similarities." By fostering engagement, self-advocacy, and community, the program equips students



The advisory program also offers team building and problem solving activities for students to work on collaboratively.

with the skills and confidence to navigate challenges and succeed in high school and beyond. Together, we're building a culture of connection and support for every student.

Here's what some of our sixth-grade students had to say about their advisory experience:

"[During advisory,] I get to share my worries and compare them with others. I'm learning that others feel the same way I do."

"It's nice to know we're all feel-

ing the same way about things. It helps me relate to others and reminds me I'm not alone."

"I can talk about what I need, and so can everyone else. Together, we figure out solutions."

With programs like this, Mary of Nazareth continues to prioritize the well-being of our students, fostering a supportive environment that empowers them to grow academically, emotionally, and spiritually.

OPT

Snow Days and Seamless Learning at Mary of Nazareth

As Christmas break came to a close, picturesque snow days marked the end of the holiday season at Mary of Nazareth Catholic School. Students and teachers embraced the fresh snowfall with enthusiasm, enjoying sledding and a snowman-building contest at home.

By Tuesday, however, the snow boots were traded for Chromebooks as Mary of Nazareth students transitioned seamlessly to virtual learning. This quick shift demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of our teachers, students, and families. Our dedicated faculty ensured that the momentum of education continued without interruption, providing engaging lessons and main-



Do you want to build a snowman? Students took advantage of the first snow day after Christmas break to get outside and enjoy the snow and participate in our snowman building contest.

taining the high standards that define our Blue Ribbon School

Continued on page 29



As the snow days kept coming, MoN students got back to work, participating in virtual learning.

Christmas Traditions at Mary of Nazareth

The Christmas season at Mary of Nazareth Catholic School is a time of joy, celebration, and community. Our school, supported by the traditions of our seven parishes – St. John Neumann, St. Rose of Lima, St. Mary's in Barnesville, St. Paul's in Damascus, Mother Seton, Our Lady of the Presentation Parish and Our Lady of the Visitation Parish – embraces the spirit of the season through



ABOVE: The student portraying the Virgin Mary looks lovingly at the infant Jesus during the Christmas Concert.



LEFT: The hallways were full of holiday cheer throughout December, shown here with some of our youngest learners dressed in Christmas attire.

BELOW: We have Bingo! Christmas Bingo is a favorite holiday activity at MoN.

faith-filled festivities and cherished traditions.

Our Music Director, Katie Gentile, orchestrates a beloved Christmas Concert for students and their families in Pre-K-5th grade. This evening of beautiful music and festive atmosphere was a great way to inspire the Christmas spirit throughout the MoN Community. Another beloved MoN tradition is Christmas Bingo, an event that brings the entire school together for an afternoon of fun and

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More Mary of Nazareth News on Page 29

ENZLER

Con't from page 1

Cross service with our three neighbors on Chevy Chase Circle — All Saints Episcopal, Chevy Chase Presbyterian and Chevy Chase Baptist. We processed together from church to church celebrating the stations.

It was meaningful to me as a follower of Jesus and as a pastor. It is particularly personal because we used my father's meditations on the stations called *Everyone's Way of the Cross*. Many members of those churches shared how much they loved my father's book, and I know he would be happy to know how it was used.

When I spend time with people of other Christian denominations, I see the fervor of their faith, their knowledge of Scripture, and the values they try to live by. I see the goodness of their pastors, the strength of their fellowship, and the joy with which they worship God and celebrate big feasts like Christmas and Easter.

From my perspective through many years of priesthood, much more unites us than divides us. We all believe in God. We believe in Jesus as the Son of God, and Mary as the mother of God. We believe in the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament. We celebrate a Trinitarian formula of baptism — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We rejoice in the gift of salvation through Jesus, and we're guided by Scripture.

I know there are things we don't always see eye to eye on, and I am not dismissing those. We don't always agree on ordination, papal authority, the emphasis upon Mary, or the Real Presence in the Eucharist. However, I think we should remember that on the big questions — "Who is Jesus?" "Who is God?" and "What does it mean to be a Christian?" — we are very similar.

I encourage all of us to think about how we might make progress welcoming and encouraging conversation with our neighboring churches, some of which are literally just down the street from our parishes. Wouldn't it be great to form a deeper relationship with or to learn more about the faith of those in our communities who go to the same shopping centers, go to the same public schools, and eat at the same restaurants we do?

As Jesus was praying with his disciples before his Passion, he said: "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." (John 17:20-21)

Maybe Jesus' prayer can be our prayer in this week of Christian Unity. We have a lot to share, and we have a lot to learn. Let us pray for all people, that we love God and our neighbor.

"This is how all will know that you are my disciples," Jesus also said at the Last Supper, "if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

OPT

MASS

Con't from page 1

choir members, greeters and musicians. As a co-founder of the Mass, Special Events Coordinator Sylvia Jones had coordinated the liturgical ministers in the weeks leading up to the liturgy and prepared some food for the reception the night before.

Yet, when her daughter, Meghan, was transferred to the hospital on January 5 for treatment of a respiratory illness, Sylvia leaned on a network of fellow parishioners and friends to ensure the Mass and reception could still happen. Their response? Done.

"As a parish, people recognize what needs to be done and do it," said parishioner Rosemary Hudecheck, who helped coordinate the liturgical ministers. "It also says something about Sylvia. We know she has our back and we have hers."

When it became clear Sylvia would be unable to attend, Doris

and Alex Chung -- veteran helpers at the parish's Lenten Pancake Supper, Yard Sale, and other events -- agreed to coordinate the reception. Hudecheck and parishioner Marianne Moore studied a handwritten list to identify which attendees had liturgical roles. Members of the parish's Haiti Committee and others arrived to arrange food and lend a hand.

Pastor Fr. John Dillon and Parochial Vicar Fr. Grzegorz Okulewicz concelebrated the Mass, which included a poignant acknowledgment of each group of people with liturgical roles. In his homily, Deacon Jim Datovech, who has an adult son with special needs, invoked actor Christopher Reeve in his journey from his iconic role in the "Superman" films to a quadriplegic and advocate for people with spinal cord injuries.

"Each one of you is a star as God's creation," Deacon Jim said. "You are who you are because of your heroic journey in love, joy,

perseverance and faith."

After the Mass, Jennifer Shannon, one of the readers of the Prayers of the Faithful, said she enjoyed taking part in the Mass and being surrounded by her family and friends. "Connecting with the community [is special]," she said.

Rachel Chung, coordinator of disabilities ministry for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington, agreed, saying Deacon Jim's homily was an incredible message for everyone. While Chung said it was odd not having Sylvia or Meghan present at the Mass, the parish's gift of hospitality, welcome, and openness was felt by all who attended.

"If the work is good, then the work continues," Chung said. "It continues to uplift the parish."

To learn how your parish can start its own Mass for All God's Children, please contact Chung at chungr@adw.org.

OPT

NEEDS

Con't from page 16

wrapping party was held to gather and assemble supplies and put decorative touches on the boxes. The shoebox collection has become an annual tradition at Holy Redeemer School, with packages stacking up under the Christmas tree in the

school's foyer in the weeks before the boxes are delivered by a school parent to SOME.

Holy Redeemer School families also participate in the parish's monthly outreach program to provide a meal to the SOME program. Children bring in bags of apples or oranges to accompany the casseroles that are made by school families and parishioners. SOME

recently reopened its dining room after a major renovation, allowing donations that were halted by the pandemic (and then the renovation) to resume. The Holy Redeemer community is excited to be able to once again participate in helping to feed our neighbors who are hungry.

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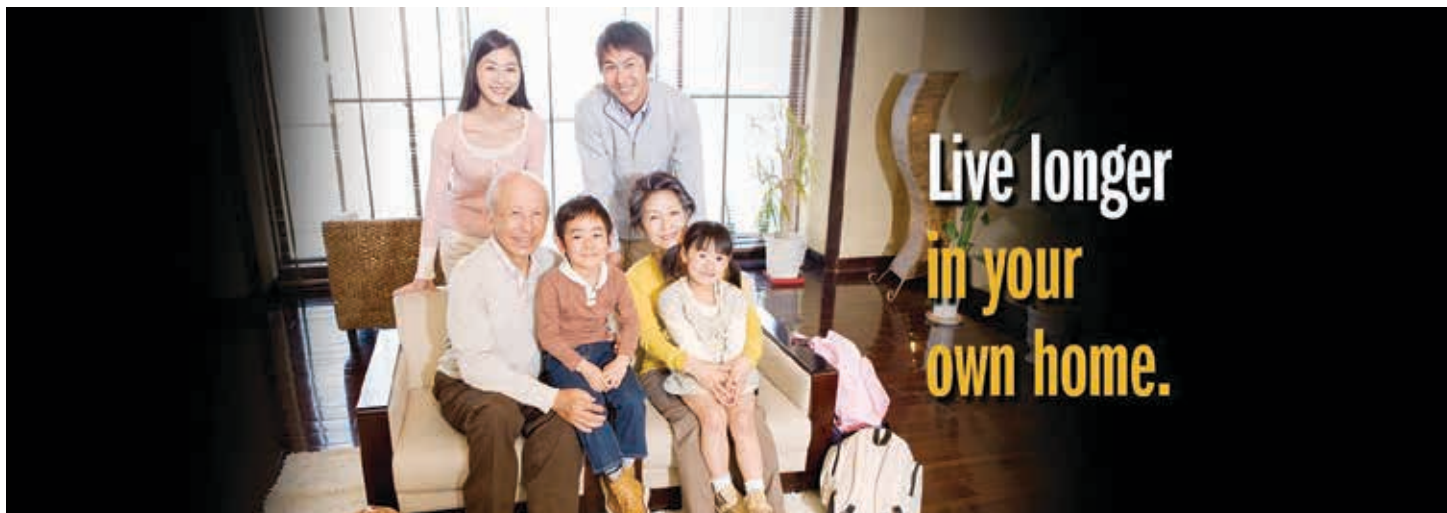
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LEFT: Students at Our Lady of Guadalupe Prayer Garden
BELOW: The Our Lady of Guadalupe Prayer Garden in the Summer



BELOW: Student actors playing Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego



ABOVE: A student displays her original artwork, recognizing Mary as our Mother.

