

The Mirror



December 9, 2022

DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU, MISSOURI

One Church, East to West: Loving Jesus, Serving Jesus, Sharing Jesus

Vol. LVIII, No. 17

— GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST —

“Only when Christ is formed in us will the mystery of Christmas be fulfilled in us. Christmas is the mystery of this ‘marvelous exchange’: ‘O marvelous exchange! Man’s Creator has become man, born of the Virgin. We have been made sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share our humanity.’”

These words from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 526) invite us into the mystery of the Incarnation that the Church celebrates in the Christmas season.

Glory to God in the Highest! *Gloria in Excelsis Deo!* ©TM



(Illustration by Dan Totilca/Getty)



The next issue of **The Mirror** will be **December 23, 2022**. Sign up to receive the diocesan newspaper via Email in digital format: Contact Debbie Thompson at (417) 866-0841, or Email: dthompson@dioscg.org.





COME, AND
YOU WILL SEE

Bp. Edward M. Rice

Longing for Christmas ...right now!

“**F**or we need a little Christmas right this very moment...We need a little Christmas now.” This particular Christmas song was first performed in 1966 in the Broadway musical *Mame*. And by now you might be thinking, “What is wrong with Bishop Rice? Why isn’t he quoting a religious Christmas song, like “Little Drummer Boy,” or “O Come, All Ye Faithful?” Or how about the classic “Silent Night?” Those are beautiful songs and it is true that they are religious, except for the first one I quoted. But with all the things that have been recently going on in the world, and within the diocese, the thought popped into my mind – maybe we should not wait until December 25th. Maybe all of us “need a little Christmas right now.”

The other day, I told one of my siblings that it seems like every time I pick up the phone, someone has passed away. Some of them were beautiful deaths of family friends in their 90s, or a family death after a long illness. But also there was the tragic accident in Cape Girardeau where two young ladies passed away who were very active in the Newman Center at Southeast Missouri State University. A third fatality from the crash, the twin of a SEMO student also passed away, while the other three passengers in the car escaped with little injuries.

Over the past weeks, I’ve been craving for the joy and the peace and the hope that comes from the proclamation of the birth of Jesus. I realize that everyone is busy this time of the year and my busyness is nothing exceptional but still: I know I need a little Christmas right now. I need to cling to the promise proclaimed in the first chapter of Matthew, “She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins.” I need a little Christmas now. There is a desire in my heart to hear the Angel say to me, “Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy.” I need a

little Christmas now. I need to hear the heavenly host of angels sing, “Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace to people of goodwill.”

“Do not be afraid.”

“He is the one who will save his people from their sins.”

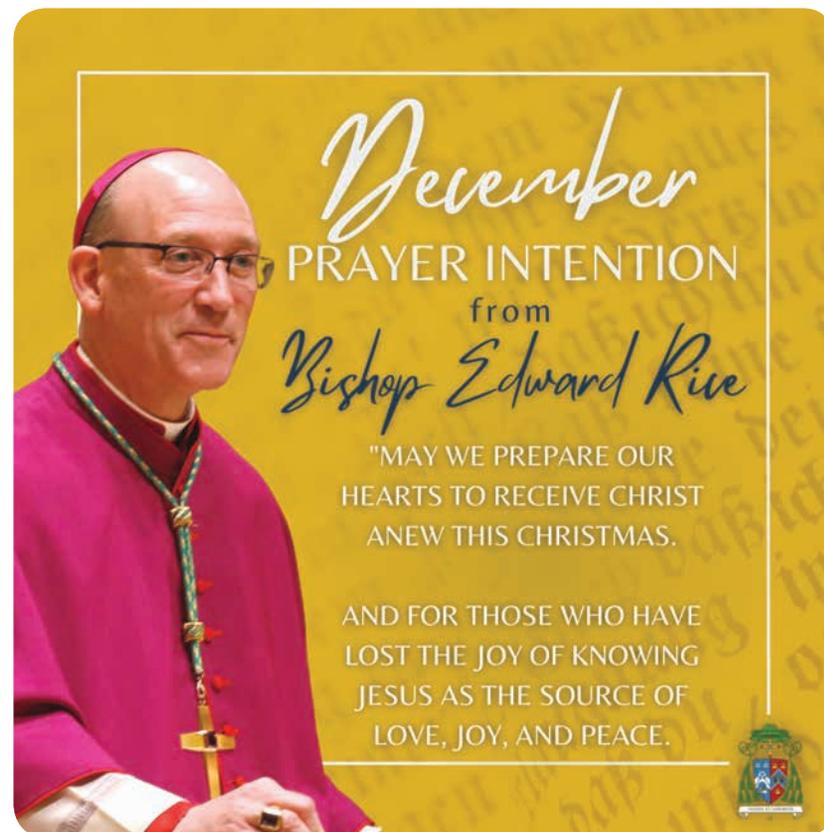
“Peace to people of goodwill.”

The message of Christmas is a message for which the entire world yearns. All of us need a little Christmas right now.

I must confess that I decorated my office right after Thanksgiving. I needed Christmas as soon as possible and I didn’t want to wait until December 25. And now, as we enter into the Christmas Season and the eight days that follow—the Octave of Christmas—the Church unfolds for us the beautiful, thoughtful feasts of St. Stephen Proto-Martyr, St. John the Apostle, the Holy Innocents, St. Thomas Becket and the Holy Family, culminating on the Eighth day with the Feast of Mary, Mother of God, Jan. 1st.

On Jan. 8, we celebrate the Feast of Epiphany and on the following day, Jan. 9, with the Baptism of the Lord, we then enter once again into the Ordinary Time of the year, until Ash Wednesday on Feb. 22.

Let us take full advantage of this Christmas Season. As always, I encourage you if not on Christmas day, then at least sometime during the Christmas Season, to make your own personal pilgrimage to the manger scene in your parish church and visit the Christ Child, offering to Him the gift of your heart. Take a piece of straw in the manger and place it in your wallet or purse and let it be a reminder throughout the year



that we are always in need of a little Christmas—the joy, the hope, the promise—that is given to us in the Christ Child.

Be assured of my prayers for all of you. As your Bishop, it is my privilege to pray for you daily, remembering you and your families at the altar of God. As you receive the Eucharist, may you also receive Christ into your hearts and be particularly mindful of him being with you throughout 2023! Merry Christmas and a happy New Year! ©TM



ANOTHER WALK THROUGH: 'WALKING TOGETHER'

by Bishop Emeritus John J. Leibrecht

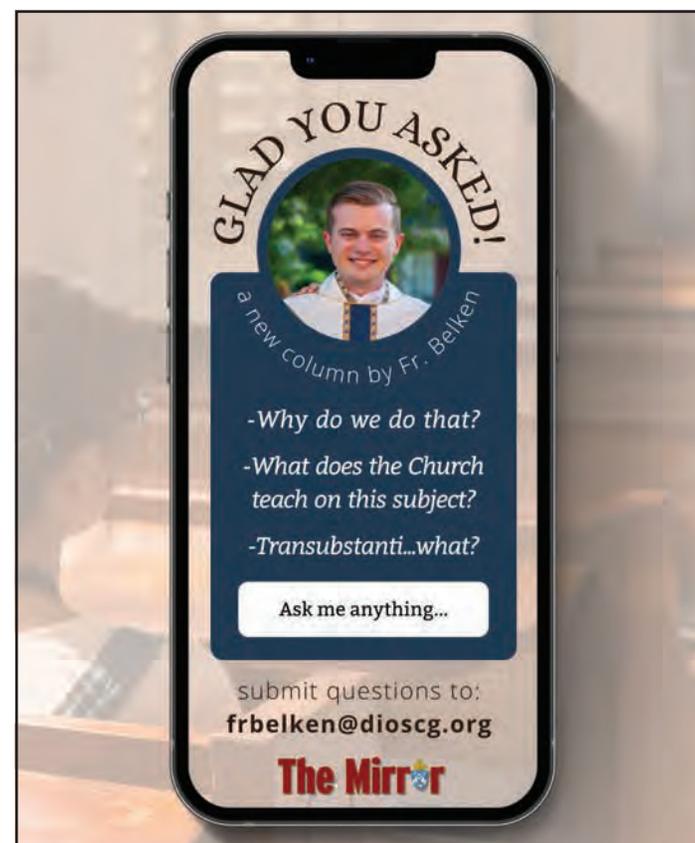
Before his retirement in 2008 as the Fifth Bishop of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Bishop John Leibrecht wrote a standing column in *The Mirror* entitled, “Walking Together.” At the end of each article, Bp. Leibrecht would normally share a funny story referencing his travels to the schools, or time with friends, family, or other bishops. *The Mirror* has decided to share a few of these in an ongoing series entitled, “Another walk through: ‘Walking Together.’” We hope you enjoy them.

