



The Belltower Beacon

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

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60 MINUTES FOR JESUS (#60MIN4JESUS)

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Well-known for his dynamic personality, contagious humor, and unwavering passion for the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, Fr. Jim Sichko spoke for exactly 60 minutes each night over three nights. From February 2-4 our Church was standing-room only each night. The first night, we were drawn by what we heard and read about Fr. Jim: his captivating personal stories, his popularity around the world, his boundless energy, and his generous spirit. The second night, even more people came because the first night had touched something deep in our hearts. The third and final night was no different, and Fr. Jim spoke to a “full house” once again. Fr. Sichko shared that he had pursued an exciting career in music and theatre before he received the call to the priesthood. As he was discerning his vocation, he realized that he could bring his gifts of comedy, public speaking and preaching to the priesthood. He was born in 1967 and ordained a priest in the Diocese of Lexington, Kentucky, in 1998. In 2015, Pope Francis commissioned Fr. Jim to be a Papal Missionary of Mercy in conjunction with the Extraordinary Jubilee Year, making him one of 100 in the United States and 1,000 in the world. Originally a temporary assignment, it has now been extended indefinitely. The instructions from Pope Francis have always been that the Papal Missionary

priests are to be “privileged instruments in the Church today” and “living signs of the Father’s readiness to welcome those in search of his pardon.”

While Fr. Jim continues to serve the Diocese of Lexington and answers to their Bishop John Stowe, he also spends 300 days a year traveling around the world. He has become popular for his storytelling, his selfies, his no-nonsense approach to all topics related to our Catholic faith, and his spaghetti sauce (from his mom’s recipe). He finds it important to stress that all money received is donated to the Missionary of Mercy and to serve the needy wherever he goes. Fr. Jim explained that most of the time he travels only with a backpack, sandals, shorts, T-shirt and a hoodie. He is, however, known to check in a bag or two full of bourbon to take back to Pope Francis. When he arrives in a new town, Fr. Jim finds the nearest Starbucks so he can make his daily “runs” for espresso. The second thing he does in every town is shop for food and gift cards. The gift cards are a vital part of his ministry as he uses them to reward people for their service, to lighten their loads, bring smiles to their faces, and encourage communication. He also gives away gift cards and religious medals blessed by Pope Francis. Surprising to his audience, Fr. Jim’s generosity extends to giving away random items he finds in the places he visits, which actually belong to someone else. We saw that played out almost immediately at our Mission when he started giving away the large Poinsettia plants around the altar. It mattered not that the plants could be bigger than some recipients, in the case of toddlers, but parents were happy to help.

continued ...

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.



As promised, the Mission began each evening at exactly 7 p.m. and ended at 8 p.m. *sharp* each night. Following each session, Fr. Jim autographed and sold copies of his book titled “Encountering God.” He also sold bottles of his mother’s pasta sauce, labeled Miss Marie’s, that was made from her recipe and named after her.

All proceeds are donated to the needy and to the Papal Missionary for Mercy initiative. Each night had a different theme but the same message: love, serve, forgive, share your resources, and be kind to all. Sunday’s 60 minutes set the stage for the next two days, including his rather fast pace and our theme song “Christ, Be Our Light!” We learned that he utilizes a mix of song, storytelling, personal sharing, and evangelizing. He utilizes his cell phone and resources found therein for added effect. He loves humor and laughs easily. He can also be very serious and direct. It was easy to see that he had countless stories and adventures to share with us from his many adventures. It made perfect sense that he would set a limit of 60 minutes to convey his message or we could easily be there all night. The first night brought us a “report card” and a guarantee. Fr. Jim gave us a grade of A+ for the warm welcome he received from everyone he encountered and A+ for the church environment. Another A+ went to our pastoral and lay ministers (music, ushers, the Word of God, and the Eucharist). Expressing disappointment, he gave us a resounding ‘F’ for not singing and for what he called a lack of reverence (there should never be food or water inside our sacred worship space, no one should arrive late or leave early).

Acting as conductor and encourager (“louder, louder, go, go!”), Fr. Jim led us in singing our theme song, all five verses. When he was satisfied that we were investing 100% of our personal best, he taped a selfie and posted it on social media. It was an extraordinary spiritual experience! At one point, Fr. Jim asked us what the sound of God’s voice sounds like in each of our lives. He reminded us that we are to seek and follow God’s voice. He asked us to consider how we love. We are to (1) “stop being a jerk,” which admittedly resonates with him; (2) stop the gossip and see that we are the problem, not the other person; and (3) always give people the benefit of the doubt. He concluded this evening by saying: “We all matter to God and are the face of Christ, the least

of our brothers.” We learned that if God brought us to it, God would see us through it. Fr. Jim guaranteed that if we make the effort to come before the Holy Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, miracles and healings will occur.

The second night was Monday and the focus became trust in God. We were encouraged to join the Ministry of Presence, and be quietly present for others instead of filling the space with words. We learn to TRUST God by applying five simple habits: (1) take TIME to pray; (2) develop a RELATIONSHIP with God; (3) gain UNDERSTANDING by reading holy Scripture; (4) SURRENDER and submit to God – let God be God; and (5) TRY and make an effort. Fr. Jim assured us that “where the world sees failure, God sees the future.”



On the morning of Tuesday, February 4 at 9 a.m., Fr. Jim presided at Mass for our day school. The first thing he shared with the students and teachers was that it was too early and he was

not a morning person. Facing the children, he exclaimed: “This is too early, what time do you get here?” Therein commenced an interactive Eucharistic celebration, complete with beautiful music and student participation. The homily was a Game of Sacraments which not only tested the students’ knowledge but also their comportment in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, a priest and their teachers. Students were promptly rewarded for their participation, knowledge, understanding and proper behavior. Fr. Jim was very patient with the various age levels, but was consistent in demanding respect from all ages. His bigger-than-life personality, style and enthusiasm made each student feel special. Eager to participate, the students’ hands were in the air more than in their laps. The gift cards became a secondary motivation as they were clearly drawn to his passionate delivery of the message of Jesus Christ. A similar response had come from the Children’s Liturgy of the Word at 10 a.m. on Sunday when Fr. Jim presided. He engaged the little ones and gave away his first poinsettia plant of the Mission. The tiny girl was thrilled and smiled the rest of the morning.