LEFT: A student expresses their love for Jesus and Mary through their artwork and a smile.

BELOW: "We love you, Mary!" was a common theme in the student art.



ABOVE: Brother Carlos and the cast from the play

BELOW: SFIS Choir Director, Christian Leanos, with choir at the Basilica



Students listened carefully as numbers were called to see if they could mark off a box on their Bingo card.

BINGO DAY

Con't from page 7

for exciting gift card prizes and enjoying the festive atmosphere. The joy in the room was contagious

as grandparents volunteered their time to call out numbers, hand out prizes, and share in the holiday spirit with our school family. It's a blessing to have our grandparents be such an active part of our community!

OPT



Bingo Day was full of fun and laughter across the generations.

SAINT

Con't from page 18

to get to the students' developmental level. The students asked incredible and deep questions about Mattie, his interests, his disability, and life in general. Dr. Jeni spoke about Mattie's humanity. Mattie is a great role model for the students because of his holiness and age. He is relatable. He helps the students to see that a small person who lives in Montgomery County, Maryland, can be holy, live virtuously, and one

day become a saint regardless of trials or setbacks. Sometimes, it is easy to look at the lives of the saints and think that a level of holiness is not attainable. Dr. Jeni reminded the students and teachers that Mattie was just a kid. He liked playing with his dog, he liked pranks, and he loved to play in general. It is also important for students to see people with visible disabilities in everyday life. We are all made in His image and likeness, and all His children should be included in everyday life!

OPT

GENEROSITY

Con't from page 18

were asked to bring in items to support the food pantry. Volunteers from the pantry let the school know the most needed items. The needed items and more expensive goods were worth three points. The middle-priced items were worth two points, and all other donations were worth one point. As students brought in items for the project, they were placed in large boxes in the front hall, designated for their House. Throughout the two weeks, the boxes needed to be emptied because they became so full! At the

end of the project, student council members counted all the points for each House. The real winners were each of the students who got to visually see the impact of their donations and the student council members who were overheard during the mundane counting of items "I love doing things like this!" As usual, Mother of God School families never disappoint, and their generosity was literally overflowing. In the end, St. Gabriel House won this competition, but with the donations from each House, St. Gabriel, St. Michael, and St. Raphael, 2033 items were donated to the St. John Neumann Food Pantry!

OPT

Honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe

We have a secret treasure at Saint Francis International School. Hidden outside a corner of our school is the Lady of Guadalupe Prayer Garden. This garden is just outside the Father Grace Chapel.

Years ago, it was noticed that people were bringing lawn chairs outside the chapel to pray. To make this space special, a garden in honor of Our Blessed Mother was built. Now people, including our students, come to pray at this beau-

tiful spot. A mosaic of the iconic image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and Saint Juan Diego is surrounded by flowers and greenery. Visible through the nearby windows is the tabernacle where Our Lord resides.

Our students have many opportunities to learn about Our Lady of Guadalupe and to honor her. In December, our choir, led by Christian Leanos, was chosen to sing at the Mass and Celebration dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception – the largest Roman Catholic Church in North America, in association with the "Walk with Mary." During his homily for the "Walk with Mary" Mass in 2023 "Walk with Mary," Bishop Menjivar said, "Mary has always accompanied us with her caring and loving presence. She has taken us by her hand to lead us to Jesus. This is the meeting and the goal of our archdiocesan pilgrimage to walk with Mary to Jesus. She

invites us today to dare to let ourselves be touched and transformed by God's mercy and love."

Our Campus Minister, Rachel Fry said, "This choir concert has given our students exposure to the beauty of the Basilica, the joy of singing together with adult choirs, the unity of Catholics throughout Washington in celebration of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the culture of the Americas represented there."

Brother Carlos, one of the Franciscan postulants who works in our school, directed students in a play about Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego for our elementary students. We read Tomie de Paulo's beautiful book *Lady of Guadalupe* during library class. For an art project, students adorned the image of our Lady with their own beautiful creations.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas, pray for us!

OPT

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Christmas 2024 Pastorela at St. Michael the Archangel



The St. Michael the Archangel Christmas Pastorela, as viewed from above.

By Héctor Silva Ávalos

The young couple walked in desperation asking for help. “My wife is pregnant, and we need some place to spend the night”, the man said. His name was Joseph. His wife, Mary,



ABOVE: King Herod enters the room.



LEFT: Two young actors representing the Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph walk the room asking for help on their way to Bethlehem.

walked in silence by his side. Nobody answered. In the end, all they got was a crude stable with a manger. There they went.

This was just one of the scenes of the Nativity portrayed by the young actors of the group Juventud Unida a Cristo (Youth United with Christ) at St. Michael the Archangel on December 18, 2024. The Pastorela, as these Christmas rep-

resentations are known in Spanish, gathered dozens of parishioners.

The representation of the walk of the Holy Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph to Bethlehem was solemn and brought the parishioners present to a moment of deep reflection in the parish's Williamsburg Room.

At the end of the play, all the faithful took a moment to express best wishes to each other and take family pictures with the talented actors.

OPT



ABOVE: The three kings adore the newborn Christ Child.



A Mariachi band filled the parish hall with music honoring Our Lady.



A statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe was present in the Church sanctuary during the celebration of Her feast day.

Celebrating the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. Michael's

By Deacon Óscar Méndez

On December 12, 2024, St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Silver Spring, Md., came alive with faith and devotion as over 300 parishioners gathered to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The evening began with a procession featuring the beloved image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, symbolizing her enduring presence and guidance among the faithful. A moving reenactment of St. Juan Diego presenting the miraculous Tilma captivated parishioners, reminding them of Our Lady's powerful message of love and hope.

Monsignor Tolentino delivered an inspiring homily, weaving key insights from “Un relato de Don Antonio Valeriano,” a 16th

Continued on page 31

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Celebrating Catholic Schools Week

“Remember that the Christian life is one of action. Not of speech and daydreams. Let there be few words and many deeds and let them be done well.”

— St. Vincent Pallotti



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St. Raphael's Angels Rise to the "Twelve Acts of Service" Advent Challenge

by Laura Long and Faith Vakil

At St. Raphael School, acts of charity and service are always a part of the Advent season, embodying the spirit of giving and compassion. This holiday, the Home and School Association embraced the school's annual theme "Angels for Others" by introducing a new activity: the 12 Acts of Service Advent Challenge. Students were encouraged to complete an Advent Wreath by participating in three Acts of Hope, three Acts of Peace, three Acts of Joy, and three Acts of Love.

Students received prompts for service ideas in each of the four categories, but were also encouraged to create their own "acts" to meet the challenge. Acts of Hope included activities such as crafting decorations for children in the hospital and making Christmas decorations for the priests at St. Raphael. Examples of Acts of Peace involved praying the Rosary with family members and showing kindness and respect to siblings and/or friends. Acts of Joy encompassed giving your teacher a compliment and par-



ABOVE: Students shared some of their favorite holiday tunes with the residents of Raphael House.

LEFT: Friends from across grade levels smile as they complete a Christmas craft.

RIGHT: Students loved the chance to come to school in their pajamas and to listen to Christmas stories.

ABOVE: The many community events throughout the Advent and Christmas season allowed buddies to spend time together doing crafts and other activities.



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ticipating in a toy drive. Finally, Acts of Love included activities like praying for loved ones, offering to do extra chores, and making Christmas cards for family members, both near and far.

St. Raphael's School also organized several opportunities for students to complete acts of service during the Advent season, such as making a holiday trail mix for McKenna's Wagon (Martha's Table) during an in-school activ-

ity. Students were also invited to spread joy by participating in, or attending, the annual St. Raphael School Band and Chorus concert. Similarly, students were given the opportunity to bring holiday cheer by caroling for the residents of Raphael House. Another option was to share love with the SRS family through Christmas Story Time! Students could wear their favorite holiday pajamas to school and then log on to Zoom in the evening for

a Christmas story reading by some very special guests, Mrs. Cotting, the principal, and Mrs. Dwyer, the former principal. Finally, students were given the opportunity to support the parish and feel the hope of St. Nick at St. Raphael's annual Breakfast with Santa event

Upon completing an act of service, students colored a space on the corresponding candle of the Advent wreath. Once all 12 spaces were filled, the completed wreath

was submitted to the principal, Mrs. Cotting. Students who completed the 12 Acts of Service Advent Wreath Challenge were rewarded with a tag day upon return to school in January! Through these meaningful activities, St. Raphael students embraced the true spirit of Advent, fostering a community of hope, peace, joy, and love.