February 5, 1988 Recently at a pastoral visit to Augustine Parish, in Kelso, I spent some time with a group of four-year-olds who were being cared for while their parents celebrated the Eucharist. When I entered the classroom, the teacher asked the children; “Do you know who this is?” They replied in unison, “Bishop Leibrecht!” Excitedly, one little boy, as he pointed to Fr. Ray Orf, the pastor at my side, said, “And there’s God!”

February 12, 1988 Are you enjoying the media blitz for “Lotto America?” We are told excitedly that the minimum prize is \$2,000,000. There is, however, a slight problem. The odds of winning are 18,000,000

to 1. May I make a suggestion—for Lent and beyond? Give the \$5 or \$10 you might spend on lottery tickets to those in need of food and shelter. The odds of God rewarding you are a lot better than 18,000,000 to 1.

February 19, 1987 Recently, while I was in St. Peter the Apostle Parish in Joplin, I asked children in Sunday CCD classes when they prayed. Interestingly, many small children seem to associate prayer with eating. Others associate it with morning and night prayers. One little boy told me: “I pray when I’m running to first base and think I’m going to be ‘out!’”



TWO RECEIVE MINISTRY OF ACOLYTE



Two diocesan permanent diaconate candidates Kevin Henderson (L) and Tony Peters (R) celebrated the Ministry of Acolyte on Sat., Nov. 12, in the Cathedral of St. Peter in Belleville, IL. Bishop Michael McGovern, of the Diocese of Belleville, presided at Mass. Henderson is a member of Sacred Heart Catholic Church, in Poplar Bluff, and Peters is a member of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church, in Cape Girardeau. An acolyte assists primarily in the celebration of Mass; attends to the needs of the altar, and may distribute Communion as an auxiliary minister. An acolyte may also be entrusted with the public veneration of the Blessed Sacrament, but does not give the Benediction. Mark your calendars now as these two men are preparing for their ordination as permanent deacons on June 10, 2023, in St. Mary Cathedral in Cape Girardeau. *(Submitted photo)*

VOCATIONS AWARENESS WEEK CELEBRATED IN JOPLIN



Fr. Andrew Williams, Fr. Paco Gordillo, Sr. Joan Schwager, RSM, and Fr. Brian Straus talked to the students in Joplin Area Catholic Schools about Vocations. Vocations Awareness Week was celebrated Nov. 6-12, 2022. They each shared their own unique story with the students of how they were called; they had lunch with the students, and Sr. Schwager read a special story to the first graders. *(Submitted photo)*



SPRINGFIELD CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL HOLDS FOOD DRIVE



The Springfield Catholic House System hosted a food drive before Thanksgiving to help the Springfield parish pantries and Catholic Charities. Students at SCHS are divided into "Houses" for various projects and initiatives throughout the year: St. Catherine, St. John, St. Therese, and St. Michael. "Our students are well aware of the hunger in our community and wanted to do their share in this problem," said Jeanne Skahan, Principal. Likewise, this was a competition between the Houses, with the total number of cans collected at 5,596. St. Therese House won the competition and had an excess of 2000 cans. *(Submitted photo)*



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Merry Christmas

AND A BLESSED, HAPPY NEW YEAR!

From the staff of *The Mirror* / Communications:
Leslie, Debbie, Grace, and Paula

Moravian star factory: 125 years of Christmas — and geometry

Herrnhut, Germany (CNS)

Almost 800,000 Moravian stars in various sizes and colors will leave the factory in the German state of Saxony this year. At least one member of the production team has worked on each and every one of them.

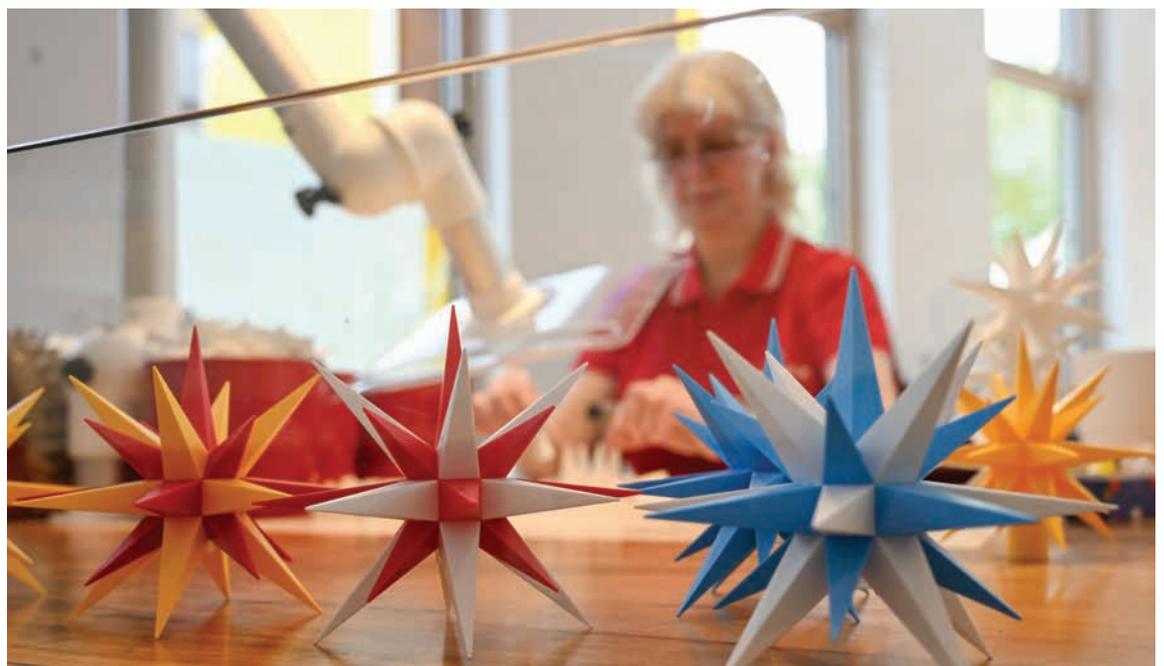
The company is a magnet for tourism and plays a big role in the economy of Herrnhut, a town of 5,000 inhabitants in a region that is structurally weak, reports the German Catholic news agency KNA. More than 64,000 people visit the town every year, and 177 people work at the star factory, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year.

The Moravian stars themselves are older: At the beginning of the 19th century, the first of these distinctive jagged stars made of paper and

cardboard shone in the boarding school rooms of the local Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine, a Protestant Free Church.

For the most part, the children were at the school as their parents were carrying out missionary work around the world and sent their offspring to be educated at the ancestral seat of the Protestant movement. Today, the Free Church, which Moravian religious refugees founded in Herrnhut, claims to have more than 1.2 million members worldwide, KNA reports.

The stars' 300-year history is told in a small exhibition in the factory. The exhibition shows that especially during the Advent and Christmas period,



MORAVIAN STARS are on display on a table at the Herrnhut Star Co. in Herrnhut, Germany, May 11, 2022, as a staff member glues small spikes together to form the infamous Christmas star. The workshop creates hundreds of thousands of stars each year. (CNS photo/Harald Oppitz, KNA)

the separation from parents was very painful for the boarding school students. The idea arose to have the children always make Moravian Christmas stars in Advent as a symbol of the Christian message of peace for their families -- to help against feeling homesick.

A teacher had the idea of using the stars as a template in math classes, to give a better understanding of geometry.

He had the children create stars from various geometric templates. This is how the distinctive shape of the three-dimensional Moravian star came about. They are only authentic with 25 points, 17 of them with a square base, 8 with a triangular base, placed on a so-called rhombicuboctahedron; they were patented in 1925.

Assembling it is a small work of art in itself, and every Advent it is probably the reason for a few swear words. The many YouTube videos are eloquent testimony to people needing help. Meanwhile, the stars are formed with impressive speed by the factory employees, with each person responsible for a specific step in the process.

There is the "plugger," who assembles one of the small plastic stars in four minutes. The "point turner"

produces about 2,500 star points per day. The "frame gluer" coats the punched-out cardboard frames with glue and places the paper cones on them -- around 3,000 a day.

With a boom in sales, there is also a tension between the demand for quality craftsmanship and international demand, KNA reports. Production takes place all year round. For a long time now, the stars have not only been used as Christmas decorations: white ones light up a couple's wedding day, red ones make for Valentine's Day decorations, blue ones are great for various countries' independence days and green ones are perfect for St. Patrick's Day.

The stars range from eight centimeters in diameter to XXL versions that are 2.5 meters. The latter can be found in the Federal Chancellery in Berlin, in the European Parliament in Brussels or in the Anglican Liverpool Cathedral.

