



The Belltower Beacon

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

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JOYFULLY CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF GAYLE

PASTORAL ASSOCIATE, SERVANT LEADER AND SO MUCH MORE

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Perhaps parishioner Candace “Candy” Martin describes Gayle best when asked about her friend of many years: “Gayle is the glue that holds St. Christopher together. She is always ready with a smile and an ear. Her mentoring

skills are irreplaceable.” Well said, so how do we top that? Easily as it turns out when we speak of a woman of such profound spirituality and high professional standards. Gayle started attending St. Christopher in 1988 and remained an active parishioner even when living on the far east side of town. For the past 25 years, Gayle has served our parish family in many varied roles. No single function takes priority over any of the others as she gives equal time and excellence to all of her many duties. Starting part-time employment on August 1, 1994, she first worked with Pastor Edward Prendergast (dec.) and Sr. Geraldine Koerner, H.M. (dec). Upon completing her Master’s degree in Ministry at Ursuline College and after Sr. Geraldine’s retirement, Gayle assumed the position of full-time Pastoral Associate. She went on to earn her certificate as Lay Ecclesial Minister and also became a certified procurator for the Diocese (authorizing her to help others petition the tribunal for annulments).

In 1997, the parish welcomed a new pastor, Fr. John Chlebo, who states that he considers himself “lucky to inherit her” as they “hit it off” and continue to work well together. “Our parish has been blessed by Gayle’s ministry in countless ways” adds Fr. John, “I consider myself very fortunate to have ministered with her these many years ... she is a true professional who loves the

people of this parish.” Gayle holds the distinction of having the most employment seniority on staff. “Gayle is a faithful servant of God and our Church” says Fr. John, “she loves her ministry to the people of St. Christopher and considers herself truly blessed to have joined our Church.”

Raised in Cochran, PA, a small town outside Erie, she graduated in a class of 52 students. She grew up as an only child and has always wished she had siblings. Calling herself a “competitive person,” Gayle was active in volleyball, basketball, and softball while in high school. She also played drums in the band and sang in the choir. Her love of sports made her desire a career in physical education. By senior year, she had changed her mind and attended Slippery Rock State College where she pursued a degree in English and Liberal Arts. She had worked in the retail business and felt she had found her chosen profession. Upon graduating college, Gayle entered the retail business at Cleveland’s Higbee Co. (currently Dillard’s). During 24 years with the company Gayle held many positions, from buyer to first-ever female general manager of a suburban store, to Division Manager of Human Resources when the store became Dillard’s. When the division was moved out of state, Gayle chose a career at St. Vincent Charity Hospital as their Director of Employee Benefits, but the position lasted just a few years. This was the end of a professional journey she really enjoyed, but a better path was just around the corner. As God would have it, while working in the secular world Gayle was asked to pray with a coworker facing her final days. They became close friends and uplifted each other spiritually. This was when Gayle believes she received her calling from God to minister to the sick and suffering. Through that experience and the power of the Holy Spirit, she is able to connect with people at a deeper level of spiritual healing.

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Prior to coming to St. Christopher, Gayle was employed with the Cleveland Diocese Office of Parish Social Ministry with a focus on the AIDS epidemic and Bereavement. Being near St. Peter Church downtown where she could attend weekday Mass was a bonus. At the same time, Gayle started working as a part-time Pastoral Associate at St. Christopher. This career change proved pivotal in permanently moving Gayle's life trajectory from the private sector to serving God in a religious setting. Gayle would come to see this unexpected change as God's calling for her to serve Him through parish ministry. Among her many responsibilities are the following ministries: to those who have had abortions (Rachael Ministry); to the sick/aging/bereaved; to divorced and separated persons; to those seeking annulments; and the Ministry of Praise. She participates in our parish healing services, is staff representative on Parish Council and staff liaison to the Ladies Guild. She visits homebound residents and those in nursing homes, she helps plan wakes and funerals, and she trains eucharistic ministers. Gayle's caring ways, humble demeanor and ever-present smile make her perfect for these ministries to individuals facing some of the most difficult times in their lives. Gayle feels privileged and honored to be that trusted person in the life of her parish. She has a special place in her heart for divorced individuals seeking annulments because she has lived through that phase in her own life. She applauds Fr. John for his support and thanks over 150 volunteers for their assistance. She is grateful to Fr. John for empowering and encouraging her at a time when most women in similar pastoral positions were not being supported to the same extent. She appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the rest of the Pastoral and Support Staff.