OPT



ABOVE: The St. Patrick's Christmas Pageant was full of beautiful performances from all our students across grade levels.

LEFT: The Christmas Pageant also featured the telling of the Nativity story.



HOLIDAY CHEER

Con't from page 7

Christmas Giving program was a heartwarming reminder of the generosity that defines our community. Families donated gifts, food, and gift cards to help those in need, making this holiday season brighter for many in our area. The opportunity to give back to our community continues to be one of our most cherished traditions, as it fosters a sense of compassion and support for those less fortunate.

We also kicked off the season with our annual Breakfast with Santa, a special event hosted by our sixth-grade families. This event brought our school families together for a morning of delicious food, festive activities, and, of course, photos with Santa. It was a wonderful way for our community to gather and celebrate the joy of the season.

Our Santa Shop gave students the

opportunity to pick out special gifts for their family and friends. This event, always a favorite among the students, allowed them to practice the joy of giving while selecting thoughtful presents for their loved ones. It's a fun way to teach students the value of giving from the heart.

Lastly, our much-loved annual Christmas Pageant was a beautiful tradition that highlighted the true meaning of the season. Led by our eighth-grade class, each grade performed songs that told the story of the birth of Jesus. It was a meaningful and memorable evening, filled with the sounds of joy and gratitude as we celebrated together as a school family.

These events reflect the warmth, generosity, and unity that make St. Patrick's School a special place. As we look back on a wonderful December, we are grateful for the community spirit that makes these traditions so meaningful.

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Celebration of Christmas Traditions Helps Build Fellowship in Spanish-Speaking Community

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

As St. Francis of Assisi's Spanish-speaking community celebrated two Christmas traditions observed in some of their native countries for the second year in a row, leaders of the group are observing members experiencing a deepening fellowship and investment in their parish home as they practice their faith inside and outside the church.

Just over two years after St. Francis of Assisi Parish founded its Mass in Spanish, ministry leader Lourdes Garcia once again oversaw celebrations of Las Posadas (The Lodging) and Los Tres Reyes Magos (The Three Wise Men) to bookend the Christmas season at the parish. On the nine days before Christmas, Las Posadas commemorates St. Joseph and Mary seeking a place where the baby Jesus could be born, while on the Feast of the Epiphany, Los Tres Reyes Magos celebrates the Three Wise Men who visited him after his birth.

Although Las Posadas is primarily celebrated in Mexico and in some countries in Central America, Garcia has been pleased to see the entire Spanish-speaking community, stemming from countries in South and Central America and Caribbean countries, come together to honor this tradition. Along with the weekly celebration of Mass, these traditions help people feel like they are home and that the church belongs to them.

"We have Mexicans, Peruvians, people



Members of St. Francis of Assisi's Spanish speaking community gather in a parishioner's home to celebrate Las Posadas, a nine-day commemoration of St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother seeking a place where Jesus could be born.

from the Dominican Republic, Columbians, Guatemalans and Nicaraguans – all of them get together," Garcia said. "It was so beautiful. Everyone enjoyed it."

During Las Posadas, celebrated from December 14-22, a different parishioner hosted 20-30 people at his or her home the first eight nights of the celebration; on the final night, the group convened in the church. Led by two people dressed as St. Joseph and

the Blessed Mother, one group would stand outside the home, asking the group inside if they could "stay" in their home. The sheltered group would sing back that they had no room. Once the group of unsheltered people were "permitted" inside, the celebration would continue with a novena prayer, songs, food, and fellowship.

During Los Tres Reyes Magos, three people dressed as the Three Kings "visited"

the church during the Mass in Spanish on January 5 and answered children's questions. After the Mass, gifts were distributed to the children attending the Mass and coffee and dessert were served.

Parishioner Yokaira Cid de Hilario helped compile the novena booklets for Las Posadas, which were distributed each night to those in attendance. She was one of several people working on a team this year to coordinate the event, a role Garcia hopes to hand off to the group next year.

A native of the Dominican Republic, Cid de Hilario said Las Posadas is not a cultural tradition celebrated in her home country. But she enjoyed helping coordinate the event, since it provides a way for people to know one another outside of church. "I really feel grateful because I'm doing something for the community that made them happy," she said.

Deacon Will Garcia, Lourdes' husband, said he is beginning to see God working through people, as they start viewing St. Francis as their faith home. He recalled a group of Spanish-speaking parishioners cleaning the statue of St. Francis and Jesus in front of the church earlier last year. And, during the recent snowstorm, one man with a plow helped clear the church parking lot, while several others helped shovel snow.

"I think they're getting a hole [in their heart] filled here," Deacon Will said. "They want to feel like a part of something."

OPT

Advent Almsgiving Programs Collect Nearly \$22,000 for People in Need and Groups That Serve Them

By Melissa Montealegre Egan

During the Advent season, St. Francis parishioners donated approximately \$22,000 to three almsgiving programs directly benefitting families in need and groups providing services to immigrants, people with no means, individuals with special needs, and those who need food.

The donations came through three main programs: the parish's Spirit Tree program, which enables parishioners to select an ornament off a tree and buy gift cards for families served by Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary's Pope Francis Outreach Center in Washington DC or the New Neighbors Interfaith Alliance (NNIA), a coalition of faith-based organizations and community groups that help acclimate immigrants to local communities; the Alternative Christmas Gift program, a ministry that



On December 15 Patricia O'Connor sells cards for the parish's Alternative Christmas Gift program, which invites parishioners to donate to worthy organizations in amounts equal to services these groups provide their beneficiaries.

invites parishioners to donate to worthy organizations in amounts equal to services these groups provide their beneficiaries; and the Christmas Stocking Help Line project, which invites Religious Education families to donate gift cards to benefit households served by Catholic Charities of Montgomery County.

All told, the parish collected gift cards in excess of \$13,000 for the Spirit Tree program, said Parish Secretary Donna Zezzo. The cards collected for families served by the Pope Francis Outreach Center were mailed to the parish shortly after Christmas. Chris King, president of NNIA, said their organization provided gift cards to more than 50 families

who were not expecting them.

"The families told us they will use the cards for shoes for their children, school supplies, food, clothes and a few treats for the children," King wrote in a thank you note to parishioners. "None of these families have income for these types of luxuries so this was extraordinary to them. Our light shines as a Catholic community to these families."

Through the Alternative Christmas Gift program, ministry coordinators Pat O'Connor and Doris Chung reported that parishioners donated \$6,813 to help people locally, in Haiti, and throughout the world. The benefitting organizations included the St. Ann's Center for Children, Youth and Families; NNIA; Little Sisters of the Poor; Montgomery Hospice; the Haiti Ministry, and So Others Might Eat.

Director of Religious Education Susan Anderson also reported that Religious Education families donated over \$2,000 in gift cards for the Christmas Stocking Help Line benefitting families served by Catholic Charities in Montgomery County.

Director of Social Concerns Tony Bosnick said he believes St. Francis parishioners support these Advent almsgiving programs because their generosity is a sign of their experience with God's love.

"It has to do with the spirit of Advent and embracing Jesus' call to be charitable," he said. "This enables people to do other things that are really helpful."

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Mary of Nazareth



A collage of our student artists showing off their masterpieces.

Celebrating Art Contest Winners at Mary of Nazareth

Mary of Nazareth Catholic School is proud to celebrate the incredible achievements of our student artists in the Celebrating Art contest, a national competition showcasing the creativity and talent of young artists in grades K-12. Several of our students had their artwork selected for publication in *Celebrating Art's* prestigious anthology, a remarkable accomplishment that highlights their hard work and artistic vision.

This year's honorees include:
 Zuri Campbell (First Grade)
 Marion Reposa (First Grade)
 Sofia Vasquez (Second Grade)
 Zoey Burrowes (Second Grade)
 Aidan Desouza (Third Grade)
 Kira Holmes, Lillian Assili, Taylor Kravitz, Gisella Rose

(Fourth Grade)
 Daniela Maria Perdomo-Zeron (Eighth Grade)

Under the guidance of our talented art teacher, Talia Rizzo, students have flourished creatively. With over 15 years of experience in art education, Ms. Rizzo fosters a supportive environment that inspires students to express themselves and embrace artistic challenges. Her philosophy, "We create art from our hearts," encourages young artists to grow confidently while exploring a variety of mediums.

We are thrilled to see our students shine on this national stage and look forward to more artistic successes in the future. Congratulations to our published artists – you've made us proud!

OPT

Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord

By Dorrette Paulin

As Mother Seton Sodalist were preparing and organizing the gifts from the Giving Tree for the retired Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, some of the parish children gathered to rehearse their readings, interspersed with songs from Advent to Jesus' birth for the Annual Christmas Program for the Sisters.

