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ST. CHRISTOPHER PARISH

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# The Belltower Beacon

*A publication to inform, welcome and inspire the spirited community of St. Christopher.*

Volume 22: Issue 85

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## REMEMBERING DEACON TOM LONG



Deacon Tom, a humble servant of God, embraced every opportunity to bring others to a closer relationship with Christ and into closer communion with our Catholic faith. For those who knew Deacon

Tom, like Fr. Dan Schlegel commented during Vespers, it makes perfect sense that he might hear the oft-used words in Matthew 25:23 upon entering into eternal rest on December 13, 2021: "... well done, good and faithful servant ... Enter into the joy of your Lord." Bidding farewell to Tom was one of the most painful experiences this parish family has shared. Fr. Dan, now Secretary and Vicar of Clergy and Religious, recalled meeting Tom years earlier as they sang in choir together. He knew Tom to be easy-going and hard working. Fr. Dan admired that Tom was happy to stay in the background and provide support wherever needed. Our pastoral staff and music ministry made sure that Deacon Tom's send-off was beautifully done. For many years, Deacon Tom and his wife Kathy (deceased), were vital, ever-present and reassuring members of our community. They became the models of Christian living: unwavering faith, unconditional positive regard for others, and selfless giving. Though they participated in countless parish initiatives and ministries, their generosity and influence extended well beyond our Church campus. The Longs were inseparable, a beautiful love story to the end, and are greatly missed. After the death of the love of his life in 2016, Deacon Tom continued to serve our parish wherever he was needed. He served at Mass and ministered to the people of St. Christopher from early adulthood until the end of his earthly journey.

Deacon Tom was a man of many gifts and talents, someone who drew others to him by his welcoming attitude, empathetic listening and keen sense of humor. He ignored barriers and was quick to embrace others regardless of their differences. As believers in the resurrection of the dead and eternity with Christ, we rejoice that Tom has reached his ultimate destination, that his death "was swallowed up in victory ... victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:55-56, RSVCE) Even so, his death results in a painful sting felt by those left behind, primarily his adult children and Tom's brother, Tim. The Longs raised their three children (Brigid, Matthew and Timothy) to be the same way: to love God, to respect and appreciate God's blessings and to take care of those in greatest need. They were proud of their adult children and spoke of them often. This past year, Deacon Tom was overjoyed to have his first granddaughter, Sloan, to admire and spoil. (Tom's biography and personal story were featured in our September 2020 issue.)

According to Deacon Tom's daughter, Brigid Long Groves, her dad was a very involved and fun parent who tried new ways to entertain them and laughed when they failed to work. For example, Tom would "set up camp" for them by the fireplace in their living room, bring down their sleeping bags, and fill the room with laughter. The children learned early that their dad was an avid history buff who "had a great appreciation for history and its impact on the here and now," so much so that family vacations were usually of a historical nature. One of the most memorable vacations the children had with their dad was a recent trip to Italy, where they toured Vatican City and the surrounding regions. It was an incredible experience that they will never forget as the children watched their father become enamored with Rome's rich history and deeply touched by the beautiful display of our Roman

*continued ...*

Catholic faith. Of course he also thoroughly enjoyed Italy's beautiful architecture, exquisite cuisine and regional wines.



Tom also had a lifelong passion for science and knowing how things work, characteristics that served him well professionally (to include teaching physics at high school and college levels). He instilled this curiosity in his children. Tom was such a positive influence upon Brigid that she pursued her undergraduate degree in chemistry and went on to earn her doctorate in pharmacy. Matthew and Timothy also inherited their parents' love of learning how things work and chose careers in mechanics and technology. They have vivid memories of growing up at St. Christopher (where Tom also grew up) and "volunteering as a family for pancake breakfasts, craft shows, Easter egg hunts and countless other events."

According to Brigid, their parents' commitment to church and community taught them the value of "servant leadership, civic duty and helping others." Matthew treasures special one-on-one Fridays with his dad on the way home from gymnastics. The ride included talk on the amateur radio as Tom took the longer route along Lake Road, so they had more time together. They would end up at Bearden's for burgers and shakes. On stormy nights, they would watch lightning coming over the lake. The youngest, Tim, describes his dad as "a unique man, a walking encyclopedia who was rarely stumped by anything historical." In addition to a lifetime of fond memories

with parents like Deacon Tom and Kathy, this past year was even more special for Tim and his wife as they welcomed their first child and Tom's first grandchild, Sloan. This precious little girl brought Deacon Tom immeasurable joy during a time when Covid was keeping us isolated with little socialization. In recent months, Tim visited his dad often. Tom's favorite topic was Sloan, wanting every tiny detail on her growth and development. All three children hope to honor their parents by continuing their favorite traditions and passing those on to Sloan. As much as they miss their dad, they see as a true blessing "that he is back with our mom, looking down on us and cracking jokes."

Deacon Tom and his younger brother, Tim, grew up in Rocky River and St. Christopher, both graduating from St. Edward High School and participating in sports and activities. He recalls that Tom was always a source of information, the voice of reason and a sounding board for others. Tim recalls where they were on the evening that Robert F. Kennedy was killed and how upset it made them. He feels that a quote from Kennedy's eulogy best describes his brother, Deacon Tom: "... I ask that he be remembered as a good and decent man who saw wrong and tried to right it and saw suffering and tried to heal it." In recent months when they could not be together, they would spend hours talking on the phone about anything and everything.

Tom's commitment to St. Christopher Parish spanned many years. The Church was the family's second home. When Tom and Kathy experienced their medical challenges, they were embraced by staff, parishioners and students that loved and respected them. When his adult children were on their own, when he found himself without Kathy, our church family became his favorite place to be to the very end. Fr. John Chlebo shares Tom's love of history and states "Tom had a particular history at St. Christopher which was unique and valuable to me in my pastoring the parish ... He remembered people and events in great detail and delighted in telling the stories of who and what." During the funeral Mass,

Fr. John mentioned how Tom would start his homilies with stories, then weave in scriptures of the day to make his point. He regrets that Tom will not be around to celebrate our Centennial, because he was understandably "so looking forward to it." As a testimonial to Deacon Tom's humility and other-centered focus, Pastoral Associate Gayle Cilimburg comments: "Although Tom loved being a deacon, he never used his status of ordination as a position of power. He supported lay ecclesial ministry and was willing to be a partner with all the laity. He was a team player and assisted in the implementation of our pastoral plans, always in attendance at parish events. He did not have to lead or be seen but was happy to support or follow."



