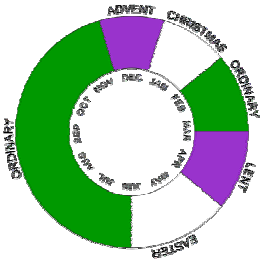


“The Canticle”



Advent /Christmas 2005



Liturgical
Year
Calendar

We are in the Season of Advent

Prepare Ye, The Way of The Lord...

- ✦ November 27th is the 1st Day of Advent...Bring the tradition home to your family by making and using an Advent Wreath
- ✦ Join us on December 3rd as we celebrate the coming of Emmanuel
- ✦ Reflect - on the meaning of Christmas through the Eucharist.
- ✦ Share the Holiday Spirit with Gifts from the Holy Day Spirit

"The Christian faith has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried."

--G.K. Chesterton



Sound the trumpet throughout the earth

For God has come to live with us!

By

Michael K. Cockrell
Editor-in-Chief

Despite its heavily commercialized overlay of the Christmas bustle, it is fair to say that most Catholics do at least give a fleeting thought to Advent as being a 4-week period of preparation for what or, more correctly, *who* is to come, namely Jesus at Christmas.

In fact, the scriptures describe it this way... “the world which was in darkness has seen a great light!”

Mary was the first human to gaze upon that light—the “light of the world!”

Few of us, however, consider Mary and the nature of her own Advent preparation, nor the depth and importance of her role in and preparation for that manifestation of her Son to the world.

We don’t ordinarily think of Advent as a time of introspection and reconciliation. But during Advent we would be wise to ponder our own human condition in solemn reflection as did Mary in her own life in preparation for the coming of her Son—not just remembering the first time, but every time.

And certainly, Mary had a lot to ponder!

Consider the circumstances in which Mary found herself leading up to that “Holy Night”...

Advent — “Coming Prepared To Greet Our Redeemer”

She was, by most traditional accounts a 13 or 14-yr. old girl, an unmarried virgin, who now was pregnant. Her future husband, Joseph, who learned in a dream that he was not the father, had originally planned to send her away quietly when he found out, instead of turning her into the town authorities, whose recourse to the Mosaic Law would have meant Mary most likely would have been stoned to death.

Mary had to know this. But she was undaunted, courageous, faithful and trusting in God’s Providence, even when she learned that King Herod had plans to find and kill the baby to which she would give birth in a place where animals lodged and ate and slept, she persevered in patience, obedience and of course, grace in abundance to fulfill her promise to God.

Mary did and does play a pivotal role in our salvation — first, by agreeing to follow God’s plans by bringing our Savior into the world; and second, by saving the Savior of the world from those who would do him harm as any good mother would, and then helping her children, through her good example, to do the same.

When we say we have a cross to bear it is generally accepted as a figure of speech.

In Mary’s case those notions of cross-bearing were all too real and painfully poignant to her in that first Advent as the salvation history that began enfolded in swaddling clothes in a manger at Bethlehem, unfolded in an equally poignant fashion between the outstretched arms of her Son on His Cross at Calvary.

By His wide-open arms, yet He gathers us in; and by His stripes we are healed!... Something to ponder in our own Advent practices as we look forward to the joy of Christmas.

*Oh Come,
Oh Come,
Emmanuel!*



Inside this issue:

Mark’s Gospel	2
Generation’s of Faith	3
Quick Look Calendar	4
PPC Corner	6
Reflections	8
“A View From The Pew”	10
Children’s Page	12



Advent and Mark's Gospel: Both Full Of Surprises!

By

Rev. Robert M. Blaney
Pastor; St. Francis Parish

The first Sunday of Advent (November 27) is the beginning of a new liturgical year in the Church.

Appropriately so, we make a shift in the readings that are used for Mass on Sundays.

For the past year (Year "A" in the Lectionary cycle) the Gospel has been taken from Matthew. With this new year, (Year "B") the Gospel readings will be from St. Mark. Now, having said that, because of the brevity of Mark's Gospel, it will be supplemented by passages from other Gospels.

In fact, we actually do not hear from Mark until the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (January 22).

Also, some weeks in Lent and the entire Easter season will use John's Gospel.

And during Year "B," there is a six week hiatus from Mark's Gospel during the summer while the Church ponders the mystery of the Eucharist and uses the discourse from the sixth chapter of John instead. That doesn't seem to leave many weeks for Mark.

I thought it might be helpful to have a little background about Mark's Gospel to help appreciate its meaning as we hear it during the coming year.

First of all, we are not sure who Mark was. Mark was a very popular name in the first century. It could be one of several people.

The thinking is that the author was a relative of Barnabas, Paul's right hand man.

Likely, Mark, was an aid to St. Peter, helping the Apostle in translating the document.

The Gospel was written around the year 60 in Rome.

It is a historical document in that it tells the story of Jesus of Nazareth.

However, it is not meant to present any kind of historical time line.



Therefore, it cannot be read as we would read a history book. Only a hand full of events in the life of Jesus are recorded and not necessarily in chronological order.

