



The Belltower Beacon

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

Volume 24: Issue 92

March 2024

LET'S WELCOME FR. LITO CLEMEN

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It may seem ironic that someone from the tropical and sunny Philippine Islands would arrive in Cleveland on an unusually cold and blustery November 28. For Fr. Lito, it was an exciting start to his five-year assignment in the United States. Because he came with no winter clothing, Fr. John, Fr. Tim, Gayle Cilimbung and

parishioners provided clothing appropriate to a northeast Ohio winter. Fr. Lito is most grateful. In fact, he is quick to say that everyone he has encountered has been so kind, welcoming and generous. Fr. Lito was excited about joining our St. Christopher community and coming to the U.S. for the first time. He looks forward to meeting parishioners and socializing more. The day after his arrival, Fr. Lito and Fr. John celebrated the 11 a.m. Mass together. Those at Mass were happy to welcome him to our community. With his friendly, easy-going and humorous disposition, Fr. Lito has quickly garnered the respect and affection of parishioners. As God's grace would have it, Fr. Lito moved from a hometown surrounded by water and fishing to Rocky River, where he is once again surrounded by water and fishing.

Responding to an offer from Bishop Edward Malesic, Fr. Lito's bishop, Alberto Uy, asked him if he was willing to go serve in the Diocese

of Cleveland. Fr. Lito did not hesitate to accept the invitation. Coming to the United States was a dream come true for him. When he learned he was being assigned to St. Christopher, he visited our church online. Upon arrival, even in the midst of stark winter weather, he saw how beautiful our campus truly is. In addition to our parish community, Fr. Lito has also been embraced by the greater Cleveland Filipino community through the diocesan Philippine American Ministry. The Philippines is a tropical island country (called an archipelago) made up of more than 7,000 islands. Fr. Lito's native dialect is Cebuano, but Tagalog and Filipino are also spoken. All students are taught English from an early age. Surrounded by water on all sides, fishing is the country's most popular pastime. Basketball is also extremely popular. The majority of residents are Roman Catholic. In the greater Cleveland area, many Filipinos celebrate the Eucharist at St. Leo the Great in Parma. Fr. Lito was invited and excited to participate in some of their Christmas celebrations. The Philippine Cultural Center, also in Parma, provides fellowship and social events for this close-knit community.

Born one of seven children (five sisters and one brother), with birth name Joselito, he grew up in Bohol in a traditional Filipino family where his father, Eugenio B. Clemen, was a commercial fisherman while his mother, Julia G. Mijares Clemen stayed home to raise the children. Both parents are now deceased. The siblings are Marcia, Elena, Marieta, Marinell and Nino; all have careers and remain in the Philippines. Another sibling, Sr. Maristela M. Clemen, answered the call to religious life and teaches young children. After graduating high school, Fr. Lito enrolled in college classes at Immaculate

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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.

Heart of Mary Seminary in Tagbilaran City, Bohol, Philippines. From 2006 to April 2011, he studied theology at Seminario Mayor de San Carlos. He felt a calling to the priesthood at a young age. His first assignment was in 2012 as Chair of Campus Ministry for the Diocese of Tagbilaran. Until his invitation to come here, Fr. Lito held the positions of parochial vicar, seminary professor, parish priest and assisting resident priest (associate pastor), in Bohol.

In order to minister effectively and promptly, it was imperative that Fr. Lito learned to drive in the U.S. Under the tutelage of parishioner Dan Gauntner, Fr. Lito started learning to drive not long after his arrival. He was already an experienced driver and according to Dan, he is a quick study. Though he expressed surprise at how many street signs there are here, Fr. Lito is very good at remembering routes and landmarks. Dan states that it did not take long for him to realize that “Fr. Lito knows more about driving than the examiners.” Dan has enjoyed spending time with Fr. Lito during lessons and over lunch, finding him to be humble and personable. For parishioners Dr. Moises and Rose Buzon, it came as a pleasant surprise that a Filipino priest was coming to our parish. Dr. Buzon is of Filipino descent and the couple has many friends in the greater Cleveland Filipino community. They have introduced Fr. Lito to other families, including Fr. Raymond Guiao, SJ, president of St. Ignatius High School. The Buzon family invites Fr. Lito to family gatherings, including a traditional American Christmas dinner. They describe him as resilient and well acclimated. They admire his beautiful singing voice and powerful homilies. Rose and Moises are not surprised that Fr. Lito is soft spoken, poised and gracious. They explained that “gentle spirits and good singing voices” are typical for Filipinos.