Perhaps the strangest order came from Greenland, with the request to send the package by September, otherwise it would not be possible to find it in the snow when it was dropped from the postal plane. The delivery went out on time, with a big red bow. ©CNS



STEM PROJECT-MORAVIAN STAR—Sixth grade students in Immaculate Conception Catholic School, Jackson, MO, made a tree out of wrapped boxes and placed a Moravian star on top. For 125 years, an Advent tradition showcases a star where Christmas and Geometry can collide. (The Mirror)



THIS MORAVIAN STAR IS A 26-POINT STAR. It has 18 large points and 8 small points. It is built on a base, which is a rhombicuboctahedron. A rhombicuboctahedron is an Archimedean solid with eight triangular faces and 18 square faces.

The origin of this design originated as a geometry lesson in a Moravian Boys school in Niesky, Germany in the 1830's. Students would make shapes out of paper and glue them together. The results were stellations or stars. This star was adopted by the Moravian Church as an Advent symbol and is commonly used in nativity scenes to represent the star of Bethlehem. Traditionally, the star is hung the First Sunday of Advent and remains up until Epiphany, Jan. 6, or the time of the coming of the Magi.

ATTENTION: CATHOLIC MEN

You are invited to the Southeast Missouri...



CATHOLIC MAN NIGHT
Men Meeting Jesus

Thursday, Jan. 19 | 6:30-9:00 pm
St. Francis Xavier, Sikeston, MO

An evening of Adoration, Confession,
& a Manly Meal with discussion to follow.

To help plan for food, please RSVP to
SEMOCatholicManNight@gmail.com
'SEMO Catholic Man Night' on Facebook
or text to 573-275-5214

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Belleville, IL—The Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Shrine staff present the **53rd Annual Way of Lights Christmas Display**, through Dec. 21, 2022. Free admission to the outdoor light display; give a donation of \$17 or more and receive a Build-A Bear Plush Lion (while supplies last). Over one million white lights are featured along a one-and-a-half-mile route depicting the Journey to Bethlehem. Camel, Donkey, and Pony rides, petting zoo, kettle corn, and a food booth. Carriage rides by St. Louis Carriage Co. offered Sunday-Friday (no Saturdays). To make reservations, call (314) 621-3334. The Visitors Center will have a Christmas Tree Display, community music performances, Lego® life-sized Nativity display and much more. For more information, contact the Shrine at (618) 397-6700 or visit www.snows.org/wayoflights.

Hill. A portion of the proceeds will be shared with the church youth group. For more information, please call Geri Geringer, (573) 208-6445.

Sikeston—All women of the parish are invited to the annual **Women of St. Francis Xavier Christmas party** will be held Mon., Dec. 12, at Susie's Restaurant, at 5:30 p.m.; dinner served at 6 p.m. The cost is \$28 and includes tax and gratuity. We are collecting non-perishable gifts, such as dish detergent, shampoo, paper towels, etc. Please bring your bag of gifts if you would like to contribute to the charitable cause. Please RSVP to Gloria Shell, (573) 703-5580, or to the parish office, (573) 471-2447.

Springfield—Springfield Area Perpetual Adoration, hosted at Holy Trinity Chapel, has an **urgent need of Adorers**: Mon., 11 p.m.; Sat., 1 a.m., and Sun., 11 p.m. Substitutes are needed for all hours. For more information or to sign up, please contact Marilyn Gibson at (417) 224-4043.

Springfield—SAVE THE DATE! Immaculate Conception PCCW will host a **Day of Retreat** on Sat., March 25, open to all women of the diocese. Watch for further details.

Leopold—St. John Church will participate in the **Country Christmas Home Tour**, Sun., Dec. 18, 1-4 p.m. Tour the beautifully decorated homes, then visit St. John Church to listen to Christmas organ music, 3-4 p.m. Afterward, enjoy homemade soups and cookies in the school cafeteria. Tickets are \$10 and available the day of the tour at any of the homes, or may be purchased in advance at the Leopold Store, Bank of Missouri, and Beussink Family Dentistry, in Marble

Parishes and organizations are invited to submit notices of future events to be printed on a space-available basis. There is no fee.



Protecting God's Children®
For Adults

The VIRTUS Protecting God's Children Safe Environment training for adults is available online.

Preregistration is necessary: If you are a new registrant please go to www.virtus.org and click on "first time registrant" on the left, and follow the prompts to register for Online training. Instructions for the registration process can also be found on the Child and Youth Protection Page of the diocesan Website.

www.dioscg.org/wp-content/uploads/How-to-Register-for-a-VIRTUS-withOnline-Option.pdf

Both in-person and online training sessions are for adults only.

Before engaging in activities involving minors and/or vulnerable adults, new volunteers or employees are required to complete the VIRTUS Protecting God's Children training for adults, submit a current Background Disclosure and Authorization Form, and read, sign and submit the annual Code of Conduct, which are available on the VIRTUS Website and the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau Child and Youth Protection Webpage: www.dioscg.org/child-youth-protection/

For more information, please contact the Office of Child and Youth Protection, childandyouthprotection@dioscg.org; or Bill Holtmeyer, billholtmeyer@dioscg.org; or Shelly Ferry, sferry@dioscg.org, (417) 866-0841.



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By
Fr. Joshua
J. Whitfield

WHAT WE BELIEVE, PART 7:

The Church's Mission for glory

Jesus's prayer in John 17 makes clear that the disciples are to be joyfully one in holiness, bound together in a glory the origin of which is divine, the glory of the Father and the Son. This is the Church on earth in its genesis. Now, as we follow Jesus further in this prayer, we see the Church in its growth.

"I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth" (Jn 17:15-17). Again, Jesus's prayer is for holiness, not escape. Jesus does not want his disciples to bury their heads in the sand, abstain from the world as if they are too pure. He wants them to be the salt of the earth, light of the world (Mt 5:13-16). The plea that his disciples will be kept from evil echoes the Lord's Prayer.

"Consecrate them in the truth." Some translations say "sanctify." The plain meaning is that Jesus is praying the disciples are made holy in truth. They will be protected from the evil one insofar as they are consecrated in the truth. The truth is the "word." The truth is Jesus. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus said the Father had consecrated and sent him into the world (see Jn 10:36). Now he asks the same for the disciples.

"As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world" (Jn 17:18). Up to this point, we have witnessed the genesis of the Church, also that it is one and holy. Now we are beginning to see that it is apostolic. As earlier, note the trajectory: the Father sends the Son, then the Son sends the disciples, making them apostles. I call this the mission for glory, this movement begun within God himself but which will in time envelop all creation. Here it begins. The Father sends the Son and the Son sends the disciples; and then the disciples sent their disciples, and their disciples sent their disciples, and their disciples their disciples — all the way to you today, or whenever it was someone talked you into going to Church or introduced you to the Faith for the first time. This mission for glory, this apostolic movement stretches from the Father all the way to you.

We see it in Scripture and in history, this great movement of grace and the Spirit. As I said, this marks the true growth of the Church, at once spiritual and geographic. In the first chapter of Acts of the Apostles Jesus says that his disciples are to bear him witness in "Jerusalem, throughout Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Thinking of Acts as a whole,

the text begins in the city of Jerusalem but ends in Rome. That is the mission for glory, the evangelical growth of the Faith and the Church. As the Church teaches, that is why the nature of the Church is missionary, because it has its origin in the "mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit," the final purpose of which is to welcome all people into the "communion of the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 850).

"And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth" (Jn 17:19). It is because of his talk of consecration here that this prayer is often called Jesus's "high priestly prayer" or his "sacerdotal" prayer. As the Father consecrates Jesus, Jesus at the same time consecrates himself because he shares the Father's divine nature. Yet it is Jesus's humanity that is consecrated, and it is a consecration for us. That is, as we share in Christ's humanity, we are consecrated in him, in truth. "He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin" (Heb 2:11). Although Jesus is soon no longer to be present to them in the way they have grown accustomed, they are consecrated in him. That is, as this community of disciples becomes apostolic, they will remain one and holy. But, of course, we should remember what form such consecration takes, namely that of a cross. Talk of consecration is very close to talk of sacrifice. It was by the Cross, through his blood, we were consecrated (see Heb 13:12). Now, this matters because of what it suggests is true of our consecration, that it will be sacrificial too. Which, of course, is why the Cross will always be part of the Faith and life of the Church.

"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..." (Jn 17:20-21). Here is where we see even more explicitly the Church not only in genesis but in growth. The disciples are sent to us. If you want to know where in the Gospels Jesus literally prays for us, here you are. We are "those who will believe through their word." But that means what Jesus desires for his disciples — that they be one, holy, apostolic — he desires also for all



JESUS TEACHES DISCIPLES—Illustration published in *The Life of Christ* by Louise Seymour Houghton in 1890 (American Tract Society: New York). As the Church teaches, that is why the nature of the Church is missionary, because it has its origin in the "mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit," the final purpose of which is to welcome all people into the "communion of the Father and the Son in their Spirit of Love." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 850)

disciples of the future, for us too.