The children, from the youngest to the oldest, delivered their best performance since we started the program many years ago. They sang traditional Christmas carols, and this year, we added

"This Holy Light" by Fr. Rick Manalo, but the Sisters waited



Mother Seton parish children perform Christmas songs for the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg, Md.

in anticipation for their favorite holiday song, "Rudolph, The

Red Nosed Reindeer". One of the youngest members in the group was not bashful about singing the introduction to the song, and, once again, the Sisters were highly amused by Rudolph's nose, which shined like a lightbulb and glowed like a flashlight. The choir and especially the boys, boisterously delivered the funny parts. The Sisters were delighted!

At the end of the program, the children distributed the gifts from the Giving Tree, enjoyed their refreshments and their time with the Sisters. We departed with a renewed sense of hope, peace and joy. "There is Peace in Christ".

OPT



Sister Lawrence Marie Callahan shares a sweet moment.



Mother Seton Pastorela in 2024

Annual Pastorela at Mother Seton Parish

By Lourdes André

The history of the Pastorela in the Hispanic Community at Mother Seton started back in 1992. It began with a group of catechists, of which I was a part of, led by Nubia Burggraff, later by Ana Maria Molina and, after the Catechism classes in Spanish ended, I took over the Pastorela.

With the help of Patricia Mir for several years and currently with the help of Brenda Rosado and Osmin Solórzano, we continue with the mission of maintaining our Hispanic culture and traditions, emphasizing that Christmas is not trees, gifts or holidays but the Birth of the Redeemer.

November and December are very cold months, but rehearsals were held twice a week, and the children memorized their roles between snacks and games. They learned about the life of Jesus along the way. The greatest satisfaction I had was when a 5-year-old boy hugged Baby Jesus and thanked



Mother Seton Parish Pastorela in 2000

they provide musical accompaniment to our play and much more. Also, a special thank you to our pastor, Fr. Lee Fangmeyer, who has supported this endeavor for the past 10 years.

The parents who attend all the rehearsals after work are a great blessing, and to end my story I only have to say that ... there is no Christmas without Jesus!

Sincerely
 Lourdes André

SNOW DAYS

Con't from page 21

of Excellence.

The smooth transition to virtual learning reflects Mary of Nazareth's commitment to innovation and preparedness. With the support of our staff, students logged in with confidence, showing that no matter the weather, the pursuit of knowledge never stops. This adaptability not only keeps our students on track

academically but also instills valuable life skills, including flexibility and perseverance.

At Mary of Nazareth, we are proud of our ability to balance academics with a strong sense of community. Snow days may bring sledding and snowmen, but they also remind us of the strength of our school family. Together, we prove that with faith, teamwork, and a commitment to excellence, we can turn any challenge into an opportunity for growth and success.

OPT

TRADITIONS

Con't from page 21

camaraderie. Students team up with their prayer partners to compete for festive prizes, share thoughtful gifts, and celebrate the season with laughter and cheer. The event fosters meaningful connections between students of all grades, creating lasting memories before Christmas break.

Throughout the season, our school community comes together in faith and fellowship, reflecting the true meaning of Christmas. From parish involvement to classroom celebrations, Mary of Nazareth embraces the joy of giving, gratitude, and unity. Our MoN traditions remind us of the blessings of our school family and the beauty of each season. We hope you had a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

OPT

him for the classes.

The support of my family, friends, and the Word and Life Charismatic Prayer Group of the Charismatic Renewal at Mother Seton is vital,

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A Visit to the National Museum of the American Indian

The second grade at St. Elizabeth school had a fantastic day at the National Museum of the American Indian! They learned how each native community is unique and distinct. Students discussed how the cultures of the Indigenous peo-



ABOVE: A group photo commemorating St. Elizabeth's field trip to the National Museum of the American Indian.

LEFT: Second-grade students enjoyed looking through the museum exhibits as they learned about Native American culture and history.



ples are alive and adaptive. Many communities blend their traditional ways with contemporary lifestyles. It was fascinating to see the every-

day objects, articles of clothing, children's toys, items of cultural heritage, and contemporary artworks that filled the galleries and exhibitions.

OPT



Usually we talk about guardian angels and the archangels at St. Elizabeth's, but the week after Christmas break we were all about snow angels.



St. Elizabeth's students showing off their snow day confection: snow ice cream!

St. E's Snow Angels

St. E's snow angels made the most of the snow days, turning the chilly weather into a flurry of fun and joy! They bundled up in warm coats and bright scarves, created snow angels, built towering snowmen, and shared laughter as snowballs flew through the air. Whether sipping hot chocolate or marveling at the new white landscape, St. E's students truly embraced the magic of winter and made memories to treasure.

OPT

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St. Mary - Rockville



ABOVE: The Annual Christmas Show was an occasion for our students to show off their festive holiday attire. They all looked wonderful!

LEFT: St. Mary's K-8th Grade students sang festive holiday carols for their teachers and parents a few days before Christmas break at their Annual Christmas Show.



Angels, shepherds, kings and blessed animals praise the newborn King.

CONCERT

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And "A Christmas Lullaby." Holy Redeemer's Music Minister, Joe Ryan, lent his time, energy, and talents to accompany the concert. Third-graders, who had worked so very hard with their teachers –

Mrs. Heyl, Ms. Silva, and Mrs. Hurley (Religion) – enacted the Gospel stories of Jesus' Nativity and the Magi's Visit as narrated by eighth-graders. The whole school community left the event, ready to proclaim the song's lyrics "Glory to the light of the world...Glory, the light of the world is here!"

OPT



Seventh-grader Emma O'Neill plays a violin solo at the Christmas concert.

GIVING BACK

Con't from page 17

children, by providing practical support, including cribs, strollers, clothing, grocery cards, diapers,

formula, and other needed items. By the end of the drive, pack'n play cribs in the church and school were overflowing with toys and clothes for children of all ages. Right before leaving on Christmas break, the OLOL eighth graders left school for

a shopping field trip to Target. They spent time thoughtfully picking out toys for children to donate to Toys for Tots. The students purchased the gifts with money they had raised as a class earlier this school year.

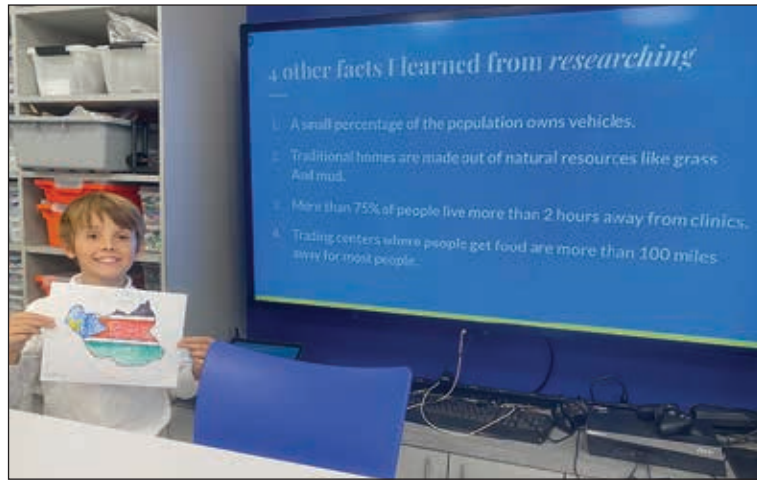
OPT

Cleverness and Resourcefulness on Display: Conducting Research in Fifth-Grade Science

By Mrs. Jodie Shoemaker, Assistant Head of School and Grade 5 & 6 Science Teacher

When most people hear the word “research,” an image of a scientist in a white lab coat with a clipboard in hand may come to mind. We might also think of complex experiments, microscopes, and other scientific tools, as well as stacks of books and expansive library collections. This all seems daunting and a bit overwhelming for the average middle school student. Fortunately, that is not what research looks like in our fifth-grade science class.

Recently, we concluded our unit of study all about water on our planet. Students then completed research projects related to this unit of study and the novel *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park. Students explored a range of topics from the supply and demand for water in South Sudan, diseases that result from drinking contaminated water, animals in South Sudan like the honeyguide bird, and the availability of electricity, telephone, and internet in the country. This project allowed students to delve deeper into a topic of their choice related to our unit of study and further



A fifth-grade student created a slide deck to enhance his oral presentation.

develop their critical thinking skills on this topic. Not only did students have to research their topic, exploring diverse perspectives, but they also had to construct a written response and include a visual or creative component that complemented their writing.

The project aimed to develop essential research and information literacy skills like identifying and evaluating credible sources of information, using online resources

effectively, citing sources properly, and staying organized while searching. These academic skills will continue to develop in future science classes. The advantages of this type of project in a middle-school science class are numerous and support academic achievement across disciplines.

Some of the benefits of conducting research projects in middle-school science classes include:

Deepening Understanding:

Going beyond memorizing facts, students actively investigate a topic, fostering a deeper understanding of scientific concepts. They learn to connect different scientific ideas and apply them to real-world scenarios. In this case, students built upon an idea from the novel *A Long Walk to Water* and made connections between the story, our science unit, and other subject areas.

