



12.2014

Saint Paul

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

The True Reason for the Season *Preparing for Christmas at St. Paul Catholic School*

The St. Paul Catholic School community is anticipating the Christmas season with a host of educational and seasonal activities to underscore the true meaning of the season.

“Our whole purpose as a Catholic school is to bring Christ to the world,” says Principal Lara Schuler. “A Catholic school is focused on Christ, His birth, His life, and His resurrection. Christ is the true reason for the season. We have to teach our children this, and it is increasingly difficult during this materialistic age. But we can do that, and our traditions help us to do that.”

The annual Christmas traditions at St. Paul begin during the Advent season. To prepare for Christmas, every grade keeps individual traditions in their classrooms, from

activity calendars that encourage students to help others, to Jesse Trees that teach students the Bible story with different ornaments. In the past, students in the older grades have also collected canned goods and helped create Christmas cards for the homebound.

“The Advent and Christmas traditions consist of a mixture of secular and religious activities for the students,” Mrs. Schuler says. “Each classroom keeps an Advent wreath. Together the students recite Advent prayers and sing traditional hymns.”

On Dec. 16, the kindergarten students will have their annual Polar Express Day. The students wear pajamas to class and board an imaginary train to the North Pole before reading *The Polar Express* together with hot chocolate and cookies.



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The True Reason for the Season continued from front cover

On Dec. 9, the third through fifth grade students will put on their Live Nativity in the evening at the church. Each fifth-grader will play a part in the Nativity story, and the third and fourth-grade students will sing traditional carols.

On Dec. 17, students from pre-kindergarten through eighth grade will take part in a Posada Procession with Benediction to follow. The children sing and process, with students dressed as Mary and Joseph as they go from door to door looking for room at the inn.

The anticipatory Christmas events conclude with the annual Christmas Pageant on Dec. 19.

“Each grade level has a few songs that they prepare with a mix of secular and religious hymns for the parents,” Mrs. Schuler says. “A few of the students also read their favorite Christmas memories, and we have an early dismissal that day.”

When the students return to school, the middle school students celebrate Jan. 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, with the Stations of the Crib. These stations are modeled after the Stations of the Cross and include 14 scenes from the life of Jesus, from the Annunciation to the Holy Family’s return to Nazareth. The stations take place in front of the manger in the church and include readings from the Gospels.

Through the annual activities at St. Paul Catholic School, our students actively prepare to receive Christ at



Christmas and learn faith-filled traditions to carry with them throughout their lives.

“If you teach children these traditions when they are young, if you plant those seeds, they’ll have something to cling to when they get older,” Mrs. Schuler says. “I remember singing ‘O Come, O Come Emmanuel’ as a child every day in Advent, and that memory is a strong one. Every year, we create those memories and live those traditions with the children.”

For more information about Advent and Christmas activities at St. Paul Catholic School, please contact the school office or Principal Lara Schuler at 850-436-6435.



A Letter From Our Pastor

Making Christmas a Time of Real Blessing

Dear Parishioners,

As we all know, December is about Christmas – and Christmas is about giving.

The basic truth of Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus the Messiah, God Incarnate, is plenty of reason for us all to rejoice and worship. But the additional load we have piled onto our Christmas observance means that worship is often almost lost in the shuffle.

Think about what weight Christmas has to bear. For instance, we send Christmas cards to people we contact at no other time of the year. We have to put up wreaths, Christmas trees and lights. It's the time of year above all others to visit relatives – “Home for Christmas” is a sort of national motto. There's the Christmas dinner to plan and cook. And then, we have Christmas presents to buy. No wonder the Christ Mass becomes an afterthought!

Presents, at least, are a natural extension of the Christmas theme: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16). As God loved us and expressed it by giving His Son, so we in turn share the love we have received by giving to others. And it's natural to show the joy we feel at the birth of our Savior with gifts, decorations and festivities.

Maybe, though, we can combine our Christmas activities with our stewardship commitments. Treasure, although challenging, is the simplest. Shouldn't the most generous Christmas present we give be the one to Jesus, whose birthday we're celebrating? Risen and glori-



fied, He needs nothing we have. But His Body, the Church, continues Jesus' mission here on earth, and as good stewards, we all have a need to return a portion of our gifts to God in gratitude for His many blessings.

Stewardship of our time may be a little more complicated, but can't we spend a little more of our time in worship and prayer? Drop in to the church and offer a prayer of thanks for the gift of God's Son. Maybe you can attend Mass each day of the Christmas Octave. Have your family gather for prayers together in the morning or at dinner, in preparation for Christmas Day and through the Christmas season.