Although Mark is the first of the Gospels written, the author had some written documents to follow.

There were "sayings" of Jesus that were recorded. Mark made use of these, as well as the accounts of Peter.

The audience for the Gospel were the Christians in Rome who were Gentile (that is, not Jewish). This is surmised in that there is little reference to the Old Testament.

Mark presents Jesus of Nazareth not simply as the Messiah, but as the suffering Messiah.

Given that the Gospel was written for Roman Christians, Mark gives much attention to the crucifixion. People living in the Roman Empire were certainly aware of the horror of crucifixion. Only the most heinous of criminals were sentenced to death in this regard. Mark needs to explain to the Christians in Rome why Jesus had to suffer and die this way.

Throughout the Gospel, Mark is always trying to answer the questions: who is Jesus, why did he die such a horrible death and what did his death mean.

Everything in the Gospel points to the cross.

Mark is also a Gospel of surprises. Constantly, it is the most unlikely character in a story who helps to reveal who Jesus is.

For example, it is ultimately a Roman soldier who identifies Jesus as the Son of God after he dies on the cross.

Mark is all about presenting Jesus as "God-in-solidarity-with-his-people."

At the time it was written, Christians were being persecuted because of their faith.

This Gospel was intended to fill them with hope and demonstrate that their suffering and faith in Christ is not in vain.

Surprise! That's the Advent message for us, too!

"The Canticle"

Publisher

Rev. Robert M. Blaney

Editor-in-chief

Michael Cockrell

Associate Editor

Michelle Cockrell

Contributors

Kathy Long; Linda Bendzewicz; Kevin Rauseo; Debbie Hovanasian; Paul Gauthier, Ron D'Amato



Published quarterly with expanded editions during Christmas Easter and other times as needed.

We Celebrate Mary

In December, St. Francis Parish will celebrate the First Sunday of Advent with our next Generations Of Faith festival in honor of the one person responsible for making Advent itself possible by her faith-filled consent to God's Will.

That person is, as Catholics know and believe, the Blessed Mother.

It is hardly a coincidence that the seasons of Advent and Christmas are focused so heavily on the role Mary played and continues to play in salvation history.

Like our earthly mother, Mary loves and watches over her children, keeps them safe, and encourages them faithfully and tirelessly to help them achieve Heaven.

Every year, on December 8th, Catholics celebrate The Feast of The Immaculate Conception which recalls that Mary was conceived without the stain of Original Sin by her parents Anna and Joachim, because God had determined that the mother of His Son would be born without

stain of sin, which speaks later to our belief in her perpetual virginity, even after she became pregnant and later delivered Our Savior on that first Christmas.

And of course, the four weeks leading up to Christmas comprise the season of Advent where we celebrate with anticipation fueled by remembrance, the impending appearance of Jesus. Mary knew of that impending appearance before anyone else thanks to the event we know as the Annunciation where the angel Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen by God Himself to be the vessel for bringing the Redeemer into this world to save mankind from its iniquity due to sin.

Join us as we celebrate our next Generation of Faith event as we learn more about Our Blessed Mother, the Rosary and Mary's part in our salvation.

The event will be held on three different dates in order to accommodate everyone. Saturday December 3rd, Sunday December 4th, Monday December 6th and Thursday December 8th.

Our Lady of:



The Rosary



Guadalupe



The Immaculate Conception

Annual Parish Picnic

Over 500 people attended this year's first Generation of Faith festival which was held September 25th in conjunction with the Annual St. Francis Parish Picnic. We celebrated Mass together, prayed together, shared a meal together and played together. It was an incredible day. Our feast included grilled meats, salads and a crowd pleasing ice-cream bar. The theme we honored as a Multi-Generation of Faith was the Church. Many gathered in the parish hall to participate in the interactive exhibits of the five dimensions of the church: institution, herald, community, servant and sacrament. There were many activities for the children of the parish including games, arts and crafts and a video presentation.

Our folk choir provided us with toe tapping music all afternoon with popular songs and oldies as well as several spiritual tunes. There was plenty of time for parents to relax and grandparents to laugh and enjoy grand story telling. Our teens were actively involved in all aspects of the event including cooking, cleaning and guiding our young parishioners around all the activities. All in all it was a grand day and a great way to join together as a family, and a community in prayer and thanksgiving. See you next year!!



"QUICK-LOOK" EVENTS CALENDAR

December

- 3rd-** Generations of Faith Festival (4:00p.m.-7:00 p.m.includes Mass)
- 4th-**Generations of Faith Festival (10:00a.m.-1:00p.m.includes Mass)
- 5th-** Bereavement Support Group (7:00p.m.)
- 6th-**Generations of Faith Festival (5:30p.m. -7:30 p.m.)
- 7th-** Smart Program (10a.m.-11:30a.m.)
- 8th-**Generation of Faith Festival (5:30 -7:30 p.m.) Mass 5:30p.m.
- 10th-**Widow/Widowers Christmas Party (12:00p.m.-3:30p.m.)
- 11th-** Peer Leaders' (5:00p.m.)
-9th gr. Confirm. class (5:30p.m.)
-Christmas Concert / St. Michael's Church (4:30p.m.)
- 12th-**Parish Advent Penance Service (7:00p.m.)
-Parent/Child Reconciliation Retreat Grade 2 (6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m.) OR
- 13th-** Parent/Child Reconciliation Retreat Grade 2(6:30p.m. - 8:00p.m.)
- 14th-** Smart Program. (10:00a.m.-11:30a.m.)
- 19th-** Bereavement Support Group (7:00p.m.)
- 20th-** Peer Leaders' Planning Comm. (7:00p.m.)
- 21st-** Smart Program (10:00 a.m.-11:30p.m.)

