

The Catholic Register



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A Christmas Message from Bishop Mark

I know someone who is convinced that the greatest invention in the 20th century was the TV remote control. Without leaving his chair, he could mute the sound or change the channel to avoid all of the commercial ads. He would always say, “Who really watches them and who needs all that stuff?”

For weeks leading up to the joyful feast of Christmas, TV and now internet ads, are loud, bright, and pushing all sorts of things that may or may not be what we really want or need. And it is rare to find an image or an explicit statement to remind us that Christmas is the birthday of our Savior, Christ the Lord. I recently saw a TV ad that captures the “spirit” of Christmas without a loud TV announcer and without any dialogue from the actors. It shows a teenage boy looking at a Christmas tree without decorations in his modest house. Then it shows his messy room with laundry that needs to be done and there is a brief glimpse of dirty dishes in the kitchen sink. Those images suggest that these were his chores that were being neglected.

Next he is shown pedaling his bike to sell some of his electronic games for some quick cash. He arrives home with Christmas decorations and puts them on the tree. Then he washed the dishes and does his laundry just in time for his Mom, apparently a single parent, to walk in the door. The Mom is obviously moved and the teenage boy has an awkward look on his face; a face that shows that he is hoping for his Mom’s approval for his efforts. The scene ends with the Mom giving her son a hug, and with this teenage boy hugging his Mom. Until that point, there was no commercial message, which is a good thing. And after the hugs, the commercial message is presented, but I could not tell you what it is. That’s a bad thing for the advertisers, because in a TV commercial they want to sell us something.



CNS Photo

On a silent and holy night, the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son who was conceived through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit. In the cold and darkness of a stable made for animals, Mary hugged the Lord Jesus as she wrapped him in swaddling clothes. From that moment, the Lord Jesus, who is Son of God and Son of Mary, has continued to inspire us, show us, invite us, and teach us how to recognize the tree without decorations, the laundry that needs to be cleaned, and the dishes that need to be washed. Those ordinary circumstances where something is missing or unfinished remind us that we are all in need of even simple expressions of God’s merciful love. They remind us that sharing God’s gracious love with others is something that anyone can do.

The Lord Jesus, whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas, also teaches us the constant need to recognize that true joy is to be found when we undergo the kind of conversion that is portrayed by the teenage boy in a TV commercial. Pope Francis explains it this way: When we let God bring us beyond ourselves, life changes and we attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at sharing and living the Gospel, because at that point the need to proclaim it arises spontaneously, it becomes irrepressible, even without words, with our own human witness (cf., *Joy of the Gospel*, n. 8). In the TV commercial, the teenager gives witness without words. He gives witness to his God-given human dignity in the simple ways in which he accepts responsibility for doing his share of work around the house. His reward is found in recognizing the joy and love he shares with his Mom. He expresses that joy as he decorates the Christmas tree. It is so simple and so genuine that it brings out the best in his Mom as she graciously accepts the expression of her son’s love.

Pope Francis is constantly reminding us that life is a love story in which God invites us to invite others to participate in that story by discovering that life can only be possessed by sharing it with others. The Lord Jesus was born into our world where there is sin and suffering, hatred of self and others, and a loss of an awareness that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. The Lord Jesus came into the world to redeem us and to give us the hope and courage to repair and restore what is wounded or missing in our lives, our hearts, our families, and our homes. As you celebrate Christmas with family and friends, pay attention to the subtle messages and expressions of the love of Jesus in your midst. They reveal the meaning of the Birth of the Savior. Don’t change the channel. It’s what Christ wants us to see and hear and share with others. It’s his free gift for everyone.

With prayerful best wishes at Christmas and in the New Year,

+ Mark J. Bartelak

Nurse is Right Prescription for Divine Mercy Catholic Academy Student

By Tony DeGol
The Catholic Register

In these last days before Christmas, all kindergartners are practically bursting to see what Santa will bring them, and Noah Cotchen is no exception.

In fact, his eyes brighten and his smile widens when he rattles off what he hopes to find under the tree.