By now, Fr. Lito has lived through some interesting and ever-changing Cleveland weather patterns. According to Fr. Tim, during a recent snowfall, Fr. Lito was watching the kids sledding down the hill behind the rectory. Watching him have such fun was both entertaining and heartwarming for Fr. Tim. When Fr. John learned that Fr. Lito had been assigned to St. Christopher, he was curious about his command of English. Upon meeting him, Fr. John says that he shares “everyone’s amazement at how well he speaks English and how easy it is to understand him.” Fr. John adds that “Fr. Lito comes with over ten years of priestly ministry

and is no stranger to work, not afraid to pitch in wherever he can.” Fr. John and the pastoral team have enjoyed seeing his reaction to things that we all take for granted. Through Fr. Lito’s eyes, it has been fascinating to see how he responds to snow falling and temperatures dropping, visiting stores with an overabundance of food options, seeing Lake Erie for the first time, not knowing what a nursing home is, our many restaurant options, trying to understand American football, and driving here for the first time. One of the highlights to date has been taking Fr. Lito to a Cleveland Cavaliers game. Accompanied by Fr. John, Gayle, and Logan, his excitement was palpable as he watched the game. Fr. John and the entire church community look forward to the



rest of his time with us. Fr. John states that “Fr. Lito is a pleasant addition to our staff and to our rectory. Since the day he stepped off the plane on a snowy morning, he has not stopped smiling. He is genuinely happy to be here.”

Fr. Lito’s presence during Mass is enhanced by his ability to preside reverently, articulate words carefully, and deliver homilies that are powerful. He is brutally honest when necessary as in a recent homily on a subzero Sunday morning when he asked us “why are you here on such a cold morning, why are you here?” Speaking to a full church, his question and tone left us utterly silent. Thus began his homily on the topic of following when Jesus challenges us to “come and see.” Just as the apostles heard from Jesus, we, too, are invited to see for ourselves that Jesus is the Messiah, and that we are to follow him. Fr. Lito also uses humor in his homilies, including mention of

“fourth and fifth kings” on the Feast of Three Kings, and those being Burger King and King Wah. This woke up and warmed a shivering congregation. Ultimately, his focus is on imparting a message that motivates us to follow Christ by asking the right questions, looking for what matters most, and deciding what we are willing to sacrifice to help others. Fr. Lito tells us that the real gift is living a life of humility and courage, doing a good deed then disappearing without being noticed. Calling him a blessing, Fr. John believes that Fr. Lito will help us to appreciate all that we have, all that we are able to do, and how very blessed we are.

Carmen Everett DeHaan

THE SEASON OF LENT



Over two weeks ago on Ash Wednesday we received ashes on our foreheads in the shape of a cross and were invited to “Repent and Believe in the Gospel.” This year Ash Wednesday fell on Valentine’s Day, a holiday during which we celebrate love. As Christians we know that we are loved daily by the God who created us and whose Son taught us to ask for forgiveness when we have sinned and ultimately died for us.

Perhaps it would be good to reflect upon how we are doing in the areas of prayer, fasting and almsgiving thus far in this Lenten season. There have been and will continue to be parish opportunities to assist us. If you have not yet picked up a trifold brochure on all of them, you can do so at the entrances of the Church or in the Parish Office. There are details about many of them in this issue of the Belltower Beacon and they are listed on the Events page but to highlight here for your consideration:

Stations of the Cross

On Wednesdays following the 11 a.m. Mass

On Fridays in the evening at 7 p.m. (the one on March 8 includes organ meditations)

On Sunday, March 3 in Mary’s Room at 6:30 p.m. Creation Lament Stations as we pray to better care for our gifts of all creation

On Wednesday, March 6 at 7 p.m. Mary’s Way of the Cross from the viewpoint of our Blessed Mother

On Sunday, March 24 at 7 p.m. Living Stations presented by the students of St. Mark, St. Christopher and Our Lady of Angels

Sharing with Others

Rice Bowls where we collect for Catholic Relief Services to share our blessings with communities experiencing hunger around the world

On Tuesday, March 12 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. a Soup Supper to benefit Zelig’s Home, a safe-haven for mothers who need food, shelter and clothing as they await the birth of their babies

Spiritual Growth

On Friday, March 1 from 11:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. there will be Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the Prayer Room

Praying with the Little Black Books which were available at the beginning of Lent

There will be a presentation on Praying with Icons on Tuesday March 5 at 6:30 p.m.

Taking advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on Saturdays at 4 p.m. or on Wednesday, March 27 from 7-8 p.m.

On Wednesday, March 27 at 7 p.m. in the Atrium attend the Book Discussion on the book, “*Who Does He Say You Are?*”

Gayle Cilimburg

LENT SOUP SUPPER

The Parish annual Soup Supper will be held on Tuesday, March 12 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. in the Parish Center to benefit Zelig’s Home. Presale tickets for the event will be the weekend of March 9-10 after all Masses, purchase tickets for \$10 online or at the event. Tickets for six raffle baskets are also available with Supper ticket sales. Tickets are \$5 each or three for \$10. The winners will be drawn at the Soup Supper.

This year’s Soup Supper is being organized by the St. Christopher Confirmation class and the “Way” (our new 6-8 grade PSR class). We are giving these students an opportunity to serve the lease of our brothers and sister with a hands-on approach. Please support our teens in this effort.

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO SUPPORT ZELIE’S HOME

“A caring community that empowers pregnant and parenting women to take positive and effective action on behalf of themselves and their children by providing physical, emotional, spiritual, and professional support.”