Christmas Masses

Saturday December 24th

4:00p.m., 6:00p.m., Midnight

Sunday December 25th

8:00a.m., 10:00a.m., 11:30a.m.

(No 7:00p.m. Mass)

January

- 1st** - Open House at Rectory after morning Masses
- 4th** -Olan Mills
- 8th**-10 grade Confirmation class (5:30p.m.)
- 9th-** Teachers meeting/Grades 1-4 (7:00p.m.-8:30p.m.)
- 11th-** Smart Program (10:00-11:30a.m.)
(6-week program begins)
- 18th**-Smart Program (10:00-11:30a.m.)
- 20th**-Marriage Prep (7:00-9:30pm)
- 21st** -7th grade retreat "Choosing Wisely" & "Resisting Peer Pressure" (9:00p.m.-2:30p.m.)
- 22nd** -10th grade Confirmation class (5:30p.m.)
-Marriage Prep (10:00am-4:00pm)
- 25th** -Smart Program (10:00-11:30p.m.)
- 27th**-Marriage Prep (7:00-9:30pm)
- 28th**-8th grade retreat "Teen Relationships" (9:00a.m.-2:30p.m.)
- 29th**-10th grade Confirmation class (5:30p.m.)
-Marriage Prep (10:00am-4:00pm)

February

- 1st** -Smart Program (10:00-11:30p.m.)
- 4th** -Day of Prayer for Friendly Visitors (9:00a.m.-12:00p.m.) (Mass)
- 5th** -10th grade Confirmation class (5:30p.m.)
- 8th** -Smart Program (10:00-11:30p.m.)
- 11th** -Generations of Faith Festival (4:00p.m.-7:00p.m. Includes Mass)
- 12th** -Generations of Faith Festival (10:00a.m.-1:00pm includes Mass)
- 13th** -Generations of Faith Festival (5:30-7:30 p.m.)
- 15th** -Smart Program (10:00-11:30p.m.)
- 16th** -Generations of Faith Festival (5:30-7:30pm.)
- 25th** -Super Bowl Bake Sale
- 26th** -Super Bowl Bake Sale

Upcoming Events

April 6, 2006

Parent /Child Eucharist Retreat

First Session 9:00am-12:00pm
Second Session 1:00-3:00pm

May 6th, May 13th

First Communion

Prayer & Scripture Study

Adoration- Every Monday 9:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m.

RCIA- Every Sunday 10:00a.m.-12:30p.m.

Children's Choir-
Wednesday 6:00p.m.-6:45 p.m.

Men's Spirituality Group
Wednesday 7:00p.m.

Centering Prayer

Monday 9:30a.m.-11:00a.m.
Thursday 7:00p.m.-8:30p.m.

Scripture Study

"A Mosaic of Mary in Scripture"
Wednesdays 9:30a.m.-11:00a.m.
Every other Wed.7:15p.m.-8:30p.m.



Kathy's Column

By

Kathy Long

Director of Religious Education &
Pastoral Associate



(Editor's Note: This is a reprint of the first article in a series entitled, "Kindling Hope & Security" By Dr. Patricia M. McCormack

©2005 Pflaum Publishing Group Dayton, OH-45439)

"What is equal to training the soul, and forming the mind of one that is young?"

This question, voiced by John Chrysostom, a 4th century saint-scholar, has been echoed throughout history and compels our attention today.

Contemporary voices register concern for the character of our nation and many parents seek support to determine how best to cultivate character in their children.

Character is the distinguishing feature of personality and behavior that persists, regardless of outside pressure or personal temptation. It is an expression of soul.

Parents are the primary agents for the spiritual, social, and emotional formation of a child's soul. Effective parenting is vital to society.

Children are born into the world as persons of infinite potential in need of formation, a process begun at conception and necessary through every age and stage of life.

Parents set the foundation and direction for soul formation; teachers build on it.

Created by God, the soul of a child is either cultivated or stifled by parenting and teaching practices.

Six elements essential to soulful growth are within the ability of adults to foster: 1) security, 2) autonomy, 3) initiative 4) industry, 5) unconditional love, 6) affective emotional skills. These elements, practiced with consistency, repetition, and continuity, form an identity that supports positive self-esteem, conscience development, a vibrant spirituality and a character that can withstand peer pressure.

Security is the first of the essential elements of soul formation.