And talent? There are lots of possibilities. You can help decorate the Church. Or perhaps you might cook

or bake for someone who is homebound or a shut-in. Invite someone who will be alone to share Christmas dinner with your family. Offer to work in a soup kitchen. The possibilities are endless.

Yes, December is synonymous with Christmas. But with a little planning, we can make this hectic time one of real blessing, both for ourselves and others.

Have a blessed and joyful Christmas.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. Doug Halsema
Pastor

MARIAN GRACE

FEATURING COLLEEN NIXON & JIMMY MITCHELL



A FREE ADVENT CONCERT
*of Sacred Hymns & Original Songs
to help prepare for Christmas*

Sunday, December 14th
4:00pm

St. Paul Catholic Church
1700 Conway Drive | Pensacola, FL 32503

“We’ve Been Very Blessed”

Getting to Know the Hodge Family

On any given Sunday, it’s not unusual for the Hodge family to attend Mass at St. Paul’s before heading home for what Blair Hodge describes as the family’s favorite day.

“We have a big front porch, and one of our favorite things to do is just to come home, put music on, and spend time on the porch as a family,” says James Hodge.

A little over three years ago, the Hodge family moved from Macon, Ga., to the Pensacola area to follow James’ job as an engineer. Blair began teaching science at St. Paul School not long after, and James currently serves on the Welcome Stewards Ministry. Now in their 13th year of marriage, Blair and James are parents to Lilah, 10; Parker, 5; and Tyler, 3. Lilah and Parker attend St. Paul School and are in fifth grade and kindergarten, respectively.

Blair and James met at Georgia Institute of Technology and married shortly after finishing college. Blair describes herself a “cradle Catholic,” while James says religion was “an on-and-off thing” in his household.

“We didn’t go to church regularly when we were dating, and we felt a void,” James says. “She’d grown up with it. She felt a calling to come back to church and I tried my best to make her feel comfortable with a church of a different denomination. She finally convinced me that being a Catholic was the right way to go, and I bought in all the way and converted.”

Central to that conversion experience was a small Catholic church called – oddly enough – St. Paul. James describes it as a very open and welcoming place that took away the all of the intimidation that some new Christians might associate with Catholicism.

“I spent a lot of time talking with the priest with everything I needed to learn [during RCIA]. and he was very lighthearted,” James says. “At the end of the day, it’s not about learning all the rules, it’s about how you lead your life. It’s okay to make mistakes and say the wrong things at the wrong time, and to need to help getting through. It took a lot of the burden off and helped me observe it for the beautiful thing it is.”

For Blair, watching James’ conversion experience has brought her own faith into a more mature and strengthened place.

“Coming back to it with my best friend, James, and to see it with fresh eyes and through an adult’s eyes allowed me to really understand it,” she says. “He’d been asking questions that I never thought to ask. As we peeled one layer back and took another step closer, it got easier and was a thing that just blossomed. God had a plan to put us in that little church. It was what we needed at the time.”

That sense of home was exactly what drew the Hodges to St. Paul here in Pensacola. Making friends and getting involved with the Stewardship Renewal has only enhanced that feeling.



James and Blair Hodge



James and Blair Hodge with their children, (from left) Parker, Tyler and Lilah

“One of the big pieces that pulled us to St. Paul is that it feels like home and it’s filled with wonderful people – we love St. Paul,” Blair says. “There’s a total family focus and we love that for our kids. I see my children growing in their faith in such a wonderful way with the teachers that they have and the family friends. It’s very inspiring.”

“We’ve been very blessed to have a great group of friends and folks like us who want to be involved and make people feel like home,” James adds. “We’re doing our best to try and help out and help do that.”

TREASURES OF OUR FAITH

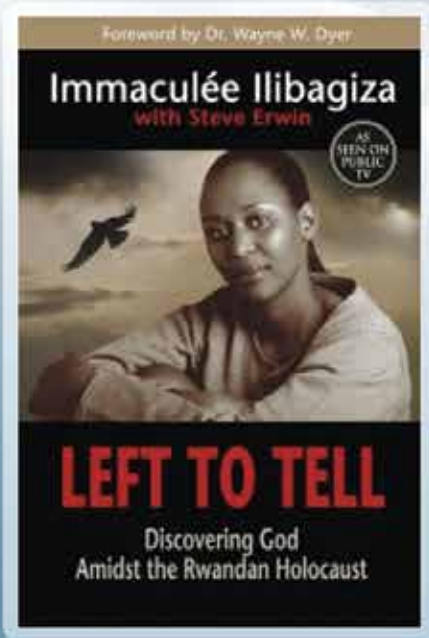
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Angel Gift Shop

Serves Pensacola Catholics

For the past 37 years, the Angel Gift Shop operated under the thoughtful care of Lou Gellner. Upon Lou's retirement last year, parishioner Jo Chambers has taken over management of the shop, and looks forward to continuing Lou's good work.