On Tuesday evening, attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions. Fr. Jim used the questions to discuss pertinent tenets of the Church and give strong advice. On the topic of children leaving the Catholic Church, he told us to “parent your children, bring them to church and lead by example;” on the topic of the Church changing, he spoke clearly and with strong conviction – Jesus calls us to live our faith, to transform and not indulge, and to align ourselves with God’s standards. God never changes and the message of Christ does not change. In fact, Fr. Jim proceeded

to share some character traits that helped Jesus draw others to him. They are: (1) He had an internal anchor – Jesus was rooted in God his Father. (2) Jesus always expressed gratitude, so say thank you often. (3) Jesus kept the vision, so stay focused on the vision. (4) Jesus communicated his vision to the multitudes, so continue to evangelize. (5) Jesus was willing to do difficult things. Fr. Jim left us with this very powerful statement: “God our Father is a very patient Father. He waits until we finally get it.” From the looks of it, the people of St. Christopher started to “get it” as the church buzzed each night with the sounds of friendships being renewed and the sheer joy of being together, almost as if no one wanted to leave.



For Nicholas Castro, a 7th-grader at St. Christopher School, the day quickly changed from a routine start into an extraordinary day that he will remember for the rest of his life.

During Fr. Jim’s homily, Nicholas raised his hand to answer a question about Matrimony. After answering the first part of the question correctly, he received a gift card. However, the answer to the second part of the question escaped him – “Who offers the Sacrament of Matrimony, asked Fr. Jim. “A priest,” responded Nicholas. “WRONG!” answered Fr. Jim. Giving the student another chance, Fr. Jim instructed Nicholas to approach the ambo so he could use the “call a friend” option. In the presence of students and teachers, Fr. Jim called Bishop John Stowe and had Nicholas ask him the same question. Nicholas then shared the correct answer – “The couple makes the offer to one another. The priest is a witness to their commitment.” Once again, Fr. Jim rewarded Nicholas with gift cards, in the end totaling \$190 for that morning’s participation. It was just the beginning of a very interesting day for Nicholas and Fr. Jim, as they continued their conversation into the evening session. After answering several more questions correctly, even more gift cards were passed on to Nicholas. The young student left church that evening with \$490 in gift cards, the last (dying) poinsettia, and a cross blessed by Pope Francis which had been hidden in the plant. It was indeed a day full of grace, blessings and surprises for Nicholas and his family. In the words of this young man, “Fr. Jim is a great guy; he is kind and generous.” Nicholas is impressed that Fr. Jim has traveled over 4 million miles to share the message of Christ and to help make life better for countless people.

Fr. Jim was intentional each night in thanking the team that planned and executed our Mission, including our priests and pastoral leadership team, lay ministers, and volunteers. He complimented our beautiful Church and how everything is so well

organized and maintained. During the school Mass, Fr. Jim was complimentary of our excellent educators and was impressed by how much the students knew about their faith. As an experienced musician himself, he gave special kudos to our Music Ministry Director, Mayumi Naramura. She did a beautiful job of keeping up with his spontaneous requests and accompanying the song he chose, “Christ, Be Our Light!”

Fr. Jim completed his undergraduate studies in vocal performance at New England Conservatory of Music. He received a master of divinity degree from Sacred Heart School of Theology. Born the youngest of five children, Fr. Jim’s mother, Marie, was a devoted and loving Italian mom who attended Mass and prayed the Rosary daily; she seemed to be in constant prayer. Miss Marie was a music teacher who served her community, cooked enough food every day to share with others, and was a great evangelizer. His dad, William Sichko, Sr., was a former football player with the Pittsburgh Panthers. The parents raised the children with strong, non-negotiable Catholic values and traditions. Though they are both deceased now, they remain a very important part of Fr. Jim’s life to this day. Fr. Jim is considered a media sensation and has a huge social media presence. He posts information, pictures, selfies and videos about his travels, adventures and Missionary trips. Many of his selfies show him with celebrities like Olivia Newton-John, Dolly Parton, Joel Osteen, the CEO of Delta airlines, and, of course, Pope Francis. He also shares selfies with individuals he is assisting in areas that have been devastated by natural disasters, severe weather, and economic hardship. At the conclusion of the Mission, Fr. Jim told us that our Mission really started at 8:01 p.m., after he was done. He received long and resounding applause before going once again to sell his autographed books and his mom’s marinara. To learn more about Fr. Jim Sichko, his videos, and books, as well as the Papal Missionary of Mercy, go to www.frjims.com, search 60MIN4JESUS, and/or find him on EWTN, Youtube, Facebook and other social media outlets.



Before dismissing the crowd, Fr. John Chlebo expressed gratitude for a very successful Parish Mission due to Fr. Jim’s contributions and the large crowds that filled the church. He encouraged us to continue coming back, to sing loudly and with conviction, and to participate fully.

Reminding us to stay until the end of Mass, Fr. John ended by asking for a selfie with Fr. Jim.

EMBRACING LENT WITH OPEN HEARTS

As we approach the holy season of Lent, we prepare for another spiritual journey that leads us to the heart of our faith which is the paschal mystery of Christ. This sacred season begins on Ash Wednesday and culminates in the celebration of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, ushering us into the sacred Triduum. While Lent is traditionally known as a penitential season marked by 40 days of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, it is not merely a time to dwell on human sinfulness. Rather, it is a privileged opportunity to reflect on the boundless mercy and unmerited benevolence of God.

At the heart of our Lenten observance is the realization that God, in His infinite love, has given us His only Son, who embraced the cross to redeem us from sin and its consequences, most especially, death. As we journey through these forty days, our prayer, fasting, and acts of charity prepare us to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. When Easter morning dawns, we will rejoice in the victory of Christ, whose resurrection renews our hope in the promise of eternal life.