Sharon Armstrong

LENTEN PRESENTATION ON PRAYING WITH ICONS – MARCH 5

Dear parishioners of St. Christopher, My name is Max Giorgi. I am from Southwestern Lake County which is about 20 miles East of Cleveland. I grew up in Mentor. I graduated from Mentor High School in 2015, and I discerned to enter Seminary for the Diocese of Cleveland thereafter. I spent seven years in Seminary and then discerned that time away from Seminary was needed. I am almost 28 years old, and I now live on my own in Willoughby Hills and I am a full-time associate with Heinen's grocery store.

This upcoming Lenten season I am looking forward to giving a presentation titled, *Light Within: Learning the Icon*. The Icon is a form of art that comes to us from the Christian East, and it is a style of art that is unfamiliar to our Western aesthetic appetite.

Classical Western art is delightful as it focuses on impeccable proportions, sharp contrasts of darkness and light, and extreme carnal detail, particularly of the human body. This style of art traces its origins to Ancient Greece and it is a hallmark of art museums and a number of Roman Catholic Churches to this day.

While Western art has its place, it may not always be the best spiritual tool. In letting the notable characteristics of classical Western art form our prayer and preferences we may find ourselves becoming overly concerned with outer beauty – the way things look and the way people look – instead of focusing on what really matters, which is inner beauty – the light within. Icons and iconography help us to quiet our senses and rearrange our aesthetic appetites

so that we more readily focus on objective beauty which God creates within. Lent happens to be a time when we set personal goals to try to reorder ourselves with the help of God, and Iconography is definitely a tool for this process.

After years of praying with Classical Western Art I was drawn to the Eastern Icon. After learning how to pray with Icons that other people made, I wanted to learn how to make the icon myself. Since 2019, I have worked with three different Icon instructors, and I have also read literature on the theology of the Icon. I then was able to give this presentation at my home parish of Divine Word, and I look forward to more opportunities to give this presentation.

Max Giorgi

LADIES GUILD UPDATE



The Ladies Guild welcomed Advent with a call to communal prayer. Prayer cards were designed displaying a special prayer for the women of the parish to pray with and for each other during the weeks of Advent. The prayer cards were distributed at all Masses on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and the second Sunday of Advent to foster unity and to encourage a calmer, deeper experience of the mystery of the Incarnation. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "It is in fact the most normal thing in the common Christian life to pray together."

Continuing its mission to bring women together, The Guild held a late January social as an antidote to the cabin fever that sets in during the winter months. Refreshments included a selection of fruit infused water as well as red and white Sangria. Everyone in attendance enjoyed the relaxed opportunity for conversation and fellowship. The Guild's ongoing book club has sparked discussion and reading pleasure with such selections as *Did Ye Hear Mammy Died* by Seamus O'Reilly and *The St. Monica Club* by Maggie Green. All are welcome to join at anytime and we'd love to hear your suggestions for new titles.

Looking ahead, mark your calendars for Mary's Way of the Cross to be held March 6 at 7 p.m. This is a beautiful and spiritually moving interpretation of the Stations of the Cross through the eyes of Mary.

On April 11, the Guild is excited to host St. Christopher's own Judge Donna Congeni Fitzsimmons (retired) as she brings to life her role as the lead U.S. Dept. of Justice Organized Crime Strike Force prosecutor in the 1983 federal trial of Angelo Lonardo, the purported boss of the Cleveland Mob, along with his five subordinates. Her presentation will also demonstrate how the "Bomb City USA" bombings in Cleveland in the late 1970s ultimately led to the takedown of the Cleveland Mob. After the trial Lonardo was the highest-ranking member of the Mafia to become a government witness. His testimony secured convictions of Mafia families throughout the United States and put both Lonardo and Fitzsimmons into the Mob Museum in Las Vegas. Most significantly his testimony brought down the hierarchy of the five Mafia families who controlled crime in New York City. All are welcome to attend this entertaining and historic presentation.

Nancy Sullivan

SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG – FROM MUSIC MINISTRY

THEN, AFTER SINGING A HYMN, THEY WENT OUT TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES.

~ Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU RICHLY, AS IN ALL WISDOM YOU TEACH AND ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER, SINGING PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS WITH GRATITUDE IN YOUR HEARTS TO GOD.

~ Colossians 3:16

You may have heard the phrase, “To sing is to pray twice,” which is sometimes attributed to St. Augustine. But the significance of music in the Christian worship goes even further. Both St. Matthew and St. Mark tell us that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn after the Last Supper before they went to the Mount of Olives. St. Paul instructs us to praise God with psalms and hymns. Music has been an integral part of our faith from the very beginning. But there is an important distinction between the music for God and the music in our daily life. The purpose of the liturgical music is not to please our ears but to express our gratitude to God. At the same time, we strive to make the best music we can because, simply put, God deserves the best!

I am humbled by the enormity of the responsibilities entrusted to me and infinitely grateful for your warm welcome and support since I joined the St. Christopher community last summer. Christmas came and went like a whirlwind, and by the time this article comes out, we should be almost halfway through the Lenten journey, preparing for the Holy Week and the great feast of Easter.