It is an inner sense of stability, trust, and confidence that comes from repeated experiences of receiving predictable responses from the significant persons in your life.

Even within the womb, a child can detect safety or distress. If the pattern experienced is one of comfort, trust becomes characteristic.

If, however, on repeated occasions our experience is that of disappointment, abandonment, or frustration, we learn to mistrust, and insecurity results.

Because human nature is limited, there are bound to be times that parents and teachers fail children.

Infrequent incidents of disappointment, while not desired, provide balance by instilling a sense of caution.

For example, children who experience no mistrust in their lives and trust all people without reservation could easily accept a car ride from a stranger or ingest a harmful substance

✓ *Check It Out!*

Even within the womb a child can detect safety or distress.

Infrequent incidents of disappointment, while not desired, provide balance by instilling a sense of caution.

Security releases energy for reaching objectives, looking forward to the future, and having a reasonable confidence that all will be well.

offered at a party.

The goal is to form a pattern of reliability on significant persons so that a sense of security becomes rooted in the soul of a child.

When security is characteristic of soul, drive develops as a basic life strength and hope flowers as a characteristic life virtue.

Security releases energy for reaching objectives, looking forward to the future, and having a reasonable confidence that all will be well.

There are indicators that suggest when a child already possesses a basic sense of security or trust and when a child is suffering feelings of insecurity or mistrust.

The profiles that follow list some typical characteristics.

Review the profiles with caution, Decide which characteristics, if any, describe your child under usual circumstances as a pattern rather than isolated instance.

If the review indicates a basic sense of security, continue whatever it is that you already do.

If instead, there is need for additional support, be intentional about increasing practices that support the growth of security: routine, procedure, system, safety, consistency, continuity, and predictability.

Avoid double standards and make sure that you 'say what you mean and mean what you say.'

A child with a basic sense of security or trust:

- is generally self confident
- considers it predictable that personal needs will be cared for
- believes that people are generally trustworthy/dependable
- has inner confidence that things will work out well or can be handled satisfactorily
- can predict with certainty the support or help of parents, family, and others
- is generally hopeful

A child with a basic sense of insecurity or mistrust:

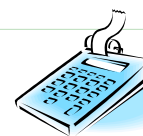
- is generally fearful
- often feels frustrated or uncertain
- feels that he or she cannot count on the support or help of parents, family, or others
- often doubts that people are honest with him or her
- is generally suspicious of others
- approaches new people and situations with a feeling of apprehension, uneasiness and fear
- conveys an aimless "lost" attitude

Kathy





The Parish Pastoral Council Report



The Parish Finance Council (PFC) is comprised of the following seven members:

Reverend Robert Blaney (Chairperson), Bill McGrail, Linda Bendzewicz, Joe Harnden, Mary Jeanne Williams, Terry Blanchette, and Rob DiBona.

The Finance Council's role is to advise the Pastor in regard to financial matters concerning the Parish. The Council generally addresses the following matters:

- The preparation of an annual budget;
- The monitoring of income and expense throughout the year;
- Accountability of funds through an annual report to the parish;
- Identifying areas of concern, if any; and...
- Assisting the Pastor with resolution.

Current Financial Outlook

The Parish is currently meeting the operating budget with offertory collections, monies received from special collections, the sanctuary fund, sacramental offerings, fundraising, and religious education fees.

Approximately \$113,000 is currently held in Savings to cover any major unforeseen and/or unanticipated expense(s).

In addition, funds are held in Savings for the awarding of scholarships (Scholarship Fund); pledged Promise For Tomorrow Campaign Funds are received quarterly and held in Savings for the proposed parking lot expansion; Grand Annual Funds are collected annually in the Fall/Winter and held in escrow to subsidize the monthly mortgage payments; Building Fund Pledges and Donations (Given In Memory of Loved Ones) are held in Savings for future building and/or capital improvements; \$1,250 monthly is budgeted to be set aside in escrow for long-term building maintenance; and, funds are held in Savings for Families In Need and the Rectory/Chapel.

Limiting Factors:

1. The Mortgage: A monthly payment of \$11,629.48 is being applied to a mortgage note at 5.5% interest. The 1.5 million-dollar note was granted by the Archdiocese in 1995 for the building of the church. Approximately \$574,985 remains to be paid. At the present monthly payment, the note will be paid in full in approximately 4.5 years. The Parish was able to shorten the life of the 20-year note by 5 years through prior-year Pledge Drives and Fundraising Activities.

The last of the three Pledge Drives ended in 2001. At that time, a monthly mortgage collection (Monthly Offertory) was established to subsidize the monthly mortgage payments.

Since the monthly offertory collections fell short of the \$11,629 monthly payment, a *Grand Annual Collection was established in 2002-2003 to subsidize the shortfall and to reduce the principal on the note, whenever possible.* Since then, if not for the Grand Annual Collection, the Parish would have incurred annual mortgage deficits, over the last 3 years, of approximately \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year.