Beginning of Ministry – 1994

Close friend to Gayle and long-time parishioner Mary Beth Pettek emphasized that Gayle is always proactive, organized and professional in her duties. She adds that Gayle "is the go-to person for new employees; she was instrumental in rebuilding Ladies Guild and starting Ladies Nights (fundraisers)." On a personal level, Mary Beth confirms how competitive Gayle is in sports like cornhole and golf, card and board games. She knows that Gayle's hobbies

include reading spiritual books as well as fiction; but this is really how Mary Beth feels about Gayle: "Luckiest for me she is my very good friend." It is clear that parishioners also feel "lucky" that Gayle has been a friend to all of us for more than 25 years.

Admittedly such a full, demanding life requires an occasional respite and spiritual reboot. This is when Gayle finds comfort in Scripture, prayer, Eucharistic celebration and worship music. She works tirelessly as an instrument of God's love and is energized by one of her favorite songs, "This is Holy Ground," with words that clarify

the indisputable statement "we're standing on Holy ground, for the Lord is here and where He is is Holy ... these are Holy Hands, He's given us Holy Hands, He works through these hands ..." Likewise, it comes as no surprise that Gayle's favorite Scripture comes from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus left us the perfect recipe for eternal salvation in His Beatitudes. In Matthew 5:3-12, we are instructed on how we are to behave if we are true followers of Christ Jesus, the primary focus being to take care of our brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest need. Gayle has spent most of her life becoming the Servant Leader that Jesus wants all of us to work toward.



The middle years

Gayle extends the following message to the parish community: "My years here at St. Christopher have been rewarding beyond my imagination! Our community of faith has been extremely supportive and affirming, and I am humbled when you share the stories of your lives with me. All these ministries are a gift to me. In my remaining years as Pastoral Associate here I hope to continue to accompany you on your faith journey to God's eternal home, the place that Jesus went to prepare for us." Indeed we are uniquely blessed to have such a dedicated mentor and advocate on our pastoral staff. Fortunately for us, Gayle has no immediate plans to retire, but she is testing the waters by moving to a four-day work week. There is no doubt that Gayle will remain a vital and vibrant member of our parish family even after she chooses full-time retirement. We are grateful for Gayle's many years of excellent service, her unwavering passion for Christ and her unconditional love for the people she serves. We can all agree with Candy's comments: "She is the most humble person I have the pleasure of knowing. She blesses my heart." Gayle, we appreciate you, we celebrate you, we hold you in our hearts, and we will always pray for you.

Carmen Everett DeHaan

AND THEY SHALL NAME HIM EMMANUEL

Behold the virgin will be with child and will bear a son. This is the perfect start to the greatest story ever told – we call it the Nativity, derived from the Latin “nasci” meaning birth or beginning. With a name which translates to Jesus and means “God is with us,” Matthew 1:18-24 tells us that the angel of the Lord promised the child “will save his people from their sins.” This is also the story of unrivaled obedience and humility on the part of the Virgin Mother and complete faith in God exemplified by Joseph the carpenter. Year after year, during the four weeks of Advent, we have the opportunity to revisit, revive and relive the birth of our Salvation Story, which began on a camel and ended up in a manger surrounded by shepherds and barn animals. God chose the most humble of beginnings for the incarnation of the King of kings. Sometimes we forget that the birth of Christ is the greatest gift we have ever received or will ever be given.

As Catholic Christians, we are aware that Advent is synonymous with a period of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. We are to spend these four weeks praying and meditating on the true meaning of Christmas. Here at St. Christopher, we are blessed with many opportunities to come together as a parish family to prepare and then celebrate this Holy season. Our Bulletin every week (also available at stchrisparish.com) lists the events and activities for adults and children of all ages. It is significant to note that there is an intentionally diverse balance of activities offered – from enjoying family time on the parish campus, to visiting the elderly, to helping needy families in neighboring communities. Parishioners can be as actively involved as they are willing and able. Every year our various Parish Groups, our School and our PSR/Confirmation students do their part to bring joy and happiness to others through service and donations. In Sunday Mass here, we are uplifted and encouraged by a beautiful Eucharistic celebration, amazing Christmas music and meaningful homilies.