Lent is a season of grace, a time when God calls us to respond to His love with renewed faith and deeper conversion. The Scriptures remind us that our God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8). He is ever ready to forgive, always inviting us to be reconciled with Him. This holy season calls us to turn away from sin and to walk once more in the ways of the Lord. It is not enough to acknowledge our weaknesses, but we must allow God's grace to transform us. Lent is a time to surrender ourselves to the loving embrace of our Father, who longs to renew our hearts and restore us to His friendship.

The Church provides us with three essential practices to guide us on this Lenten journey: almsgiving, fasting, and prayer. These are not mere external acts of penance but means by which we are drawn into a more authentic and Christ-centered way of life.

Lent reminds us that all we have, our resources, our talents, our very lives are gifts from God meant to be shared. In giving to those in need, we recognize the dignity of every person and acknowledge that the goods of the earth are entrusted

to all humanity. Fasting is more than mere abstinence from food; it is a discipline of the heart that helps us detach from worldly excesses and focus on what truly nourishes us, God alone. By voluntarily denying ourselves, we cultivate a spirit of self-control and solidarity with those who have less. When our fasting leads us to share with the poor what we have saved, it becomes a powerful act of love.

Above all, Lent is a time of prayer, a season to listen more attentively to the voice of God and allow Him to shape our hearts. True prayer is not merely a recitation of words; it is an intimate encounter with our loving Father. During this sacred time, let us open ourselves to God's grace, allowing Him to purify our hearts and renew within us a steadfast spirit.

Lent is not a burden but a gift, an invitation to renewal, to holiness, and to a deeper participation in the mystery of God's love. It is a time to return to the Lord with all our hearts, to embrace the Gospel more fully, and to prepare ourselves for the joy of Easter.

Fr. Lito Clemen



St. Christopher School and PATHS
present



The Beggar and the Wolf

By Patrick Rainville Dorn

A two-act comedy based on the legend of St. Francis of Assisi

Thursday, March 27, 2025
9AM (school performance) & 7PM (public performance)
The Parish Center

Produced by special arrangement with Pioneer Drama Service, Inc., Englewood, Colorado

St. Christopher School Drama Club students invite you to come see *The Beggar and the Wolf* on Thursday, March 27 in the Parish Center. Based on the popular 13th century legend of St. Francis who tamed the wolf terrorizing the town of Gubbio, this two-act comedy is loaded with outrageous puns, slapstick humor, and a cast of 19 quirky characters. Performances are free and take place on Thursday, March 27 at 9 a.m. and 7 p.m. Come witness the hilarious and heart-warming antics of *The Beggar and the Wolf!*

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM – A NEW MILESTONE FOR DEACON MIKE



Is there anything more beautifully holy (and unpredictable) than infant Baptisms? On Sunday, December 22, Deacon Mike had the unique privilege of baptizing four infants after our 11:30 Mass. While introducing himself, Deacon Mike revealed to the families that it was his first time in this important role. Each child came with his or her own large group of family and friends. The support surrounding the young parents and babies was a beautiful sight to behold. According

to Deacon Mike, the logistics of arranging four families took some thought and planning, but it all worked out well in the end. For the most part, the infants were well behaved and cooperative throughout the various sacred steps, including anointing before and after, which Deacon Mike states was his favorite part. The innocent smiles at the Baptismal Font were great signs of being welcomed into the Church. For one infant, however, crying took the place of the smile as the afternoon unfolded. Gabriel remained fussy until Deacon Mike returned with the sacred chrism. At the second anointing, Gabriel quieted down immediately as if he knew the holiness of that moment. Mom and Dad were pleasantly surprised and relieved. Deacon Mike considered it a tremendous

privilege and stated: “The families were lovely to be with for the sacrament. It’s always an honor to be part of their lives and together celebrate these special times.”



Adding to this holy occasion of four baptisms, one of the young couples had asked Fr. John to help them celebrate their marriage in the Catholic tradition following their daughter’s baptism. New to St. Christopher, Brett Baisch and Stelah Ottichilo Baisch had

previously been married in a civil ceremony, then travelled to Kenya to celebrate in a traditional ceremony. On the same day their daughter, Alora, was baptized here, the couple once again celebrated their marriage, this time at St. Christopher. Both sacraments were witnessed in the presence of family, including a grandmother who traveled from Kenya and an uncle who traveled from his U.S. military post in Italy. As our parish community continues to welcome an increasing number of young families, it was indeed a perfect day to celebrate our holy sacraments.

Carmen Everett DeHaan

ST. COLMAN CHURCH-IN-THE-CITY PARTNERSHIP



Our St. Colman Pantry collection is progressing well. The bins in the upper gathering area are being steadily filled; we thank everyone who has contributed. We have a team of nine drivers who pick up the items and deliver them to St. Colman. Special thanks to Vid Lutz, Angela Rosati, Marilyn Michael, Kevin Becker, Nancy Sullivan, and Brian Hurtuk, who have served as drivers in recent months.

The Neighborhood Meals program had a difficult start. Unfortunately, we had to cancel the meal scheduled for January 18 due to a lack of volunteers. We urgently need someone to pick up the food and deliver it to St. Colman. The cost of the food will be covered by our St. Colman funds through St. Christopher. If you are interested in helping out in this way, please contact me for more details.

Do you enjoy baking? We are looking for five families to bake two dozen cookies and two dozen cupcakes for dessert for our meals. Please drop off the baked goods at the parish office by 3 p.m. on the Thursday before the Saturday meal. Make sure to package the baked items in disposable containers. You can sign up through the parish website. Thank you!

The meal on February 15 was a success. Thank you to the families who helped serve the meal. The next St. Colman Neighborhood Meal will be held on Saturday, March 22. We are grateful to have a volunteer who will pick up and deliver the food.

Bishop Malesic is asking every Catholic in the Diocese of Cleveland to identify their mission of service in the world—a specific way in which they have been called by the Lord to help those in need. I encourage you to bring this intention to prayer and ask the Lord if He is calling you to serve at St. Colman.

