



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Vicar for Religious

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November 15, 2017

Dear Monsignor/Father,

Peace to your heart and to your ministry!

You and your parishioners are being given the opportunity to come to the aid of retired religious men and women through the outpouring of your treasure for the ANNUAL COLLECTION FOR RETIRED RELIGIOUS scheduled for the weekend of December 9-10. These men and women who gave so generously of themselves over the years to assist the Church in various ministries are in need of your assistance now in their golden years. They served the Church with generous hearts and so now it is our opportunity to open our hearts generously as we express our gratitude for all that they did. Most of us have been touched by these men and women in the classroom, in a hospital setting, in religious education programs and in various other ministries of service. They labored for the love of God and their fellow man.

I am grateful to Rev. Msgr. Timothy Stein, editor of the Diocesan newspaper, **The Catholic Register** for the article that appeared in the November 13, 2017 edition of the Register. It was interesting to read the statistics in regard to the needs of the thousands of retired religious throughout the United States. Many of you who are retired realize how difficult it is to live on pensions where every penny counts. However, many religious communities are not able to supply some of the needs of members of their communities since these communities have not been included in retirement benefits. They depend heavily on this Annual Collection.

Please open your hearts (and your wallets and pocketbooks) to these men and women religious who opened their hearts in loving service to you and to me over the years. They sacrificed for us, can we find it in our hearts to sacrifice for them?

May the Lord bless you and keep you always in His loving care!

Prayerfully yours,

Fr. Anthony Francis Spilka, OFM Conv.

Very Reverend Anthony Francis Spilka, OFM Conv.
Vicar for Religious



Family Life Office

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IDEAS FOR LIVING BETTER FROM THE FAMILY LIFE OFFICE

Family Ritual

Advent Bedtime Ritual

Each night before bedtime, light a candle, then turn out the light. Pray that Jesus' love and mercy will come into our world. Then ask: How did you bring Jesus' love to someone today? How did you feel Jesus loving you today? Blow out the candle and reflect in silence.



Advent Reflections

Fire of Advent

by Edward Hays

"Advent, like its cousin Lent, is a season for prayer and reformation of our hearts. Since it comes at winter time, fire is a fitting sign to help us celebrate Advent...If Christ is to come more fully into our lives this Christmas, if God is to become really incarnate for us, then fire will have to be present in our prayer. Our worship and devotion will have to stoke the kind of fire in our souls that can truly change our hearts. Ours is a great responsibility not to waste this Advent time."



Last Days of Advent

by Pope John Paul II

"The liturgy of Advent...helps us to understand fully the value and meaning of the mystery of Christmas. It is not just about commemorating the historical event, which occurred some 2000 years ago in a little village of Judea. Instead, it is necessary to understand that the whole of our life must be an 'advent,' a vigilant awaiting of the final coming of Christ. To predispose our mind to welcome the Lord who, as we say in the Creed, one day will come to judge the living and the dead, we must learn to recognize him as present in the events of daily life. Therefore, Advent is an intense training that directs us decisively toward Him who already came, who will come, and who comes continuously."

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Fr. Brian Cavanaugh, TOR

Christmas Day Origin

The best evidence indicates that Jesus was born in the Spring of the year when shepherds were normally in the fields. His birth also most likely occurred about the Year 4 B.C. Why do we celebrate His birth then on December 25? Here is how this particular day came to be celebrated as Christmas Day.

In the year 274, the Roman Emperor Aurelian officially instituted a feast which he called "Sol Invictus" or "The Unconquerable Sun." Since December 21st is the shortest light day of the year, the days after became days to celebrate the return of the Sun to prominence because from this day on, each day has a few more minutes of daylight.

To counteract this pagan feast, somewhere between 275 and 336 A.D., Christians instituted their own feast to celebrate the coming of the Son of God. But, Probably to our surprise, it never became the popular feast as we now know it until the 1800's. Prior to that time it was the Epiphany that was the major Christian celebration because it celebrated the coming of the Magi—the only non-Jews mentioned in the Christmas Story as worshipers. This feast of the Epiphany was to celebrate the coming of Christ for all humankind.

Christmas Day is a family day in almost all homes. It is a day when every family needs to examine their own blessings and values. It is also a day when families need to be aware of others less fortunate. Some things to do are:

- ♥ Attend Church as a family.
- ♥ Think about what other families have done for you and members of your family this year.
- ♥ Try to do something this day that will help or bring cheer to another family.
- ♥ Think about the value of your parish church and the ways it brings families together.