2. Religious Education: The Religious Education Fees collected (\$35,000) annually pay for 34% of the cost of the Religious Education - Generations of Faith Program. The cost of the Program this year, which includes (2) full-time employees, is budgeted at \$102,990. The remaining 66% in costs, or \$68,000, is absorbed by the operating budget ~ *resulting in the Parish contributing approximately 10% of operating funds to the Church's mission of Catholic education.*

In addition, the Archdiocese requires all parishes to *subsidize* Catholic School Education through an annual assessment based upon a percentage of the Offertory. Our parish is assessed *6% of the Offertory*, which comprises an additional *3.8% of the operating budget ~ or approximately \$27,000 annually.*

The Generations of Faith Program was incorporated into the Religious Education Program, to benefit all parishioners, in the

Fall of 2004. The \$9,000 cost to host Generations of Faith events was offset by \$5,000 in funds raised. *Therefore, the cost of the Program last year was \$4,000.*

3. Facilities Expense: The Facilities Expense is comprised of the cost of utilities, heat, water & sewer, property and liability insurance, maintenance equipment contracts, maintenance supplies, maintenance of grounds and buildings, long-term building maintenance escrow, vehicle fuel and maintenance, and (2) part-time employees. The cost to maintain the church, the rectory, and the grounds, including the staffing of (2) part-time employees, is approximately \$119,080 annually ~ or 17% of the total operating budget.

Quarter 1: July 1 - Sept. 30, 2005

In the first quarter of this new Fiscal Year, the Parish met the budgeted income goals. The balance remaining in the Grand Annual Account continues to help defray the shortfall in the monthly offertory, and the Weekly Offertory is just meeting the anticipated collection amount.

Although the income goals in the first quarter were met, actual expenses were higher than anticipated, primarily due to rising fuel and energy costs (affecting Facilities), the purchase of new Religious Education books for all grades (approximately 652 students in 60 classes), and Professional Development Costs which included RCIA training for 3 RCIA Leaders.

Future Financial Outlook

Due to the current economic climate and rising costs, particularly in the area of fuel and energy costs and the rising costs of books, insurances, and facilities, it was decided that this year's Grand Annual Funds ~ in addition to being used to subsidize mortgage collection shortfalls ~ would also be used *to offset any immediate shortfall realized from the weekly offertory collection* (funds used for operating expenses). This would enable the Parish to maintain timely invoice payments without withdrawing funds from Savings, now or in the future.

Parish
Pastoral
Corner

Quarterly Meeting Notes:

The Parish Pastoral Council held its first meeting of the 2005 – 2006 term on October 5, 2005 in the Rectory.

In its first order of business the Council welcomed two new members; Dennis Williams and Jack Durocher.

The Council then discussed the results from the Parish survey that was undertaken in the Spring of 2005.

The Council agreed that more focus needs to be put on evangelization, especially to the new families who have joined the Parish.

The Council also reviewed the establishment of the St. Vincent Paul Society at the Parish.

The first order of business for the newly formed Society is to assess the needs of the Parish and also work with the Town of Dracut in forming a

Dracut food pantry.

The Council then discussed its assessment of the Generations of Faith program to date as well the upcoming programs. Further discussion was held regarding adding approximately 75 more parking spaces as well as a second access road onto Wheeler Road.

An engineering firm has been retained to provide an assessment for further review.

More information regarding the parking lot will be forthcoming over the next few months.

The Council always welcomes feedback and comments on any of the issues facing our Parish.

Please feel free to contact any member of the Council to discuss these issues.

—Kevin Rauseo



St. Vincent De Paul

St. Francis Parish, rekindles the spirit and mission of St. Vincent De Paul; becomes a partner of SVDP Society for Dracut

The society of St. Vincent de Paul was founded in 1833 by Blessed Frederic Ozanam, a 20 year old student at Sorbonne University in Paris.

In answer to a challenge for Christians to “Practice what they preach”, Ozanam and a group of his fellow students started to seek out and visit the poor of Paris in their homes, taking them bread and clothes, and giving them their friendship and their concern. This small group took as their patron St. Vincent de Paul, the great French priest, who alerted the world to social problems.

Today, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SVDP) is a world wide organization of catholic men and women numbering 880,000 of whom 60,000 are in the United States.

As we reinstate SVDP here at St. Francis, the mission is the same as in 1833. The aim is to bring the friendship of true charity to all those in need. The work of SVDP is the Gospel message in action: I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was a stranger, I was naked, I was sick, I was in prison and you cared.

—Ron D’Amato

PPC NEWS BITS

Grand Annual Appeal: Meeting our needs head on!



The Grand Annual Appeal taken up in October has generated \$65,000 as of this writing. Our goal is to reach \$90,000 by December 1st.

Teen Contributions of Time and Treasure are on the rise!

Our teenagers have a generous heart. They have taken their role as young adults in the parish community to heart and are ready to give their share.

“How much should I give,” they ask? A good gauge to use for teens is to set aside 1 hour’s wage per month. If you earn \$6.75 an hour then your contribution to the parish would be \$6.75 a month or \$1.68 a week. As your wages increase, so, too, would the amount you give but still maintaining the 1 hour of wages per month guideline as your goal.