Melissa DiFini

LADIES GUILD UPDATE



In Bishop Edward Malesic’s recent Pastoral Letter, *A Flourishing Apostolic Church*, he extols the importance of small groups and communal encounters in our parishes. He says,

“Our world is more digitally connected than ever, yet the data tells us that people are also lonelier than ever...The remedy to this loneliness is authentic Christian friendship and community.” For generations, the Ladies Guild has fostered a Christ-like spirit of friendship and community amongst the women of St. Christopher Parish. This spirit was alive on a cold January evening when Guild members gathered in Mary’s Room for a Water Bar Social. The ladies enjoyed a respite from mid-winter’s cabin fever, catching up with friends, and sipping on refreshing, fruit and herb infused water. The highlight of the evening was a beautiful candlelit and prayerful guided meditation led by Claire Kaufman of Inner Bliss Yoga. Claire skillfully led the women through breath work and Scripture passages to calm their minds and open their hearts to the love of God. It was a moving and spiritually renewing experience.

The Ladies Guild also nourishes spiritual connection through prayer. During Advent special prayer cards were distributed at weekend Masses for the women to pray with and for each other

during their Advent journeys. In addition, the Ladies Guild page on the parish website offers a Woman of the Month feature on an inspiring woman of faith as well as a Monthly Novena. On February 23, Guild members will to come together for the 11:30 Mass which will be celebrated for all living and deceased members of the Guild. In remembering all those faithful women who have gone before us, we are reminded that we are all united in Christ as members of the Communion of Saints. During Lent, on April 2nd at 7 p.m. in the Church, the Ladies Guild will once again gather to pray Mary’s Way of the Cross. All are welcome to this moving version of the Stations of the Cross through Mary’s eyes.



As Bishop Malesic says: “Small faith-related groups allow us to recognize what is universally true about our Catholic faith in our particular situations. They allow us to share our faith with

others in more personal, often more meaningful ways. They allow us to share our stories with each other.” Come join the Ladies Guild. We’d love to hear your story!

Nancy Sullivan



2024 SOCIAL CONCERNS

Thanksgiving Food Drive



UPDATE FROM THE UKRAINIAN WELCOME CIRCLE AND A MESSAGE FROM THE KUSHNYR FAMILY



At the end of April, the Kushnyr family will celebrate their second year in the United States. Their educational, professional and social progress has been nothing less than extraordinary. The UWC team has been impressed with the family's resilience, courage and high standards when it comes to acclimating to American customs. Their language skills, especially the children, have improved beyond our expectations. They have trusted our mentoring while at the same time asking pertinent questions and doing their own research on important topics.

Dmytro and Valeriia have been diligent and unwavering in their commitment to being financially responsible for their livelihood and family support. The youngsters, Dariush and Aniela, have learned to speak English and enjoy American holidays and traditions. In 2024, the family vacationed in Florida, spent a day at Cedar Point, and toured the Rock 'n Roll Hall of Fame, to mention just a few of many adventures. Dariush continues to play on soccer teams at every opportunity and is happy that he can play year-round. Aniela, now almost three, has become a very verbal young lady. Members of our UWC agree that the Kushnyrs have become family and will always be an important part of our parish community. They continue to be a real pleasure to walk alongside and watch grow. It is clear that our friendship will continue well into the future. Further updates will be presented in upcoming issues of the Belltower Beacon, postings in our Church Bulletin, and/or via the St. Christopher website.

In previous issues, Dmytro and Valeriia have shared their journey, their joy at being here, and their gratitude. Now speaking on behalf of the family, Dmytro added the following: "Our family could not even imagine how much help we would receive from St. Christopher and the Welcome Circle. From the first warm hugs and smiles at the airport in the middle of the night to crossing the threshold of our new, fully furnished and stocked home, many tears of relief and joy were shared. I remember that something stabbed me in the chest at this moment and it was not a heart attack. Our family was and is very grateful to God that these people came into our lives when we needed them most. The next day, our Uniting 4 Ukraine program sponsors George and Lora Blaha came to visit, along with Fr. Tim. Lora had tears in her eyes and George shook my hand tightly. We could see immediately that Fr. Tim would be special to us as his gaze radiated kindness and sincerity. We have not met such people in



our lives. For me personally and for my family, this was a gift sent by God. Every day in America has been filled with social and educational events, including college classes. The challenges of studying in an educational system that is completely new to us and in a different language (and alphabet), as well as seeing even

minimal progress, have all been unforgettable. The unexpected but interesting path we're on was made possible thanks to the members of the Welcome Circle. Being in America for almost two years, we came to realize that nothing is permanent and changes will come. No matter where life takes us in the future, this invaluable experience and time spent in Northeast Ohio will remain in our memories and in those of our children forever. We have shared countless adventures, a long list of firsts, very few tense moments, too many laughs to count, and the joy of being surrounded by unconditional love. To St. Christopher parish and all the people who helped us and continue to do so, from the very bottom of our hearts, we are infinitely grateful for everything."

Carmen Everett DeHaan

SAVE THE DATE

JOIN US FOR OUR 4TH ANNUAL ST. CHRIS PARISH WEEKEND

AUGUST 22 - 24

SCPW 2025
AUGUST 22 - 24

VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR UPDATES & TO GET INVOLVED OR BE PART OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

SCPWEEKEND.COM

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

St. Christopher School celebrated Catholic Schools Week (CSW) from January 26-31. Students “discovered and celebrated” their faith in a variety of ways following this year’s theme of “Catholic Schools: United in Faith and Community.”