Wireless earbuds top his list.

As cool as that present would be, Noah — wise beyond his years — realizes he has already received the best gifts.

Those blessings include loving and devoted parents, a great older brother, and a supportive school family at Divine Mercy Catholic Academy in Johnstown.

Noah received a bonus gift earlier this school year — a friend and sidekick, if you will, who happens to be a registered nurse.

Noah battles type one diabetes, which requires constant monitoring and daily measures to control the disease.

“When he was about 13 months old, he started crying constantly, he would throw up, he was constantly thirsty,” recalled Heather Cotchen, Noah’s mother.

After many doctor visits and uncertain days, the diagnosis eventually came, and Noah’s parents learned how to care for him.

“Once he started with the insulin, he started feeling better,” Heather added.

“Everybody thinks they understand diabetes because it is a more common ailment, but, in reality, understanding it and managing it are different things — especially with a child of 13 months old,” noted Stephen Cotchen, Noah’s father. “He wasn’t talking at the time, he couldn’t tell us how he was feeling, so it was a challenge.”

As Noah grew and the family managed his condition with greater confidence, the next step was addressing Noah’s needs once he entered school.

He attended pre-kindergarten at the West Campus of

DMCA. The Cotchens felt very comfortable with the school nursing situation, and all went very well.

This year, as a kindergarten student at DMCA, registered nurse Robin Holsopple has entered the picture in a big way.

“Miss Robin has really just blessed us and become an extension of our family,” Stephen explained.

“Noah loves her,” Heather stressed.

Holsopple, whose services are covered through the family’s medical insurance, arrives at the Cotchen house at 6:30 a.m. on school mornings, checks Noah’s vital signs, and helps in other ways during the morning rush.

She then accompanies him on the bus, stays with him in the classroom and elsewhere throughout the day, and makes the trip home with him.

“Obviously, she’s his caregiver, she’s his friend, she’s his disciplinarian when he gets out of line — she does a little bit of everything,” Stephen said. “She’s everything he needs as far as a nurse. When he goes to school, we don’t worry. He’s going to be cared for and have a normal school experience.”

Holsopple strives to find the balance between caring for Noah and giving him the freedom to be a regular kid.

“I basically sit in the back of the classroom and let him do his thing with his class,” she said. “Before lunch, we go down to the nurse’s station and check his blood sugar. With lunch, I help him with picking the right food choices.”

On days when Noah’s blood sugar soars, Holsopple tracks it and does whatever is necessary to treat the situation.

“So it’s just constantly monitoring, but sort of being in the background so he can have as much of a normal life and routine as he can,” she mentioned.

Having a nurse in the classroom helps teacher Jaclyn Klein focus on Noah’s academic needs instead of his medical situation.

“Noah is wonderful to have in the classroom,” Klein remarked. “He gets along with everyone. He puts a smile on



HEATHER, NOAH, ETHAN, AND STEPHEN COTCHEN

everyone’s face every day with something that he says.”

Certainly, Noah can be a character, Holsopple joked.

“He definitely can grow on you,” she said. “I think we have a special bond.”

A bond for which Stephen and Heather are especially grateful this Christmas.

“Obviously, the Divine Mercy family and our faith family have been critical on this whole journey, because it’s not easy,” Stephen confessed. “But God has blessed us with a good support system with our school, with our family, and now we have this nurse. Those things don’t just fall into place without the good Lord looking over us.”

Editor’s Note: Noah Cotchen’s story will be featured on Proclaim! TV on December 22 at 10:30 a.m. on WATM ABC 23.



SPECIAL FRIENDS: Divine Mercy Catholic Academy Kindergarten student Noah Cotchen shares a special bond with registered nurse Robin Holsopple, who joins him at school every day to monitor his diabetes. Below, Noah and a classmate enjoy story time in the classroom



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104 Year Old Parishioner is a Gift that Keeps on Giving this Christmas

By **Tony DeGol**
The Catholic Register

Oh, the drudgery of daily exercise, right?