In a special way this Advent, our parish family is invited to prepare for the Nativity and grow closer to God through a five-part Bible Study facilitated by parishioner Tom Pussel, who brings with him many years in ministry and a unique conversion story. This gift is brought to you by the Ladies Guild and will take place in the Prayer Room. It will study the Advent and Christmas Gospels, allowing us to have an expanded understanding in preparation for Christmas. Also new this year, there will be meditation and gentle yoga on Thursdays during Advent (12/5, 12/12 and 12/19) at 9:30 a.m. Enjoy the peace of surrendering to God in quiet relaxation. Please contact Robin at (440) 331-4255, ext. 105 for more information.

So as we look forward to Advent and Christmas, let us focus on what really matters, not the costly holiday items but on permanent, life-changing gifts of HOLINESS. As we already know, the gifts we give to others return to us a hundredfold, not in material form but in much more important spiritual sustenance. In fact, the fruits of the Holy Spirit are the most valuable gifts we can offer and they cost us nothing: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-24 NAB). Sharing these fruits with others will make us the best versions of ourselves and encourage others to do likewise. This Christmas, stop to consider that Jesus taught us that the greatest of all Commandments is love and that His unconditional love is freely given to us. We are to carry His message and share His love every day with everyone we encounter, and in a special way with the poorest of the poor.

The Parish Staff and your Belltower Beacon wish you the most spiritually rewarding Advent and a very Holy Christmas. Enjoy our extraordinary services, and may you be blessed beyond measure!

Carmen Everett DeHaan

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Work has begun on Centennial Park! Some temporary fencing will keep the area clear for construction work and equipment. Grading will begin to help prepare the area and work will begin on the pavilion and some other concrete work as weather permits. Playground equipment will be ordered so as to be ready next year for installation and as a way to take advantage of this year's price quotes. Keep an eye on the area as work progresses toward completion next summer.

Progress on our Centennial Capital Campaign continues as Fr. Tim and I, along with a committee of parishioners continue to contact families and individuals to talk about the campaign and ask for pledges to help reach our goal of \$3 million over the next three years. All of our parish families will have an opportunity to participate in the campaign in the coming weeks and into the New Year. The New Century of Service Campaign seeks to provide funds for faith formation and capital projects within the parish, to ensure that our parish has the financial ability to serve future generations of Catholics and to fund events for our centennial celebration in 2022. This includes the creation of St. Christopher Centennial Park that has been a topic of planning for more than a year. You will be hearing more about the campaign in our weekly bulletin and can read more details on the home page of our website. You can also watch the progress on the Pledge Thermometer in the weekly bulletin. Thank you for your interest and support!

Fr. John

GLIMPSES OF THE HOLY LAND

Bishop Nelson Perez and 50 pilgrims from the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland began a 10-day journey to the Holy Land on October 23. This was the second time my wife, Paula, and I had journeyed to the Holy Land and I was hopeful that this time it could be a pilgrimage rather than a tour. We left Cleveland for our first stop in Newark, New Jersey. There, the group learned the first lesson of every pilgrim: we live by God's time rather than our own. Mechanical issues with the airplane resulted in us spending the night and delaying our arrival in Tel Aviv by a day.

Since the time of our baptism, each of us has been on a lifelong journey home to the Father. The aisle in the church building reminds us of this each time we travel up that aisle to receive Communion. As we journey up the aisle, we prepare our minds to be transformed when we receive the sacred body and blood of Jesus Christ in the form of holy Communion. On October 24, the pilgrims, joined by Bishop Perez, journeyed 5,800 miles "up the aisle" to the Holy Land and arrived at our hotel in Nazareth at 4 a.m. October 25. The day-long journey allowed the pilgrims to place some distance from our lives at home and to prepare our minds to be transformed by the pilgrimage.



