

Bulletin/Weekly Update

December 27, 2020



St. Mary's 2020
Advent Story



Special Edition: Our Advent Story

As Advent 2020 comes to a close, it's time to pause and reflect on the past four weeks. Scroll down for all the wonderful details of our parish Advent story. We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

ROCKs (Raising Our Catholic Kids) Advent Project and St. Nick Delivery

ADVENT PROJECT

This year our ROCKs Advent project was an Advent Blessing Jar. Kits were made available to our parishioners that included a jar, nativity decal sheet, a tea light and paper stars. The jar was to be decorated with the nativity decal and stars were to be put in the blessing jar for each act of kindness that was displayed during Advent. Extra kits were placed in the back of church so that all parishioners could participate. On Christmas Eve, families who attend Mass in person will display their lit jars outside church, and families who watch from home will put their lit jars in a window or on their porch.

ST. NICK DELIVERY

Our St. Mary ROCKs group organized a St. Nick Delivery to approximately 170 parish families with children in the elementary grades on December 5. A special Thank You to the high school students for helping to fill bags and the many delivery elves who helped deliver them to the doorsteps of our parish families. Each family received a bag with an Advent project kit, Advent activity pages, candy canes, chocolate kisses, hot chocolate, and a St. Mother Teresa book.

Advent Facebook Group

A private Facebook Group called *Ripples of God's Love – Advent Edition* was created to provide a community building opportunity for our St. Mary Parish and for ALL who wanted to connect more during this season of Advent. 119 people (and still growing) have come together to share daily devotions and FUN opportunities to celebrate the season together!

Parish Council Outreach

Because we are not able to gather *en masse* this Advent and Christmas season, the Parish Council decided to reach out to all of our parishioners to check in, ask if their parish could do anything to help them, and answer any questions they might have. We've left a lot of messages and are still working through the list, but the conversations that we have had have been wonderful! We know that times are difficult and we want to do all that we can to connect to parishioners! Please do not hesitate to reach out if there is anyway we can help you.

Needs Tree

Wow! We sure came through in 2020 despite all the challenges brought forth by COVID. Through your generous support, we were able to provide gifts for Apricity (Mooring House and Casa Clare), COTS For Women, Men and Moms, Edenbrook Nursing Home, Harbor House, Manor Care Nursing Home, Pillars, Ryan Community, Salvation Army, Villa Phoenix, Youth Go, and 4 individual families. On behalf of the Human Concerns Committee, thank you for always supporting our community.

A special thank you to Annie Van Stralen, Sue Rogers and the Human Concerns Committee for shopping, delivering, and organizing.

Neighborhood Outreach

As part of our neighborhood outreach we delivered 50 "St. Nick" bags to our closest neighbors on State, Walnut, 7th and 8th streets. We shared a short message of joy, some sweet treats and oranges. As a sign of gratitude one of our neighbors returned the gesture and delivered a handwritten note and ornament to us.

Warming Shelter

During the first weekend of Advent, St. Mary's parishioners provided over 75 dishes for the Pillars Adult Shelter. The parking lot was bustling as hot meals and dishes were exchanged. Thank you to our amazing crew who organized and delivered the meals each evening!

Virtual Advent Storytime

Families hopped on a Zoom call to pray together and to join storytellers Fr. Bill and Kara Main for two great stories. Fr. Bill shared *Gloria the Christmas Angel* by Scott Anthony Asalone which is about a humble little angel who stumbled on to the birth of God's Son and her life changed forever! Kara Main shared *I Was There the First Christmas* by Sandra Brooks which describes Mary and the birth of Jesus and has everyone guessing who is speaking.

Window Decorations

Again this year, the Christmas story unfolded in our windows with beautifully hand-painted figures and lots of lights. Viewers tuned in on their car radios to hear narration and music. Exciting news: we took 2nd Place in the Hope for the Holidays Downtown Appleton Decoration Contest! Thanks to all who voted!

Open House

Since attending a Christmas Mass in person isn't an option for everyone this year, our Christmas Crew organized an Open House. Family groups were able to sign up for time slots to visit church safely with their own small group.

Video Parish Family Christmas Card

We all miss seeing our parish family members! The Christmas Crew organized a video Christmas card featuring photos and video greetings from parish family members. Check stmaryparish.org on Christmas Eve to view!

Advent Evenings of Prayer

This year, Fr. Bill highlighted the tradition of Vespers, or evening prayer, with Evenings of Prayer on each Monday of Advent. These beautiful services helped us to slow down and find peace in Jesus, our Stillness in the Chaos.

Virtual and In-Person Advent Connect Groups

Fr. Bill hosted a virtual Tuesday evening Connect Group to discuss the beautiful Sunday Readings of Advent. Mary Ann Otto hosted a masked and socially distanced in-person session on Wednesday mornings. Participants came together to pray and share their insights about God's Word especially in light of today's world.

Beacon Ministries Update: Grades 1-5

Parents stopped by the parish on Nov. 23 to pick up their *Family Advent Experience Bag* and found out there was an adventure inside! In the weeks that followed, families at home and together as part of virtual Zoom sessions discovered the meaning of Advent. They used their Bibles to explore Scripture, received an Advent wreath, and prayed the special Advent prayer Fr. Bill wrote for the parish to use this year.