Many people despise it, but Geraldine Cunningham embraces it. In fact, she faithfully rides her stationary bike every morning for at least 15 minutes.

Big deal, you say?

It actually is a big deal because Geraldine is 104 years young.

“See how easy that is?,” she asked as she gingerly eased herself onto the bike without assistance.

This charming lady really does make it look easy. So much so, that watching her confidently and youthfully pedal away, one could quickly forget her actual age.

She credits the morning bike ritual with keeping her going strong.

“I don’t want my legs to give out,” she insisted. “I think it helps, otherwise you just sit and fall apart. I get up from here, and I can walk in there. It strengthens my legs.”

With Christmas around the corner, Geraldine’s longevity and stamina are, indeed, reasons for her to celebrate with gratitude.

Born on August 28, 1915, Geraldine is the mother of eight children. Her extended family is huge – 44 grandchildren, 98 great-grandchildren, and at least a dozen great, great-grandchildren.

Imagine that Christmas dinner table.

A member of Saint Benedict Parish in Carrolltown, Geraldine’s Catholic faith is – and always has been – an enormous part of her life.

“We went to church, and the priest would come every now and then to bless you and talk to you and make you feel as though you belonged to something, and I guess we did,” she recalled. “We grew up like that. We had our religion. That’s what we had. We went to church, we went here, we went there, and the days go.”

Prayer continues to be im-

portant to Geraldine.

“That’s why I lived so long,” she added with a chuckle.

Geraldine resides with her daughter and son-in-law in Ebensburg.

Since she only leaves the house for medical appointments, she no longer attends Mass. Her Pastor, Father Jude Brady, OSB, thoroughly enjoys his periodic visits with her.

“Geraldine is a beautiful person,” said Father Jude. “She is fun to speak with.”

He is right about that.

Her memory is sharp, her stories are engaging, and her smile is disarming.

Notably, she is a woman who seems to enjoy a spirit of peace as she looks back on a life well lived.

“We grew up on a farm, and that makes a big difference,” she stated. “Out on the farm, we had work to do. We did it and we enjoyed it because this person was coming to help and that person was coming to help. We couldn’t wait to go out and do it. We grew up appreciating people coming to help and us being able to go and help others when they needed it.”

Geraldine’s passion for hard work is evident all these years later as another part of her daily routine includes crocheting blankets for cancer patients and others in need of a little comfort.

“I work on this every day,” she boasted as she held up her latest creation – a blanket of various shades of purple.

She also enjoys reading, but she has no time for another popular hobby.

“I don’t watch TV because half of it is just garbage,” she noted with a laugh.

As Geraldine looks forward to another Christmas, her loved ones are surely counting their blessings as well.

“Not too many people have the opportunity that I have,” admitted Rita Caretti, the daughter with whom Geraldine lives. “The fact that she’s in such good condition makes it even more joyful. Knowing that she’s comfortable and happy makes it twice as enjoyable for us.”