Fostering Creativity and Innovation: Students have the freedom to explore their own interests and develop unique approaches to their research questions. This encourages creative thinking and innovative problem-solving. This fifth-grade research project required students to include a visual or creative piece that complemented and reinforced their written responses. It had to be original, not copied from another source.

Improving Communication and Presentation Skills: Students learn to communicate their research findings through written reports, presentations, and scientific posters. They also learn to explain complex scientific concepts to others. Another requisite element of this research project was sharing their findings in a semi-formal oral pre-

sentation to the class.

Boosting Confidence and Self-Efficacy: Completing a research project gives students a sense of accomplishment and boosts their confidence in their scientific abilities. The fifth graders worked diligently on this project as it was the first major grade of the second trimester.

Increasing Engagement and Motivation: Research projects can make science more engaging and relevant to students' lives. They provide opportunities for hands-on learning and exploration, which can increase student motivation and interest in science. I cannot tell you the number of times I heard students comment on how much they enjoyed working on the project. They said, “Wow, did you know...?” or “I cannot wait to tell you about my project.”

This research project provided a valuable learning experience for the fifth-grade students, helping them develop essential 21st-century skills and a deeper appreciation for the scientific process. I was pleased to witness the students' cleverness and resourcefulness displayed throughout the process.

OPT

Celebrating El Día de las Velitas at The Woods Academy

By Mr. Randy Bednar, Middle School Religion Teacher

Señora González came up with a wonderful idea to honor her Colombian heritage by celebrating El Día de las Velitas (Day of the Little Candles). This Colombian tradition involves lighting candles and faroles (lanterns) to illuminate the streets on the nights of December 7-8. Each light represents a personal



Handmade faroles (lanterns) adorned the Middle School hallways of The Woods Academy.

wish and gratitude in honor of our Blessed Mother.

Middle-school students teamed up with Señora González and religion teachers during their classes to write heartfelt letters and prayers to the Blessed Mother. The entire school

participated in a walk through the hallways on their way to chapel, where they were mesmerized by the glowing display of faroles in the main entrance and Middle School hallway.

Once inside the chapel, students listened intently to a PowerPoint presen-



Señora González, Spanish teacher, introduces middle-school students to El Día de las Velitas, a cherished Colombian tradition.

tation showcasing neighborhoods in Colombia celebrating this meaningful tradition. During the week leading up to the event, students also read prayers in Spanish to the Virgin Mary during morning announcements.

We hope to make this a yearly tradition at The Woods Academy to honor the Blessed Mother and celebrate the beauty of Colombian culture!

OPT

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FEAST

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century indigenous account of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe. He emphasized the humility and faith of St. Juan Diego,

chosen by Our Lady to deliver her message to the world. Monsignor also highlighted the profound faith of the parish community, which embodies a message of unity, love, and perseverance.

Following the bilingual Mass, celebrated in English and Spanish, the festivities continued

with a joyful fellowship in the parish hall. Parishioners enjoyed a pleasant atmosphere, and a live Mariachi band playing traditional songs in honor of Our Lady. The music filled the room with a festive spirit, uniting the community in faith and celebration. This cherished tradition at St. Michael's not only

honored Our Lady of Guadalupe but also strengthened the bonds of the parish family, reminding everyone of her ongoing intercession and maternal love.

OPT



Members from all three choral groups joined together to minister at the Christmas Eve Mass.



Hildegards and Cecilia singers share Christmas carols with the residents at Raphael House.

Living Our Faith Through Song

By Michelle Perrier, OLVP Director of Music

At the beginning of the school year, Our Lady of the Visitation Parish decided to try something new. Rather than have a traditional children's choir focused solely on singing hymns at Mass, OLVP created two ensembles

that might offer its youth and their families additional opportunities for formation and service. Five months later, twenty-four young disciples of Christ are already inspiring the parish through their stewardship and loving devotion to God.

The Canticles, named after the

Magnificat during the Visitation, are made up of OLVP music ministers ranging from first through fifth grade. Although they come together once a week to rehearse, all of them spend additional time listening to the music at home, in the car, even while doing their homework. Their

parents lovingly support them, helping them read the lyrics, singing along to the recordings, and learning sign language to some of the hymns with them. Many of the parents come to the rehearsals, too, to learn more about sacred music, the lives of musical saints, and the

various aspects of the liturgy with their children.

By the time the Canticles sing the music they've been preparing at Mass, they no longer view the hymns as ordinary songs but rather as deep, loving prayers their souls

Continued on page 34



John and Dana Ingrassia's family lights display shares their joy of the season with the whole community.

Parish Family Shares Unique Light Show

The tradition of decorating your home with Christmas lights to share the light of Christ is one way to share in the beauty of the season. Adding fun and whimsical elements can draw in people of all faith backgrounds allowing everyone to laugh and experience the joy of the Christmas season. The Ingrassia family has created

a fun and festive light show and display that welcomes the entire community to their front yard. As Father Greg stated, "It was the most impressive Christmas decoration at a home I think I've ever seen!"

Fifteen years ago, after viewing the popular Winter Lights Festival at Seneca Creek State Park, John and Dayna Ingrassia began to wonder how they could incorporate the beauty of the lights, which can be viewed only at night, with a more visible display that could also be enjoyed during the day. This began their effort to design and build full sized yard art figures. In 2009, they crafted, built and displayed their first piece "Santa's Sleigh". In each subsequent year they have custom built a new figure, typi-

Warmth in the Winter at OLVP



LEFT: Teens strike a pose to celebrate the New Year with Father Greg.



ABOVE: Women of the parish join in small group discussion on the topic of forgiveness as part of the monthly Sodality meeting.



LEFT: Youth lend their voices to the Choir of Angels at the annual Christmas Pageant.

Families Helping Families

Each year during the Advent season, OLVP parish families open their hearts to families in need. The Social Concerns committee adopts families identified by Montgomery County's Linkages to Learning program. A giving tree is made available in the parish gathering space full of wish list items from the "adopted" families. The requested gifts are purchased by parishioners and delivered by Social Concerns volunteers to the families in time for Christmas.

The Adopted Family Collection is one of the longest running projects of the Social Concerns Ministry at OLVP, starting shortly

after the Church was established in Darnestown. The program has had several formats since it began. In addition to the Christmas collection, needed items are collected during the 'Back-to-School' season as well as in the spring to meet needs that may arise over the summer when school is not in session. Marianne Beattie, long-time coordinator of the program states, "The parishioners are very generous in answering God's call to serve those less fortunate than ourselves. It has been rewarding to watch several of the families become self-sufficient over the years as a result of our assistance."

Parishioners look forward to sharing the delight of gift giving during this annual opportunity. Social Concerns coordinator Liesel Flaig shares that she is so "impressed with the care and intentionality that goes into choosing the gifts" for the families. She has received feedback from various organizations that OLVP donations are always generous and well received.

This year three families with thirteen members were adopted by the parish and parishioners provided seventy-five new gifts in total.

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Continued on page 33

St. Jude Regional Catholic School Celebrates Catholic Schools Week Beginning January 25; Holds Open House on January 26

The excitement is building for Catholic Schools Week (CSW) at St. Jude Regional Catholic School (SJRCs)! The week will open with a Mass on Saturday, January 25, at 5:00 pm with Bishop Esposito celebrating. The Shrine of St. Jude was Bishop Esposito's first parish. There will be an Open House on Sunday, January 26, from 11:30 am to 2:00



First graders Madison, Hawi, Effy, Ana, and Kadison love St. Jude Regional Catholic School!

pm, where tours will be given in English, Spanish, and Amharic. All are invited to attend.

This year's CSW theme is "Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community". To show that SJRCs is united in faith and community, students will be collecting much-needed baby supplies for the Gabriel Project.

Other CSW activities include Career Day, which will give students the chance to learn about many different occupations. SJRCs is grateful for the men and women who will speak with the students about their own chosen careers.

SJRCs will celebrate its students

and families with a traditional family lunch and a BINGO game, and the students will have a night out to celebrate as well.

On Thursday, January 30, the annual celebration of International Day will be held as the Thaddeus Room is turned into every corner of the world. From singing to dancing to food, the students will celebrate the world and all of God's creations.

The CSW closing Mass will be held on Friday, January 31, and will honor SJRCs's incredible teachers.

Please join our school community as we celebrate St. Jude Regional Catholic School and demonstrate that we are United in Faith and Community.

You can also learn more about St. Jude Regional Catholic School on its website: www.stjuderockville.org. Additionally, Mrs. Jeanne Donatelli, principal, can answer any questions you may have about the school or the application process. She can be reached at 301-946-7888 or Jeanne.Donatelli@stjuderockville.org.

OPT

Feast of St. Lucy

SJRCs celebrated the Feast of St. Lucy with Leilani, an eighth-grade student dressed as the saint, and SJRCs teacher Miss Lucy Young. Eighth-grade religion students are shown in the background.



Photo by Juan Carlos Mora.

The Three Kings prepare to distribute gifts to parish children in celebration of the Epiphany.