The place of Jesus' birth

The third day was focused on Mary's role in Jesus' life, and therefore in ours. We celebrated Mass at the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth. We viewed a mosaic of the Holy Family which showed Mary doing one of the many normal tasks in first century Israel – making bread. The mosaic reminds us that while Mary was the mother of God, she was also an ordinary person like each of us. If Mary could say "yes" to God and still maintain her family life, shouldn't each of us also be able to do the same? The pilgrimage asked each of us to consider what in our lives is preventing us from saying "yes" to God.

Day 4 of the pilgrimage focused on the places where Jesus preached outside of Jerusalem. The day started on the Mount of the Beatitudes, the site where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount which included the beatitudes. All day I kept going back to the beatitudes. When we think about the many blessings we have

received freely from God, how many times do we focus on material things such as wealth, possessions or our health? As we read the blessings Jesus shared with the people, none of them relate to these material things. Instead, these beatitudes are meant to focus us on the spiritual blessings which we also received from God, such as being poor in spirit, being meek, being humble and seeking justice, to name a few. All day, my pilgrim's thought was while most of us are quick to share our material blessings, do we approach our spiritual blessings in the same manner? And as we all know we cannot share something we do not have in our lives.

Day 5 took us from sea to sea – that is, from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. As we journeyed along the Jordan River, we stopped at what is considered the oldest city in the world: Jericho. This day focused my thoughts on the walls built to keep others, who were not like the residents, out of the cities. The people of Jericho found out, these walls cannot keep God out because the walls crumbled as Joshua and the Israelites brought God to the city. The people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus through the gates in their city wall. But when they did not like Jesus' ways, they led him outside the walls to be crucified. This did not work either, because Jesus found his way back into the walls in a way the people of Jerusalem never could have imagined. We, too, build walls in our lives to keep out those whom we consider are not like us. As pilgrims, we should ponder, where are the walls in our lives and how can we remove these walls so we can follow Jesus by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

The pilgrims spent the sixth day in Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. We began our day at the Shepherd's Field, the site where the angels appeared to the shepherds who were watching their sheep when the angels announced that Jesus was born. We visited the Chapel at the Shepherd's Field which was built over the spot where the angels appeared. Then as pilgrims we toured the birthplace of Jesus in the Church of the Nativity. Pilgrims were able to touch the very spot where Jesus was born. As we journeyed, I pondered if the sites we visited were the actual sites. Did someone mark these sites more than 2,000 years ago? While these sites have been celebrated for centuries and traditions have been handed down from generation to generation, what if the sites are incorrect? Reflecting on this question led me to the story of doubting Thomas. He would not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead unless he could touch Jesus' wounds. Jesus told Thomas and each of us that "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." As pilgrims, whether in the Holy Land or anywhere in the world, we need to see with body, mind, heart and soul. A pilgrim should always remember that we are all journeying home to the Father based on our faith.

The next day focused on the end of Jesus' life here on earth, which was the beginning for Christianity. We started before sunrise, as the pilgrims prayed the Stations of the Cross following the route Jesus took almost 2,000 years ago. The stations end in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. This church encompasses Golgotha as well as the tomb of Jesus Christ. Mass was celebrated at the Calvary Chapel for

the pilgrims. As we visited these sites, the pilgrims were moved by the reality of it all. We see firsthand just what Jesus endured to save us. A pilgrimage is about being transformed to be more like Christ. As pilgrims, we are called to prayer for others, even when others do not. We are called to carry the burdens of others, both physically and spiritually. We carry these burdens even if their weight causes us to fall multiples times. We are called to have empathy for the suffering and pain of others, even to weep for them. We are called to sacrifice for others. All of these Jesus did for us and so much more. Our pilgrimage is not just 10 days, but a lifetime. I am reminded of the words of Jesus who said, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more." As pilgrims, each of us has been entrusted with more.