As in the past, SCS kicked off CSW with the students speaking at each of the weekend Masses, the student art show and the School Open House. 8th grade ambassadors were onsite during the open house to guide visitors through the halls making each guest feel a part of the school community. This year’s displayed artwork was completed in art classes and inspired by van Gogh, Kandinsky, Marc Chagall, and Peter Bruegel to name only a few artists. Additional artwork, Bubble Art, created by 2nd graders in STREAM also hung in the halls. In the Middle School hallway were “Break Up Letters” to King George from America, written by 8th graders in social studies and aged in science class. President reports including president portraits filled the 5th grade hallway. One 5th grader, Sammy, was so inspired by his assigned president he took advantage of his family’s trip to Washington, DC for the inauguration and visited President Taft’s grave. The Makerspace was a buzz when students went to the next level to build the tallest cup towers possible. Ladders had to be brought into the room as students exceeded height expectations. As Theodore Roosevelt said, “Believe you can and you’re halfway there.” SCS students believed they could and they did. The day’s tallest tower was 27 cups high. The artwork and schoolwork displayed in the halls during the open house reaffirmed that a Catholic education “teaches and embraces the whole person, body, mind and spirit.”

Monday, January 27, students were reminded that God created light, the sky, the earth, the sun and moon, animals, and humans with a visit from the Realm of the Reptiles. Students learned interesting facts and interacted with a variety of reptiles from an Eastern Box Turtle, Boxie, to a Bull Snake, Ferdinand. Students were taught each reptile has a unique trait that protects it. God created all things with their own unique and special gifts. The bullsnake’s mix-brown coloring is perfect for camouflaging in forests. Each and every person has a special gift from God. Students came to understand that it is our job to use our gifts to care for all God’s creations.

Tuesday, January 28, SCS celebrated FAITH by attending the CSW All-School Mass lead by the 5th grade. Fr. John compared each individual to a puzzle piece. Each piece of the puzzle is different but necessary to complete the whole puzzle. Mass attendees were encouraged to use their individual unique gifts to shine the light of Jesus through their actions and deeds every day.

After Mass, students were entertained by the St. Edward Orchestra and Trash Talkers. The Trash Talkers are a percussion group whose instruments are trash cans, trash lids and buckets. The St. Edward Orchestra and Trash Talkers brought to life Psalm



66:1-2, “Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; sing forth the glory of his name; make his praise glorious.”

Wednesday, January 29, many SCS students made a joyful noise by sharing their unique talents of song, dance, music, and comedy in the CSW Talent Show. The talent show not only offered entertainment for the school community but was an opportunity for students to explore their creativity, develop social skills like public speaking and build confidence. The talent show was yet another way for the students to embrace their uniqueness and see first hand how much others enjoyed and admired their unique God given talents.

Thursday, January 30, focused on science through the Science Share. Pope Francis, in his special letter *Laudato Si*, “Care for our Common Home” asks us to recognize the wonder of the magnificent world that God has created – people, animals, plants, the solar system, etc. Pope Francis says that the “earth is God’s gift to us, full of beauty and wonder” and that we, “the whole human family needs to work together to care for our planet earth so that we sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.” Pope Francis wants us all to, “put love for the world and love for our neighbors, into action, by living together in harmony, and caring for nature.” What better way to promote the message of Pope Francis than to make students aware of environmental themes than having the older students teach the younger students through the annual Science Share. The 7th and 8th graders selected a variety of science topics to research in order to create and present 20-minute lessons to the younger students of SCS. Each presentation even included an assessment activity such as Jeopardy, Constellation Memory, Camouflage Search and Find, and a fan favorite Aim for the Hoop. Students learned, “they are called to care for creation not only as responsible citizens, but also as followers of Christ” – Pope Francis.

Community spirit was the theme for Friday, January 31. Middle school students took part in a 3-on-3 basketball tournament. Parents continued to join their SCS student(s) for lunch as in the previous days of the week. The day ended with angel partners getting together to play All School Bingo. The SCS Angel Program pairs a 6th grader as a Guardian Angel to a kindergartner. These students work together throughout their years at SCS to build a bond of friendship and faith as they grow academically and spiritually.

The takeaway from this year’s Catholic Schools Week can best be summarized with the following quote, “Just like puzzle pieces fit together to make a beautiful picture, we (at SCS) fit together as a community to make something special, helping and caring for one another.”

Catholic Schools Week





BELOVED TEACHER



Mr. Ralph Reznik passed away peacefully at the age of 77. A dedicated husband, father and grandfather, after serving our country in the US Army, he served the St. Christopher community for 35 years as the 8th grade Math teacher in homeroom 8A. As an educator, Mr. Reznik loved solving for an unknown variable, leading the school in charitable causes, monitoring the cafeteria, and watching his many students succeed.

He instilled a sense of discipline in the St. Chris student body that was rooted in a deep caring for all students. His longevity as an educator was remarkable. Our mom, Lori, was in his first class, and we both had him several years later – a testament to his devotion and love for both education and the St. Christopher community. His life’s work was shaping young minds and instilling Catholic values in our children. We are forever grateful to Mr. Reznik, and he will always be remembered.

Stephen Alexander and Ryan Alexander

Tributes from Mr. Reznik’s former students and colleagues:

One student who wants to be anonymous: early 2000s

“What first comes to mind was how strict he was but once you got to know him it made perfect sense. The 7/8 graders are old enough to be dumb and smart simultaneously, so I think he did a great job of navigating that. You could tell he cared. He wasn’t strict because he was angry but because he wanted the best for those he taught and he made sure you learned the right way!”

Leslie Moder, former band teacher:

“Ralph was one of my favorite colleagues. I admired him as a person and as a professional. I greatly appreciated the way Ralph treated his students with care and kindness. He was the kind of teacher that I hoped my own children would get to work with.

As a colleague, he was generous with his guidance, especially in my first few years at St. Christopher School”

Mary Deckelman, retired 4th-grade teacher

“I remember Ralph always being the first teacher to step up for different causes, relief, and disasters. He began the all-school money collections and had his students collect and count the money. He was ready to help those in need. (pennies for Africa, hurricane relief, different missions, food, Christmas gifts, etc)”

John Karaffa, retired junior science teacher:

“First, he helped me get acquainted with teaching at St. Chris. I took a twenty-five-year break from teaching seventh grade and was

a bit rusty. During several summer breaks, we painted classrooms and halls in the older part of the school and a few rooms in the Rectory. He could paint the straightest lines freehand.