Families also explored the ancestors of Jesus who were waiting for him in the Old Testament through the Jesse Tree. Using their Bibles and watching short video clips, the families created ornaments which represented people like Abraham, David and Ruth.

Also in their *Advent Experience Bag* was a special box which contained a *Christmas Star* mask, a star chocolate pop, a star tealight and an invitation to search their Bibles for the passage about the journey of the Magi to visit the Holy Family.

Beacon Ministries Update: Grades 6-11

Our Middle and High School youth received a special invitation to a virtual movie night featuring the short film, "The Shepherd". They enjoyed hot cocoa, popcorn, and conversation after.

Music Update

Advent and Christmas music preparation is always a heartwarming but frantic time of year. The music selected is to be comforting as it tells the salvation story but also familiar to help us all raise our voices joyfully to our Lord. You may have noticed that the music during the Advent season was the same throughout. This was done purposefully to help maintain the theme of "Light" that Fr. Bill spoke about. The music was a combination of traditional,

with contemporary, and even a soft version of a praise and worship style. Our Christmas choices will include traditional carols and a contemporary song you might remember from last year's Advent and Christmas season (*Make Room*).

Since the Christmas season will last for six liturgies during the next four weekends there are plenty of carols to be sung! Please join with us as we joyfully lift our voices this Christmas season!

Holiday Office Hours

The parish office will be closed on December 24, 25, 28, 31, and January 1. We wish you and yours a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

St. Joseph Food Program Collection Jan. 2/3

This time, we're collecting international food items (Chinese, Italian, Mexican, German - think of your favorites!). No glass containers or perishable or expired items please. Collection carts will be in the back of church and in the Marian Way.

Prayer Needs

Contact Luanne Witthuhn (dlaawi@gmail.com) or Ann Walkowski (920-428-0969) if you have a prayer need. Please remember the requests in our prayer baskets.

In Loving Memory

Please pray for the family of Jackie Thiel (sister of Ron Colling). May fond memories comfort you at this time. If you have lost a loved one and would like them to be remembered in the bulletin, call the parish office at 739-5119.

Mass Attendance

In an effort to help you determine your safest options, we are providing Mass attendance numbers from the previous week. For reference, our church capacity at 25% is 120. Week of December 14-20:

Monday, 5:30 pm (16)	Saturday, 4:30 pm (56)
Tuesday, 5:30 pm (12)	Sunday 7:45 am (47)
Wednesday, 12:05 pm (33)	Sunday, 9:45 am (69)
Thursday, 12:05 pm (40)	Sunday, 6:30 pm (16)

Mass Times & Intentions

Monday, December 28, 5:30pm	For the Spiritual & Physical Well-being of the Lee & Mary Hurley Family
Tuesday, December 29, 5:30pm	Parishioners of St. Mary
Wednesday, December 30, 12:05pm	Harry Morse
Thursday, December 31, 12:05pm	Phillip Lampert
Friday, January 1, 8:30am	For the Spiritual & Physical Well-being of Paul Gerard Engel
Saturday, December 26, 4:30pm	Candace Schoultz
Sunday, December 27, 7:45am	For the Spiritual & Physical Well-being of the Ellen & Tom Hoover Family
9:45am	Marie Smits
6:30pm	Karen Ellenbecker

We Gratefully Give

So much is different this Christmas season, yet the focus and dedication of our parish ministries remain constant. Your generous online donations are needed now to help sustain parish ministries that reflect the promise of God's love. The upheaval and distress caused by COVID-19 give these ministries added importance, and your kindness will help us continue our outreach to our parish families and neighborhood. From your computer, smartphone or tablet, you'll be able to set up a recurring donation or make a one-time gift.

St. Mary Parish Support			
December 2020	Budget	Received	Variance
received 12/14- 12/18/2020		31,153	
December- month to date:	158,000	76,628	-81,372
7/1/20-12/31/2020			
Fiscal Year To Date :	484,000	389,213	-94,787

There are two easy ways to give with Faith Direct:

1. Head to stmaryparish.org and click on the blue DONATE button in the upper-right corner of the homepage.
2. Text to Give - Open a new text message and enter (920-294-1189) in the 'TO' Field. In the 'TEXT MESSAGE' field, enter a dollar amount, then hit SEND. You will be prompted for the next steps. Need help? Call Faith Direct at 1-866-507-8757 or contact Pam Acker in the parish office at (920) 739-5119 or packer@stmaryparish.org.

End of Year Contributions

The IRS requires donations to be received **ON or BEFORE Dec. 31, 2020 to qualify for your 2020 deductions**. Please note: the parish office will be closed on December 31 & January 1 so plan accordingly. Checks intended for 2021 MUST be dated 1-1-2021 or after.

COVID Tax Tip: New for 2020 - Most taxpayers can deduct up to \$300 in charitable contributions without itemizing deductions!