Saint Francis Peer Leaders Set Agenda During First Meeting Of New Academic Year

The Saint Francis Peer Leaders’ Group met last week, adding 15 new 11th graders bringing its membership roster to 30 students. After a brief time spent getting acquainted, the peer leaders discussed their agenda for this year which included defining their mission and motivation as peer leaders and the nature and scope of their involvement at charitable events in the parish and the community it serves. In fact, many of the peer leaders serve St. Francis by teaching in the Parish’s Religious Education program.

Last week was their first meeting of the new school year and future meetings are scheduled for every second Sunday of the month at 5:30 p.m.

All high school students are eligible to become a peer leader and anyone interested in finding out about the peer leadership program is invited and encouraged to call the Parish Office for more details.

—Brent Cassella

Reflections of a Decade Ago ...

"Building a Light on the Hill"

By
Debbie Hovanasian

The world was quite a bit different a decade ago. Gas prices were manageable, Katrina was simply a feminine name, and the new millennium was still waiting to be ushered in.

Closer to home, our parish community during the autumn of 1995 also looked quite different. The people of Saint Francis worshipped in a crowded little white church on Methuen Street, while on Wheeler Road a very special project was underway.

As the autumn leaves fell slowly off the trees, the parish family was afforded an unobstructed view of this long-anticipated project. Beam by beam, the new Saint Francis Church – the culmination of years of planning, dedication and sacrifice -- rose up magnificently from the rolling hills and fields of the former Ogonowski farmland.

With each step, parishioners surveyed the progress with a unique sense of ownership, a feeling of tremendous pride, and a great anticipation for the day when they could pray together as a parish family in this beautiful new dwelling.

Joe Harnden, Chairman of the Executive Building Committee, dedicated many hours over a two-year period to the construction of the church. His leadership and teamwork with St. Francis Pastor Father Brian Kiely and the many volunteers proved invaluable to a project that was ultimately finished on schedule for the dedication on May 5, 1996.

Harnden reflected on the church's construction – a time that he considers a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work on a project that affected a great many people in a highly personal way":

"The steel frame was going up in November. We lost some time due to ledge that was not expected; otherwise, we were

pretty much on schedule. We had a very difficult winter, which caused some delays in getting the roof on and the siding complete. The siding carpenters worked in terrible cold and wind.

There were other challenges besides the weather, added Harnden. Among them, keeping the project on schedule and on budget:

The budget was a moving target. Even though we had a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) from our contractor, the price was based on conceptual drawings and changes were being made constantly throughout the building process. Due to the terrible weather we lost a fair amount of time on the schedule, but we were committed to get this building done for dedication on May 5th.

Harnden recalls as his biggest challenge, however, listening to all of the ideas from committee members and trying to avoid hurt feelings when ideas were not implemented:

"There were a lot of ideas that just could not happen. It is very hard to say no to people who are trying their very best to provide ideas that they think are in the best interest of the church. Any idea brought to the table was personal in nature because you are talking about a personal home to so many people. There's a whole lot of emotion involved."

The challenges were insignificant, however, compared to the rewards of working so closely on this important project with so many volunteers, explains Harnden. While he jokes that "Dedication Day" was the most exciting part, there were many special moments along the way that Harnden considers unforgettable:

"Not everyone was on board for building a new church at the time. What I found neat was those who were on board took ownership and wanted the very best we could do. It was clearly exciting working with Father Kiely and the many committees, where I truly learned what diplomacy meant. It was an exciting

time for the parish because this was all new to us as a parish and we were living history."

As the construction progressed into the year 1996, the electricity was eventually installed. Hence, the faithful who prayed for a place where thousands could go to find comfort, worship together as a family, and give thanks to the Lord for His goodness were rewarded with their very own "Light on the Hill".

As for Harnden, he's just gratified that the many hours spent with Father Kiely and the various committees produced the best possible results – results that have positively affected so many lives in a personal way.

"Let's face it," he said. "You can't get much more personal than church, and to be highly involved on a daily basis for over two years on a building that many people go to find peace is pretty awesome."

The accomplishments of a decade ago, as God worked through a special group of people to create this "Light on the Hill", are worthy of prayerful and festive celebration ten years later – this time with our many new family members. Be sure to mark your calendars for the week of May 1st, 2006, for our 10th Anniversary of Dedication Celebrations!

In the next Canticle, look for reflections from Sharon Coram, Chairperson of the Dedication Committee, as well as others involved in planning for the Dedication Day events.

Dedication of St. Francis Church 10th Anniversary

May 1, 2006 Evening Night of Prayer

May 5, 2006 Church Service Praying the Living Rosary

May 6, 2006 Evening Celebration Banquet at Lenzi's

May 7, 2006 10:00am Celebration Mass with Archbishop Sean O'Malley

Family Day following Mass

St. Francis Parish

Christmas Mass Schedule



Advent Penance Service
Monday, December 12th at 7 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation
 Saturday, December 17th
 9:30 a.m.-10 a.m.. & 3:15 p.m.-
 3:45 p.m.