In August of 2002, I went to Nairobi, Kenya to visit my brother’s grave and bring some of his possessions back home. Ralph and some of his students prepared my classroom for the school year for there wasn’t much time when I returned before the start of school.

He knew more about the workings of the young adolescent mind than I would ever know and I learned much from his interactions with students.

Finally, he arranged the funeral of an elderly friend. He asked me to attend the wake for he didn’t expect many people to come. He was correct.”

Lisa Pellman Spicer, former student

“Mr. Reznik was my 8th grade teacher in 1985-1986 and many years later taught my son, Ryan Spicer in 2008-2009 and my daughter, Sara Spicer in 2012-2013. I have many great memories of not only my years with Mr. Reznik but my kids as well. He was a teacher that truly cared about his students and we were lucky to know him. RIP”

Susan (Pellettiere) Zimmerman, former student

“Mr. Reznik was my 8th grade teacher at St. Margaret Mary. He was kind, funny, fair and a great teacher that made you want to learn and do well in his classes. Now working in a Catholic school in the diocese, whenever I am asked if I had a favorite teacher, my reply is always Mr. Reznik. Sympathy to your family. What a wonderful life he lived. Please know there are many of us out there who you do not know, but whose lives he touched in a special way. God Bless.”

Joyce Needham, former St. Christopher School principal:

“I met Ralph when I was hired as principal in 2006. He had worked as an assistant principal to Sr. Pat. He knew the workings and the culture of the school, the families, the teachers, and many things in the parish and diocese. I recognized his dedication and hard work. I utilized his knowledge throughout my tenure. We worked well together! My crazy ideas were always run by Ralph and we laughed and planned together. We were a good balance for each other. He was honest, and forthright and became more flexible during our years together. He was my sounding board in times of chaos. He was my partner in laughter.

His student math scores were phenomenal. When approached with applying for the National Blue Ribbon School award, he was the first to agree to work on the long, tedious application. He was so proud when we were granted the award in 2010.

When our students participated in the high school Algebra early morning classes for credit, many commented it was easy because they learned so much in Mr. Reznik’s class. (He was certified 1-8. If he had high school certification he could have taught the class. We had to follow the rules).

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

Open House

He was an early morning organizer and his day ended when it ended. I remember his freshly pressed shirts and ties. When we had dress-down days, he never participated. I encouraged him to dress down, first, he would wear a Browns shirt over his tie, and eventually, he enjoyed the full dress-down garb. That was Ralph. He was a rule follower from his army training. Change was always done in little steps.

I saw him grow as a teacher. Chalk was his friend in the math class. Pencils and paper, notebooks, etc. were important in his class. Enter technology. Whiteboards, online-grading, and power points were challenging at first but Mr. Reznik loved the challenge and was tech-savvy in no time.

He loved teaching Church history in his religion class. He wanted to share his faith and enjoyed the Confirmation preparation with the students. He was disappointed when the program was moved to the 9th grade. Together we planned many prayer services and he helped me with ideas for my preaching. Ralph was always involved in planning the 8th-grade retreat.

I cannot remember many days Ralph was out for a personal or sick day. When he had his hip replaced, he scheduled it in the summer to be ready for the new year. When I asked him about mental health days, he laughed at me.

It is hard to describe Ralph Reznik unless you had the opportunity to work with him. He loved St. Chris. He wanted to teach and form the students in a Catholic school. He was tough but sentimental. Strong, but flexible. He enjoyed every day. He loved his wife endlessly and was proud of his daughter and grandchildren. Ralph Reznik was the epitome of a Catholic educator! I am proud to have worked with him at St. Christopher School.”



A HOME FAR FROM HOME: MY HEARTFELT VISIT TO THE PHILIPPINES

After more than a year, I was finally blessed with the opportunity to return to the Philippines for a vacation. It was a time of joy and renewal as I reunited with my family, reconnected with old friends, and revisited my former parish assignments. Every moment spent with my siblings, relatives, and former parishioners was filled with laughter, gratitude, and cherished memories. While I traveled across familiar places, I carried with me the many beautiful and wonderful stories of my life and ministry here at St. Christopher Parish.

Sharing these stories with my loved ones was a meaningful experience. They were eager to hear about my journey here in St. Christopher, about this faith-filled community I have found, the kindness I have received, and the joy I experience in my priestly ministry. I told them how blessed I am to serve at St. Christopher Parish, how truly fortunate I am to belong to such a welcoming and vibrant faith family. Even my bishop in the Philippines (*pictured, right, in white T-shirt among other priest friends*) was overjoyed to hear of my experience here, and he expressed his heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your kindness, and generosity.

Of course, the contrast between the two places was striking. I couldn't help but notice the stark difference in climate. Back home, the temperature ranged between 85 to 90 degrees, quite the opposite of the freezing temperatures I had left behind in Cleveland. And yet, despite the warmth of the tropical sun, I found myself missing something unexpected, the cold weather of Ohio! But more than that, I realized that a big part of my heart remained here at St. Christopher Parish.

Though I was on vacation, the call of vocation never takes a break. As much as I enjoyed my time in the Philippines, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was also missing my parish family here. It was then that I realized something deeply personal that St. Christopher is not just where I serve; it has become my home. St. Christopher Parish is not just my assignment; it is my family.

This realization was affirmed in a simple yet meaningful encounter on my journey back. As I arrived at Los Angeles International Airport, I stood before the immigration officer, who asked me a few routine questions about my travels. Upon discovering that I am a priest serving in Ohio, she asked how I was adjusting, especially to the cold weather. Without hesitation, I responded, "Yes, it is cold there, but the people are warm." She smiled at my words and told me how much she loved that analogy.

Now that I am back, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your warm welcome and love. Coming home to St. Christopher Parish fills my heart with joy, and I am grateful for each and every one of you. My journey to the Philippines was a beautiful reminder of my roots, but it also deepened my appreciation for the new home God has given me here. Indeed, this is truly a home far from home. Thank you for being a part of my journey, for your prayers, kindness, and love. It is a privilege to serve you, and I look forward to continuing to walk with you in faith.