Music ministry is involved in various aspects of the parish life. In addition to regular Masses on weekends and major feast days, we take part in sacraments of marriage, confirmation and first reconciliation. For each occasion, I oversee the selection of music, schedule a cantor, and, when appropriate, work with instrumentalists and the choir. In fact, I spend more time planning and preparing than executing music. It takes a proverbial village to make beautiful music for liturgies. And I invite you to consider being an active part of this village.

The Parish Choir is open to all singers from high school age and above. While the ability to read music is helpful, it is not an absolute requirement as long as you love making music to praise God. Right now, I am blessed to work with a group of several

wonderful women, a mix of long-time parishioners and newer people. But the Choir is not meant to be for women only, and what I am missing is YOUR voice! I would be more than happy to assist your learning process with practice videos and other resources. The Choir typically rehearses on Wednesday evenings and serves at the Sunday 10 a.m. Masses from mid-September to Pentecost. If you are interested but unsure about the commitment, I do not ask you to sign a two-year contract – we are not a cell phone company – I would love for you to try out even for a few weeks, maybe around Christmas or Easter. Researchers have shown that choral singing is beneficial for both physical and psychological wellbeing. How about singing as a part of your fitness routine?

Experienced singers are also welcome to serve as a cantor. With four Masses on weekends and additional Masses on feast days, cantors are always in high demand. If you are new to this ministry, I can pair you with a more experienced cantor until you feel comfortable to go solo. I will, of course, help you whatever way I can to prepare you for your ministry.

If you play any musical instruments, please consider sharing your talents as instrumentalists. You can contribute as little as five minutes of your time to play the prelude. If you have some special music you would like to present to God, please let me know – we can work together to make that happen. If you already know how to play the piano and want to try your hands (and feet) on the organ, I can help you with that, too. That’s how I started with the organ not too many years ago.

Sing to the Lord a new song, sing to the Lord, all the earth. (Psalm 96:1) If you are interested in being a part of the music ministry, please contact me at mnaramura@stchrisparish.com.

Mayumi Naramura



THANKSGIVING FOOD DRIVE

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the Thanksgiving Food Drive. With your help we were able to deliver six carloads of food to St. Patrick (Bridge Ave.). The food was distributed to 130 families living in the St. Patrick and St. Colman communities. They were extremely grateful for the generosity of our parish.

Jane Berkeley

2023 CHRISTMAS G.I.F.T. PROGRAM WOWS – THE BEST EVER!



The annual Christmas drive, Giving in Faith Together, sponsored by the St. Christopher Social Concerns Committee (SCSCC) was a phenomenal success!

St. Christopher parishioners chose almost 800 tags, donating to 15 different agencies and non-profits that support the needy in our area. That number topped last year's generous total by over 150 tags! Thank you to all who helped to make this the best program in over 20 years.

This drive impacts a wide variety of social service agencies from our newest partner Sisters Haven (supporting pregnancy and parenting) to our longtime partner Malachi House (providing end-of-life compassion.) All 15 agencies serve vital needs in our communities including education, childhood trauma, families in crisis, drug/alcohol recovery, meals, clothing, supplies and shelter for the homeless, life skills, foster care, and senior activities.

Tags were available in November and, for three weeks, gifts and supplies were brought to the Gathering Area to be stored until the distribution date on December 17.

On that day, SCSCC members (with the invaluable help of 19 students from the PSR Junior High and Confirmation classes) carried, sorted, and loaded carts with gifts ready for agencies to pick up. A long line of agency cars and vans began arriving around noon and were speedily loaded by our PSR volunteers.

Sr. Marilyn Nickel from St. Colman Church wrote, "Please convey our appreciation to everyone who assisted with this program during the Advent Season. Your students were so helpful in bringing all of the donations to our car on a very rainy day!"

"With love and gratitude, thank you for all you do for us," wrote Sr. Mary Kay from House of Champions, an after-school enrichment program on the near West Side.

Fill This House sent this note, "Thank you and the congregation for the amazing generous donation of items. The young adults we serve who have aged out of foster care will be so blessed by the kindness of many. You all are truly the hands and feet of Jesus here on earth."

Your gifts, gift cards, and online donations mean so much for so many! Thank you for your amazing generosity!

Jane Berkeley





WALKING THROUGH WINTER WITH J+WALKERS!

J+Walkers Youth Ministry had an eventful end to 2023! Alongside our traditional “Youthgiving” and Christmas celebrations, we enjoyed an incredibly successful #WeGiveCatholic campaign that will help fund three years of increased youth programming through retreats, service, and outreach. The first of these events funded by our campaign are already underway, as middle school members built over 100 blessing bags in January containing snack items for members of Cleveland’s homeless community in partnership with Little Annie’s Hope Train. In early February, high school members were given first-hand exposure to homeless ministry with the group’s founder, Annie Kline. Witnessing the dire effects of poverty and homelessness in our own city was a profound experience for these young people. Additional events, including two summer retreats, are in the works thanks to the generous support of so many St. Christopher parishioners during our #WeGiveCatholic campaign. Thank you!

