

Saint Mary

ON THE HILL

CATHOLIC CHURCH



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News and Notes from Fr. Jerry

Come Home for Christmas

Dear Parishioners,

By now I hope you have heard of the massive outreach to Catholics who have drifted away from the Church. The Diocese of Savannah is undertaking an evangelization initiative – Catholics Come Home – that invites our sisters and brothers back to the practice of the Faith. This evangelization initiative begins this month and will continue through the end of January. Over 2,000 television ads will air on the major area stations. These ads encourage those who have drifted away to come back home.



There are 20 million Catholics in the United States who no longer practice the Faith or do so sporadically. I know some of you who are reading this newsletter haven't been to Mass in months. There are many reasons ranging from a crazy schedule by which you can barely make ends meet, to laziness to indifference to doubts or deep hurts.

I have a beloved cousin who no longer is a practicing Catholic because he was looking for a Church with upbeat praise music. He found it at the Joy Community Church.

Ironically though, while we have large numbers of Catholics leaving the Catholic Church to join a more 'spiritually alive church', a more 'Bible based church', we also have in the past 20 years a growing number of Protestant ministers being led by the Spirit to convert to Catholicism. We also have a number of lay evangelicals joining the Catholic Church, as well as a number of people who were raised in the Catholic Church, joined an evangelical church for years, and now are returning home to the Catholic Church.

This phenomenon is amazing to me when I consider the following factors:

- Nearly all of the Protestant ministers now converting to Catholicism were raised in an anti-Catholic atmosphere.
- They were very well educated in their own religious beliefs. So it wasn't as if they didn't truly know what their particular church believed.
- Joining the Catholic Church meant losing their jobs. Nearly all of these converts were pastors in their churches. When they joined the Catholic Church they wanted to continue in Christian ministry. Some were able to do this, others were not.
- Often these men left vibrant faith communities to join a parish that may not have been very spiritually alive.

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Wonder and Awe

Preparing the Church for Christmas

The proverb, “Good things come to those who wait,” might as well have been referring to the seasons of Advent and Christmas. The excitement and joy we feel on Christmas morning is in part because of the weeks (and for some, months) we’ve spent in anticipation of the anniversary of Christ’s birth. No more waiting, we think, Christmas is finally here!

Some parents capitalize upon this feeling of anticipation, and rather than decorate the home during Advent with candy canes, garland and miniature manger scenes, they wait until Christmas Eve, after the children have gone to bed, to set up the Christmas tree and other decorations. The effect is nothing short of magical. When the children rise the next morning, the home has been transformed into a Christmas wonderland.

A small group of St. Mary’s parishioners accomplish a similar feat each year, as they decorate our church for the Feast of the Nativity. Organized by Jerri Bentley, the ladies arrive at the church on the day before Christmas Eve, and spend a few hours – with the help of a few of their husbands – arranging bright red poinsettias, evergreen garland, and holiday wreaths throughout the church. When parishioners arrive for Mass the next day, many are captivated by those very same feelings of wonder and awe.

“Nothing will make you feel closer to God than preparing the church for a liturgy,” says church decorator Pat Bush. “It’s a gift that God has given us, and we give back.”

Many of the ladies have been decorating for Christmas for as long as they can remember. Pat, who is relatively new to the group – joining the others in 2006 – enjoys sharing her floral arrangement talents with the rest of the parish. For the past 30 years, she has created beautiful arrangements for weddings, special ceremonies and church liturgies.

Pat says providing flowers and decorations for church services does much to enhance parishioners’ experience of the liturgical seasons.

“It’s important because it sets a mood for the service,” she says. “We look for ways to be creative but respectful.”

Over the years, the group has received the appreciation of many in our community – gestures of thanksgiving for their hard work and artistic eye.

This Christmas, as you walk through the doors of the church and admire the poinsettia Christmas tree, beautiful wreaths and other decorations, know that the beauty of our church is made possible by ordinary parishioners – such as the ladies who decorate the parish each liturgical season.



Our Dedicated Church Decorators

Jerri Bentley

Anne Proctor

Pat Bush

Kay Owens

Ellen Burroughs



Advent

A Journey of Anticipation

Advent is a time of preparation for the arrival of our Savior. (The word “advent” itself means “coming.”) Associated with personal reflections on the birth of Christ, Advent often is considered merely a symbolic period of waiting. Yet, in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ directly reminds us of His second coming: “So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.”