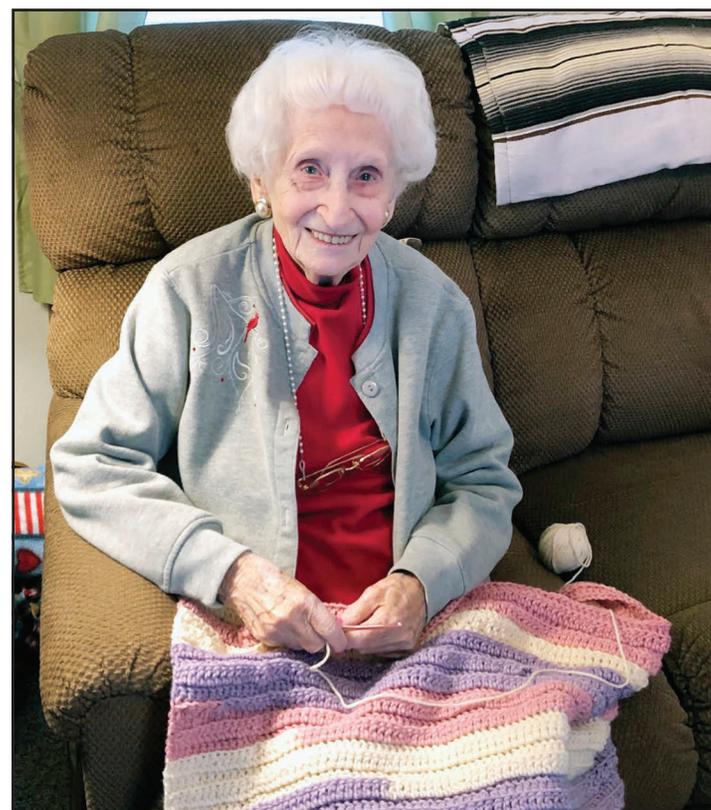
For Geraldine and her entire



family, praise and thanksgiving to God will certainly be a priority this Christmas season.

“For as old as I am, I have good health, and what I can do, other people can’t do,” admitted Geraldine. “So I guess I’m thankful for so much that I can do. I can just keep going. I have nothing holding me back. That’s the way you’re supposed to feel!”

CYCLE OF LIFE: 104 year old Geraldine Cunningham rides her stationary bike for exercise every day (top photo). She credits the routine with keeping her active and healthy. When she is not on her bike, she is often found crocheting blankets (right). Geraldine is a member of Saint Benedict Parish in Carrolltown.



Tea Time Highlights Support for CCW Haiti Ministry

By Tony DeGol
The Catholic Register

Russell Miller wanted an experience that broke the boundaries of what he considered Church to be.

His involvement with the Hands and Hearts Haiti Ministry – and particularly his two trips to the island nation – has more than delivered.

The ministry, sponsored by the Carmelite Community of the Word – a diocesan community of religious sisters, welcomes the faithful to be part of an enduring relationship between the CCW and the Little Sisters of the Incarnation in Haiti.

The Carmelite sisters, with loving help from throughout the diocese, annually collect a slew of basic items to send via sea container to Haiti in the fall. A delegation typically travels to Haiti in January.

Miller's two trips were eye-opening.

"When I went there, I was not really prepared for how desperate this country is in terms of poverty, in terms of the unrest that happens," he recalled.

During a recent tea and basket auction to support the ministry, Miller could not help but become a little emotional when Sister Marilyn Welch, CCW, Administrator General of



TEA TIME: Dylan Miller, a member of Saint Patrick Parish in Newry, serves tea to Amy Gresh (left), a parishioner of Holy Family in Colver, and Mary Ann Shoemaker, a member of Saint Benedict Parish in Carrolltown, during a gathering to support the Carmelite Community of the Word's Hands & Hearts Haiti Ministry.

the community, gave the crowd a somber update on the current situation in Haiti.

"They are suffering, my brothers and sisters are suffering," Miller explained. "So that connection breaks down the boundaries of a parish. It breaks down the boundaries of a diocese.

We are the universal Church." According to Sister Marilyn, the situation is being described as worse than Haitians have ever experienced.

"They are starving, there is not enough food, there's no fuel, therefore there's very little electricity," she explained. "It just is

not a good situation at all."

Because of the recent turmoil in Haiti, Sister announced that the annual sea container filled with supplies collected over the past year, did not go in October as usual.

"We were warned that if we shipped it, it would not get there,

and if it did get there, it would not go to the people it was intended for because of the high rate of violence and the political unrest that exists right now," she stated.

As soon as the CCW receives the go-ahead to ship the container, they plan to do so. The January trip to Haiti is also on hold.

"All I know is that we need to keep supporting our little brothers and sisters and the people they minister to in our prayers, in our thoughts, and what you're doing today is helping us to support them by coming together for this tea," Sister Marilyn encouraged.

The inaugural gathering, indeed, drew a huge and enthusiastic crowd that not only enjoyed tea, but wonderful platters of delicious finger food. Guests also placed bids on baskets filled with goodies.