And this is where the rubber meets the road: "may all be one." He prays for those who will believe through the disciples' word, that they too may all be one — hēn. Again, to speak personally, this is why I'm so uncomfortable about our apparent comfort with Christian division. The lack of any sense of a problem with Christian division and denominationalism, the strange notion that all that matters is an individual's personal relationship with Jesus regardless of one's communion with others, it is indeed an easy thing to think, especially in polite company. But let us not fool ourselves by assuming this way of thinking has anything to do with the New Testament. It doesn't. Jesus prayed for oneness. Just as his disciples are to be one as the Father and the Son are one, so too are today's disciples. Again, long before converting to Catholicism, this is what haunted me, that Jesus wanted us to be one, but that we were not one at all.

But why is this so important? Jesus goes on: "as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us..." (Jn 17:21). Is it possible that our oneness as disciples is a condition of our communion with God? That, at least in this verse, the oneness of disciples seems conditionally associated with divine indwelling should serve as a deep warning about our unreflective comfort with Christian division. Our participation in God is involved in our participation with each other. How can we be divided and still comfortably assume God's favor? Our union with each other does matter. Where two or three are gathered, we should remember, Jesus is present (see Mt

18:20). Our relationships with each other are significant to our relationship with God. Again, these are the verses that began to make me uncomfortable being content with Christian denominationalism and division. They are the verses that forced me to think of the Church like a Catholic, to think of the Church as communion, one communion, holy and apostolic.

But that is not the only reason oneness matters. Remember, Jesus is sending out his disciples for a reason: "that the world may believe that you sent me" (Jn 17:21). Supposedly Gandhi once said, "If it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian." Speaking from his experience of Christians, it was a fair point. When your experience of

Christianity is of warring missionaries, when, on the one hand, you have the pope and, on the other hand, televangelists, Twitter stars, and megachurch preachers, each claiming to represent Christianity, it makes perfect sense that reasonable people would look at all these different voices and pass on Christianity, to think none of it credible or believable. It is amazing to me that more Christians do not see this. And it is also amazing to me how many Christians and Christian institutions, of all denominations, spend vast amounts of time, energy and money on evangelism and missions, tinkering with preaching, with outreach and on and on, yet very few say anything about this verse: "may they may all be one ... that the world may believe." To me, it is perfectly obvious why Christians of any stripe are having a hard time convincing people about Jesus, because our divisions have become so many and so hardened. Unity affects credibility. Jesus said so. This has always been true, and is what we have always believed.

NEXT EDITION:
WHAT WE BELIEVE: PART 8

The Church still glorious, still one

Father Joshua J. Whitfield is pastor of St. Rita Catholic Community in Dallas and author of "The Crisis of Bad Preaching" (Ave Maria Press, \$17.95) and other books.

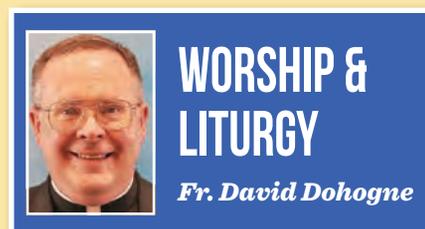
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Eucharistic Revival and Renewal

If you have been keeping up with the news going on in the “Catholic” world, you are aware that the Church in the United States is in the midst of a three-year “Eucharistic Revival.” What is this all about?

The Eucharistic Revival is a spiritual movement and initiative in the United States to help restore a deeper understanding and devotion to the great mystery of the Holy Eucharist. What is the need of this movement? A 2019 Pew Research survey revealed that only 30% of Catholics in the United States believe in the “Real Presence” of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. While this belief is at the heart of our Catholic Faith and the foundation of our relationship with Christ, sadly many Catholics have convinced themselves that they have no need for the Holy Eucharist. This is reflected in a drastic decrease in weekly Mass attendance. In many ways, we are currently in a “crisis mode” when it comes to the Holy Eucharist and Mass. The United States Bishops hope to turn around this “crisis of faith” through various efforts taking place in parishes during the Eucharistic Revival.

I would like for us to reflect on the statement: “How we receive reflects what we believe.” The Church offers two ways to reverently and properly receive our Lord in Holy Communion



WORSHIP & LITURGY

Fr. David Dohogne

at Mass—in the hand or on the tongue. Both forms should be done with love, devotion, reverence, and great care. When receiving Holy Communion in the hand, it is the practice and tradition of the Church that BOTH hands be extended properly to form a “throne” to receive our Lord. One hand should be placed in the palm of the other. When the Holy Eucharist is placed in one hand, a person should use the other hand to reverently place the Sacred Host on his/her tongue. If, for some reason, both hands are not able to be extended properly to form a “throne,” then it is the preference that you receive on the tongue. Some examples of this might be carrying and holding a child in your arms or holding a child by the hand, or perhaps walking with a cane and needing to hold on to the cane while receiving Holy Communion. It is not “proper” to merely extend one hand to receive the Sacred Host and then “pop” the Host into one’s mouth like a pill or piece of candy. Also, a person should not “take” or “snatch” the Host from the Priest,

Deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. When we receive our Lord in Holy Communion, a person should bow and respond

“Amen” when hearing the words “the Body of Christ.” To say nothing at all and remain silent at that moment would give the impression that you do NOT believe that this is truly the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Savior. Back to our original statement: “How we receive reflects what we believe.” If we receive the precious gift of our Lord in Holy Communion in a hurried, careless, and irreverent manner, it is a grave injustice and a sign of disrespect for our Lord. Before receiving Holy Communion (regardless of the form in which that takes place), a person should bow in order to show respect and reverence for our Lord.

If you have ever attended a funeral with full military honors and have witnessed the folding and presentation of the flag, which draped the casket of the deceased person, you see the care, respect, diligence, and reverence which is given to the flag of our nation

HOW WE RECEIVE
Reflects
WHAT WE BELIEVE.



by the honor guard. It is a beautiful and moving experience to witness this action and moment—the attention, detail, and care that is given in folding the

flag and how it is lovingly presented and entrusted to the family. If we give such care, respect, and reverence to a symbol—the flag of our nation (which we SHOULD do!), shouldn’t that same care, respect, and reverence be given to our Lord and Redeemer as he gives himself to us in the mystery and gift of the Holy Eucharist? In our culture, it almost seems that we have lost respect and reverence for just about everything and everyone!

May the Lord touch our hearts and souls during this time of Eucharistic Revival and Renewal and help us to truly understand and realize WHAT and WHO we are receiving in that most sacred moment of Holy Communion, one in which lives and love are intimately exchanged! ©TM

Father Dohogne is the Pastor of St. Henry Parish, in Charleston. He also serves as diocesan Director of Worship and Liturgy.



YOUTH GROUP—On Oct. 23, after celebrating Mass at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Ozark, Bishop Edward M. Rice blessed the new Stations of the Cross Prayer Trail behind the church. The Trail was an 18-month parish project organized and led by the SJW Youth Group, grades 6-12. (The Mirror)



BLESSING—Trailed by Fr. Joji Vincent, pastor, Bp. Edward M. Rice walked and blessed the new Stations of the Cross prayer trail behind St. Joseph the Worker Parish, in Ozark, on Sun., Oct. 23. The Trail was an 18-month parish project organized and led by the parish youth group, grades 6-12, under the leadership of Vanessa Coleman. (The Mirror)

Youth craft parish Prayer Trail in Ozark

Ozark, MO

Bishop Edward M. Rice joined parishioners and Pastor Fr. Joji Vincent in blessing the newly-installed Stations of the Cross Prayer Trail behind St. Joseph the Worker Church, in Ozark, MO. The Trail was an 18-month parish project organized and led by the parish youth group, grades 6-12, under the leadership of Vanessa Coleman.

Coleman was looking for a project to keep the young parishioners engaged over the summer months when they don’t typically meet. The youth discussed various ideas and decided upon a Stations of the Cross Trail for the parish, to be located in the “little patch of woods” behind the church. Work commenced in June 2021 cutting into the woods to clear the trail. To involve the whole parish, the youth asked parishioners to sponsor the cost of the individual Stations and the flowers to be planted beneath them. Each would have a mounted plaque with the desired name(s) or message of the sponsoring parishioner. These were all sold within two weekends.

Mulch for the trail was donated by a tree-trimming company and laid by the youth group. In the Spring of 2022, the mulch was replaced with rock from the front of the church that was being replaced. Initially, the youth laid the rock with buckets, wheelbarrows, and shovels. Later, they were able to rent a rock mover for two weekend workdays. The final rock was laid on Aug. 27, 2022. The Stations were mounted on Sept. 18, 2022.

At different stages of the process, several groups and individuals, assisted by family members, offered assistance: The parish Knights of Columbus Council #10200, the parish Boy Scout Troop, and parishioners Tony Leciejewski and Brian Coleman mounted and installed the Stations. Judd Beam spent several hours cutting through the brush and trees. Parishioner Barry Reicher constructed and installed the entrance sign.