We Three Kings

The Shrine of St. Jude had a special royal visit from Three Wise Men during the celebration of the Epiphany of the Lord at the Sunday Spanish Mass. The trio from the East (parishioners Carlos Aviles, Herbert Ventura and Jose Vidal portrayed Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar) paid tribute to our Lord and Savior in a grand proces-

sion, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. After Mass, the three kings held court in the Thaddeus Room, where the excited parish children lined up to receive small gifts from the grand men dressed in flowing robes. Festivities continued all afternoon with delicious food and music.

OPT

Frederick M. Gossman Memorial High School Scholarship

By Rick Ibanez

The Frederick M. Gossman Memorial High School Scholarship is a prestigious initiative by the Maryland State Council of the Knights of Columbus. The scholarship offers three annual grants of \$1,500, renewable for up to four years, assisting students with tuition costs at accredited Catholic high schools in Maryland. To qualify for the scholarship, applicants must be the son or daughter of a Knight of Columbus in good standing within Maryland. Details are found in kofc-md.org.

For Catholic men interested in deepening their faith and joining a global community, the Knights of Columbus offers a convenient

online membership option. Visit kofc.org and complete the online membership form for free. Use 5317849 as the Member Referral Number.

OPT

Shrine of St. Jude Parish
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St. Jude Regional Catholic School class of 2025 recently visited the Embassy of Peru!

LIGHT SHOW

Con't from page 32

cally based on the Claymation TV Christmas movies of their childhood. For example, characters from *Frosty the Snowman* and *The Year Without a Santa Claus* have made their appearances throughout the years. Dayna draws the design on plywood and John cuts out the figures before they paint and install the lights. Over the years they have added "movement" to the figures and designed timed lighting features. Now Frosty can be

seen throwing a snowball and the Abominable Snowman lights the star atop the Christmas tree.

A highlight of the display arrived three years ago when the Ingrassia's created a "Snow Show". Their teen children and friends began playing in the falling snow of the snow machines. Now the interactive element is set to Christmas music inviting guests to become a part of the winter wonderland. Each year the whole family continues to participate: some of the younger generations have begun to be involved in the building of the features, and others by handing out candy canes during the show. John says, "[t]his

is the most fun part, visiting and chatting with friends and neighbors that come to see the lights, getting to meet and know extended families visiting for Christmas, and sharing a peaceful moment of Christmas joy together."

The 30-minute interactive "Snow Show" will be available again next year. It can be viewed at 705 Kent Oaks Way in the Kentlands Community at 7:00 p.m. on weekends in December and each night during Christmas week (weather permitting).

OPT

St. Paul's Catholic Parish Begins Holy Year Observations

Pope Francis inaugurated a Holy Year on Christmas Eve, and focused Catholics on the virtue of hope. We look forward to life with the Lord forever, and this year we look for a new beginning in our lives. Pilgrims from around the world will make their way to Rome, including some from St. Paul. Deacon Dave Terrar is working with at least five parishioners who are making plans to go to Rome as pilgrims and also as volunteers helping other pilgrims.

In the Archdiocese of Washington, there will be less extensive pilgrimages to Holy Year sites including the Cathedral of St. Matthew, the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and the Saint John Paul II National Shrine.

At St. Paul's, Fr. Cusick came back from his pilgrimage to sites in Poland hoping to see several small groups forming to strengthen and revive faith. On January 12, this initiative began, with 65 people meeting in the parish center to sketch their hopes for a dozen small groups – some continuing their on-going activity but inviting others to join, and some starting up for the Holy Year.

There's the Men's Ministry offering fellowship and works of charity, the Men's Club offering monthly



pancake breakfasts and offering a place for the non-Catholics associated with the parish, and the Knights of Columbus with a new young acting Grand Knight offering service including pro-life activities.

The Catholic Daughters continue their numerous services but will also offer a Lenten retreat and a pilgrimage to a local Holy Year site. In addition, there are two more women's groups, one exploring the feminine genius and the other made up of wise women reading several encyclicals and other magisterial documents.

One group will sing evening prayer each Sunday, praying with millions of other Catholics world-

wide, using the Liturgy of the Hours.

One group will read and study the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which St. John Paul II commissioned as a tool for evangelization in the Third Millennium.

One energetic group intends to take pilgrimages seriously, walking all over the state to various pilgrimage sites. Emphasis on walking!

Two groups will meet simply to pray and share, one of them praying the Rosary.

In the cold of winter, in the calm order of Ordinary Time, the parish is bursting with hope.

OPT



The Hildegards is the youth ensemble for middle and high schoolers.

SONG

Con't from page 32

cannot proclaim through just words alone. They eagerly praise God with their voices and inspire the rest of the congregation to worship with them in joyful song.

Inspired by Saint Hildegard von Bingen, the Hildegards is the youth ensemble for middle and high schoolers. The Hildegards participate in the same beautiful ministry as the Canticles, but with additional ways outside the Mass to use the gift of music God blessed them with so that they may be bless-

ings for others. This December, for instance, the Hildegards went with the adult music ministers to Raphael House to spread peace and joy as Christmas carolers. The residents were so grateful they asked the Hildegards to return next year.

"Commitment" might be a word today's society often shies from, yet through their ministry these young parishioners teach what a true joy it is to be lovingly committed to Jesus Christ. Their devotion to God and desire to serve Him with fullness of heart is a beautiful representation of the burning spirit alive and vibrant in the OLVP parish community.

OPT

PASTOR

Con't from page 6

Wyble was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Washington in 2016. He served as Parochial Vicar at Our Lady of Mercy in Potomac and then as Pastor of Sacred

Heart and Holy Angels parishes in Southern Maryland prior to coming to Holy Cross. Principal Lisa Kane states, "The entire parish and school community are filled with joy and anticipation as we unite in faith, ready to embrace the future under the inspiring leadership and spiritual guidance of Fr. Wyble."

OPT

Socks from the Knights

The parish provides a long list of services to people in need – food for the homeless in Gaithersburg, support for abused women and pregnant women in shelters in the county, clothing and other services through the St. Vincent de Paul Society, hospital visits – the list goes on and on. Amidst the steady labor, there's a simple humble service worth noting. The Knights provide socks for the homeless.

A bag of needed items for someone on the streets might include a

wool blanket and two heavy duty plastic bags and cigarettes and water and granola bars and a dry bath pack. But sometimes, the most important item is simple: clean, dry socks. So the determined and faithful Gary Boughan has challenged the Knights year after year to collect socks, or buy socks (donations to "K of C 11105" with a note "socks for the homeless" are welcome), and hand them out. Hundreds and hundreds of pairs of socks.

People often think of socks as a

reusable item, and that's not a bad idea if you live in a house. But that's not always good sense.

Socks – new, white, athletic or crew. Gloves (brown cotton insulated) are good too, but especially socks. You can drop them in the sock box in the back of the church. In the cold on the streets, the most vulnerable point is your feet.

The Knights have worked tirelessly to protect unborn children and help women and couples facing pregnancies they didn't plan. They help coordinate participation in the March for Life each year, including prayer at the church during the March for those who can't make it downtown. They organize prayer to support counselors at a local abortion clinic. They led the Rosary after Mass regularly, praying for those threatened by abortion.

But also, don't forget the homeless. Say hi; be respectful; help when you can. Simple things help. Socks.

If you have questions, call Gary Boughan at 301-253-6177.

OPT



Parent volunteers are the backbone of de Chantal Dukes basketball organization and their winning attitudes.

BASKETBALL

Con't from page 8

sportsmanship, and have fun competing against nearby parishes.

De Chantal is also blessed to have a strong alumni base willing to give back to the community. In addition to the professional referees on hand to officiate, de Chantal alumni served by readying the facil-

ity, operating the scoreboard, and maintaining accurate records for each game. It would not be possible to host these games without the generosity of these high school volunteers. The learned lessons of fundamentals, sportsmanship, and service never leave the hearts of a de Chantal Duke. The CYO is very excited that students and alumni can bring these attributes back to their home court.

OPT

"Building Dreams"

**The Maryknights Cocktail Party
To Benefit Sleep in Heavenly Peace**

Saturday, April 26, 2025
Cost: \$75.00 / person
Rosensteel Hall
9707 Rosensteel Avenue
Silver Spring, MD

For more information contact:
Beth Ward at 301-873-4015 or
baward2006@gmail.com

**NO KID SLEEPS
ON THE FLOOR!
IN OUR TOWN!**

<https://shpbeds.org>

St. Paul Catholic Church
9250E Damascus Road
Damascus, Md.

Fr. Mark Cusick, Pastor
John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe
OPT Editor
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Students enjoy an art camp during Saint Peter's Summer Program

Registration Open for Saint Peter's Summer Program

Saint Peter's welcomes students ages 4 to 14 for a summer of faith, friendship, and fun. Saint Peter's Summer Program will run for seven weeks from June 16 through August 1. A variety of age-appropriate camps will be offered each week including arts and crafts, baking, outdoor sports, nature, fun science, and more. The

camp runs from 8:45 am – 12:15 pm. Before and after care is also available. The summer program is led by enthusiastic counselors who are engaged in education, are devoted to young people, and who are living out their Catholic faith. For more information visit <https://stpeterssummer.org/>.

OPT



ABOVE: Saint Peter's sixth graders took center stage at the school's Christmas Show.