"To see a turnout at something like this be so spectacular is amazing," remarked Miller, a member of Saint Augustine Parish in Dysart.

Prayers are critical in supporting the ministry, he added, but so is the money raised at events such as the tea.

"Even though I can't physically be there right now, I still feel a very strong connection by being able to help raise funds because I know it goes for a very good cause," Miller stressed.

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NCYC: A group of teens from throughout the diocese attended the National Catholic Youth Conference November 21-23 in Indianapolis. The local delegation was among 25,000 high school students from around the country. The Altoona-Johnstown participants sported orange hats with small Slinkys attached. All youth wear hats that reflect something from their geographic area. Hollidaysburg, of course, is home to the Slinky. Bishop Mark joined the local group for some of the festivities, which included Masses, Adoration, workshops, service projects, and uplifting music. The gathering occurs every two years.

A Star-Spangled Salute to Veterans at All Saints Catholic School

By **Tony DeGol**
The Catholic Register

At a time when some people spurn celebrations of God and country and show disrespect for the American flag, Vietnam veteran Thaddeus Mikolajczyk walked away from a gathering at All Saints Catholic School with a very full heart.

"I can't say how much we thank the children and appreciate it," he said. "They put a lot of effort into making a memorable event for all veterans."

Certainly, the annual Mass and social in honor of veterans is a highlight of the school year not only for the students, but also for the men and women who proudly served our country and for those who treasure them.

"So we honor all of these folks who have given themselves and dedicated their lives to service," stated Father Leo Arnone, Pastor of Saint Aloysius Parish, Saint Francis Xavier Parish, and All Saints Catholic School in Cresson. "We honor them equally for that gift. Because of their sacrifices, we have great opportunities."

A veteran of the United States Navy, Father Arnone was in good company with the many other veterans on hand for the uplifting liturgy. Following



BLESSING: Amid of sea of All Saints Catholic School students, Father Leo Arnone, Pastor of Saint Aloysius and Saint Francis Xavier parishes in Cresson and ASCS, offers a blessing to his fellow veterans following a Mass and tribute to the men and women who served our country.

Mass, the student body gathered in front of the altar and paid tribute to the heroes in patriotic song.

"If anyone deserves our respect, it's our veterans because they put their lives on the line and they served our country, and no one deserves it more than them," said ASCS eighth grader Richard Scholzen.

"It is amazing seeing their faces, and you can tell they enjoy it so much, and we enjoy it as a school," added Lydia Myers, also an eighth grader.

The gathering was undoubtedly extra-special for fifth-grader Isaac Luther. Isaac's dad is a sergeant in the Army Reserves and

was present for the Mass.

"I believe that I will one day grow up and be in the Army, and it means a lot for him to come and watch everyone in my school and me sing songs and celebrate Veterans Day," Isaac commented.

"Every year I come to this and it brings tears to my eyes seeing the support from the community and the children – it's overwhelming," Sergeant Luther added.

Perhaps nothing summed up the spirit of the day more than Isaac's personal message to his dad:

"I love you, and thank you for serving our country."

Around The Diocese

CHRISTMAS MASS TO BE TELEVISED

The Christmas Mass from Saint John Gualbert Cathedral in Johnstown will air on a tape-delay basis on Christmas Day, December 25, at Noon on WATM ABC 23. As always, Bishop Mark will be the celebrant and homilist.

CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULES ON-LINE

Christmas is a Holy Day of Obligation in the Catholic Church. A schedule of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Masses at parishes throughout the diocese is available on the diocesan Proclaim! E-News site at proclaim.dioceseaj.org, the diocesan website at dioceseaj.org, or the diocesan Facebook page.

BASILICA TO HOST CHRISTMAS CONCERT



The Basilica of Saint Michael the Archangel in Loretto will present Christmas Around the World on December 27 at 7:00 p.m. The concert will feature the Saint Michael Children's Choir (above) and the Basilica Choir singing favorite Christmas Carols from around the world. A free-will offering will be taken for the Basilica music program and organ repair fund.