Following tax law changes, cash donations of up to \$300 made this year by December 31, 2020 are now deductible without having to itemize when people file their taxes in 2021.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act includes several temporary tax law changes to help charities. This includes the special \$300 deduction designed especially for people who choose to take the standard deduction, rather than itemize their deductions.

This change allows individual taxpayers to claim a deduction of up to \$300 for cash donations made to charity during 2020. This deduction lowers both adjusted gross income and taxable income – translating into tax savings for those making donations to qualifying tax-exempt organizations. Please see your tax accountant for more details.

Events Calendar

Monday, Dec. 28

Parish office closed

7:00pm Boy Scouts/St. Anne Room

Tuesday, Dec. 29

2:00pm Rosary Group/Chapel

6:15pm Confessions/Chapel

Wednesday, Dec. 30

9:00am Connect Group with Mary Ann Otto/L7

Thursday, Dec. 31

Parish office closed

Friday, Jan. 1 Happy New Year!

Parish office closed

Saturday, Jan. 2

St. Joseph Food Program Collection

9:00am Confessions/Chapel

10:00am THEO/Community Room

Sunday, Jan. 3

St. Joseph Food Program Collection

11:00am RCIA/Community Room

Your Ministers & Support Staff

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In Joy & Hope with Father Bill

I would like to share my Christmas Homily with you. Hopefully, there is something in these words which will minister to you on these Holy Days of Christmas.

If you are like me, and, in fact, like many people across our nation and world, these last nine months have presented particular challenges like none other. The Washington Post asked readers to sum up the year 2020 in one word or phrase, offering their reasoning. I would like to start here because I think it would be so disconnected not to bring the hope of the Christmas story to the reality that has overwhelmed us. What has 2020 been like?

Here are the top three descriptors that the editors of The Post came across again and again from their readers.

1. Exhausting...All of our challenges have been drawn-out, slow-motion car wrecks. From COVID, to the election, to unemployment, to no sports, to some sports and no fans, it just keeps dragging on. I feel trapped in a corner, and all I can do is try to block the next thing that is thrown at me.
2. Lost...We've lost our way as a country. The year was lost for students, families, weddings, funerals, holidays, positive human interaction. Lives were lost unnecessarily to disease. It feels like being lost in the wilderness with no compass.
3. Chaotic...Coronavirus, aftermath of general election, inability to acquire provisions like toilet paper, racial injustice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg dying...families being torn apart. I do not recognize this country anymore.

Just to fill out the list, here are a few more single words to describe 2020: surreal, a television show that never knows when to end, fallow...a time of temporary stillness...limbo, heartbreaking, nightmare, broken dreams, stifling, dumpster fire, a year of missing, you are on mute...unmute...can you hear me?

I think there is something here that may resonate with everyone here. So I have identified the reality that we bring to the Lord at this

celebration of Christmas. Now let me offer some thoughts that take us closer to the gift which is Christmas.

This is a true story. This is a real-life conversation shared by Ana:

My eight-year-old son in the car today: "Do you want me to throw the confetti in my pocket?"
Me: "Not in the car! Why do you have confetti in your pocket?"
Eight-year-old: "It's my emergency confetti. I carry it everywhere in case there is Good News!"

We might ask ourselves, "What is the Good News of Christmas?" It is this...

- God in Jesus, the Son of God, wanted so much to come so close to us...to never leave us alone...to cry with us when we cry and to laugh with us when we laugh. The Mystery of Incarnation is that God in Jesus is with us, for us and in us.
- The gift the Lord wants to give to us just simply needs to be received. Have you opened your heart to Jesus with a prayer along these lines? Jesus, I want to experience more deeply your presence in my life. In the midst of the chaos, when I feel like I am at my wit's end, Jesus, I want to trust that you are close to me...that you have made your home in my heart. Sometimes I just go through the motions but I really want to receive the peace and joy that only you can give me. Jesus, come into my life. Jesus, come into my life.
- We all have our own weaknesses or fears or struggles. Jesus wants only to be our strength.
- The beginning of Jesus' life among us was not a piece of cake either. There was fear accompanying his birth - a palpable meanspiritedness as doors were closed to Mary and Joseph - a danger from political forces that wanted to destroy Jesus - through it all, the Holy Family hung on mightily to their trust in the Lord God. "Let it be done to me as you say!"
- No matter the darkness of the night, Jesus is our Radiant Dawn. In the stillness, Jesus is close. Let us not be afraid of stillness and silence. Jesus wants to get our attention. Let us make time and space

in our lives when we give Jesus our undivided attention.

With Father Austin Fleming, whose blog [The Concord Pastor](#) you may want to check out, let us pray:

Lord, let your love come upon me, let your Spirit fill me, cover me, overshadow me, envelop me, overwhelm me, engulf me, anoint me, caress me, hold me, melt me, initiate me, infuse me, bathe me, and surround me. Let your love grip me, engage me, embrace me, feed me, and touch me...Lord, let your love come upon me. Send me your Spirit from above and below, on my left and my right, from behind and before me, from within and without...Send me your Spirit, Lord, and let your love come upon me...

Let all say Amen!

Amen!