RIGHT: Second-grade teacher Mrs. Nichols poses with students at the Christmas Tree Lighting.



LEFT: First graders spread Christmas cheer at the Brookdale Senior Living Community in Olney.



ABOVE: Christmas Bazaar volunteers pose in festive holiday attire.

A Season of Joy

Saint Peter's kicked off the holiday season with the parish's annual Christmas Bazaar and Breakfast with Saint Nick on December 6 and 7. Friday night featured an Italian dinner, bingo, and opportunities to shop for baked goods, crafts, and household items. On Saturday morning the Parish Hall was filled with festive cheer as parishioners gathered for a delicious breakfast and the children present eagerly awaited their chance to meet Saint Nick.

The holiday spirit continued December 13, as the school community gathered for the annual Christmas Tree lighting. The evening began with a spirited performance from the school choir who

sang a mix of traditional carols and modern holiday hits. Families visited with one another while enjoying warm hot chocolate and cookies. The evening concluded with a special visit from Santa himself, accompanied by the Sandy Spring Fire Department.

On December 17, Saint Peter's held its annual Christmas Show. This year's show "We Knead a Little Christmas," depicted the story of Jesus' birth through a tale about a family run bakery in Bethlehem called "The House of Bread." As is tradition, sixth graders had the leading roles on-stage as well as working behind the scenes as technical crew. Grades one through five provided musical performances that accompanied

the story throughout.

Finally, on December 18, first graders spread Christmas cheer into the community with a visit to the residents of the Brookdale Senior Living Community in Olney. The students performed Christmas songs and joined residents for crafts. The students previously visited Brookdale during Halloween. The visits provide an opportunity to teach their first graders about the importance of Christian service and how to reach out to others as Jesus did. Principal Lauren DeZinno said, "We want our students to look out instead of looking in. Especially during this time of the year as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the greatest gift given."

OPT



Fr. Emanuel Magro celebrates a school Mass.

Farewell Fr. Magro

Saint Peter's Parish hosted a farewell reception for Fr. Emanuel Magro on January 5. Parishioners from several of the parishes that Fr. Magro has ministered came together to wish him well as he returns to serve his home coun-

try of Malta. Fr. Magro served as a parochial vicar at Saint Peter's since July 2023. Thank you Fr. Magro for all your contributions to our school and parish. The Saint Peter's community will keep you in our prayers.

OPT



Fr. Magro greets parishioners at his farewell reception

Un-Bee-leviable Spellers

For the second year in a row, Saint Peter's is participating in the Scripps National Spelling Bee. First, students from

grades 2-8 participated in spelling bees in their individual classrooms. The fourteen winners from the classroom competitions advanced

to the school-wide spelling bee in December. The school-wide spelling bee proved to be a fierce competition. After twenty rounds that spanned two days, sixth-grader Abigail R. was crowned the champion. Next, Abigail will participate in the Scripps National Spelling Bee regional competition.

OPT



Abigail was crowned Saint Peter's spelling bee champion.

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Our Lady Queen of Poland Christmas Scenes

Edited by Bozenna Buda

The Advent and Christmas seasons were full of beautiful events at Our Lady Queen of Poland.

The Feast of St. Nicholas, Sw. Mikolaj, was celebrated on December 8 at OLQP. St. Nicholas was helped in the distribution of presents by angels. The OLQP Polish School, with Principal Ewa Chlebowska and Teacher Teresa Kazimierzczak, organized this annual event, with the participation of parents, students, parish children, altar servers, and others.

Each year the OLQP Polish Saturday School puts on an elaborate Nativity Play, "Jaselka". Ms. Chlebowska and Ms. Kazimierzczak made sure the parish hall was decorated to resemble the setting of the first Christmas when Jesus was born. After the presentation of the play on December 14, OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych blessed the "Oplatek" before everyone received a piece to share with others, along with traditional wishes. All enjoyed a Polish Christmas Eve, "Wigilia," repast prepared by the parents and staff.

Throughout the season of Advent, parish children were encouraged and reminded to perform good deeds. On the Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated on January 5, they brought their list of good deeds written on heart-shaped pieces of paper to church and placed them in the manger as their gifts to Baby Jesus. OLQP Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych read some of their deeds out loud.

OPT

Our Lady Queen of Poland

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RIGHT: The cast of the Nativity Play and their adult leaders.

BELOW: St. Nicholas and his angel helpers, delivering gifts to the children of the parish



ABOVE: Our Lady Queen of Poland Pastor Fr. Jerzy Frydrych, S.Chr., with altar servers Tomasz and Jas at his side, exchanged New Year's greetings with parishioners, including Professor Sznajder (foreground), after celebrating Holy Mass on January 1, 2025.



ABOVE: The young shepherds deliver their lines as they tell the story of Jesus's birth.

BELOW: Students depicting the Holy Family as part of OLQP's annual Nativity Play.



ABOVE: The three kings come bearing their gifts for the Infant Jesus.

RIGHT: The Nativity display in Our Lady Queen of Poland, decorated with poinsettias and evergreen branches. Children of the parish offered their good deeds, written on heart-shaped pieces of paper behind the manger.



ABOVE: Fr. Jerzy Frydrych reading some of the children's good deeds completed throughout Advent and Christmas and offered them to the Infant Jesus.



EMMANUEL

Con't from page 16

First Friday Mass found every grade attending with their Buddy Class so that every older student worshiped with a younger child, building up our school community. The entire school prayed the Rosary on December 12 in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patroness of Holy Redeemer's sister parish in Togo, Africa.

As excitement for Christmas built up, teachers found innovative ways to capture the students' attention and expand their knowledge across the curriculum. Christmas-themed activities engaged learners from PreK3 through Eighth Grade. Two longtime Advent traditions continued to thrill students in PreK3, PreK4 and in First Grade.



First-graders delight in fifth-grader Grace Grabenstein's reading.

Parishioner Jamie Beins reprised his role as Santa and paid very special visits to all five PreK classrooms. First-grade parents rallied to support teachers Jen Mahoney and Mary Woo as their students decorated individual gingerbread houses. Third-

grade teachers Andrea Heyl and Claudia Silva became tour directors as their students packed a "suitcase" and visited many countries on every continent of the world to learn about different Christmas traditions. They wrapped up their world tour with an



All eyes are on Santa in Mrs. Morin's PreK4 class.

Around the World Christmas party that featured homemade treats, Nativity scenes, music, games and Christmas Crackers filled with prizes. In the Third Week of Advent, children enjoyed a relatively new

HR tradition, the Christmas Read Along, when Buddy Classes met to read Christmas picture books together before homerooms celebrated their Christmas parties.

OPT



ABOVE: All of the children in the Religious Education Program performed the story of The Nativity for family and friends.

BELOW: Natalie Kavanagh works to create her Advent Craft while enjoying her donut at our monthly Donut Sunday.



LEFT: Members of St. Mary's Choristers were joined by college music ministry alumni and guests to provide a half hour of Preludes, as the Religious Education students prepared for the Pageant Mass on Christmas Eve.

BELOW: River Conley had an animated conversation at the Knights of Columbus Santa Breakfast. She made sure her gift requests were made clear.



ABOVE: Confirmation Candidates Alina Jung and Cecilia Tung prepared crafts and activities for the children in preparation for Christmas.



ABOVE: Members of St. Mary's Church Choir, High School Ensemble, and guests provided a half hour of Preludes prior to the Christmas Eve Mass.

RIGHT: The ladies of St. Mary's and Presentation Parishes gathered for an evening of prayer, reflection, and dinner at Advent by Candlelight.



ABOVE: On November 22, the National Pastoral Musicians' DC Chapter held a "St. Cecilia Sacred Songs & Spirits" event at the Father Reid Pavilion. Several area churches participated. Pictured here: St. Mary's parishioners in attendance.



LEFT: The Knights of Columbus from Our Lady of Fatima Council were joyful elves in preparing for the Christmas Breakfast with Santa.

Prepare a Way for the Lord

The St. Mary's faith community began their preparation for the birth of Jesus on the first Sunday of Advent. Once a month, the parish youth host a Mass. For Advent, the sixth grade parishioners read the Scripture and the younger children led the congregation in song from the altar. A St. Mary's student cantor and musicians assisted from the choir loft. The Jesse Tree in the Sanctuary contained dozens of tags with names of families in need and patients at Springfield Hospital, Sykesville, Md., St. Michael's in DC, and local fami-

lies through WUMCO, an emergency assistance program located in Poolesville. Donations were accepted to help fill the 25 baskets that are prepared each year.

The Pavilion was abuzz with activities for Advent, which created an environment of faith and service. The Sodality sponsored service activities to support the Shady Grove Pregnancy Center. Donations of new and gently used baby items were collected. The Annual Cookie Bake Sale and Craft Stand proceeds also went to the Center. The Haiti committee supported our twinning parish

with Haitian ornaments and coffee sales.

The children were provided with a variety of Advent and Christmas crafts. The craft theme offered a spiritual reflection to assist the children on their path through Advent. The children had a wonderful time during these activities. The event coincided with Donut Sunday, which is always a special treat!