The youth group will continue to spend at least two Saturdays a year maintaining the trail and will host a Parish Trail Day annually. In the near future, they hope to install a Marian Grotto on parish grounds. ©TM

OFFER GOD THREE GIFTS: YOURSELF, SILENCE, AND TIME

By Effie Caldarola

Once, an elderly archbishop was hosting a gathering at his home during the holidays. Someone presented him a gift that included a refrigerator magnet with that familiar cheery bromide, “Jesus is the reason for the season!”

The archbishop grinned sardonically: “He gets blamed for everything.”

If anything brings out the conflicting sides of our spiritual quest, it’s the Christmas season. If anything brings out the yearning for quiet reflection and simplicity, and throws that yearning kicking and screaming into the maelstrom of American busyness and consumerism, it’s the Christmas season.

If any time of the year finds our hearts sometimes torn between the season and the reason for its celebration, it’s Christmas in our cultural milieu.

To remedy this conflict between our spirituality and our social reality, we might begin the season with a quiet period of reflection. That sounds good, doesn’t it?

But when, actually, does the season begin? We know when Advent begins. But let’s face it, even though we decry the commercial tendency to jump right from Halloween to Christmas, many of us are formulating Christmas shopping lists in our minds even before this.

Christmas shopping can become a heavy burden, and often requires the planning and execution of a major military campaign. Then, there are the cards,

the cookies, the Christmas programs, and parties.

Do you catch yourself looking at your kids and wonder if they really get the meaning behind all this, or the humble birth of Jesus? **Where’s the simplicity of Christ’s life in the midst of this?**

So back to that idea about beginning with reflection. Maybe the hectic Advent and pre-Advent season is a good time to acknowledge

that every day, in every season, should begin with reflection.

It’s easy to say we have no “time” to pray. But do we have time for television, social media, endless scrolling through our various feeds? We all have “time.” It’s a question of how we use it.

During Advent and the Christmas season, offer God three gifts: yourself, silence and time. God will do the rest and gift us bountifully.

REFLECTION IN EVERY SEASON

We might ask ourselves two questions each day.

One, how can I simplify? Teach your children to want less and to give more. A little gift-giving mantra

for what we buy our kids and grandkids: “Something they want, something they need, something to wear, something to read.”

Notice the emphasis on “something,” not “lots of things.” Cut back on junk.

Focus on a quality gift, and perhaps gifts of time and experience as opposed to more plastic. This can apply to grown-up gifts as well.

Second question to reflect on daily: **How can I give, today?**

Don’t make it one more stressful, costly duty.

Instead, think of simple gifts of love. A phone call to a lonely relative. Reaching out to an estranged family member.

Baking cookies? Have your kids deliver some to an elderly neighbor. Read your kids a book about Jesus’ birth or watch a movie that brings out the beauty of Christmas. Share a dinner conversation about how today’s refugees are much like the child Jesus, and how we might help them.

Mark on your calendar what “gift” you gave each day, and in gratitude, one gift you received. Then, leave the stress behind. You’re doing your best. This philosophy would be good to continue in the new year... And, have a Merry Christmas. ©CNS

Caldarola is a freelance writer and columnist for Catholic News Service.



“**Maybe this hectic season is a good time to acknowledge that every day, in every season, should begin with reflection.**”



MIRIAM DINNER draws 8 young women

Cape Girardeau

A Miriam Dinner was held Nov. 3 in the St. John Henry Newman Center, Cape Girardeau, and attended by Sr. Evalyne Ekesa, Sr. Margaret Sergon, and Sr. Kevin Karimi from the Little Sisters of St. Francis community. Also there were Sr. Lety and Sr. Rosio from the Congregation of the Poor Clare Missionary sisters who work at Sacred Heart Catholic School in Poplar Bluff, MO. Miriam Dinners include opportunities for prayer and a meal with local consecrated religious for young women interested in discernment of a religious vocation. Attendees heard talks from those consecrated religious on their lives and ministries as well as remarks from Bishop Edward M. Rice. Sister Kevin Karimi shared her vocational experience as a religious working and evangelizing in different parts of the world and her arrival with the other four sisters to work in Cape Girardeau Saint Francis Medical Center. From several area parishes, attendees included Kate Prost, Becky Kitchen, Maya Coleman, Mary Madigan, Regah Kintz, Adelynn Rackers, Kylei Harvey, and Veronica Beck, as well as other local religious. ©TM



Vatican Christmas Tree-Lighting Ceremony 2022

Vatican City

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas at the Vatican. A large hand-carved wooden Nativity scene was unveiled in St. Peter Square on Saturday night at the Vatican's Christmas tree-lighting ceremony.

Cardinal Fernando Vérgez Alzaga presided over the ceremony on Dec. 3. Due to heavy rain and thunderstorms, the celebration took place inside Vatican City's Paul VI Hall with a video livestream from St. Peter's Square of the Christmas tree-lighting.

The Christmas tree is a nearly 100-foot-tall white fir from Rosello, a mountain village with around 182 inhabitants in the central Italian region of Abruzzo.



THE TREE was adorned with ornaments made by children at a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Italy. Other decorations for the tree were crafted by residents at a nursing home and schoolchildren from Abruzzo. (Daniel Ibanez/CNA)

The tree was adorned with ornaments made by children at a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Italy. Other decorations for the tree were crafted by residents at a nursing home and schoolchildren from Abruzzo.

The outdoor Nativity scene is made of life-size figures hand-carved out of alpine cedar trees from Italy's northeasternmost region, Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

The scene includes a wooden grotto with an ox, donkey, angel, Mary, Joseph and the Baby Jesus. The wooden figures will also have tradesmen and tradeswomen typical of the area where the Nativity was made, a shepherdess, and a family and children.

The Vatican has placed a Nativity scene in front of St. Peter's Basilica for the Christmas season since the 1980s. For about a decade, the Vatican has asked different countries or Italian regions to lend the Nativity to be displayed. In 2021, the scene came from Peru.

This year, the Vatican is also displaying an indoor Nativity scene donated by the government of Guatemala inside the Paul VI Hall, where Pope Francis receives many audiences in December.

The Holy Family and three angels were handmade



THE LIGHTS on the Vatican's nearly 100-foot Christmas tree were lit on Dec. 3. (Daniel Ibanez/CNA)



THE OUTDOOR NATIVITY SCENE is made of life-size figures hand-carved out of alpine cedar trees from Italy's northeasternmost region, Friuli-Venezia Giulia. (Daniel Ibanez/CNA)

by Guatemalan artisans in the local tradition, using large golden crowns for the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph.

Pope Francis spent time in silent prayer in front of the Nativity scene set up in Paul VI Hall on Saturday morning ahead of the ceremony.

In an audience with delegations from the communities that donated the Nativity scenes and the Christmas tree, the Pope said that the Christmas tree with its lights is a reminder of Jesus, who "comes to illuminate our darkness, our existence often shrouded in the shadow of sin, fear, pain."

The Pope said: "Yes, God loves us so much that he shares our humanity and our lives.

He never leaves us alone; he is by our side in every circumstance, in joy as in sorrow. Even in the worst of times, he is there, because he is the Emmanuel, God with us, the light that illuminates the darkness and the tender presence that accompanies us on our journey."

©CNA

Andrew Project



Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau

PROJECT ANDREW draws several local young men interested in discernment

Cape Girardeau

A Project Andrew dinner was held Nov. 7 in the St. John Henry Newman Center for local men open to considering a vocation to the priesthood. These evenings provide an opportunity for prayer, discussion, and a meal. Bishop Edward M. Rice and Deacon Tom Schumer, director of the Newman Center, spoke about discernment and its importance in discovering God's will every day. The dinner was attended by several local young men from area parishes, Noah Coleman, Jackson Jones, Thomas Dittmer, Blake Schreckenberger, Jared Koehler, Alex T. Harold, Michael Eftink, Damian Criddle, Grayson Broun, Joseph R. Green, Dillon G. Cahill, Peyton Lintner, Drake Cheaney, Ethan Foti, James Thurmoon, as well as local clergy. ©TM



THIS ADVENT... CAN WE ACTUALLY WAIT?

build up God's kingdom instead of the world. Instead of heeding the call to immediate gratification, we should at least make some space to hear our Lord's invitation to wait and to prepare.

to think that we can wake up on Christmas morning and just step into a breathtaking experience of the joy, peace, and beauty of God's greatest gift.

Father was right. It is controversial to try to slow down the celebration of Christmas and use Advent instead to anticipate what he called "the paradox of what is to come and what has already happened." But if a deeply meaningful and enjoyable celebration is what we're after—and we can probably all agree on that—let's challenge our families to gradually grow in our appreciation for and practice of anticipation. ©TM

MARANATHA!