Comments received from the Religious Education Office, the Parish School of Religion and our day school express the sorrow of losing such a dear friend, catechist and team member. Director Sharon Armstrong considers Tom a close personal friend as they have spent so many years sharing work space and PSR duties. Almost daily Tom was found in her office helping out, providing emotional support and sound advice, always with a good dose of humor. Marilu Norena, administrative assistant, came to know Deacon Tom more recently but noticed right away that he was always willing to help. She admired the great love he had for the youth of the parish. Tom was a mentor to the younger adults, always "strikingly honest" in the words of Youth Minister Eric Perusek, "he was reliable, supportive, loving, refreshing, honest about his faith while at the same

time funny and fun.” Pastoral Minister Logan Feldkamp noted that “Tom was always willing to step up and do whatever was needed, he was a man of great service and love for his community.” Deacon Tom was an important part of our Confirmation Team, highly regarded by staff, catechists, and students alike. His teaching partner, John Burke, saw Tom as “a guiding light in church teachings, a true witness for Christ, he truly loved God with all his heart and soul.” Catechist Theresa Mystic described him as “brilliant, always there for others, always with a smile on his face, and a great role model.” As for this writer/catechist, Tom and Kathy were the first to welcome our family to St. Christopher almost 36 years ago. Their encouragement and loving attitude led to our involvement in church ministries. We became close personal friends and celebrated many milestones. School principal Scott Raiff remembers Tom as “a source of inspiration who continued to persevere, work and contribute to the life of the parish despite the health challenges he faced. He did this while maintaining a wry and self-deprecating sense of humor that never failed to lighten the moment.”

Because we were so accustomed to seeing him around our campus, we sometimes forget the extent of his involvement in just about every ministry. For example, before the pandemic changed everything, Tom was part of our choir. He had a voice that commanded attention, whether preaching from the ambo or singing from the loft. It was a weekly habit for Tom to be singing in choir and Kathy bringing them Communion. Music Director Bob McMurray has only the fondest memories of those years. He recalls that Tom was part of the Bass Section that met often and bonded over the extra help they sometimes needed. They made their presence known to Bob during the funeral services. According to Bob, “Tom was loved dearly by the music ministry. His presence brought kindness, caring and many belly laughs, others felt blessed to work with him. Tom became much more than a member of the choir.” On a personal level, Bob shared, “Tom became my dear friend.”

Tom was a good friend to many; his kind, approachable demeanor drew others to him. According to parishioner Ken Szabo and his wife, Carol, the families became close friends over 30 years ago. They participated in the same ministries, volunteered and raised their children together. According to Ken, “our families laughed, cried, prayed and provided each other with love and support. Tom and Kathy were always ready to share their time and talents.” One of Tom’s greatest gifts was answering Ken’s question “Why are we here?” Tom’s answer: “To know, love and serve God and each other.” Deacon Tom’s homilies usually contained similar truths, always leaving us with much to discern and hopefully imitate. In one of his last sermons, Tom suggested that we write our own mission statements, “so we know why we’ve been sent.”

Some friends came through Tom’s mom, Ruth, before she died. Deacon Tom and Kathy met Judith Albanese through her many years of friendship with Ruth. Judy recalls Ruth telling her of Tom’s childhood desire to become a priest, how she would make him vestments, help him set up an altar, and he would “play priest.” In hindsight, Judith believes that this childhood activity was the beginning of Tom’s calling which remained with him through life’s twists and turns. Also through his mom, Deacon Tom met Rev. Jon Fancher, pastor of RR Presbyterian, when he became Ruth’s neighbor. Rev. Fancher came to know Tom and Kathy during their visits to Mrs. Long. He admired how their children were so caring and how lovingly they treated Ruth.

Through it all, Deacon Tom stayed passionate about his Catholicism and the Word of God. After raising his family and meeting career demands, the calling eventually became a reality when he was ordained. He became a supportive resource for retreats, prayer initiatives, Sacramental preparation and community based groups like Christ Renews His Parish. Whether speaking to senior members, engaged



couples, expectant parents or teenagers, it was when encouraging a closer relationship with Christ that Tom flourished and was most comfortable. When processing this great loss with the current Confirmation class (where Tom had been a catechist), the student comments were particularly touching – “he was a great teacher; he’ll be greatly missed; Mass will never be the same; he inspired us to be better people; he was always present and fun in youth group; we hope he can finally be with his wife.” Deacon Tom had the unique gift of reaching people of all ages, and he shared it generously. He and Kathy handled their difficulties with grace and gratitude, turning to a loving God for healing and comfort.

So as we keep Deacon Tom and Kathy in our prayers and fondest memories, we also celebrate that they now enjoy God’s promise which is greater infinitely than any earthly happiness. In their honor, let us follow their example by becoming instruments of peace to one another and remain faithful, humble servants. Brigid, Matthew and Tim, we continue to pray for your families. In your dad’s own words, “hang on to each other for dear life.” Your parents will always be remembered fondly and with utmost gratitude. In the midst of pain, we rejoice with you for we all know that “...it is only by dying that we are born to eternal life.” (Prayer of St. Francis) Their contributions, their humor, and their joyful presence will always be an important part of St. Christopher history.

*Carmen Everett DeHaan*



## LADIES NIGHT OUT

Last fall we made the decision to postpone Ladies Night Out until May of 2022 and, unfortunately, we will need to postpone our fun evening together once more. COVID-19 has certainly put a new twist on event planning and a new meaning behind adaptability. We are all ready for this life-changing pandemic to be over and to socialize freely with our friends and family. I thank you all for your understanding and urge you to dig deep for patience as the pandemic continues to unfold around us. We don't know when we will be able to socialize without the laundry list of COVID-19 concerns churning in the back of our minds, but we do know this: we WILL have a Ladies Night Out for the wonderful women in our parish this year. Mark your calendars for October 13, 2022. Optimistically, it will be the event we all enjoyed in 2019: an evening filled with great wine, tasty food, fun auction prizes to support Moriah Family Shelter, and fabulous friends. However, if we have learned one thing through this pandemic, it is that we cannot plan anything in detail. Ladies Night Out will happen this fall. It might not be back to normal. It might be outside. It might be purely social, without a fundraiser. It might be virtual. Whatever it is, it will happen and I trust that God will provide exactly what we need to reconnect once more. Thank you all for your patience and understanding as we continue to adapt and reconstruct Ladies Night Out to support the physical, mental, and social needs of the beautiful women in our parish.