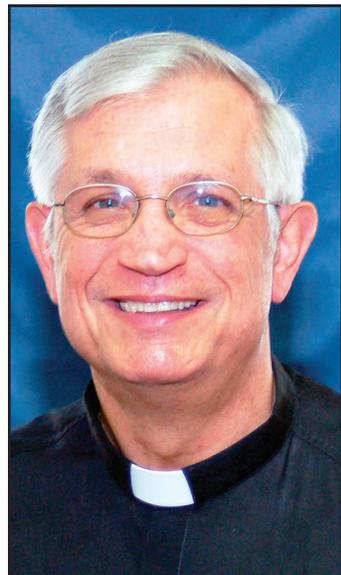
POLISH CAROLS TO HIGHLIGHT CONCERT

All Saints Parish in Boswell will host a concert of beloved Polish Christmas carols (Koledy) on December 29 at 3:00 p.m. Following the event, refreshments will be provided. Any questions can be directed to the parish office at (814) 629-5551. All are welcome.



Christmas Mass with Bishop Mark
December 25, 12:00 PM
WATM ABC 23

Priest Celebrates Golden Jubilee



REV. LAWRENCE LACOVIC

attended Bishop McCort Catholic High School in Johnstown, Saint Francis University in Loretto, Saint Francis Seminary in Loretto, and the North American College in Rome.

He was ordained to the priesthood on December 19, 1969, at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Father Lacovic served as Parochial Vicar at Saint Benedict Parish in Johnstown from 1970-1973 and Saint Rose of Lima Parish in Altoona from 1973-1983. He was Pastor of Saint John the Baptist Parish in Central City from 1983-1989, Saint Stephen Parish in Johnstown from 1989-2000, and Prince of Peace Parish in Northern Cambria from 2000 until his retirement in 2017.

He is currently a Senior Priest in Residence at Saint Anthony of Padua Parish in Windber. He assists in ministry at Saint Anthony of Padua as well as Saints Cyril and Methodius and Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton parishes in Windber.

Father Lawrence Lacovic, a Senior Priest of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown, is celebrating the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

A native of Johnstown, he was born on January 22, 1945, the son of the late Frank and Sophie (Roseman) Lacovic. He



SPIRIT OF THE SEASON: The Family Life Committee at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Altoona sponsored a Jesse Tree where parishioners can hang children's hats, gloves, scarves, mittens, and socks to be distributed to those in need by local service agencies. Hanging items on the tree are Blase Jr., Brennan, and Blakey Raia.

Beacon of Hope: Journey Of Grace



REV. JOZEF KOVACIK, LINDSAY PULLARA (CENTER), AND TARA NAYLOR

Editor's Note: This is the third in a series of stories highlighting individual and family journeys to the Catholic faith. Lindsay Pullara was brought into Full Communion with the Church at the 2019 Easter Vigil at Saint Matthew Parish in Tyrone by Reverend Jozef Kovacik, Pastor. Susan Burkholder, the Christian Initiation Director, reached out to Lindsay to share her journey with us. For more information about Christian Initiation, please contact Jeanne Thompson at jthompson@dioceseaj.org.

By Lindsay Pullara

My name is Lindsay Pullara. I am 42 years old. I am a wife, mother, daughter, and friend, and I value that description. I have owned a dance studio for 17 years and have been teaching dance for 23 years. I love teaching and watching children grow in spirit, dance, and life. I feel blessed that God has led me in my career path with something that brings me so much joy every day.

I have been married 11 years and my family is my greatest gift. I was raised Methodist and went to Sunday school through ninth grade. I was baptized and confirmed in sixth grade. I grew up in Altoona and had many Catholic friends.

As an adult I was introduced to Catholicism again by my husband, but I believe my journey really started when I had kids. I attended Mass at one Altoona parish sporadically and was married there, but after we moved to Tyrone, I began to attend Mass at Saint Matthew Parish in Tyrone. From my first experience and after listening to Father Jozef's homily, I finally felt like I had found my home. I felt the love that Saint Matthew's gives everybody with a sense of belonging and community, faith, family, and friendship. I found myself learning so much and opening my mind and heart in so many ways.