Married for 20 years and the proud parents of five children, Soren and Ever Johnson are co-founders of Trinity House Community, a Catholic nonprofit with a mission to inspire families to make home a small taste of heaven for the renewal of faith and culture. They contribute the column, "Heavenly Home," to the USCCB For Your Marriage blog, the root of which is to support marriage, the engaged, parenting, and family life: www.foryourmarriage.org.

by Soren & Ever Johnson

"First, a controversy," our new parochial vicar began a recent Advent homily. "When is it okay to decorate for Christmas?"

After nervous laughter rippled through the sanctuary, and more than a few spouses got jabbed in the ribs, he reminded us that the Church sets aside an entire octave to celebrate Christmas. Lest we forget, this octave doesn't begin in November—when we start to see decorations in stores. It begins on the vigil of Christmas. And then, he said something unexpected.

SMALL STEPS

We thought he would advise holding off on decorating until Christmas Eve, in order to fully inhabit the season of penitence and waiting in expectation of our Lord. But instead, he said, "How about going a bit more slowly? Maybe get your tree and put the lights on, but don't put all the ornaments on until Christmas Eve," he suggested.

You could just feel the tension dissipate and love for our newest priest grow. Nervous smiles turned genuine as we all thought, "That sounds doable." Knowing the futility of telling us that we should change all of our bad habits at once, Father went easy and suggested small steps. He understands the burden of change.

WAIT AND PREPARE

Though change we must. Our culture has taught us to see waiting—for anything... the delivery of an Amazon package, our order at the restaurant, even sexual intimacy—as a waste of time. Inefficient. Old-fashioned. And it's phenomenally easy to just be swept along in our consumer culture's push to frenetic shopping, activity, and having it all now.

Against this powerful cultural push, Christian families must push back, but we can't change everything at once. We need to take small steps and enact a realistic plan to change our habits to

THE JOY OF ANTICIPATION

Because isn't so much of true enjoyment—a little taste of heaven on earth—found in anticipation? Do we really enjoy the things we get right away or do we rightly only truly savor the things we waited and worked for? As we take the invitation to wait as an invitation to true enjoyment, let's think about how so much of building a Trinity House is oriented toward this type of slow build.

We slow down on the Sabbath so that we can take that enjoyment into the rest of the week. We take time with each other because we want the pleasure of living in a family with healthy relationships. We share hard work in the home so that we can have the satisfaction of having provided for one another. We extend our family meals and linger at the table because that kind of togetherness is the whole point of life.

So, working a bit of true waiting into Advent—cultivating a vein of quieter preparation—is just another form of building a truly memorable and enjoyable time of celebration. Absent this type of intentionality, it's unrealistic



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Nicholas was born in St. Louis, MO and grew up in Southeast Missouri. He obtained a bachelor of Arts in Marriage and Family from Conception Seminary College, and a Master of Studies in Marriage and Family from the International Theological Institute. He currently lives and works in Krakow, Poland teaching Theology of the Body in person and online.

Topics:

- ✓ January 7: "Overview and TOB Ch. 1: Christ Appeals to the Beginning"
- ✓ January 14: "TOB Ch 2: Christ Appeals to the Human Heart"
- ✓ January 21: "TOB Ch 3: Christ Appeals to the Resurrection and Celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven"
- ✓ January 28: "TOB Part 2: The Sacrament of Marriage"

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Day/Time

Saturdays in January
9:30am-10:45am CST

Location

Zoom Video Call, link provided after registration

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Sponsored by the Office of Faith Formation, Diocese of Springfield- Cape Girardeau

OBITUARY | *Msgr. Harry G. Schlitt*



San Francisco

Cape Girardeau native Msgr. Harry George Schlitt, of San Francisco, CA, passed away peacefully in his home on Thanksgiving, Nov. 24, 2022. He was 83.

Father Schlitt was born in Cape Girardeau, MO, on June 3, 1939, the youngest child of the late William and Theckla (Dirnberger) Schlitt. He left school after the eighth grade and at the age of just 13, he entered Cardinal Glennon College, a Catholic St. Louis-area seminary. He attended the Pontifical North American College in Rome, representing the newly-created Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau (1956). A doctor, a friend of the family, paid for his schooling and expenses for all four years of college. On Dec. 16, 1964, Fr. Schlitt was ordained a priest in the Vatican at St. Peter's for the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. He was conferred the title of "Monsignor" on July 15, 2000.

After ordination, he returned to Missouri to start a ministry that led him from teaching in the local minor seminary, Sacred Heart House of Studies, and in St. Agnes High School, to the pulpit, and onto the airwaves in 1968. He was dubbed, the "Rock & Roll DJ priest," hosting a wildly popular Top 40 call-in show for teens entitled, "I'll Never Tell," a youth-oriented stories and issues show—in a town with a Catholic population of just five percent. It all began at then-KICK radio in Springfield, MO.

"The idea," Fr. Schlitt told the *LA Tribune* in 1979, "was that kids hide things somewhere in the backs of their minds, not wanting to tell anybody what it is or how it feels. The thrust of show was be open, with yourself, your thoughts, your personality."

Having ministered outside the diocese for many years, "in light of my special ministry in religious communications," Fr. Schlitt was incarnated into the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1979 as the Executive Director of the Archdiocesan

Communications Center, providing services for the production of community-oriented brochures, radio, and television spots.

In 1970, "Father Harry from the God Squad," was introduced with lyrics from several popular songs woven together with 15 seconds of Fr. Schlitt delivering a folksy spiritual message. It was syndicated through the RKO chain, reaching an estimated 6 million people a week, including some 150 ships at sea. The program engaged young people by connecting rock and roll with Christian teachings. His remarkable

success led to stints in radio and TV in Chicago, Las Vegas, and San Francisco. He then spent 20 years broadcasting and interviewed legendary musicians and rubbed elbows with everyone from politicians to the less fortunate. Father Schlitt served in various roles for the Archdiocese of San Francisco including Director of Communications, director and chaplain of the Newman Center, SFSU, Moderator of the Curia, Vicar General, and Vicar for Administration. He also served at Sacred Heart Parish, San Francisco; Saint Veronica Parish, Holy Name of Jesus Parish, and former Pastor at Saint Gabriel Parish. He was also an interim administrator at St. Raymond Parish, Menlo Park, Most Holy Redeemer Parish, San Francisco; Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, San Francisco; and St. Philip the Apostle Parish, San Francisco. Most recently, Fr. Schlitt resided at St. Vincent de Paul Parish the last seven years. He also celebrated Mass every week, in retirement at St. Vincent's School for Boys, San



COUNSELOR, DEAN, INSTRUCTOR—Father Harry Schlitt is seen teaching in Springfield's Sacred Heart House of Studies minor seminary in the 1960s. The media "rock and roll" priest born in Cape Girardeau died on Thanksgiving in California. (*The Mirror archives*)

Rafael, as well as volunteering for Catholic Charities.

Fun fact: Fr. Schlitt held a world record for water skiing from Cape Girardeau to St. Louis. He was the author of, *I'll Never Tell: Odyssey of a Rock & Roll Priest* and *I'll Never Know: The Rock & Roll Priest Looks at 80*. More information may be found on his fatherharry.org Website.

Father Schlitt was predeceased by his brothers, Charlie Schlitt (Mary) and John Schlitt, and is survived by his sister, Odila "Della" Darling and sister-in-law, Betty Dumas. He is also survived by many nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews. The Mass of Christian Burial for Fr. Schlitt will be celebrated on Mon., December 12, 2022, in St. Mary Cathedral, San Francisco. Interment will be in Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery, Colma. Donations may be made in his memory to the San Francisco Archdiocese Priest Retirement Fund, One Peter Yorke Way, San Francisco, CA 94109. ©TM

OBITUARY | *Sr. Mary Dorothy Calhoun, RSM*



St. Louis

Mercy Sr. Mary Dorothy Calhoun, RSM, passed away on Wed., Nov. 23, 2022. She was 88.

Joan Marie Calhoun was born on Dec. 31, 1933, and is predeceased by her parents

John Worthing Calhoun (1943) and Dorothy Louise Tremoulet Calhoun Brundige (1992), sister Dorothy Calhoun Jackman (1982), brother John Worthing Calhoun, Jr. (2015), and stepfather William Hart Brundige (1955). She is survived by brother William Hart Brundige, Jr.; nieces and nephews John Daniel Jackman, Jr., MD; Michael Calhoun Jackman, Joan Jackman Becker, Worthing Francis Jackman, John Worthing Calhoun, III, Catherine Clann Calhoun,

Susan Calhoun Waggoner, William Hart Brundige, III, and John Dudley Brundige.