Laura Hunter

## NEW ST. CHRISTOPHER STATUE

In early December our new St. Christopher statue arrived in our church to occupy the space that had been renovated for him. Since he was a “giant of a man” an appropriate location that was enlarged was accorded him in the alcove on the center east side of the church. The previous smaller St. Christopher statue was installed in our school.

On December 5 at 11:30 Mass, Fr. John dedicated and blest this new statue as part of the celebration of our parish centennial, donated by the Buckley and Haas family. The statue was designed by internationally renowned Norbert Koehn of Koehn Sculptors and Designers Ltd. in South Euclid, Ohio. It is carved out of a 3,000 pound block of Lindenwood.

The dedication prayer:

*Lord, we bless you for you alone are holy.*

*You fill us with your kindness.*

*Today we praise you for the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on Saint Christopher, your generous servant in whose honor we bless and dedicate this statue.*

*May we follow in the footsteps of the Lord, keeping before us the example of Saint Christopher, and grow to maturity measured not by nature, but by the fullness of Christ's love manifest among us.*

*May we proclaim Jesus' gospel by word and deed and, shouldering our crosses daily, expend ourselves in the service of our sisters and brothers.*

*Like the patron of our parish family, Saint Christopher, may we help to carry others through the waters of new life as living witnesses to the gospel.*

*As we carry out our earthly duties, may we be filled with the spirit of Christ, keeping our eyes fixed on the glories of heaven where you live and reign forever and ever.*

*Amen!*

Gayle Cilimburg



## PREPARING FOR LENT 2022



After the snow storms in January and February, it's hard to believe that spring is just around the corner. Along with the changing of seasons comes the Church's great Lenten season in preparation for the Easter celebrations. This begs the question: what is the best way to experience Lent this year?

Right from the start, it is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way – therefore no “best way” – to experience Lent. The Holy Spirit touches the hearts of Christians in various ways. Each person responds differently to the Spirit's varied movement. However, there are some basic pointers that can be used to make Lent a prayerful and enriching season of grace to prepare to celebrate with Paschal Joy the Easter season.

During Lent, the Church focuses renewed interest upon the three traditional disciplines of the Christian life: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The Gospel reading (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18) for Ash Wednesday highlights these traditional practices, calling them to mind at the very start of the Lenten

season. Of course, every Christian is called to pray, fast, and give alms or works of charity throughout the year, but Lent offers an opportunity to intensify one's efforts in these facets of the Christian life.

One suggestion for intensifying one's prayer life during Lent might be to attend daily Mass. Each day, Mass is offered in nearly every parish throughout the Diocese at various times throughout the day. Another suggestion might be to daily read from the Bible. The Gospel according to Mark, the shortest of the Gospels, is a great place to start. Otherwise, the practice of praying over the daily Mass readings (found online at bible.usccb.org) is also a great Lenten prayer practice.

In terms of fasting, there are many ways people can fast. Based on one's health and capabilities, a suggestion for fasting during Lent might be to offer up a meal (e.g., lunch) weekly on Fridays for the hungry around the world. The money saved from such fasting could easily be donated to Catholic Charities of the Diocese as a concrete gesture of almsgiving. Fasting does not have to just involve food or drink. Another possibility is a technology fast. Perhaps on Fridays in Lent, one might consider fasting from social media for a period (e.g., one hour beginning at 3 p.m.)

or, for the more adventurous, giving up a certain platform like Facebook for the entire Lenten season. The possibilities are endless, but the intention of each one's fasting ideally would be to give up that which prevents a fuller relationship with God and neighbor.

Finally, in addition to increasing one's weekly tithing or donation to the Annual Catholic Charities Appeal, a suggestion for almsgiving is to discover how one could become more involved in the parish. There is a need for more people, especially young adults, to step up to the plate and volunteer. This, too, is a form of almsgiving – a giving back to the community. To begin volunteering, one might consider speaking with one of the priests after Mass to see where the need is greatest. Serving the parish family in some new way this Lent is an excellent means of almsgiving.

Prayer, fasting, and almsgiving remain the tried-and-true manner of experiencing the Lenten season. There are a plethora of ways Christians can pray more intensely, fast in humility, and give alms more generously during Lent. One's imagination and an openness to the Holy Spirit's promptings are all that is needed to make this a fruitful Lent.

*Fr. Anthony Marshall*

## LADIES GUILD ACTIVITIES

The Ladies Guild sponsored some fun activities for their members both in the great outdoors as well as on Zoom. Four Holy Hikes took place during Advent. The ladies would meet at the marina on either a Saturday or Tuesday morning. They prayed for those suffering from Covid, enjoyed conversation and fellowship while experiencing the beauty of the river valley and the stress relief and exercise of a brisk walk. The December weather did not dampen the enthusiasm of those in attendance as they were a hale and hearty crew.

The Ladies Guild members were also busy learning how to decorate their Holiday tables. Guild member Natalie Meyer, owner of CNC Home & Design hosted a Zoom session where she shared her decorating ideas for a festive holiday table. Natalie is a talented young designer who was recently featured on New Day Cleveland and we hope to see Natalie in future decorating sessions.