Several other popular events were frequented by teens this winter. Our Advent prayer service examined the traditional themes of hope, love, peace, and joy through scripture and music. At the end of January our teens enjoyed a night of food and bowling at RollHouse North Olmsted, spending time with friends and building relationships. In February students discussed topics such as love and “living in the dark” as Lent began. We are excited for the many new opportunities warmer weather will bring us in the months ahead!

Logan Feldkamp

UKRAINE WELCOME CIRCLE UPDATE: THE KUSHNYRS CELEBRATE ONE YEAR IN AMERICA



On April 27 the Kushnyrs will celebrate their one-year anniversary of arriving in the United States. Well over a year ago, our parish community came together to discuss ways we could help the people of Ukraine as they attempted to escape violent attacks by Russia. Frequent meetings, detailed planning and the amazing support of our parishioners resulted in welcoming Dmytro and Valeriia Kushnyr, and their children (Dariush, now age 7 and Aniela, almost 2). As we approach the family's anniversary, we applaud and

celebrate the many milestones crossed along the way. Looking back to that early morning arrival, it seems almost impossible that they have reached and surpassed many of their expectations (and ours). Arriving with smiles on their faces, they have remained resilient, bright, hard-working and grateful newcomers. They learned to speak English and embraced their diverse new country. During this year, the UWC team helped them celebrate many "firsts." The adults are both licensed drivers now and have their own vehicles. They are both employed and continue to study English. Dariush has adjusted well to second grade and helps other new students. Aniela is learning to talk and enjoys being with other toddlers at a nearby childcare center.

The Kushnyrs have learned to find their way around Parma and are happy attending St. Leo Church. They enjoy experiencing our American traditions, our MetroParks and Cleveland attractions. They look forward to visiting friends in Rocky River and at St. Christopher. Members of the Ukraine Welcome Circle continue

to advise the Kushnyrs, provide companionship and emotional support, and walk beside them through their journey. Housing, childcare, educational, medical and social support have remained constant. Not long after the Kushnyrs entered our lives, they became family. Together we celebrated their birthdays, the four seasons, and holidays like Independence Day, Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Though new to our eating habits and customs, they make it a point to learn about and experience them.

The UWC team is ever mindful of how difficult it has been for the Kushnyrs, and how they have suffered through some horrible experiences. They left behind family, friends, careers and possessions. Some of these can be replaced, some can never be replaced. We admire their courage and willingness to start over in an unfamiliar land. On the other hand, the team and the Kushnyrs have shared many happy moments – fond memories which are being photographed and recorded for future reference. Despite too many changes to mention, there are some things that we hope will never change. They are a pleasure to be around, full of gratitude, free of complaints and eager to acclimate. All team members coming to and leaving their home experience their heartwarming welcome of smiles and waves in the front window as they await and greet our arrival. Upon leaving, the same smiling faces are waving goodbye in the window. This is an amazing story of survival for our entire parish community to watch as it continues to unfold. It is only through the generosity of parishioners like you who choose to live out God's message of faith, hope and love, that the Kushnyrs are enjoying such incredible success. The UWC team asks you to continue praying for the health, happiness and well-being of our Kushnyr family as they adjust to their new way of life.

Carmen Everett DeHaan

ADOPT A COW PROJECT

St. Christopher School first grade class participates in the Adopt a Cow Project. This project is a fun way for the children to learn more about cows: their environment, how they are raised and also taken care of at the farm! Each month the farm in which our cow is located, sends us an update about our cow. This update comes with her new size, any physical color changes, and anything else they want to tell us! Our cow's name is Snickerdoodle. The farmer named our cow and sends the information to us! We also receive information about the farm and our farmer that takes care of Snickerdoodle! It is so fun to see how much she has grown each month when we receive our update! They send us about 10-20 pictures each month of her. They also send us overall pictures and videos of the farm in which she is located. Our farm is located in Millersburg, OH. This project is also very cool in the aspect that there are many learning opportunities. The Adopt a Cow Project has presentations you can make about your calf, coloring activities, information videos, a growth chart for your calf, and more! This is a fun activity and the children truly look forward to our email from the farm each and every month!



Sarah Skodny

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

Catholic Schools Week (CSW) was celebrated January 28–February 1 this year. This year's theme was *Catholic Schools United in Faith and Community*.

Sunday St. Christopher School (SCS) followed along with the national theme of *Celebrate Your Parish* with student ambassadors speaking at each Mass. "Catholic schools benefit all year long from the religious guidance, prayers, and support parishes provide." St. Christopher School featured students' artwork and academic achievements at this year's Open House. An additional treat this year at the open house was donuts. Students, families, and parishioners gathered in the library and through the halls sharing stories and memories of their times at school. Even though the layout of the school has changed it was very evident that the mission of SCS has not changed – SCS continues to empower the mind, nourish the spirit and care for others all in Jesus' name.