"It was very important for her to be close with her customers, and for to her to have anything someone was looking for readily available," Jo says. "I hope to continue her legacy by staying in touch with the customers that come in, and continue to help them in a timely manner. I'm continuing to do special orders, for things that can be difficult to track down or specific things they are looking for. I just want to be able to meet people's needs."

In addition to attention to customer service, Jo is also excited about the future of the shop now that they have a computer system.

"I'm trying to streamline our merchandise and carry more things that are bestsellers," she says. "Our bestsellers are basic things, such as crucifixes, books, holy water bottles, scapulars, and medals. What the computer system has enabled us to do is to be able to track how much we're selling of each item, and how quickly it turns over. This helps us to know exactly how much to order each month, and the technology has helped tremendously."

As one of the few Catholic gift stores in the Pensacola area, Jo is determined that the gift shop will continue to be a great service to parishioners and other local Catholics.

"I would even call [the shop] a ministry," Jo says. "There are some customers that just rely on us being there so they don't have to go all over town to get what they need. It's also a good place to go when you're looking for a gift for a sacrament, such as a First Communion, a Baptism or even a wedding. We're a place that sells Catholic merchandise, but it's also a great way to learn more about your faith. With the items we offer, especially the books and prayer cards and little biographies, there's always something you can learn while you're in there."



The gift shop relies on the work of dedicated volunteers, who also benefit from their service to the parish.

"By serving and giving of their time, volunteers are also able to gain faith knowledge," Jo says. "Someone always comes in with something you've never heard about, and when you have to find what they are looking for, you learn about it, too. Another thing is that they are interacting with a lot of people in the parish. I know that friendships have been gained through volunteering – both with people who stop in regularly, and with the people that work in the gift shop together."

The Angel Gift Shop is always looking for volunteers, and encourages parishioners to stop by any time they are looking for a religious item.

"If they're looking for something that's unique or something they can't find anywhere else, we can always

make that special request and try to find it for them," Jo says. "I hope that we will continue to grow and continue to have this ministry available to people!"

The Angel Gift Shop is open Monday-Sunday, after the 8:30 a.m. Mass on weekdays and after all weekend Masses except the 6 p.m. Mass. For more information, please call the Angel Gift Shop at 850-434-2551, ext. 115.



Address Service Requested

Advent/Christmas Schedule

Advent/Christmas Confession in Church

Wednesday, December 3: 6:30 p.m.

Messiah Concert in Church

(The Choral Society of Pensacola)

Saturday, December 6: 7:30 p.m.

Breakfast with Santa in Parish Center

Sunday, December 7: 9 a.m.

The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Holy Day of Obligation & Patronal Feast of the USA.)

December 8, Masses: 6:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 7 p.m.

Live Nativity in Church

Tuesday, December 9: 6 p.m.

Middle School Retreat

Wednesday, December 10: 8 a.m.

Immaculee Retreat in Church and Parish Center

Friday, December 12: 3 p.m. &

Saturday, December 13: 8:30 a.m.

Marian Grace Concert in Church

Sunday, December 14: 4 p.m.

Blue Christmas Service and Mass

Wednesday, December 17: 7 p.m.

School Christmas Program

Friday, December 19: 9:30 a.m.

Christmas Eve Masses

Wednesday, December 24: 4 p.m., 6 p.m., 8 p.m. (no incense)

Christmas Masses

Thursday, December 25: 12 a.m. (Midnight Mass with Incense) & 9 a.m. (no incense)

Mary the Holy Mother of God (Holy Day of Obligation) and New Year Masses:

Wednesday, December 31: 4 p.m., Thursday January 1: 6:30 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 7 p.m.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 9:00, 11:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m. | **Daily Mass:** Monday-Saturday, 8:30 a.m.

Confessions: Saturdays, 9:00 a.m., 3:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.,

most Sundays during 9:00 and 11:00 a.m. Mass, 1st Wednesdays, 6:30 p.m., and by appointment

Eucharistic Adoration: Thursday 9:00 a.m. until Friday 7:30 a.m.