If you are interested in joining the Ladies Guild, please contact Cindy McDonough at [cindymcdonoughcpt@gmail.com](mailto:cindymcdonoughcpt@gmail.com)

*Cindy McDonough*





# SYNOD GATHERINGS AT ST. CHRISTOPHER PARISH

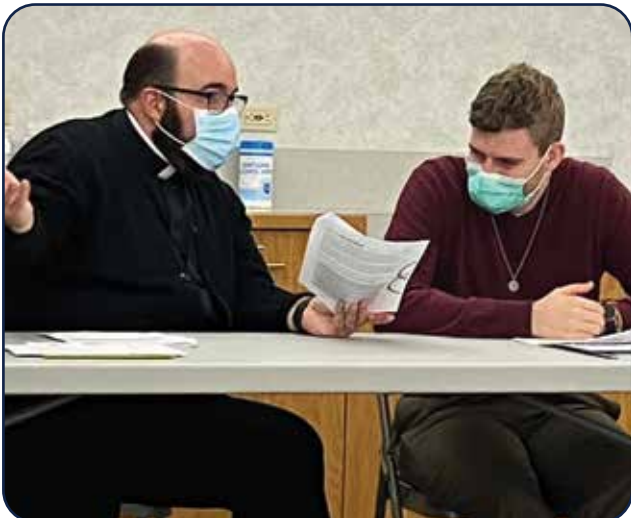
In October 2021, Pope Francis officially opened the Synod of Bishops with the theme of walking together as a community of believers. He has asked every diocese the world over to hold listening sessions with the People of God. These sessions, which began in 2021, will culminate in the formal gathering of the Synod of Bishops in 2023 in Rome. The entire People of God, in all its diversity, has been invited to participate in the upcoming Synod which will focus on the three pillars of a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.

Describing the synodal process, Pope Francis noted his goals for the upcoming Synod: *“The Synod then offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer. Today how much we miss the prayer of adoration; so many people have lost not only the habit but also the very notion of what it means to worship God! To listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world, of the need for a renewed pastoral life and of the signals we are receiving from those on the ground.”*

To this end, St. Christopher Parish conducted numerous listening sessions during the months of December, January and February. The first was held with the parish pastoral staff. Members of the RCIA were also participants in a listening session. The faculty of St. Christopher School were part of another session at the beginning of the new year. The entire parish was also invited to participate in two additional sessions. The final one was held with the members of the Parish Pastoral Council. Fr. Anthony Marshall and Logan Feldkamp were trained by the Diocese to lead these Synodal Listening Sessions and to report back to the Diocese a summary report of the parish listening sessions.

If parishioners are unable to attend one of the open listening sessions, they are invited to participate online at [dioceseofcleveland.org/synod/individual-participation](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/synod/individual-participation)

*Fr. Anthony Marshall*



## AN EVENING TAIZÉ SERVICE

St. Christopher church recently held its first Taizé prayer service. This ecumenical gathering was attended by about forty people from our parish, as well as from neighboring churches. Special thanks to Father John for opening the doors of St. Christopher and to Pastoral Associate Gayle Cilimburg, for spearheading this event.

We were led in song, chanting, and prayer by our music ministry director, Bob McMurray, and Mike Reiling from Blessed Trinity parish, on guitar. The theme was Advent, making the candle lighting especially fitting, as we awaited the coming of the Light of the World. Taizé also includes ten minutes of silent reflection.

If you were unable to attend, but would like to experience Taizé, do not worry. Attendees opined that a Lenten-themed and/or an outdoor Taizé service in our very own Centennial Park, would be a welcomed event.

Keep an eye out in the bulletin for our next Taizé service.

*Roberta Trutko*



## WHAT'S NEW IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE?

We have been very busy in the Religious Education Office this January and February. PSR is running smoothly this year. Students and teachers are finding our new PSR format of three in-person classes and one take home class per month convenient with their busy schedules. We are always looking for teachers, aides and helpers to join our Religious Education Office team to assist in educating the children of our Parish.

The 2nd graders in our Parish prepared for First Reconciliation which was originally scheduled January 7 and 9 but was rescheduled for February 6 and 11 because of COVID running rampant in January. We completed preparations and celebrated First Reconciliation on Saturday, February 12 and 19.

Preparations for First Communion are underway as we look forward to celebrating 82 First Communions during many weekend Masses in May. Please pray for these students and teachers as they complete their study of Jesus on the Eucharist.

Our 8th graders have been hard at work since September preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Please pray for these 74 students as they go on Retreat Saturday, March 12. May the Holy Spirit touch their hearts as they come closer to Confirmation day with Bishop Malesic on May 3.

**Save the date for Vacation Bible School** from June 13-17 in collaboration with Rocky River Presbyterian Church. Registration for ages 4 through 5th grade will be available at the end of April. Please watch the bulletin and website for more details.

**Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowls** are available at ALL entrances of the Church throughout Lent. For more information or any questions, please contact Sharon Armstrong in the Religious Education Office at (440) 331-6226.

*Sharon Armstrong*

## FIT FROM FAITH



On a cold January Saturday morning, a dozen parishioners and Fr. Anthony met in the atrium to attend the Fit From Faith presentation. Lindsay Fullerman, its founder and coach, conducted an interactive workshop, giving those in attendance, much to ponder. The program is designed specifically for Catholics, focusing on the whole person approach to health and wellness. Attendees went home

with hand-outs to assist in healing and empowering them in mind, body and spirit.

*Roberta Trutko*



## PRINCIPAL RAIFF RETIRES



“The sense of community at St. Christopher School is what makes the difference,” Scott Raiff stated when asked about what he liked about his time as principal of St. Christopher School. Mr. Raiff became principal at SCS in fall of 2015 after having worked for thirty years as an educator in the Mentor schools. He will retire when the school year ends this spring after being the St. Christopher School principal for the last seven school years.

Though anyone who meets Mr. Raiff can see that he is a natural in his role at St. Christopher, he didn’t always intend to be an educator. Having grown up in Parma with both parents as educators, he initially thought that he would enlist in the Navy rather than attend college. His mother talked him into trying college for a semester at Cleveland State University, and he found he liked it and decided to stay. He also thought he might attend law school after getting his bachelor’s degree, but his mother suggested education as a “back up plan.” He, once again, listened to his mother and pursued education as his career choice. Shortly thereafter he received the Cleveland State University’s Excellence in Student Teaching award. He suggested that everyone should heed their mother’s advice!

Mr. Raiff’s career in the Mentor school district started with a job teaching social studies at middle and high school levels. During his tenure with the Mentor schools, he was a classroom teacher as well as a coach. He coached football, wrestling, track, girls’ basketball, and tennis. He was also the intramurals coordinator, pep club advisor, academic challenge advisor, department chair and robotics team coordinator. He became the assistant principal of Mentor High School during his last few years with the school district.