My son attended pre-school at Saint Matthew, and as time went on we were members of the parish. My oldest daughter was going to be making her First Holy Communion in April 2019, and I knew it was a journey I would be interested in sharing with her so I signed up for RCIA. It was hard at times, with a full-time job raising two elementary school age kids, having family and friends to carve out time for all the extras but it was 100% worth it.

Tara Naylor was my sponsor, and she was there for me every step of the way. This was a time in my life that my intense desire to learn more about the Catholic Church grew and grew. I pursued many conversations with my husband, Catholic friends and especially my sponsor. I know these would not have taken place before I began the RCIA process.

Susan Burkholder, the parish director, was a wonderful mentor in guiding me through weekly classes, by learning, reading, journaling, and having amazing conversations. I learned so much through the months from her. She carved time out of her busy schedule to meet with me once a week because I work evenings and couldn't make a class time. I'm grateful for that.

I could feel everyone's love, support and Faith, not only in me but in our commitment to God, from my Rite of Welcoming at Saint Matthew's, to the Palm Sunday Retreat hosted by the diocese, and finally my big day during the Easter Vigil.

I feel that people who were born into a Catholic family and baptized as infants in the Catholic Church may not feel as deeply about the Church as they grow up as I do now. I know that your journey and faith is never ending, and always growing and I look forward to every step as I continue to live this decision I made.

Local Artist Allen Capriotti Features Gospel of John on His Parish Church Walls

By **Tony DeGol**
The Catholic Register

Like most good Catholics filling the pews, Allen Capriotti sits in the same spot for Mass each week.

In his case, his seat in the back of Saint John the Evangelist Parish in Altoona gives him a bird's eye view of the entire worship space.

When the parish built a new church building a number of years ago, Capriotti, an accomplished local artist and long-time parishioner of Saint John, painted a large mural in the back of the worship space as a gift.

Despite the art being a welcome addition to the new structure, Capriotti – from his perch in the back – felt there could be other opportunities to enhance the entire area.

His next project was a mural of the Crucifixion on gold leaf behind the altar.

“But still, I felt the church needed something,” he recalled.

Before long, he noticed the spaces on the upper portion of all of the walls. From his perspective, they were great canvases for his future creations.

After much consideration and research, he proposed painting scenes from the Gospel of John.

Thanks to some cash his parents gave him as a Christmas present, Capriotti was ready to roll.

He was going to start with one panel, and go from there.

“What amazed me was, it didn't seem like a big project at the time, but I went back to the studio and stretched a canvas that was nine feet long by four feet high,” he reminisced. “I didn't realize what I was getting myself into! This was going to take longer than I thought! But I continued on.”

Indeed, he did. The majority of the spaces are now filled with scenes including the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, and the Burial of Jesus – each exhibiting remarkable detail.

“I make the figures read just like it does in the Gospel so you can just follow the story the

whole way around the church,” Capriotti noted.

Monsignor Michael Becker, Pastor of Saint John the Evangelist, said the art is a valued addition to the worship space.

“There is not a person who comes to the church who doesn't find themselves awestruck by the beauty of the sanctuary with the marvelous story of the Gospel of John beginning with the Baptism of Jesus and concluding with the Resurrection,” Monsignor noted. “We are most grateful to Allen. Few parishes have the blessing of having their own artist in residence, if you will, but this parish is one. We are certainly blessed.”

And if you ask Capriotti, he, too, is blessed to be able to share his time and talent with his parish family.

Each panel takes roughly three months to complete. With five more panels to go, Capriotti hopes to have the entire project completed by 2021 when the parish will mark its 100th anniversary.

If, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words, then the walls of Saint John the Evangelist Parish speak volumes thanks to Allen Capriotti.

Along the way, Capriotti continues to embrace his relationship with the Lord.