Advent, therefore, carries a twofold purpose, as explained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “For by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for this second coming.”

Today, in a society that moves at such a fast pace, there is a tendency to lump Advent and Christmas together when, in fact, they are two distinct liturgical seasons in our Catholic Faith.

While Christmas includes the Birth of Our Lord, the Feast of the Holy Family, the Epiphany, and the Baptism of Our Lord, the Advent season shouldn’t be overlooked, as it contains many rich traditions and feast days of its own, including the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of our Blessed Mother (a holy day of obligation) on Dec. 8 and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.

Advent is the season of anticipation of the mystery of the incarnation, and is a time for spiritual renewal and preparation. Yet, for many of us, Advent is filled by one long pre-Christmas “to-do” list. Choosing, buying, and wrapping gifts. Getting Christmas cards to the post office in time. Planning your family Christmas dinner.

Once Christmas Day arrives, many of us are glad, not because Advent is over and we are finally able to joyously celebrate Christ’s arrival, but because we’re so relieved that all the stress and work of the Christmas holidays is finally over!

So how can we change the way we experience Advent? There are many ways in which we can fully participate in this beautiful season:

- Start Advent traditions in your home, like lighting an Advent Wreath and discussing weekly readings.
- Take food to those who are hungry, blankets to those who are cold, toys to children who have nothing to play with.
- Attend our Advent Penance Service, Dec. 6 at 7 p.m..
- Since Advent is the beginning of our liturgical year, it is also the perfect time to make your New Year’s resolutions instead of waiting for Jan. 1
- An Advent wreath as a centerpiece, and displaying an Advent calendar in your home, are both wonderful traditions to share with your children (*turn to page 7 for more information about Advent wreaths*).

Throughout Advent, let us commit ourselves to spending time in prayerful expectation, so that when Christmas Day arrives, we will be able to fully welcome Christ into our homes and hold Him in our hearts.



Family Night Workshops

Creating Memories

Family, fun, food – three things that, when combined, are the basis for many family nights. But with the Family Night Workshops sponsored by St. Mary’s, an element of faith brings family night to a whole new level as families gather together to eat, to laugh and, most importantly, to learn more about our Catholic Faith.

Joan Purucker, co-director of the CCD Program along with Barbara Kareis, says that the idea of a family night workshop has evolved over the years. What initially began as two separate events (family Adoration and family night) are now combined into workshops which are held twice a year, typically during Advent and Lent to celebrate these important liturgical seasons of our Faith.

“What a better time than Advent or Lent to come together,” explains Barbara. “It’s all about practicing our Catholic Faith, gathering in fellowship with other families, and taking the opportunity to slow down and put Christ back in our lives.”

The workshops always begin with family Adoration, which is set up to be very kid-friendly. Periods of silence are interspersed with prayer, music, and reflection in such a way that, amazingly, 30 minutes goes by very quickly.

Parishioner Erin Williams, who organizes this portion of the workshop, says that family Adoration is not about the silence, but about establishing a faith foundation that will serve children as they grow into adulthood.

“When a family participates in Adoration together, they share the experience of creating a domestic church,” she explains. “And when children grow up with Adoration, it becomes part of their earliest memories.”

Parishioner Michele Marks, who helps organize the refreshments, agrees and sees Adoration as a way to grow spiritually as a family unit.

“Attending Adoration as a family is a totally different experience,” she explains. “When you go alone, it’s because you are looking for spiritual time for your own well-being; but when you attend as a family it’s almost as if you become better family members for each other.”

Following Adoration, family night continues in the Parish Hall. Activities are set up at different stations, and Barbara says that the key is for parents and children to do the activity together. The type of activity correlates to the liturgical season, with each family taking home everything that they’ve worked on together.

Finally, family night wouldn’t be complete without some refreshments. Michele explains that, in the past, there has been hot chocolate, candy canes, and birthday cake for Advent, and pretzels for Lent.

All these elements – family, fun, food, faith – are what make the Family Night Workshops such a wonderful opportunity to create lasting memories for our children – memories that are woven in the rich traditions of our Faith.

The next family workshop will be held Wednesday, Dec. 1 for the Advent season. For more information, contact the Joan Purucker at 706-733-6627.