Fr. Lito Clemen



CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD



St. Christopher Parish-Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been up and running since October 2024. 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 at Mass.

We have a special room designed in the school especially for this program. It is the Good Shepherd Room. The Kindergarten class at St. Christopher School was the first group to start instruction in the new room. We have seen so much growth in them in just a few months.

Fr. John came in to bless our Good Shepherd Room on a Friday in November. He was able to see the class in action and observe exactly what it is we do on Fridays with the kindergartners. Thank you, Fr. John for blessing our sacred space.

Our hope is to expand the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for the day school and PSR by next 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

Sharon Armstrong



J+WALKERS YOUTH MINISTRY CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS, EPIPHANY, AND MORE!

Our J+Walkers winter was filled with numerous liturgically-themed meeting nights. Kicking things off was our third annual Christmas party, featuring cookie decorating, our traditional white elephant gift exchange and a new addition this year: oven mitt unwrapping! We sure had a blast at this highly anticipated event. A few weeks later our high school students reflected on the theme of Epiphany as we entered 2025, considering the three gifts given to the baby Jesus that represented thanksgiving, hope, and trial. The following week, middle school students learned about the power of water and the rich symbolism it provides in the sacrament of baptism. They learned that, much like a pickle cannot leave the solution of a pickle jar, we cannot leave the waters of baptism. It is the waters of baptism (or in this case, the pickle solution!) that gives us our distinct “flavor” as Christians.

As we enter spring, our J+Walkers have many exciting things planned, both big and small! Stay tuned and join us for these exciting events in the coming months!

Logan Feldkamp

A SEASON OF BLESSINGS: CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY'S GENEROSITY THROUGH THE CHRISTMAS G.I.F.T. DRIVE

This past holiday season, the spirit of giving shone brightly within our community, showcasing the generosity and compassion of St. Christopher parishioners. The annual Christmas G.I.F.T. (Giving in Faith Together) drive, organized by the St. Christopher Social Concerns Committee, was a tremendous success!

Parishioners selected 850 G.I.F.T. tags, contributing to 15 non-profit agencies that support people in our community and beyond who are in need. This total exceeded last year's generous contributions! Thank you to everyone who helped make this the best program in over 20 years.

This drive has significantly impacted various social service agencies, ranging from Edna House, which allows women to recover from alcohol and drug addiction by providing a safe, sober place to live, to our longtime partner, Malachi House, which provides end-of-life care. All 15 agencies address vital needs in our communities, including education, support for childhood trauma, assistance for families in crisis, pregnancy support, drug and alcohol recovery, meals, clothing, supplies, and shelter for the unhoused, life skills training, foster care, and activities for seniors. G.I.F.T. Tags were available on November 23, 2024, and donations were collected in the Gathering Area up until the distribution date on December 15, 2024.

On the distribution day, volunteer parish members, along with the invaluable help of students from the PSR Junior High and Confirmation classes, carried, sorted, and loaded carts with gifts ready for the agencies to pick up. A long line of agency cars and vans began arriving around noon, and the PSR volunteers played a crucial role in loading the gifts quickly and efficiently.

Shena Maddox from Sisters Haven wrote, "Your unwavering support means the world to us! Thank you for your kindness and generosity and for walking alongside our cause." Veronica Favela from Westside Catholic Center wrote, "We are in awe of your kindness and grateful for your support, and we look forward to 2025 knowing we will thrive with this blessed community that surrounds us." Sister Mary Kay from House of Champions wrote, "The generosity and support of your parishioners is such a blessing."

As we reflect on the success of this year's drive, we would like to invite other parish members to help coordinate future events. Your involvement can help us extend our outreach and support to more needy people in our community. Together, we can make a larger impact on the lives of others. If you're interested in participating or have ideas for future initiatives, please contact the Social Concerns Committee at socialconcerns@stchrisparish.com.

We look forward to your support and collaboration!

Julie Mallett



FROM THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE

The students from “the Way” have been busy around the Parish, serving others and learning about how to be an active parishioner. Service is an important part of their new program. Our 110 junior high students have been visiting the residents of the Normandy, packed Christmas gifts for the needy, made holiday cards for parish shut-ins, picked up litter at St. Colman Church, collected food to feed the poor for Thanksgiving, collected toys, hats, and mittens for inner-city children in need, just to name a few ways to serve the least of our brothers and sisters.

These “service minded” students will be hosting the Soup Supper again this year on Tuesday, April 1 from 5-7 p.m. The beneficiary of our meal will be the diocese of Tagbilaran to support those suffering from the effects of global warming in the Philippines. We will be selling tickets for the Soup Supper, raffle baskets, and fair trade coffee and chocolate.

Our Confirmation program is well underway. The annual retreat is coming up on Saturday, March 22. Please pray for our 58 students preparing for this important sacrament.

Sharon Armstrong



FIRST RECONCILIATION RETREAT

The St. Christopher 2nd graders enjoyed a prayerful retreat in preparation for their First Reconciliation. They spent the morning creating a pillow which they used in the Good Shepherd Room and will use again in the future when they prepare for First Communion. The students stuffed their pillows and even included a couple of hearts inside the pillow to remind them that Jesus loves them. They then travelled to a very special room, The Good Shepherd Room, where they laid on their pillows while meditating. The students imagined that they were in a quiet, special place and along comes Jesus! They were guided through a conversation with Jesus in which they discussed times in which the student did not always make good decisions. Jesus forgave the student and was once again in His good graces. The students also reviewed the procedure for their First Reconciliation and created a couple of different art projects to help them better prepare for this sacrament. It was a wonderful morning! The students are all looking forward to their Jesus Day Retreat in April to help prepare them for their First Communion.

Robin Seedhouse

THE KNIGHT AT THE OSCARS

On February 1, the PATHS (Parents and Teachers Helping Students) organization hosted its annual fundraiser, “The Knight at the Oscars,” a glamorous evening dedicated to supporting St. Christopher School.