When he learned of the opportunity to be principal of St. Christopher School, part of the appeal in becoming principal at SCS was the proximity to his home. He had commuted to Mentor as a west-sider every day for thirty years and was ready for a change and to be closer to home. He and his wife of 36 years, Tina, live in Westlake where they raised their four children. Tina, now retired, was an elementary school teacher for 36 years. Of their four children, two remain in the greater Cleveland area while the other

two are in Raleigh Durham, NC and Jersey City, NJ. They were recently blessed with their first grandchild, Grace, and Mr. Raiff says that he and Tina “can’t get enough of her!”

The academic success the students have shown during his tenure is what Mr. Raiff said he is most proud of from his time as principal of St. Christopher. This success is evident by the many merit scholarships earned by the 8th graders heading to high school as well as the success the SCS graduates have had while in high school.

Part of this academic success is surely due in part to the changes in curriculum Mr. Raiff implemented at St. Christopher School. He implemented several online learning programs which allow the children to learn at their own pace. He often, very kindly, rewarded the children who did well in these programs by paying for rewards for their achievements out of his own pocket. These rewards included pizza lunches with the principal, ice cream treats and donuts.

Aleks, one of the programs Mr. Raiff implemented is an online math program. Students were able to earn membership in what was dubbed the “Order of Aleks” if they successfully achieved 75% of their grade level topics. They had their pictures taken and displayed in the school hallway as a member in this academic order. If a student earned the right to be in the Order of Aleks, or achieved awards in Edmentum, a reading comprehension program, they were treated to donuts once a month via the Donut Club. Other online programs Mr. Raiff implemented were Achieve3000 for reading comprehension and Actively Learn. In addition, he implemented the use of the PSAT for the 8th grade class.

Academics were not the only area in which Mr. Raiff made changes – he also encouraged the students to have fun. He added ping pong, air hockey, and foosball tables as well as a pop-a-shot electronic basketball game for use during lunch and indoor recesses. During his time at SCS, many clubs were added, and he personally supervised the ping pong club, chess club, tennis club and tutoring clubs after school.

Mr. Raiff was described as an “all-in and whatever it takes administrator,” by Mrs. Molly Fuerst, the computer/stream/technology coordinator at SCS. Mrs. Fuerst added that in addition to supporting the students, Mr. Raiff provided for the teachers by encouraging Professional Learning Communities among the staff. He would often make a run to Starbucks if a teacher needed a little extra boost in the morning or afternoon. He found funds in the budget to send teachers to workshops and conferences, all to benefit the SCS community.

The SCS community showed their appreciation to Mr. Raiff last year in the spring on a day that was declared “Mr. Raiff Day.” Many of the SCS students recorded videos thanking Mr. Raiff for his dedication to the school.

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The St. Christopher School Pre-school program started in the 2019-2020 school year, and Mr. Raiff acts as its director. He is often found helping with the 3-5 year old “Little Knights.” The program has been a tremendous success, and many of the little knights have gone on to register for kindergarten after completing preschool.

After Mr. Raiff retires, he and his wife intend to travel and have planned a trip to Europe this Fall. He also hopes that he may be able to spend time in, or potentially even work for the state’s park system or perhaps the National Park Service. His love of parks and the western United States was fostered during his childhood family camping vacations to Wyoming and Montana. Whatever Mr. Raiff pursues during his retirement will surely be done with enthusiasm and a positive attitude.

*Annemarie Polito*



## YOUTH GROUP WINTER

After several weeks of escaping winter weather, it seems that the snow has finally caught up to us. With the hazardous weather and the pandemic, attendance at youth meetings has been lower than normal. This challenge, however, has given us a chance to reflect more than normal. The smaller groups have led to more vibrant discussions about matters of faith: how do we know God exists, how can we share our faith with others, where do we find our Catholic beliefs in the Bible? As always, the teens continue to amaze me with their openness and honesty. Hopefully as the weather warms, we will enjoy the outdoors and see attendance rise again, but in the mean-time, this has been a great period of reflection and prayer for the youth group.

*Eric Perusek*

## SPRING LINE UP

**FEB. 17 - SPRING KICK OFF**

7P - BOTTLEHOUSE LAKEWOOD - APPETIZERS - GAMES

**MAR. 9 - BLANKET MAKING**

ST. LUKE - TIE BLANKET MAKING - 6:30P

**MAR. 16-25 - NIGHT OF CONFESSIONS/NINE NIGHTS**

DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND NIGHT OF CONFESSIONS - ALL PARISHES - 5 TO 8PM

NIGHT PRAYER - TRANSFIGURATION PARISH - 8:15PM

**MAR. 30 - BOWLING NIGHT**

MADISON SQUARE LANES

**APR. 3-5 - MISSION**

ST. LUKE MISSION - FR. DAMIAN FERRENCE

**MAY 5 - CASINO NIGHT**

ST. CHRIS 6PM - CASINO GAMES - BARTENDER - MAGIC PERFORMANCE - CINCO DE MAYO THEME

**EVERY THURSDAY - GRAPEVINE**

ST. LUKE 7P - DISCUSSION - FRIENDSHIP - FOLLOWED BY SOCIAL

## YOUNG ADULTS READY TO "SPRING" INTO WARMER WEATHER

After a few months of hibernating off the winter blues (and the COVID surge in Northeast Ohio) the West Side Young Adult Group is eager to resume its meetings! Our lineup for February through May offers a wide variety of activities and experiences for those in their 20s and 30s. Casual nights out, prayer and service opportunities, and a Cinco de Mayo-themed casino event highlight the lineup. Additional events continue to run through the diocese, including weekly young adult meetings with the “Grapevine” group at St. Luke, other special events in the Parma Young Adult Group, and diocesan-wide programming such as the Evening of Confessions and Nine Nights of Night Prayer. Cleveland’s Catholic young adult community is growing rapidly and there is no shortage of opportunities to get involved! Want more information on upcoming events? Email Logan Feldkamp, Pastoral Minister at [lfeldkamp@stchrisparish.com](mailto:lfeldkamp@stchrisparish.com).