Monday was candid and group picture day. What better way to celebrate community than taking pictures of the many school clubs, groups and classes. Each photo captured the essence of SCS; working together for a common goal based on mutual respect, collaboration/ teamwork and responsibility. 2023 was filled with service projects that allowed students to practice and live their faith. Students participated in the St. Christopher Parish Thanksgiving Food Drive and made Blessing Bags for the Rocky River Assistance Program. SCS families donated small toys, toothbrushes and toothpaste, gloves and hats, plus snack foods to pack holiday decorated bags with messages of holiday faith and hope to be given to those in need. These service projects inspired random acts of kindness each day of Catholic Schools Week. Monday's CSW Random Act of Kindness was to write letters of friendship, faith and encouragement to one of St. Christopher's own students, Evan Guhde. Unfortunately, due to health issues Evan has not been able to return to the physical building, but Evan's strength and positive attitude exemplifies the spirit of the SCS community. Following the word of Galatians 6:10, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." Students performed random acts of kindness each day that week in order to do good.

Faith was celebrated on Tuesday at the Catholic Schools Week Mass. Fr. Chlebo's homily reminded those in attendance that Jesus taught us to be kind. We can be kind to one another by sharing our gifts and talents. We show kindness when we give our best and encourage others to do their best in order to spread the kindness of Jesus. Kindness can make a difference in our school, our parish, and our community so be kind in your actions, words, and deeds.

The St. Edward String Orchestra and Trash Talkers spread kindness through the school when they shared their musical talents during a morning performance. Music inspires, motivates and encourages one to reach beyond their expectations, strive for excellence, and dream big. The energy of the St. Edward students resonated through the SCS student body and all left the performance feeling excited to go forth and magnify the greatness of the Lord.

SCS students performed random acts of kindness throughout the day by visiting former teachers and sharing words and acts of appreciation. Resonating Matt Bevin's words, "While it may seem small, the ripple effects of small things are extraordinary."

Talents were celebrated Wednesday with the SCS CSW Talent Show. Students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade were given the opportunity to share their God given talents Wednesday morning during the talent show. Research shows that children who perform are quick thinkers, have positive self-esteem, awareness, and creativity. All are characteristics SCS students are taught to develop and model in order to be Christ bearers and sharers. Students were encouraged to help their parents with a random chore at home to complete today's random act of kindness.

Thursday we celebrated science. The 7th and 8th grade students spent the day sharing their love of science with the younger students during Science Share. The 7th and 8th graders created presentations, interactive games, and activities to instill a love of science within the younger students. Science Share topics included layers of the ocean, biomes, extinct animals and many, many more. Success was achieved. The bus line Thursday afternoon was a buzz with science facts and additional questions to research in future science classes.

Friday's celebration of creation included the Realm of the Reptile assembly, angel sharing, and the 5th and 6th grade retreat. The Realm of the Reptile assembly intertwined biology and theater into an entertaining and educational opportunity of the wonder and awe of God's greatness in relationship to creation. As stated in 1 Corinthians 10:26, "Creation and all created things are inherently good because they are of the Lord," which made touching and petting some of the featured reptiles a bit easier for some of the SCS students.

Angel Sharing is a beloved event at SCS. This week younger and older students got together to play games, read stories, and just spend time together in order to build friendships that will grow and last over their years at SCS.

The theme of 5th and 6th grade retreat was Love One Another. Sirach 6:14-17 was used during the retreat.

*A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter;
he that has found one has found a treasure.
There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend,
and no scales can measure his excellence.
A faithful friend is an elixir of life;
and those who fear the Lord will find him.
Whoever fears the Lord directs his friendship aright,
for as he is, so his neighbor also.*

This passage can also be seen as a representation of Catholic schools. As friendships develop relationships among individuals Catholic schools develop, guide, and assist students into a relationship with God in order to become mature Christian believers and followers.

Mary Meler

Catholic Schools Week





LITTLE KNIGHTS

St. Christopher Preschool is where “little knights” come to play, pray and learn. The Preschool opened its doors to the Parish and Rocky River community in 2019. Since then, it continues to grow and evolve. The program engages students in a nurturing environment focused on instilling a love of learning through early academics and socialization. The Preschool offers 3-year old, 4-year old and Pre-K classes.

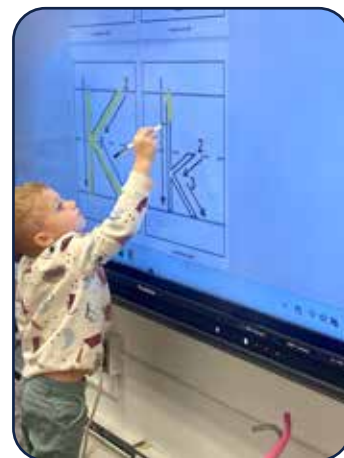
Within the learning environment of the 3’s classrooms, students are introduced to the concepts of letter, number, shape and color recognition. Students begin to identify the beginning sounds of letters, as well as begin to write his/her name. Fine motor skills such as pencil holding and cutting with scissors are fostered through small group activities and sensory play. Another emphasis within the 3’s program is on play-based learning. Through play-based activities, students build social skills like sharing, cooperation and personal responsibility. Students in the 3’s classes must be 3 years of age by September 30 and completely toilet-trained.