Holiday Calendar 2010

Family Advent Adoration and Workshop

December 1, 6:45 p.m. in the Church

Advent Penance Service

December 6, 7 p.m.

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception (Holy Day of Obligation)

December 8, Masses at 7 a.m., 9:15 a.m., noon and 6 p.m.

Breakfast with Santa

December 12, after the 7:45 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Masses

Live Nativity

December 21, 7 p.m., 7:25 p.m. and 7:50 p.m. in the front parking lot of the school

Christmas Eve, December 24

Masses at 4 p.m. (Contemporary Choir), 6 p.m. (Family Mass with Youth Choir), 9 p.m. (Brass with Parish Choir) and midnight (Brass with Congregational Singing)

Christmas Day, December 25

Masses at 9 a.m. (Congregational Singing), 11 a.m. (Congregational Singing), 1 p.m. (Vietnamese Mass)

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

January 1, 2011 (Not a Holy Day of Obligation)
Masses at 6 p.m. (December 31, Vigil Mass), 9:15 a.m.

Come Home for Christmas *continued from front cover*

- They joined the Catholic Church during a time when the media highlighted all sex scandals and the cover-up of these by our bishops. Who needs to join such a church?

So why were these ministers led to the Catholic Church? Briefly, they were led to the Catholic Church as a result of extensive study especially into the roots of Christianity. All of these former ministers now believe that the Catholic Church is the one true church founded by Jesus Christ.

As I reflect on the phenomenon of Catholics leaving their church to join a "spiritually alive" church, and Protestant ministers and lay people and former Catholics returning home to the Catholic Church, I think this is what is happening:

- If people are searching for a "spiritually alive" church, good upbeat music, great preaching, few rules or traditions, there is a good chance they will end up in some evangelical church.
- On the other hand, if seeking people take time to study the history of Christianity, its origins, the Early Fathers of the Church, there is a good chance they will join the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, the vast majority of seekers will not study history and the Early Fathers. The great Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman, former Oxford professor, Anglican clergyman and convert to Catholicism, once said "to study church history is to be led into the Catholic Church".

A huge need in our Church today is to educate children, teenagers and adults in the beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church. Even more so we need to help our young people and adults to have a strong personal relationship with Jesus. Every

minister who converted to Catholicism and every Catholic who joined an evangelical church and returned to Catholicism will always be grateful for how their time in their evangelical church led them to a strong personal relationship with Christ and a deep love of the scriptures. Catholics who have a strong personal relationship with Christ and know why they believe what they believe will rarely, if ever, leave the Catholic Church. For if the Eucharist truly is an encounter with the Risen Lord, it would be almost impossible to turn you back on His Church.

The ads airing on television are the first step in our evangelization initiative - Catholics Come Home. The site www.cch.diosav.org will help you with additional information. While ads might help, nothing is more effective than a personal invitation. Invite someone you know to come back home to the Catholic Church. And to anyone reading this issue of *The Marianite* who has not been to St. Mary on the Hill in a while, I would encourage you to come home for Christmas and stay with us so that together we can build a faith community that is truly spiritually alive with joyful Catholics who have met the Risen Christ in the Eucharist and want to go out to all the world to share the Good News. Don't forget to check out the Web site!

In January, *The Marianite* will discuss the role St. Mary on the Hill will play in implementing the Catholics Come Home program here in Augusta.

God bless you,

Fr. Jerry Ragan

Fr. Jerry



Christmas "Presence"

by Katie Conner

Recently I got a phone call from a local news reporter. She asked if she could come to our house and do a little story about how Gabriel, our adopted boy with the bonus chromosome, came to be part of our family. Always eager for a chance to encourage others considering adoption, I happily agreed. And as a mom of a child with Down Syndrome, I thought it would be a great way to let the world know just how amazing our little guy is.

The reporter asked Steve and me if we felt that Gabe would some day make a difference in our community. Great question, I thought, and immediately jumped into "advocate" mode. I replied that he indeed would make a difference some day. He would go to school, learn to read and write, find meaningful work and be a productive, fulfilled member of society. But Steve gave an answer far superior to mine and it took my breath away when he said it. He told that reporter Gabe has already made a difference, to his parents and siblings, just by his presence among us. And that is the truth. He doesn't have to accomplish anything (though he does everyday!), or prove anything to make a difference. He makes a difference just by being here, allowing us to love him and loving us right back. We delight simply in his presence, because we are his and he is ours.