A HEART FOR ART: Artist Allen Capriotti works on his next creation for Saint John the Evangelist Parish from his studio. The photos below are examples of his art hanging on the walls of the Altoona Parish. Capriotti is painting scenes from the Gospel of John such as the Last Supper. Capriotti also painted a mural of the Crucifixion on gold leaf behind the altar (bottom photo). To see more of Capriotti's work, please watch the December 8 edition of *Proclaim!* on the diocesan Facebook page.

“Like most people, your faith is a journey,” he admitted. “I was always surrounded by my faith, but it didn't make any sense until I started to live it.”



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Bishop Mark Enjoys Thanksgiving Meeting with Pope Francis

For the first time in his life, Bishop Mark did not spend the Thanksgiving holiday with family and friends. Instead, Bishop Mark joined his brother bishops from Pennsylvania and New Jersey for their ad limina visit to Rome during the week of November 24.

The highlight of the trip was the group's meeting with Pope Francis on Thanksgiving Day.

"Happy Thanksgiving," the Holy Father said to the bishops at the beginning of their meeting. That friendly greeting set the tone for a two hour conversation with Pope Francis. It was simply an open discussion, "like spending time with an older brother or close friend who wants to hear what's going on," said Bishop Mark.

After an opening prayer led by Pope Francis, Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark got things started. He was quite candid in telling the Pope about the impact of the clergy sex abuse scandal in our dioceses.

Other bishops joined in and Bishop Mark observed that it was very obvious that Pope Francis is aware of the scope of the problem and reminded the bishops that everyone needs to support each other, especially the victims and their families.

When Pope Francis invited Bishop Mark to ask a question, he brought up the concerns of young people; especially teenagers and young adults who are not regularly participating in the life of the Church. Pope Francis was aware that many young people today question their faith; they are not sure that God exists.

In his response, Pope Francis mentioned two things: don't be afraid of their doubts and questions. When they share them with you, the first thing is to listen. And he said that it is important to accompany them, just like Jesus did when he walked with two of the disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus after his crucifixion.

Bishops around the world are required to make an ad



MEMORABLE VISIT: Bishop Mark L. Bartchak stands in Rome during his ad limina visit during the week of Thanksgiving. (Photo courtesy of the Diocese of Erie/AM Welsh). The highlight of the week was his meeting with Pope Francis (below). He and his brother bishops from Pennsylvania and New Jersey updated the Holy Father on the status of their dioceses. (Photo courtesy of Father Mauricio Tabera-Vasquez/Diocese of Metuchen, NJ).



AD LIMINA: Pope Francis poses for a group photo with bishops from New Jersey and Pennsylvania in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on November 28. Bishop Mark L. Bartchak is pictured third from right. The bishops were making their ad limina visits to the Vatican to report on the status of their dioceses to the Pope and Vatican officials. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

limina visit every five to seven years. This was Bishop Mark's second ad limina. It was Cardinal Tobin's first, but he saw hundreds of Bishops come to Rome when he worked at the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. At that time, the visiting bishops just sat and listened; but that has changed. Cardinal Tobin told Catholic News Service, "We're treated now as brothers."

Cardinal Tobin was the principal celebrant and homilist at the Mass the group celebrated the day after Thanksgiving at the tomb of Saint Peter in Saint Peter's Basilica. Earlier that week, the bishops celebrated Masses at basilicas including Saint Mary Major, Saint John Lateran, and Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

Bishop Mark missed Thanksgiving dinner with his family and friends at home, but he was not alone. At the seminary of the North American College in Rome, Bishop Mark was seated for Thanksgiving dinner with Nick and Kate Will and their two daughters. Several years ago, Nick was music director at the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament in Altoona. He has a similar role at the seminary in Rome.

When asked about the dinner, Bishop Mark said, "There was plenty of turkey and pumpkin pie. And best of all there was a huge room full of people enjoying faith and friendship."



For more information and additional photos of Bishop Mark's ad limina visit, please visit the diocesan website, Facebook page, or *Proclaim!* e-news site.