The 4-year old Preschool program at St. Christopher is structured around academic and play-based activities that prepare students for success in Kindergarten and promote excitement about learning. The 4’s program focuses on upper and lowercase letter recognition and formation as well as first and last name recognition and writing. Students learn to identify and write numbers in addition to basic math concepts. Fine motor skills such as proper pencil holding and scissor grip and motion are developed through daily class activities and art projects. Through play-based activities, students build social skills such as sharing, collaboration and problem solving.

The Pre-K class is in its inaugural year at St. Christopher. This class incorporates structure and routines to help students develop school behaviors that promote learning. The Pre-K class is designed for a child who’s birthday is near the Kindergarten cut-off date. This child may need a year to build his/her self-confidence, independence and social skills in addition to growing academically. While the curriculum in this class is similar to the 4’s, students in Pre-K participate in enrichment activities that enhance basic math concepts and beginning reading and writing skills. Students learn through play driven by discovery, exploration and hands-on experiences. Center-based learning is utilized to enhance a child’s academics and social-emotional skills. As students rotate centers, they participate in activities involving seasonal themes, reading readiness, writing, science, math, sensory experiences and pretend play. Next year, our Pre-K students attend STREAM and Physical Education classes. It is recommended that students in this class turn 5 years of age before January 1.

Information about the class options and tuition can be found on the school website, scsrr.org, under the Preschool tab. There is a waitlist for many of our classes for next year; however, there are a couple of spots available in the 3’s and 4’s afternoon half-day classes. Email Michelle Federico at scspreschool@scsrr.org for more information or to request a tour.

Michelle Federico



WHAT'S NEW IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE?

We have a brand new program starting up in our Parish – Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. This is a unique religious education program based in the Montessori method of teaching, where through a prepared environment the child develops a personal relationship with Jesus learning and preparing for fuller participation in Mass.

We have a special room designed in the school especially for this program. There are some generous people in our Parish who helped make our dream a reality. Zak Patton who owns Patton painting, donated the paint and manpower to make the room shine – it is beautiful! Brian Fehrenbach donated his time talent and wood to make a child-sized tabernacle, altar, altar cabinet and platform. They are works of art and will be a vital part of students' education of the Mass. Brian is a master craftsman and we are lucky to have him share his talent with us.

We have also received a grant from the Diocese of Cleveland to help defray the cost of the room, which should be completed by this summer.

This program has taken some time to pull together. Marilu Norena and Sharon Armstrong spent two summers, 90 hours total in training to be certified to teach "the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" for ages 3-6. We have already implemented parts of the program for the 2nd graders in Sacramental prep. Marilu is also trained in "the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" for ages 7-10. Our hope is to start up the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for the day school and PSR by this fall, but we need more trained Catechists. If you are interested in becoming trained or would like to hear more about this special program, please contact the Religious Education Office at (440) 331-6226 or sarmstrong@stchrisparish.com

Please pray for our students who are preparing for First Communion and Confirmation. The Confirmation candidates are on retreat Saturday, February 24 to prepare for their celebration of Confirmation in May with Bishop Woost. Our 2nd graders prepare for their Communion in May, with a retreat on April 19-20.

Sharon Armstrong





SCP WEEKEND

JOIN THE
PLANNING COMMITTEE
OR
CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING
DURING THE FESTIVAL WEEKEND

SAVE THE DATE!
August 23rd - 25th

**INTERESTED IN
GETTING INVOLVED!
QUESTIONS?? IDEAS??**

CONTACT
KEVIN TENNANT,
SCPW CHAIR
ktennant@stchrisparish.com
or (919) 491-1560



**SCPW
2024**
AUGUST 23-25

A KNIGHT AT THE LODGE

The St. Christopher School annual auction was a HUGE hit again this year! The Parish Center was transformed into the coziest lodge setting around to match the theme “A Knight at the Lodge.” The food boards, created by JJ’s Pizza & Platers, enhanced the theme. The 200 guests grazed on cheese and crackers, veggies and dip, mini sandwiches, desserts, and a Bavarian hot pretzel bar. Thank you to all who attended and participated from home. We are so very grateful for your support!

Angela Rosati



TECH TALK WITH TERRI



Let’s talk about social media. OK, don’t stop reading – give me a chance. Some people live on their screens while others don’t even own one. Some of us like receiving reminder notifications about

appointments but can’t handle one more sales ad or call. How many are worried about too much screen time? Did you give up your screen for Lent?

I hope not. In fact, I am inviting you to MORE screen time for the remainder of Lent. Use your screen for spiritual growth and renewal. We are repeating our daily Pause for Prayer and Mom’s Minute posts. You can go to our Facebook page and focus on the posts for a minute or as long as you care to devote to the prayer.

New additions that you will find include video and site links. We are posting the homily from the 8:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday.

We are offering links to a variety of spiritual resources ranging from daily prayer offerings to thought and prayer provoking reflections. You will find Jesuit-spirituality,

Franciscan-spirituality, Diocesan and national resources. Sift through and find the one that is your cup of tea. You can set the link up with your bookmarks or just revisit our page each day.

We hope that at least one of these social media connections will help you grow this Lent. If you have any recommendations you would like us to consider adding, please contact me at x111 in the office or email tpastura@stchrisparish.com.