Actually we loved Gabe even before he arrived, in the anticipation of life with him. The waiting and preparing aspects of the Advent season were very meaningful last year as we set up Gabriel's crib and bought plane tickets to finally bring him home, just in time for Christmas. We love him even more now that he is here and we really know him. This year, Gabe's first full Advent as one of us, I can't help thinking about how Christ is already present with us, as we prepare to celebrate His first coming among us as Emmanuel, "God with us." Jesus came so quietly, with so little fanfare, tiny and vulnerable; he introduced Himself to us as a poor and helpless baby. Could it be that He wanted us to fall in love with Him just for His presence among us? Not for His power or glory or the miracles He would someday perform but just because He loved us so much He came to earth to be one with us. Could it be He wanted us to delight in Him, just because we belong to Him and He belongs to us? Perhaps one of the infinite lessons of Christmas is that Jesus wants us to love Him for the same reason He loves us – because He is ours and we are His.

And we get to love Him not just with anticipation of His arrival, but in the intensity of His being already present. So this Advent, as always, our family will prepare for and anticipate the great feast of Christmas. But one of the ways we will do that is by trying to become more aware and delighted by His presence among us right now. At dinner we'll be talking about how we experienced Jesus that day. Maybe it was in the beauty of the sunshine or a really unusual cloud. Maybe it was an act of kindness we witnessed on the playground or in the check out line. Maybe it was even in us when we reacted with patience when we wanted to yell. Maybe it was in the Eucharist or His Word. Maybe it's just the enjoyment of being together as family. Jesus is making a difference in our lives every moment of every day because He is already right here with us! This Advent and beyond, we're going to delight in this. A blessed and delightful Season to you and yours.



Make Room for Tradition this Advent

The Advent wreath is a time-tested and true method of bringing the altar alive in our homes. Children love the beauty and simplicity of family religious practices, which are easy to establish but create lifelong memories.

This wreath consists of a simple wire ring decorated with evergreen branches and four candles: three purple and one pink. Wreaths can be purchased from any Catholic supply company, although it is nearly effortless to make your own. Use a coat hanger for the wire ring or purchase a ring from any art supply store. Wrap the ring with evergreen branches and place four candles amongst the branches. Add ribbon or pine cones for additional beauty.

Prayer of Blessing for the wreath:

O God, by whose word all things are sanctified, pour forth Thy blessing upon this wreath, and grant that we who use it may prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ and may receive from Thee abundant graces. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen."

Prayer for week one: "O Lord, stir up Thy might, we beg thee, and come, that by Thy protection we may deserve to be

rescued from the threatening dangers of our sins and saved by Thy deliverance. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen." (One candle is then lit.)

Prayer for week two: "O Lord, stir up our hearts that we may prepare for thy only begotten Son, that through His coming we maybe be worthy to serve Thee with pure minds. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen. (The original purple candle and an additional purple candle are lit.)

Prayer for week three: "O Lord, we beg thee, incline Thy ear to our prayers and enlighten the darkness of our minds by the grace of Thy visitation. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen." (The first two candles and the rose candle are then lit.)

Prayer for week four: "O Lord, stir up Thy power, we pray Thee, and come; and with great might help us, that with the help of Thy grace, Thy merciful forgiveness may hasten what our sins impede. Who lives and reigns forever. Amen." (All four candles are lit.)

Ad Placement



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In memory of Bill Price

Mr. and Mrs. Rick Cundey

Please remember Catholic Social Services this Christmas by helping provide food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, job training for the unemployed and, for the seriously ill without income or insurance, the peace and security of continuous medication. Together, in love, let us prepare the way for Christ...as He comes.

Baptisms

Norah Ellen Cunningham,
daughter of Khristen and Ellen

Gabriel David Wilcox,
son of David And Veronica

Aaron James Silva,
son of Ricardo and Jodie

Taylor Nicole Wimpey,
daughter of Nicholas and Michelle

Elijah Ayden Hutchinson,
son of Chris and Emmanuelle Hutchinson

Colleen Elizabeth Heward,
daughter of John and Caitlin

Jones Edward Rhodes,
son of Scott and Ryan

Lee Therese Rhodes,
daughter of Brian and Therese

Johanna Katherine Phillips,
daughter of Danny and Katie

Noah Floyd Welch,
son of Corey and Jennifer