Sister Calhoun graduated from Holy Name of Jesus School & Mercy Academy, and entered the convent in 1952, at the Mother of Mercy Novitiate, St. Louis Province. She is a graduate of St. John's Hospital School of Nursing in St. Louis, 1958; BS Nursing, St. Louis University, 1960; Masters in Hospital Administration, St. Louis University, 1968; Certification in Clinical Pastoral Education, Baptist Hospital, New Orleans, 1990. "Sr. Dorothy's" / "Aunt Sis's" life of dedication (nursing, administration, ministry) included supervisor of obstetrics, delivery, nursery, OR, ER, and director of nursing services at Mercy facilities in New Orleans, Brownsville TX, St. Louis, MO, and St. Paul, MN (1958-1967); Administrator (CEO/CFO) Mercy Hospital New Orleans (1968-1973); Administrator (CEO/CFO) St. John's Hospital, Springfield, MO (1973-1977);

Administrator (CEO/CFO) Mercy Health Center, Laredo, TX (1977-1980); Director of Pastoral Services for Sisters of Mercy & Mercy Hospital, New Orleans (1981-1992), and St. Joseph's Mercy Health Center, Hot Springs, AR (1992-1995); Pastoral Care Chaplain, Hot Springs (1995-2014); Volunteer at Mercy Hospital, Fort Smith, AR (2014-2020). Sister Calhoun's past two years were spent in prayer and works of mercy, in loving care with the retired Sisters of Mercy, St. Louis.

The Mass of Christian Burial was held on Wed., Nov. 30, 2022, in the chapel of Catherine's Residence, 2039 N. Geyer Rd., St. Louis, MO. Interment was in Calvary Cemetery, St. Louis. Donations in memory of Sr. Mary Dorothy Calhoun, RSM, are appreciated, to Catherine's Residence Ministry Fund, Sisters of Mercy – The Americas, 2039 N. Geyer Rd., St. Louis, MO 63131, attention Sr. Richard Mary Burke, RSM.

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Three Christmas Gospels highlight invisible God made visible

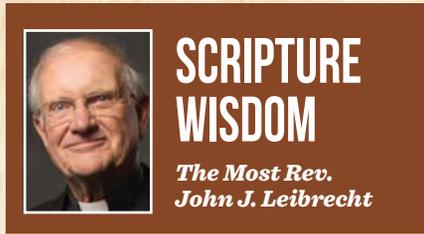
The joys of past Christmases will again inspire my Christmas this year. For instance, I recall aunts and uncles joining my family for Midnight Mass at our parish church. Afterward, we enjoyed a freshly-prepared hot breakfast at home. Then, we went to the living room for an exchange of gifts.

Next to the Christmas tree, with its multicolored lights, was the crib scene. Mary and Joseph on either side of the new-born child lying in a manger. Looking on were two shepherds, one standing and the other kneeling. Off to the side was a donkey and cow at rest.

Christmas celebrates the birth of a child unique in all human history. The Church tells us about this child in three different Gospels proclaimed at the various Christmas Masses.

MIDNIGHT MASS

At Midnight Mass, the Gospel relates the familiar story of the pregnant Mary journeying with Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem to register in a census ordered by the Roman emperor. Then, Mary's child is born. An angel of God appears to shepherds in the area: "A savior has been born for you who is Christ the Lord." The shepherds hurry, the Gospel of the early Mass tells us to see for themselves, "... this thing that has taken place." Amazed at all they saw and heard, they proceeded to share with others what had been told to them about the child, wondering if he could be the long-awaited messiah.



SCRIPTURE WISDOM

The Most Rev.
John J. Leibrecht

CHRISTMAS MORNING

John's Gospel at the late-morning Mass reveals more about who this child is: "In the beginning was the Word ... and the Word was God ... and the Word became flesh." This son of Mary, named Jesus, is indeed the Son of God. The heavenly Father has sent his Son to make his dwelling among us. During the years of his life on earth, Jesus would serve in his Father's name as the "true light which enlightens everyone."

For Catholics and all Christians around the world, Christmas makes us grateful for the faith we have in Jesus Christ. Faith allows us to see in him the invisible God made visible. It makes possible our acceptance of Jesus as humanity's Savior announced by the angel of God.

Jesus came to save us, the Scriptures say, from two things: sin and death. Our human weakness does not keep us from sinning, but through Jesus, our sins can be forgiven and, by means of our personal efforts, we are able to live a life based on love of God and love of others. While we are not kept from dying, death does not have the final word. Himself raised from the dead, Jesus promises his faithful followers a whole new life after life on this earth.

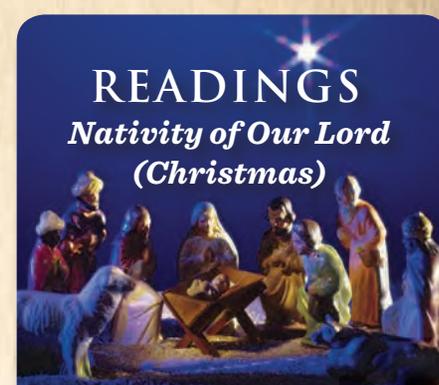
CHRIST: OUR CENTER & LIGHT

Therefore, for Christians, Christmas is more than a Happy Holiday. Christmas focuses our attention on the remarkable presence Jesus wants to have in our lives. One way we can maintain our focus on him—in our lives and certainly in this season—is by participating in Mass each weekend. At Mass the Christ born at Bethlehem becomes present on the altar when the priest prays the Lord's own words over the bread and wine: This is my Body, This is my Blood. As the priest elevates the host and chalice, the Lord offers himself to the Father, inviting us to offer ourselves with him and to the Father.

Offering ourselves with Christ to the Father involves a willingness to die to one's Self, to make an effort to be less Self-centered, more Other-centered so we can live in conformity with God's ways and do good for others. In coming to us in Holy Communion, the Lord becomes the spiritual strength we need to act in accord with our offering of Self to the Father.

Mass is all-important to us Catholics. It deepens and transforms the relationship we have with God, who loves us beyond measure.

May you have a blessed and joyful Christmas, enhanced by good memories of past Christmases. And may Jesus Christ, who is our way and truth and life, be a lamp to your feet in order to light your path in the weeks and months ahead in 2023. ©TM



Vigil Mass

Is 62:1-5

Ps 89:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

Acts 13:16-17, 22-25

Mt 1:1-25 or Mt 1:18-25

Mass during Night

Is 9:1-6

Ps 96:1-2, 2-3, 11-12, 13

Ti 2:11-14

Lk 2:1-14

Mass at Dawn

Is 62:11-12

Ps 97:1, 6, 11-12

Ti 3:4-7

Lk 2:15-20

Mass during the Day

Is 52:7-10

Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4, 5-6

Heb 1:1-6

Jn 1:1-18 or Jn 1:1-15, 9-14

Retired Bishop Emeritus John J. Leibrecht served almost 24 years as the Fifth Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. Now retired, he resides in Springfield.



I HAD NO CLUE: I ONLY THOUGHT I WAS A 'BELIEVER'

by Mike Wilson

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) is a very valuable asset to the Catholic Church. I am a product of this process for those seeking full communion with the Catholic Church, and I am proud to now call myself a true believer in the Mystery of the Blessed Sacrament. However, this was not always the case.

One who has completed the requirements for full initiation into the Church are oftentimes referred to as "converts," assuming that there has indeed been a conversion at some point in the person's life. My Protestant years were consumed with attending church, learning about the graces of God through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection. So, what was there to convert?

I learned the Catholic prayers, the responses, and went through all the motions. I was Catholic just like everyone else. During my initiation at the Easter Vigil in 1992, I really thought I believed. As it turns out, I had no clue.

Many struggles had occurred within my faith and family when my son began to participate in sacramental preparation for Confirmation in 2010. I had also begun to assist our youth ministers in the parish, mainly by showing up as a warm body to provide support as needed. This was the beginning of what I know now was my conversion story. It was a slow and agonizing process.

During that first year assisting in the parish, the youth ministers tried to get me to attend the summer Steubenville



Mid-America Youth Conference with the youth group.

For those readers unfamiliar with the Steubenville conferences, each July it is held on the Campus of Missouri State University in Springfield. Teens from North Dakota to south Texas, including all the states in between, converge to one of the two weekend events. Steubenville conferences help teens (and their chaperons) recognize their own faith identity by evangelizing through technology, charismatic music, vocations, prayer, Adoration, and world renowned Catholic keynote speakers. At any rate: Nope, it was not going to happen! I had no interest in such a conference: I would rather be fishing. Oh, how I love to fish! Another year passed, nope, I didn't attend! And another year, nope! I had better things to do. Just the sound of it did not appeal to me whatsoever. I was reluctant to go to such a conference and I didn't!

So, I had been working with our youth as a volunteer for four years before I attended my first Steubenville Youth Conference. Unfortunately, someone had to die in order to get me there. Yes, you read that right: Someone had to die to get me there!

The lead couple of our parish youth group had just experienced a death in the family and asked my lovely wife, LeAnn, and I to take their place. She, of course, said yes. I complied so there would not be an argument. This is the point where God began to chisel away at my inner being.