The women of the parish participated in an evening of prayer, reflection, and dinner at Advent by Candlelight. The room was lit from the glow provided by each

table's unique Advent Wreath. A spiritual reflection was provided.

Our Lady of Fatima Council of the Knights of Columbus sponsored a Breakfast with Santa. The food was delicious and the children were thrilled to visit with Santa. The Knights also sponsored a Keep Christ in Christmas poster contest.

Each of the religious education classes had an Advent Wreath at their Prayer Station throughout the four weeks of Advent. As the weeks progressed, all prepared for our Program Pageant. The Program Pageant was performed

for parents and families during the last class in December, followed by a reception. Children who were available also participated in the Pageant at Christmas Eve Mass.

OPT

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Rev. Kevin O'Reilly,
Pastor
(301) 972-8660
www.stmaryonline.com

St. Martin of Tours



We love connecting with our parents by sharing not only school-related topics, but also cultural experiences beyond the classroom. What better way to celebrate than by showcasing Latin culture through our 'Sabor Latino' event during Hispanic Heritage Month!



When Santa needed a helping hand, our incredible parent volunteers stepped up! Parents play a vital role in making our events run smoothly. Here, Mrs. Kouko and Mrs. Adrian are busy collecting tickets for our Christmas raffle during the festive 'Morning in Santa's Workshop' event.

Nothing sets the Christmas spirit quite like decorating gingerbread houses! Our middle-school students had a blast unleashing their creativity to design festive gingerbread masterpieces. And sneaking a few bites of icing and candy along the way!



(L-R) Father Stefan and Father Joe had the tough task of choosing the winners for each decorated door. Teachers and students put in incredible effort, working together to create beautiful, festive doors. All the doors were filled with Christmas cheer, making the school look wonderfully festive and creating lasting memories.

Our Lady of Lourdes



Dr. Lam and her daughters pose for a family photo at Breakfast with Santa on December 14 at OIOL



Lourdes fourth-grade girls celebrate Breakfast with Santa

EDUCATION

Con't from page 18

for an entire hour! Parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members come to cheer and even run around the beautiful campus.

As always, this past fall was a testament to the fortitude of children and the generosity of family and friends. Many preschool students ran over three miles! Several first graders ran five miles, and the all-around winner, Michael, a fifth



ABOVE: MOGS students race for Catholic Education!



LEFT: Eighth graders make a tunnel for PreK students to run through.

grader, ran over eight miles in his hour! Leading up to Race Day, students ask their parents, friends, and families to sponsor them. The school asks businesses and generous families to sponsor the event. This fundraiser is more than just fundraising for a renovation or Chromebook cart. Every year, all proceeds go directly to need-based scholarships, making parents' desire for an authentic Catholic education a reality.

Race for Education is a favorite day for families, students, and teachers. The kindness and encouragement shared between Houses and grade levels is a testament to the amazing students here at Mother of God School.

OPT



The Holy Family with an angel, shepherds, and animals in the background.



First and second graders sing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen".

REMEMBERING

Con't from page 18

Christmas carol, to a trendy song, "What a Glorious Night", to our more traditional, "Adeste Fideles". As the various grades conclude their part of the program, the performers stay on stage or to the side so that at the pageant's end, all students are

in front to join in our last song, led by our PreKindergarten students, "Happy Birthday Jesus". It is one of the only songs that remains consistent yearly. It is a long-standing tradition that brings tears to the eyes of many of those in attendance.

Each year is different, and each year is reverent and faithful to the message of Christ. It is such a blessing to be able to celebrate this

story in our classrooms and with our families. Catholic education is such a gift. In an unplanned turn of events, at the end of production, the animals, portrayed by a few of our PreKindergarten students, hopped up on stage to get a closer look at the Newborn King. May we all have that same unabashed desire to get just a little bit closer to Jesus this year.

OPT

National Prayer Vigil for Life on January 23

Catholics across the country are invited to observe a nationwide prayer vigil from Thursday, January 23 to Friday, January 24, 2025, to pray for an end to abortion and a greater respect for all human life.

The National Prayer Vigil for Life will be held January 23-24 in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. The vigil has always taken place on the eve of the March for Life, which marks the date of the historic 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision by the Supreme Court of the United States. The Opening Mass will take place in the Great Upper Church of the Basilica 5:00-7:00 PM on Thursday, January 23. The principal celebrant and homilist for the Opening Mass will be Bishop Daniel E. Thomas of Toledo, chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Pro-Life Activities.



Immediately following the Opening Mass, a National Holy Hour for Life will take place with a Eucharistic Procession, Eucharistic Adoration, Recitation of the Rosary, and Benediction. The Opening Mass and Holy Hour of the National Prayer Vigil for Life will be broadcast on various Catholic networks and will be livestreamed on the Basilica's website: www.nationalshrine.org/mass. The vigil concludes at 8:00 AM on Friday, January 24 with the

Closing Mass celebrated by Bishop Robert J. Brennan of Brooklyn. The full schedule of the 2025 National Prayer Vigil for Life is listed below. (All times are in Eastern Time.)

Thursday, January 23:

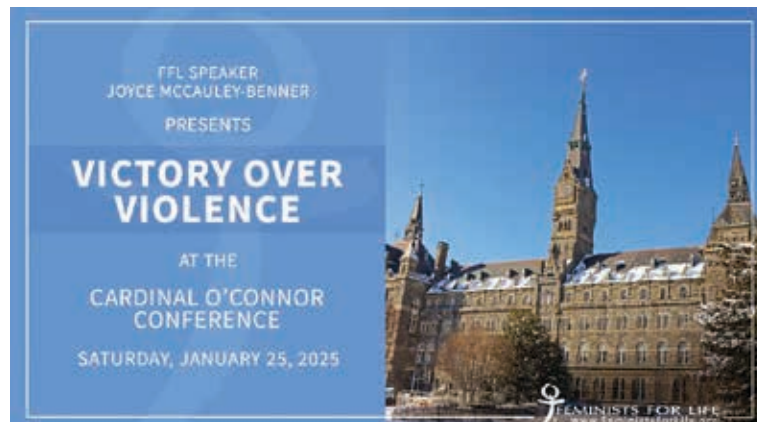
- 4:45 PM Chaplet of Divine Mercy
- 5:00 PM Opening Mass with Bishop Thomas
- 7:00 PM Holy Hour for Life

Friday, January 24:

8:00 AM Closing Mass with Bishop Brennan

For more information about on-site attendance at the Basilica for the National Prayer Vigil for Life, please visit the information page on the Basilica's website: www.nationalshrine.org/faq/

OPT



Retirement Fund for Religious

Please give to those who have given a lifetime.

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WOMEN DESERVE BETTER THAN ABORTION

Abortion is a reflection that we have not met the needs of women.

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"Building Dreams"

The Maryknights Cocktail Party To Benefit Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Saturday, April 26, 2025
 Cost: \$75.00 / person
 Rosensteel Hall
 9707 Rosensteel Avenue
 Silver Spring, MD

For more information contact:
 Beth Ward at 301-873-4015 or baward2006@gmail.com

SHP NO KID SLEEPS ON THE FLOOR IN OUR TOWN!
<https://shpbeds.org>



Jubilee 2025

GENERAL CALENDAR

DECEMBER 2024

24 December

Opening of the Holy Door of Saint Peter's Basilica



Photo Vatican Media

JANUARY 2025

24-26 January

Jubilee of the World of Communications

FEBRUARY 2025

8-9 February

Jubilee of Armed Forces, Police and Security Personnel

16-18 February

Jubilee of Artists

21-23 February

Jubilee of Deacons

MARCH 2025

8-9 March

Jubilee of the World of Volunteering

28 March

24 Hours for the Lord

28-30 March

Jubilee of the Missionaries of Mercy

APRIL 2025

5-6 April

Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers

25-27 April

Jubilee of Teenagers

28-30 April

Jubilee of People with Disabilities

MAY 2025

1-4 May

Jubilee of Workers

4-5 May

Jubilee of Entrepreneurs

10-11 May

Jubilee of Musical Bands

16-18 May

Jubilee of Confraternities

24-25 May

Jubilee of Children

30 May - 1 June

Jubilee of Families, Grandparents and the Elderly



JUNE 2025

7-8 June

Jubilee of Ecclesial Movements, Associations and New Communities

9 June

Jubilee of the Holy See

14-15 June

Jubilee of Sport

20-22 June

Jubilee of Governments

23-24 June

Jubilee of Seminarians

25 June

Jubilee of Bishops

26-27 June

Jubilee of Priests

28 June

Jubilee of the Eastern Churches

JULY 2025

28 July - 3 August

Jubilee of Youth

SEPTEMBER 2025

15 September

Jubilee of Consolation

20 September

Jubilee of Justice

26-28 September

Jubilee of Catechists

OCTOBER 2025

5 October

Jubilee of Migrants

8-9 October

Jubilee of Consecrated Life

11-12 October

Jubilee of Marian Spirituality

18-19 October

Jubilee of the Missions

30 October - 2 November

Jubilee of the World of Education



NOVEMBER 2025

16 November

Jubilee of the Poor

21-23 November

Jubilee of Choirs

DECEMBER 2025

14 December

Jubilee of Prisoners