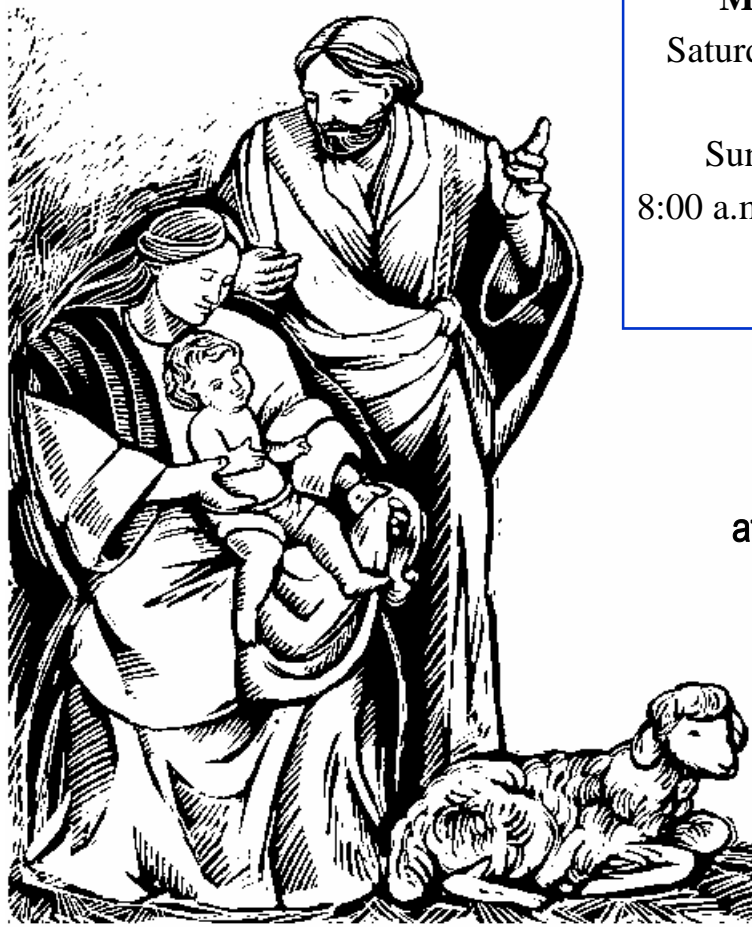
Saturday, December 24th
 9:30 a.m.-10 a.m.

Saturday, December 24, 2005
 4:00 p.m. & 6:00 p.m.
*(Children's Pageant & Children's Choir
 at 6:00 p.m. Mass)*

Sunday, December 25, 2005
 Midnight
 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m. & 11:30 a.m.
*(Please note: There will be NO 7:00 pm
 Mass on Christmas Day!)*

Mary Mother of God
 Saturday, December 31, 2005
 4:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 1, 2006
 8:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:30 a.m.,
 & 7 p.m.



Rectory Open House
Sunday, January 1st.
 after all morning Masses.
 All are welcome!

A View From The Pew: "Men's Spirituality Group"



By
Paul Gauthier

Five years ago, I was asked if I would be interested in attending a Men's Spirituality Group at St. Francis Church.

I accepted... and that decision has changed my life in many positive ways.

At first, I didn't know if I should go, because I didn't feel I knew much about my religion and I was afraid that I wouldn't fit in.

But although the group discussed religion, they also discussed how our faith could be used in our every day life.

I came to realize that we are all in the same boat, and that we all have issues to address.

Each week there is a topic on which we focus (sacraments, ten commandments, etc.)

We start with a short prayer, followed by some scripture readings that pertain to the topic at hand.

Then we read the "quotation for meditation" written by Father Benedict J. Groeschel, which discusses and summarizes the scripture readings.

Next we discuss the topic, using the three questions that are provided.

These questions are designed to promote discussion and sharing of ideas. We end our session with prayer petitions and the Lord's Prayer.

The guys in the group come from a wide variety of backgrounds: Accounting, Engineering, Firefighting, Computers, Management, and Retirement.



They are great guys and we've come to be good friends.

We are all at different points in our faith journey and we all learn from each other.

Over the past five years, I have certainly

learned a lot about my own Catholic faith and other religions as well. I also learned of the importance of prayer in daily life.

In any relationship there must be communication, and prayer is our way of communicating with God.

I have realized how many blessings there are in my life and that the important things are family, friends, good relationships, and helping others.

I have come to discover beauty and joy in small things, like a beautiful sunset or hugs from my daughters.

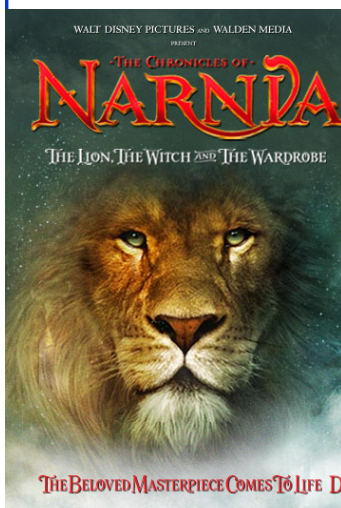
I have come to realize that I'm not alone, but that God is with me always.