That first year, I attended Steubenville with a group of 20 youths. At the end, the event piqued my interest. But for two straight years, I attended the conference before my eyes began to see and my heart began to feel things in a different light. For some unknown reason, I was becoming vulnerable, bit-by-bit—and during that third year, I experienced true conversion.

Continued on next page...

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

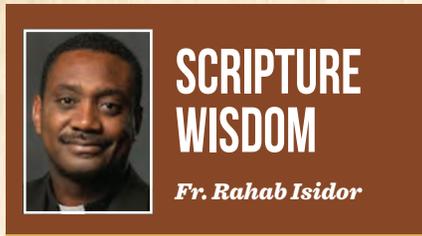
Let the Lord enter, he is the king of glory

*1st Reading (Isaiah 7:10-14);
Responsorial Psalm: 23;
2nd Reading (Romans 1:1-7);
Gospel text (Matthew 1:18-24)*

Today's liturgy of the Word invites us to consider and admire St. Joseph's figure, a truly good man. It has been said about Mary, God's Mother, that she was blessed among women (cf. Lk 1:42). About Joseph it has been written he was a just man (Mt 1:19), an influencer, an admirer.

ARE YOU AN INFLUENCER OR ADMIRER?

Whether you're the hero who influences the lives of your followers or you're the one being influenced by your hero, it's important to evaluate the impact of such influence in your life and the life of others. As a role model, Joseph, should be the light at the end of a tunnel, guiding us when we are lost. Folks, we have no doubt that Joseph, through his job and personal commitment to his familial and social surroundings, sort of won our Creator's "Heart," when considering him the man to be trusted in the collaboration of human Redemption through his Son, made a man, as we are. We are urged to learn from St. Joseph: his allegiance, already proven from the very beginning, and his good



SCRIPTURE WISDOM

Fr. Rahab Isidor

behavior during the rest of his life, closely correlated to Jesus and Mary.

Joseph is the patron and mediator of all fathers, whether biological or not, those that, in our world, must help their sons to provide a similar response to his.

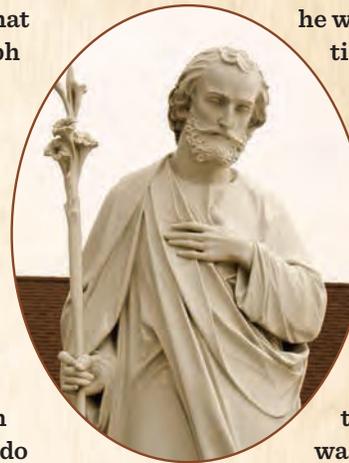
Joseph is the patron of the Church, as an entity closely linked to his Son, and we keep on hearing Mary's words when she finds that the Child Jesus was "lost" in the Temple: "Your father and I..." (Lk 2:48). Consequently, with Mary, our Mother, we find Joseph as the father. St. Teresa of Avila trumpeted: "I took for my advocate and comforter the glorious Saint Joseph, and commended myself fervently to him (...). I do not remember at any time having asked him for anything which he did not grant."

Joseph is the admirable father for those of us who have heard the call of our Lord to fill up, through the priestly ministry, the place Jesus Christ has handed over to us to carry on with his Church. In our daily prayers, we are suggested to ask glorious St. Joseph to protect our families, our communities, all those hearing the call to vocation of the priesthood, as we hope there will

be many of us. Joseph, as the earthly father of Jesus, is definitely our role model.

There is not a lot about Joseph contained in Scripture. Most of what is found in the Bible is right here in Matthew 1:18-25. And what we find here is that Joseph was a man who you and I would do well to imitate in many ways. And that just makes sense. The man whom God would choose to bring up His Son on earth, in His formative years, would be spirited to His plan. And even though there is not a lot of information contained here, what we do find is that Joseph serves as a great illustration in several areas, such as his example of balancing righteousness and love, and his example of obedience.

Joseph's obedience to God's is an outstanding Example for us to follow. Obedience is one of the most important signs that you really are a Christian, and that you love the Lord. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15). He also said, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord', and not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). No, you aren't saved by your obedience. But if you are really saved, you are going to obey. And if you consistently disobey God, it is one of the surest signs that you have



never really come to know him at all. Joseph is a great example to us of how to live a life of holiness and obedience toward God, and love toward other people. Scripture tells us nothing of Joseph's death, though presumably

he was not living during the time of Jesus' ministry, or Jesus would not have felt the need to entrust his mother's care to the beloved disciple (John 19:26-27). What we pick up from Scripture about Joseph is that God chose him as a man who was devout, full of faith to "father" Jesus. Joseph was a man who was just,

merciful, and one who loved and carefully guarded both Mary and the Child Jesus. Finally, we parody Pope St. Paul VI when the sovereign pontiff preached, more than half a century ago: "We call upon Saint Joseph for the world, trusting that the heart of the humble working man of Nazareth, now overflowing with immeasurable wisdom and power, still harbors and will always harbor, a singular and precious fellow-feeling for the whole of mankind. So may it be" (From his homily on the Feast of Saint Joseph, March 27, 1969). ©TM

Father Rahab Isidor is Pastor of St. Lawrence Parish, in Monett, and Sacred Heart Parish, Verona.

THE STEUBENVILLE EXPERIENCE

Imagine a basketball arena full of young people and adults. The lights grow dim, the house band is playing music to set the tone, and spotlights split the darkness to illuminate the Body of Christ placed within the most ornate monstrance one could lay his eyes upon. Participants kneel, some with out-stretched arms during the Eucharistic procession. The music is playing loudly, as the priest begins walking the Eucharist through clouds of incense. The procession winds through every level of the arena: up the stairs, down the stairs, zig-zagging through thousands of prayerful Christians, both young and old, in every corner of the vast arena. This is where my life changed.

Seated in the end seat of the aisle in Row 15 of Section B, the procession slowly grew closer to our immediate area. The monstrance holding the Eucharistic stopped right next to my seat. What seemed like an eternity was only a brief period as I began to no longer hear

the music. I could no longer take my eyes away. All I could see was the light; a light so bright that it pierced right through me, but it did not burn my eyes. Paralyzed in the awe of Jesus Christ right there before me, I wept.

The priest carrying the monstrance appeared to be in a trance, his eyes glazed over like a foggy morning window. He was not carrying the Blessed Sacrament throughout the arena, it was Jesus leading him through the arena!

I could not take it anymore. Jesus was staring at me. Jesus was speaking to me. I tried to turn away, but I could not. Like Peter, I responded, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man," but he would not leave. At this moment, time stood still, and God crushed my pride and opened my heart. For the first time in my life, I truly listened. I genuinely **believed** and mine was an absolute conversion.

All I could see was a light so bright that it pierced right through me, but it did not burn my eyes. Paralyzed in the awe of Jesus Christ right there before me, I wept.

This Eucharist is not just a funny-shaped piece of bread-like wafer or mere wine made by bald-headed, barefoot monks or nuns with strange looking habits. It is the real and literal flesh and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ: I've seen it with my very own eyes.

Since that day, having Christ be a part of my daily life is necessary, not optional. St. Paul, after being knocked off his horse and blinded by a great light, experienced true conversion. Fortunately, God spared me the embarrassments of such an event, but I, too, have personally and intimately (at a public event!) received the grace of God, and that is my conversion story. These words of St. Paul to Timothy stay close to my heart:

I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and an arrogant man, but I have been mercifully treated because I acted out of ignorance in my unbelief. Indeed, the grace of

our Lord has been abundant, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Of these, I am the foremost. But for that reason, I was mercifully treated, so that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display all his patience as an example for those who would come to believe in him for everlasting life (1 Timothy 1:13-16).

After my personal encounter with Christ alive in the Eucharist in the summer of 2017, there is no doubt within me. Conversion does not happen overnight; God works in his own time. In a world where the denial of Jesus is more prevalent than ever, I beg you: open your heart, give Jesus, fully present in the Eucharist, a chance to change your life. He has changed mine! ©TM

Wilson serves as a youth minister in Sacred Heart Parish, Webb City, and St. Ann Parish, Carthage. He is also an Aspirant for the Permanent Diaconate in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau.

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417-866-0841 | kbayman@dioscg.org | <https://dioscg.org/respect-life/>

All families of the diocese are invited to join the FAMILY BIBLE CHALLENGE!

Each Sunday, families will receive an email identifying a new passage from the Bible that they are asked to read together as a family, reflect upon, and discuss. Families will be provided with the passage, reflection, and trivia questions, as well as a link to a short introductory video for that book of the Bible. You just have to make the time to do it together as a family and Advent is a great time to start!

The "challenge" is to engage your family with Sacred Scripture. There is no contest. There are no rules. There is, however, the great benefit of falling in love with Jesus through the power of the Good News found in the Bible!

The videos are provided through a partnership with The Bible Project. The reflection and trivia questions are the work of generous volunteers and the staff of The Institute for Catholic Formation.

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