Held in our Parish Center, the event welcomed parents, staff, and community members for a night of Hollywood-style entertainment, delicious dining, and charitable giving. Guests arrived dressed in their finest, walking the red carpet and

posing for photos in a dazzling Oscar-themed setting.

The evening featured an exciting silent auction, raffles, and engaging activities that helped raise funds for essential school programs, classroom resources, and student enrichment initiatives. The highlight of the night was a heartfelt presentation from the student body and a Lifetime Volunteer Award to Mrs. Mary Kay Curtis. Along with Mary Kay Curtis, Mrs. Kristy Bertke

co-chaired the event to perfection with their outstanding committee.

Thanks to the generosity of attendees and sponsors, “The Knight at the Oscars” was a resounding success, reinforcing the spirit of unity and support that defines St. Christopher School. PATHS extends its deepest gratitude to all who participated and contributed to making the event both memorable and meaningful.

Mary Meler



CHURCH CHATTER

HAPPY BIRTHDAY Birthday wishes go out to PSR secretary **Marilu Norena** (March 9), **Fr. Lito** (March 20), pastoral associate **Melissa DiFini** (April 14), **Sr. Jeanne Cmolik** (April 30), school secretary **Judy Zell** (May 9), pastoral associate **Gayle Cilimburg** (May 14), and **Fr. John Chlebo** (May 17). Send them your best wishes on their special day!

ITALIAN PILGRIMAGE More than 100 people from the Diocese of Cleveland joined Bishop Edward Malesic on a 10-day pilgrimage to Italy in January, as the Jubilee Year of Hope began. **Mary Horvath** and **Mary Jane Linn**, two St. Christopher parishioners, joined this travel group, along with Fr. Dan Schlegel, a former St. Christopher Pastoral Vicar. Highlights of the trip included a general audience with Pope Francis, visiting major churches in Rome, Florence, and Assisi, touring the Vatican Museums, and sightseeing. Mary serves on Parish Council at St. Christopher and is a lector. Mary Jane assists in our funeral ministry. Buona!

SENIORS RULE The Rocky River Seniors Council recently elected **Toni Holtzhauser** as its President. Also on the Council are fellow parishioners **Georgene Cooper**, and **Mark and Nancy Seryak**. The Council directs the Rocky River Senior Center to create opportunities for healthy aging. Congratulations to all.

QUINCEANERA **Gabriella Krncevic**, granddaughter of parishioner **Ana Santos**, celebrated her Quinceanera (15th birthday) with her family and friends. The Mass of Thanksgiving included Gabriella thanking God for life and committing to serve others in a life dedicated to Mary as a Christian woman.



DINNER BELLS One of Cleveland's newest and unique restaurants is **The Friar's Table**. Located in the heart of Playhouse Square at 1305 Euclid Avenue, and open Tuesday through Saturday for dinner, this restaurant is truly one-of-a-kind. The eatery is a collaboration of the Cleveland Capuchin Ministries, Edwin's Leadership and Restaurant Institute, and Playhouse Square. Overseen by Edwin's leader, Brandon Chrostowski, The Friar's Table not only serves delicious soups, salads, stews, and main dishes, but also provides formerly incarcerated adults training, employment, and purpose. With a mission deeply rooted in the values of simplicity, dignity, and community, the restaurant aims to bring together residents and visitors alike in an environment that nourishes both body and soul. Visit them at thefriarstable.org.

CHRISTIAN BOOK STORE This is the time of year to purchase gifts and keepsake mementos for First Holy Communion, Confirmation, graduations, and weddings. Visit **The Galilee Gift and Bookstore**, next to Church of St. Clarence in North Olmsted for all your needs. It has a vast selection of rosaries, prayer cards, statues, prayer books, medals, greeting cards, and more!

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	LENT FAMILY NIGHT	April 1	LENTEN SOUP SUPPER
March 2	PARISH DONUT SUNDAY	April 2	MARY'S WAY OF THE CROSS
March 6, 13, 27, April 3, 10, 17, 24		April 3, 10, 17, 24	
May 1, 8, 15	WALKING WITH PURPOSE	May 1, 8, 15	BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP
March 7, 14, 21, 28		April 4	SCHOOL JESUS DAY FIRST COMMUNION
April 4, 11, 18	EVENING FAMILY STATIONS OF THE CROSS	April 5	PSR JESUS DAY FIRST COMMUNION
March 7, April 4		April 6	LAMENT STATIONS OF THE CROSS
May 2	EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION	April 6	PRE-CANA DAY
March 8	CUB SCOUT PINEWOOD DERBY	April 6	APOLLO'S FIRE CONCERT
March 12, 26		April 6	ST. MARY PARISH
April 9, 23	MORNINGS WITH THE WORD	April 13	LIVING STATIONS OF THE CROSS
March 12, 19, 26		April 16	SCHOOL LIVING STATIONS OF THE CROSS
April 2, 9, 16	MORNING STATIONS OF THE CROSS	May 3, 10, 11, 17, 18	FIRST COMMUNIONS AT MASS
March 13	FATHER-DAUGHTER EVENT	May 6	CONFIRMATION
March 22	CONFIRMATION RETREAT	May 30	8TH GRADE GRADUATION
March 28 & 29	PARISH RETREAT ON THE EUCHARIST		

HOLY WEEK SCHEDULE

Palm Sunday, April 13	Regular Weekend Mass Schedule	Holy Saturday, April 19	Food Blessing 3 p.m.
Wednesday, April 16	Confessions 7-8 p.m.	Holy Saturday, April 19	Easter Vigil 8:30 p.m.*
Holy Thursday, April 17	Mass of the Lord's Supper 7 p.m.*	Easter Sunday, April 20	Masses at 8:30 a.m.* in Church, 10 a.m. in Church and Parish Center & 11:30 a.m. in Church
Good Friday, April 18	The Passion of the Lord 3 p.m.*		
Good Friday, April 18	Stations of the Cross Noon (outdoors, weather permitting) and 7 p.m. in Church		

* Also livestreamed