I now pray daily and know that God is listening to me and guiding me.

Many of the things that I used to worry about are no longer that important, thus removing much of the stress I had been experiencing in my life.

Recently two new members have joined our group.

I would like to extend the invitation to any man who would be interested in learning more about his faith and who would welcome the support and companionship that this group can provide to join us on Wednesday evenings at 7:00 p.m.



Walden Media and Walt Disney Pictures are set to bring their faithful film adaptation of C.S. Lewis' epic Christian allegory, "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe" to the big screen beginning December 9th. That release date is an interesting and an altogether fitting choice to debut a story lavishly and cleverly integrating Catholic Theology using Christian archetypes since it comes one day after Catholics have celebrated the Feast of The Immaculate Conception.

Lewis, a Christian convert, repeatedly drew parallels between the character of Aslan and the person of Jesus Christ. In the *Chronicles*, love is expressed through obedience and self-sacrifice. Love and responsibility go together. This is a good movie to see as a family and discuss how God's love is depicted in this film.

Following in the successful footsteps of movies like Mel Gibson's "Passion of The Christ" and Leonardo DePhillipis' lesser known biographical treatment of the saint of the "Little Way," "Therese," Walden Media has engaged highly acclaimed director Andrew Adamson, the visionary behind the box office smash and Academy-Award winner "Shrek," to bring the first live action feature film adaptation of C.S. Lewis', "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe" to a new generation of moviegoers.

Christmas PageantCasting Call

What would it be like to have Christmas more than once a year?

Well, one could ask Sister Lenore Auger who is a Sisters of Notre Dame, who knows perhaps better than most what that is like and gave the parishioners of Saint Francis a glimpse of her unique perspective.

In her “spare” time, Sister Lenore casts, stages, produces and directs Christmas Pageants complete with Old Testament prophets, saints, angels, shepherds, kings, wise men, townspeople and of course the real stars of this human tableau, Mary, Joseph, and The Baby Jesus. Her pageants are A veritable plethora of performers. She draws on those performers from 5 to 15 years of age to re-enact the span of human history that encompasses these real-life characters and then adds a modern dimension to this epic, world-altering story, “The Greatest Story Ever Told”— She gives a microphone to several of the “townspeople” for a unique “man-on-the-street” perspective, who report the heavenly commotion and it’s impact on those fortunate enough to have witnessed it all in a way not possible in Jesus’ day—A kind of Christ Mass Media event, as it were.

It is time to cast this year’s Christmas Pageant. Any Parishioner between the age of 5 and 15 is eligible. Please contact the Parish office for more details. The number is (978) 452-6611



“Sing a New Song Unto the Lord...” Join the Saint Francis Parish Children’s Choir!

St. Francis has formed a new Children’s Choir and is looking for new members.

The Children’s Choir under the able direction of the parish’s Musical Director, Mr. David Keefe was initiated as a result of a suggestion made in the recent Parish Survey in an effort to continue encouraging young people in the parish toward greater involvement in the parish community. Bring your best voices and join in the harmonious happenings on Wednesdays at 6:00p.m. Practices are held in the Church!



Children's Choir

“The Giving Tree...”

It’s a tradition of sharing something special with someone special who is in need.

And St. Francis Parish continues their spirit of giving!

As in past years, the Giving Tree will stand tall in the Church foyer beginning Sunday November 27th.

The tree will be covered in gift tags highlighting a particular age of a child or specific need.

The Giving Tree tags will be available through the weekend of December 4th. All gifts should be dropped off by December 10th.

We thank you for your generosity and willingness to help in this effort to make someone’s Christmas a bit merrier!



Traditions of Our Faith...

"The Advent Wreath"

The Advent Wreath is a symbol of anticipation used by Catholics to remind us of the approach of Christmas, which is the birthday of Jesus Christ; Our Savior. The Advent Wreath consists of a circular wreath of evergreen, signifying the vitality and unending nature of God's promises of the Messiah whom He sent to redeem us and be with us always; not just at Christmas, but throughout our daily lives, in which are placed four candles; 3 purple; 1 pink, signifying the four weeks of the Season of Advent.

Prayers are recited and passages from scripture are read, usually at the family table prior to sharing an evening meal. One candle is lit at the beginning of each week prior to Christmas; the pink candle being the third one lit before Christmas Week begins. The pink candle is lit on what is known as "*Gaudete*" Sunday. "*Gaudete*" is the Latin word for "rejoice"

This year, Advent begins on Sunday November 27th. Bring the spirit of "Christ-mas" to your home with this great tradition. Anticipating the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in a reverent and special way in preparation of the celebration of his birth.



St. Francis Parish

115 Wheeler Road
Dracut, Massachusetts 01826

Phone: 978-452-6611
Fax: 978-452-0772

PRESORTED
STANDARD
NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE PAID
DRACUT, MA
PERMIT NO 63