*Logan Feldkamp*



## CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK



A midweek winter storm couldn't put a damper on St. Christopher School and Preschool celebration of Catholic Schools Week. While our celebration of CSW may have been cut short by a day, it was, nevertheless, thoroughly enjoyed by all. The week started with a school family Mass. SCS students served as lectors, prayed the petitions, and brought up the gifts. The school Open House and Art Show followed the Mass. Both current and prospective families toured the school and preschool. They also got to enjoy the artwork produced by SCS students, which was displayed throughout the school's halls.

On Monday, the students and staff enjoyed a show by Rick Smith Jr., a nationally renowned magician, illusionist, and holder of four Guinness Book of World Records. Throughout

his high energy and interactive show, everyone was amazed by Rick's displays of mentalism, sleight of hand tricks, and card throwing demonstrations. Later in the day, students and staffers enjoyed an ice cream social courtesy of PATHS.

The school celebrated a school Mass on Tuesday. Fr. John's homily spoke to the importance of being a joyful people – the perfect message for Catholic Schools Week. After Mass, younger students paired up with older ones for collaborative activities including games, crafts and prayer. In the afternoon our middle school students presented collaboratively developed science lessons to students in grades K-5. The SCS tradition of Science Share is valued by all and gives the middle schoolers an opportunity to develop their leadership and communication skills. Science Share lessons were presented throughout the rest of the week.



A highlight of every CSW is the school's annual Talent Show. This year's hour-long show was truly exceptional. It included individual musical and dance acts, comedy routines, group performances, and a martial arts demonstration. Teachers Julie Dzurec and Mary Meler did an outstanding job planning and coordinating this year's show. Students Madeline Cook and Tricia Cukon were also excellent in their roles as show emcees. The event was also special in that parents and grandparents were able to attend and enjoy a great show. Snow days put a stop to Thursday's and Friday's activities. They would have included all-school Bingo (another great CSW tradition) and a performance by the St. Edward High School Trash Talkers, a very unique percussion ensemble that uses steel trash cans and lids for instruments. SCS loves the Trash Talkers and their humorous and high energy show is always a hit. The performance is being rescheduled for later in the year.

While the weather shortened our celebration of Catholic Schools Week, our students, families, and staff made sure it was a joyful one. Our parish school is a vibrant one, preparing students spiritually and academically to make a difference in the world. The SCS staff would like to thank the parish community for their ongoing support of the school.

*Scott Raiff*





## GIFT PROGRAM INSPIRES CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

What makes the true spirit of Christmas come alive at St. Christopher? For me, it is seeing individuals and families dropping off gifts to make wishes come true for our 16 non profit agencies serving those in need. Through the annual Giving in Faith Together (GIFT) program, parishioners' generosity is always inspiring and evident in the abundance of gifts and gift card donations collected in December.

This year was even more meaningful with the renewed GIFT Program sponsored by the Social Concerns Committee. It was great to see SCC members and Confirmation students (organized by Sharon Armstrong, Director of Religious Education) sort and load the gifts together into the agencies' cars as they arrived to claim their wishes. While the program was still active in 2020, it was downsized to gift cards, online and mail-in donations for safety reasons due to the pandemic.

St. Colman Church has long been a participant in the program. Sr. Marilyn Nichol wrote, "We shared your gifts of warm hats, gloves and financial donations at our monthly meal. Your gifts will provide caring and warmth for a long time to come." The House of Champions is an after school care service on the near West Side. Sr. Mary Kay sent her prayers and a big thank you on behalf of all the children. The children included Mason, Nelson and Kendra who sent a card thanking parishioners for their generosity.

A new agency added this year, Edna House provides temporary housing and services for women in recovery. Jenn Lasky, Executive Director of the Edna House wrote: "Everything you give adds to the safety, support and dignity of our women and organization."

The generous spirit of the people of St. Christopher has impacted the lives of many who struggle daily with lack of basic needs of food, clothing and support. May you continue to share your prayers and resources with those in need throughout the year.

Be on the lookout for more details about the SCC Lenten Soup Supper. If you are interested in more about social justice issues go to the SCC Facebook page, the SCC website ([stchrisparish.com/ministries/social-concerns-committee/](http://stchrisparish.com/ministries/social-concerns-committee/)), or contact John Hosek at [jjudehosek@gmail.com](mailto:jjudehosek@gmail.com).



*Sharon Hosek*





## SCHOOL FUNDRAISER "HAWAIIAN KNIGHTS" A ROUSING SUCCESS

On February 12, 200+ guests escaped the cold at Hawaiian Knights, the school fundraiser put on by PATHS (Parents and Teachers Helping Students). Guests were welcomed by swaying palm trees, steel drum music, and enjoyed a tiki bar, Hawaiian-inspired dinner as well as the chance to bid on more than 80 silent auction and raffle packages. The incredible tiki bar was built by Kevin Buddie, Tony Pichotta, Graham Post, and Breese Watson.

The event raised over \$75,000 to benefit our day school students through PATHS initiatives such as technology equipment and programming, teacher supplies, extracurricular school-sponsored clubs, field trips, and recess supplies. Guests were told "thank you" by students in a charming video produced by Kevin Tennant. Hawaiian Knights would not have been possible without the dedication of the planning committee.

Committee members included: Julie Carr, Gina Christoffers, Allison Coale, Jen Conroy, Mary Kay Curtis, Cassy Hubka, Laura Kowalski, Anamarija Machesky, Andrea McGannon, Mara Myers, Susan Paez, Micaela Pap, Sarah Pap, Sue Pichotta, Kristin Post, Angela Rosati, Katie Shivak, Allison Tjan, Sarah Warren, Maggie Watson, and Nancy Zagaria. Special thanks to Fr. John Chlebo and Mr. Raiff for their support of Hawaiian Knights.

*Beth Van Horn*





## CENTENNIAL HAPPENINGS

As you know, we have entered our centennial year as a parish community. A committee has been working on a number of events to celebrate our blessings of the past and plan for a new century of service. The hope is to have some special event each month beginning in May and continuing until October. What follows is an outline of current plans as of this writing. Watch our bulletin, future Belltower Beacon articles, the parish website and Facebook page and the Constant Contacts that are sent to learn more about the details of these various celebrations. If you are interested in helping with any of these events or have other suggestions please contact me at the Parish Office and I will direct you to the right contact person.