Reprinted from the booklet published by the Family Life Office entitled
HOLIDAY SPIRITUALITY IN THE HOME—Thanksgiving to Epiphany.

Families and the Gospel

December 3

Mark 13:33-37

Today's gospel tells us to "Be watchful." This comes natural to families. Parents are watchful of their children's health, grades and friends. Children are watchful of parental moods. Today's gospel encourages us to use this ability to see God acting in the innocence, tenderness, love and forgiveness of your family. "Be watchful," the Lord is already with you.

December 10

Mark 1:1-8

Why is it so hard to forgive, yet so easy to get even? Listen to John the Baptist in today's gospel and repent of the anger and ugly feelings which block your ability to forgive. This Christmas give a gift which makes a difference. Give forgiveness.

December 17

John 1:6-8, 19-28

Today's gospel reports "there is one among you whom you do not recognize." It is hard to believe Christ is present in a family with crazy schedules, suppers that start too late and end too early, cars that don't start, misunderstandings, frustrations, piles of laundry, unmatched socks and stretched food budgets. The list is endless. The words spoken at mass, "The Lord is with you," are not a hope, they are a fact.

December 24

Luke 1:26-38

Q: What do you call a family which began with an unmarried pregnant teen and had a twelve year old son who ran away from them and was eventually executed as a criminal?

A: HOLY! Two lessons: (1) No matter what is happening in your family, "The Lord is with You." (2) "Do not be afraid" for "nothing is impossible with God."

December 25

Luke 2:15-20

This Christmas remember your task as a parent is the same as Mary's: We must not let our doubts, fears and unfulfilled expectations get in the way of our loving **acceptance** of our children.

December 31

Luke 2:22-40

The gospel shows Mary and Joseph weren't perfect parents. Have you ever been amazed and astonished at what came out of your child's mouth, then you are in good company—so did Mary and Joseph. Parenting is tough but it is also the stuff of holiness.



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A Family Perspective by Bud Ozar

Christ on Christmas: Jesus tells all

For a story with such humble beginnings—a young couple, a newborn, and a stable—we sure have piled on the glitz. Seemingly unsatisfied with the sparkles brought to the Christ child by the angels and kings, we've added Santa, reindeer, presents, elves, trees, stockings, cookies, candy, spectacularly lit houses and streetscapes, carols, and hot buttered rum. It's a lot for one babe's birthday celebration.

How should we approach all the trimmings of the holidays in a way that honors Jesus? Maybe we can ask Him to give us his perspective on this!



What are your thoughts on Santa?

Santa's got guts. Sneaking into strangers' houses to give them gifts—what an example of brave Christianity. This Christmas, sneak into someone's life and leave a gift without waiting for one in return. Think what our world would be like if everyone were as generous as Santa.

What do you have to say about the 12 Days of Christmas? 12 Days? The reason I was born was so that we would have 365 days of Christmas. 365 days of LOVE, PEACE, JOY. Twelve is not enough.

Can you comment on the elves? Elves set a great example for the rest of humanity. Work hard. It doesn't matter if you're short, have ears that are too big, or if your feet are too long. Work hard at everything you do. And while you work, sing!

What about the Grinch? The Grinch reminds me of a lot of the leaders I knew back in my days of teaching. The Grinch could not stop Christmas from coming. He took presents, decorations, even the roast beast, but it came anyway. Let the Grinch be a reminder to all that nothing can stop me from entering the world. For I am love.

Decorations? Make sure you spend as much time getting your soul ready for Christmas as you spend getting your house ready. Make sure the light inside your heart is as bright as the lights on your bushes.

"Happy Holidays" or "Merry Christmas"? Does it matter? I gave you the jobs to do, I made it clear. Feed the hungry. Give drink to the thirsty. Clothe the naked. Welcome the stranger. Visit the sick and imprisoned. Worry less about what you say and more about what you do. Let your life's work show your beliefs. St. Francis of Assisi said it well: "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words."

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**IMMACULATE CONCEPTION CHURCH
DUDLEY, PA**

Has an immediate opening for the following position:

Temporary Parish Secretary

Responsibilities include assisting parish pastor and secretary with the development and implementation of effective business practices. Flexible work schedule is based upon a short-term maximum of 200 hours. Interested candidates must contact the parish rectory at 814-635-2919 or email the administrator at mbaum@dioceseaj.org. Please respond no later than December 1st.