Terri Pastura



CHURCH CHATTER

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Birthday wishes go out to **Fr. Lito** (March 20), Pastoral Associate **Terri Pastura** (March 28), **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 receiving your best wishes on their special day.

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Since 1994, parishioner **Donna Congeni Fitzsimmons** served as Judge of the Rocky River Municipal Court. Among her numerous awards and accolades are "Gem of Cleveland" for her civic service in women's causes, advisory council of the Mob Museum in Las Vegas, and Community Leader Hero. She is now enjoying her well-deserved retirement.

RADIO DAYS

Did you know that Cleveland Catholic radio, known as The Rock, can be listened to on AM1260? Last month, The Honorables **Brendan Sheehan** and **Michelle Sheehan** were interviewed on The Rock's "God Calling" program. The Honorable Brendan Sheehan is the Administrative and Presiding Judge of the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas and his wife, The Honorable Michelle Sheehan, sits on the Eighth District Court of Appeals bench. At St. Christopher, Brendan is a Eucharistic minister and Michelle is a lector. Thank you for spreading the good news of the Catholic faith.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Over the years, St. Christopher has been blessed with seminarians and priests. The following lists some of them and their current assignments. **Fr. Damian J. Ference**, vicar for evangelization and secretary for Parish Life and Special Ministries, now resides in the rectory of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist in Cleveland. **Fr. Daniel F. Schlegel** concluded his appointments as secretary and vicar for clergy and religious, and Communion of Saints Parish in Cleveland Heights as administrator; he is now the pastor of St. Raphael Parish in Bay Village. **Fr. Joshua F. Trefney** is the parochial vicar at St. Gabriel Parish in Concord Township. **Fr. Anthony J. Marshall** is the administrator at Communion of Saints Parish in Cleveland Heights. Our pastor, **Fr. John C. Chlebo**, concluded his appointment as administrator at St. Clement Parish and as administrator at St. James Parish, both in Lakewood; he continues as pastor at St. Christopher and as the delegate for senior priests of the Diocese of Cleveland.

SUPER STUDENTS

Rocky River High School (RRHS) senior, **Daniel Capka**, has earned the distinction of National Merit Semifinalist. In addition, **Nick Hollabaugh** and **Sophia Vailoff**, also RRHS seniors, have been recognized as National Merit Commended Scholar. Congratulations to all!

BREAK A LEG

The RRHS spring musical, *Bye Bye Birdie*, will be performed April 18-20, at the high school. **Caroline Kysela** has the lead female role. In addition, Caroline is in the chorale choir, River's Edge Show Choir, and Chromatix A Capella group, and is a National Honor Society member. At St. Christopher, she is an altar server and participates in J+Walkers. She is looking forward to continuing in theater in college and is currently auditioning for 15 colleges. St. Christopher parishioner, **Carter Sindelar**, is also in the musical, as the lead male role. He plans to pursue an acting degree and is in the process of completing college auditions.

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



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UPCOMING EVENTS

March 1, April 5, May 3	EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION	March 24	LIVING STATIONS OF THE CROSS
March 2	CUB SCOUT PINEWOOD DERBY	March 27,	LADIES GUILD BOOK CLUB
March 3	LAMENT FOR CREATION STATIONS OF THE CROSS	April 11	DONNA CONGENI FITZSIMMONS TALK
March 5	PRESENTATION ON ICONS	April 19	JESUS DAY FIRST COMMUNION SCHOOL STUDENTS
March 6, 13, 29, 27	MORNING STATIONS OF THE CROSS	April 20	JESUS DAY FIRST COMMUNION PSR STUDENTS
March 6, 20, April 3, 17, May 8, 29	COFFEE AND THE WORD	April 27	ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY UKRAINIAN FAMILY
March 6	MARY'S WAY OF THE CROSS	April 27 & 28	ANOINTING OF THE SICK AT ALL MASSES
March 8 (with organ meditations), 15, 22, 29	EVENING STATIONS OF THE CROSS	May 6	CONFIRMATION
March 10	PRE-CANA DAY	May 11, 12, 18, 19	FIRST COMMUNIONS
March 12, April 9, May 14	MONTHLY GRIEF SUPPORT GROUP	May 19	PRE-BAPTISM CLASS
March 12	SOUP SUPPER	May 31	EIGHTH GRADE GRADUATION

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Palm Sunday, March 24	Regular Weekend Mass Schedule
Wednesday, March 27	Confessions 7-8 p.m.
Holy Thursday, March 28	Mass of the Lord's Supper 7 p.m.*
Good Friday, March 29	The Passion of the Lord 3 p.m.*
Good Friday, March 29	Stations of the Cross Noon (outdoors, weather permitting) and 7 p.m. in Church

Holy Saturday, March 30	Food Blessing 3 p.m.
Holy Saturday, March 30	Easter Vigil 8:30 p.m.*
Easter Sunday, March 31	Masses at 8:30 a.m.* in Church, 10 a.m. in Church and Parish Center & 11:30 a.m. in Church

** Also livestreamed*