**MAY** One of the major events that will initiate our celebration is a Mass with Bishop Edward Malesic on Saturday, May 14 at 5 p.m. in the Church followed by a reception in the Parish Center. The first Mass in the “new” St. Christopher Parish was celebrated by the founding pastor, Fr. Richard Patterson, on Sunday, May 14, 1922 at 8 a.m., exactly 100 years ago to the day! That Mass took place in the old Rocky River Town Hall, which is now Tartine Restaurant.

**JUNE** As of this writing, there is no specific event scheduled. We will be scheduling outdoor weekend Masses in Centennial Park as well as concerts in the park throughout the summer. Watch for future announcements in the coming months.

**JULY** Monday, July 25 is the Feast of St. Christopher. We will anticipate that feast on Sunday, July 24 with an outdoor Mass at 11:30 a.m. That afternoon we will bless cars and other modes of transportation in honor of St. Christopher, the patron Saint of Travelers. The possibility of a car wash is in the planning stages along with an ice cream truck during that same event.

**AUGUST** We are planning to use our annual Block Party as a major time of celebration with increased activities, possibly over the weekend of August 20-21 or 27-28. Outdoor Mass(es), our annual raffle, food, games and a celebration for parishioners and friends of all ages is the goal being investigated by the Centennial Committee.

**SEPTEMBER** A back to school celebration for our Day School and PSR students will help focus on our young parishioners as we encourage them to be an important part of our new century of service. Special t-shirts will be designed for each student to receive one.

**OCTOBER** The annual pet blessing will be a highlight as we take time to ask for the Intercession of St. Francis of Assisi to watch over our beloved pets. The Centennial Committee is also considering a parish clambake as a way of completing our centennial celebration.

**ARCHIVES** A very dedicated group has been working to prepare displays of pictures, stories and memorabilia to show the history of our parish. These items will be displayed at the May 14 event and other events throughout the summer primarily in the Parish Center.

*Fr. John Chlebo*

We're looking for donors to help support the production of a beautiful centennial commemorative book! Look for the details in the next Beacon and in future bulletins.

## SCS MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS SHARE THEIR LOVE OF SCIENCE



Middle school students (grades 6-8) love science class and love sharing their scientific knowledge with others even more. Each year, typically around Catholic Schools Week, the middle school students prepare and present science lessons to students in grades K-5. The topics are incredibly diverse, including dinosaurs, weather phenomena, astronomy, marine and land animals, and environmental issues. The multimedia lessons are collaboratively developed and presented by teams consisting of 3-4 students. The amount of time, research, care, and enthusiasm that go into creating and presenting the lessons is incredible. Especially impressive is the creativity shown to make the lessons interactive to keep the younger students engaged and interested in the presentation. The games often used as part of the lessons are always a hit with the recipients.

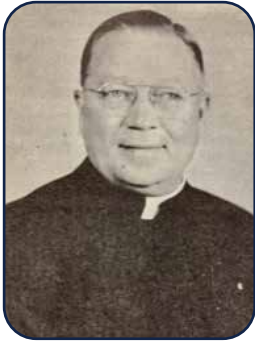
Science Share has many benefits for all SCS students. The middle school students deepen their subject knowledge while preparing to teach the lesson. They also develop their collaboration, communication, and leadership skills. The younger students are exposed to interesting subject matter that isn't typically part of the grade level curriculum. They also get an opportunity to interact with and be mentored by older peers. Many are already looking forward to their time to present a “Science Share.”

Middle school science teacher Mr. Tom Thorne has coordinated Science Share since its inception. The SCS community is grateful for his ongoing efforts to give our students opportunities to deepen their knowledge, develop interpersonal and communication skills, and share their love of science.

*Scott Raiff*

# ST. CHRISTOPHER PARISH – IMPLEMENTING VATICAN II

*As we celebrate our parish centennial this year, we will use the Belltower Beacon to look back at some of our history. This third article in the series will cover the days that correspond to the pastorates of Msgr. Bernard Weigand and Fr. Edward Prendergast.*



Following the death of Msgr. Ahern on June 5, 1966, Msgr. Bernard J. Weigand was appointed the third pastor of St. Christopher. His seven-year pastorate would prove to be the shortest during our first century. Yet much happened in this short time as the parish adjusted to the changes resulting from the Second Vatican Council. The rectory was expanded, the first school library was established and eventually a media

center as well. A new organ was installed in the church and a PTU was formed in the school. St. Christopher was demoted from the official calendar of saints during this time. This meant that no new churches would be built with this name, but existing churches could retain the name.

A significant development that occurred during this time was the publication by the diocese of guidelines to establish Parish Councils. This is one of the major changes to take place that resulted from the recently completed Vatican Council. St. Christopher Parish responded by establishing a Council to help advise the pastor in his leadership role in the parish. The group met for first time in May 1970. The first issue of a parish newsletter, *The Councilor*, followed as a means of improving communication in the parish. Such changes as English during Mass, an altar facing the people and Lay Eucharistic Ministers at Mass were introduced during this time. The parish celebrated its 50th Jubilee in 1972 followed by Msgr. Weigand's retirement in 1973. He continued to live in the rectory and help at the parish until his health led him back to be with family in Millersburg, Ohio where he died in July 1981.

In February 1973, Fr. Edward Prendergast was named the 4th pastor of St. Christopher. His arrival came after 17 years of teaching at Borromeo Seminary. He was, however, no stranger to the West Side. He grew up in St. Clement Parish, graduated from St. Ignatius High School and, after his 1951 ordination, was assigned to St. Luke Parish. Fr. Prendergast spent his early years as pastor by first



visiting every home in the parish and then seeking input from parishioners regarding the needs of the parish. This led to several significant developments in the parish including growth in the Religious Education Program, the introduction of Christ Renews His Parish as a spiritual growth opportunity for adults, an organized Ministry to the Sick, Aging, Bereaved and Divorced and the building of the Community Center

in September 1981. The PTU and the Ladies Guild continued their support of the school and parish by way of many social activities, fund-raising and volunteer work around the parish. Baptisms grew in number throughout the 1980s as did enrollment in the Day School and Religious Education Ministry.

Another major accomplishment under Fr. Prendergast was the remodeling of the church in the mid-1980s. Fourteen large stained glass windows, representing the Stations of the Cross, were a highlight of the project. Stained glass windows in the sanctuary representing the seven Sacraments and a dozen mosaics of the Apostles added to the simple elegance of the space. A new altar and the removal of the Communion Rail opened up the sanctuary and new carpeting, fresh paint, refinished pews and cleaning of the organ pipes added to the fresh look of this magnificent Romanesque Building that continues to serve as our place of worship. Fr. Prendergast continued his leadership in his kind and gentle manner until his retirement in July 1997, 24 years of faithful service. He was a truly spiritual man who encouraged spiritual devotions and prayer groups. His goal was to preach the Gospel and live a Christian life in a way that led people away from the world and closer to knowing the Lord. He visited the parish and helped with Masses in his early retirement until his health would no longer allow him to do so. In December 2008 he returned to the God whom he served so well.

*Fr. John Chlebo*

## HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

|                         |                                   |                         |                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Palm Sunday, April 10   | Regular Weekend Mass Schedule     | Good Friday, April 15   | Stations of the Cross Noon and 7 p.m. |
| Wednesday, April 13     | Confessions 7-8 p.m.              | Holy Saturday, April 16 | Easter Vigil 8:30 p.m.*               |
| Holy Thursday, April 14 | Mass of the Lord's Supper 7 p.m.* | Easter Sunday, April 17 | Masses at 8:30,* 10:00* & 11:30 a.m.* |
| Good Friday, April 15   | The Passion of the Lord 3 p.m.*   |                         |                                       |

*\* Also livestreamed.*



# CHURCH CHATTER

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY** Birthday wishes go out to REO secretary **Marilu Norena** (March 9), Pastoral Minister **Melissa DiFini** (April 14), **Deacon Dennis Conrad** (April 18), **Sr. Jeanne Cmolik** (April 30), school secretary **Judy Zell** (May 9), Pastoral Associate **Gayle Cilimburg** (May 14), and **Fr. John Chlebo** (May 17). They would appreciate your best wishes on their special day.

**TENNIS, ANYONE?** **Caroline Moritz**, a junior at Magnificat High school, and her tennis doubles partner, were finalists in the OHSAA state tennis tournament for Division I. They came in second in the state! As a sophomore, Caroline and her partner came in fourth. Caroline has been a parishioner for about 13 years and teaches tennis to younger children. She has two college-aged sisters. Proud parents are Jeff and Pam Moritz.

**ESSENTIAL OILS** Essential oils is all the rage! **Mark Biviano**, semi-retired Senior VP of Akron-based Rubber City Radio group was elected to the board of directors of Ascend/GLDN LLC, a Denver, Colorado-based processor of health-related essential oils. Best wishes to Mark in his new endeavor. Mark has served as a Lector for many years at St. Christopher.

**90 YEARS YOUNG** On January 2, **Neil Butler** celebrated his 90th birthday at 8:30 Mass, with his six daughters (his son was unable to attend due to a snowstorm in Michigan). In addition to seven children, Neil has 23 grandchildren, 18 great grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. Neil has been a parishioner for 15 years and sold raffle tickets at last year's Block Party. Having graduated from Notre Dame in 1953, he is a huge fan. Look for Neil sporting his Notre Dame garb at Mass.

**TIME CAPSULE** The **Centennial Committee** is busy planning a myriad of activities and events for our centennial year celebration. One item to commemorate our one hundred years is a time capsule, or an air-tight, water-proof container. Do you have any knowledge or expertise with such? What would you like to see in a time capsule? Please respond to this columnist. Thank you for your ideas!

**BREAK A LEG** The St. Christopher School **Drama Club** will present "Fairy Tale Misfits" on Thursday, March 31, at 7 p.m. in the Parish Center. Please attend to see and support our young thespians. All are invited!

Share your joyous events with us! Please forward submissions for Church Chatter to **Roberta Trutko** at (440) 263-7894 or [roberta32red@hotmail.com](mailto:roberta32red@hotmail.com).

## THANK YOU ST. CHRISTOPHER CHILDREN

Every major holiday – Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas – the students of St. Christopher and the Parish School of Religion Program make hundreds of holiday cards to go to our community's nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and the homebound. These cards are full of handwritten greetings and beautifully colored pictures, which exhibit the joy of childhood. After each holiday we receive many thank you notes from the recipients of these cards. Thank you for bringing joy to so many people who usually don't get visitors or cards!

*Sharon Armstrong*





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Eric Perusek and Scott Raiff

## UPCOMING EVENTS

|                                       |                                    |                          |  |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| March 2                               | ASH WEDNESDAY                      | April 8                  | JESUS DAY<br>FIRST COMMUNION SCHOOL STUDENTS               |
| March 4, 11, 18, 25<br>April 1, 8     | EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION             | April 9                  | JESUS DAY<br>FIRST COMMUNION PSR STUDENTS                  |
| March 4, 11, 18, 25<br>April 1, 8, 15 | EVENING STATIONS OF THE CROSS      | April 10                 | LIVING STATIONS  |
| March 5                               | CUB SCOUT PINEWOOD DERBY           | April 24                 | BLOODMOBILE  |
| March 9, 16, 23, 30<br>April 6, 13    | MORNING STATIONS OF THE CROSS      | April 29                 | MOTHER/SON EVENT   |
| March 12                              | CONFIRMATION RETREAT               | May 3                    | CONFIRMATION   |
| March 13, 14, 15                      | LENTEN PARISH MISSION              | May 7, 8, 15, 21, 22, 28 | FIRST COMMUNIONS   |
| March 16                              | DIOCESAN EVENING OF<br>CONFESSIONS | May 8                    | MOTHER'S DAY   |
| March 18                              | DADDY/DAUGHTER EVENT               | <b>May 14</b>            | <b>CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION MASS<br/>WITH BISHOP MALESIC</b> |
| March 25                              | SOCIAL CLUB LUNCHEON               | May 22                   | BLOODMOBILE  |
| March 27                              | PRE-CANA DAY                       | May 22                   | PRE-BAPTISM CLASS  |
|                                       |                                    | May 27                   | SOCIAL CLUB LUNCHEON                                       |

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*We are the people of St. Christopher Catholic Church, a Eucharistic community of faith  
dedicated to ... Welcome, Celebrate, Care, & Grow ... in the image and likeness of Jesus.*