The pilgrims started Day 8 with Mass and then headed over to the Church of the Dormition. This church is where tradition says Mary "fell asleep." From there her body and soul were assumed into heaven. The Upper Room, where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his apostles, is located steps away from the Church of the Dormition. All of these sites are located on the top of Mount Zion with the House of Caiaphas, the high priest, located just down the mount. It was his house that Jesus was brought to after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The cistern beneath Caiaphas' house is where Jesus spent Thursday night before he was brought before Pilate. St. Peter Gallicantu Church was built on the site of Caiaphas' house, and commemorates Peter's denial of Jesus after Jesus' arrest. Throughout our pilgrimage, we have visited many churches which were built over the site of a Crusader Church, which was built over a Byzantine Church. Over the years, Jerusalem was completely destroyed several times and partially destroyed more than 50 times. The stones from the past were used to be part of the walls and buildings placed on top the foundation of the city. A pilgrim learns that our Catholic faith is similar. We have a strong foundation in the sacred Scriptures and Jesus Christ. We then can use the stones (our traditions) of those who came before us (the apostles and their successors) to strengthen our faith and protect us from those who want to destroy us. The experiences of a pilgrimage allow our foundation and traditions to be fortified.



Inside the tomb of Jesus

The last day for the pilgrims in the Holy Land continued inside the gates of Jerusalem. The Western Wall, which is also known as the "Wailing Wall," was our final stop. It was the western wall of the city during the building of the first temple in the 10th century B.C. The pilgrims were able to spend some time at the Western Wall praying with our Jewish brothers and sisters. It has been said that a pilgrim's life should be a lifelong dialogue with God. If one were ever to question the value of prayer, a visit to the Western Wall is all that is required. The wall has been a special place for more than 12,000 years. And before the wall was built, people prayed at this site for well over 1,000 years. In other words, for more than 160 generations, the people in the Holy Land have been in dialogue with God. A pilgrim not only needs to be clothed in our faith but also needs to remain in a lifelong dialogue with God.



The Encounter Chapel in Magdala

Day 10 found the pilgrims en route to their homes, but they were forever transformed. While in Magdala, the pilgrims visited The Encounter Chapel which had the above image behind the altar. Take a moment and review the image before reading the rest of this entry. The image represents the story of the woman who had a blood disease for more than 10 years and no one could cure her. As Jesus walked by, she touched his cloak and she was healed. The woman's life was forever changed after her encounter with Jesus.

This pilgrimage took us down some familiar roads but also some roads we could not have imagined. As we journeyed, we traveled not only where Jesus walked, but we also traveled with Jesus. Some pilgrims walked alongside Jesus as the disciples did in this story. But many of us are like the woman, in that we encounter Jesus in our lowliness and in our humility. A pilgrim needs to do more than just walk alongside Jesus. We need to seek an encounter with Jesus. After our return to Cleveland, each of us continues our pilgrim journey home to the Father. It is up to us to decide if we will walk alongside Jesus or truly encounter him on our journey.

Deacon Dennis Conrad

LADIES GUILD KICKOFF

On a beautiful September evening nearly 100 women of the parish gathered to celebrate the official kickoff of the new Ladies Guild. Red carnations and heart shaped balloons adorned the Atrium, symbolizing the power of love and the energy of the Holy Spirit present in those gathered. Sounds of laughter and conversation filled the room as old and new friends enjoyed the fellowship. Past President Georgene Cooper delivered an emotional and detailed history of the Ladies Guild and its decades of service to the parish, highlighting its many accomplishments. She recognized the large number of past officers in attendance and tearfully expressed her joy at seeing the Guild begin anew. In a symbolic ceremony, the original Ladies Guild gavel was exchanged between past presidents representing each decade of its history until it was finally passed to the new president, Cindy McDonough. Upon receiving the gavel, Cindy rapped the podium and called to order the first meeting of a new era for the Ladies Guild. She announced this year's officers and committee chairs: Vice President Jenn Krebs, Recording Secretary Nancy Sullivan, Treasurer and Outreach Chair Nancy Bulic, Communication Secretary Alison Leszcz, Social Committee Chair Tamara Gibbs, and Spiritual Committee Chair Meredith Duncan. Fr. John Chlebo then offered a prayer for the Guild and extended a beautiful blessing upon all.

The capstone to the evening was guest speaker Sr. Maureen Doyle, OSU, retired president of Urban Community School. Sr. Maureen spoke fittingly of change. As the just canonized St. John Henry Newman said: "To live is to change, and to be perfect is to have changed often." Recently celebrating her 50th anniversary as an Ursuline Sister, she describes the upheaval she witnessed in both the Church and in religious life over the years. She also shared her own personal experiences of change as she continues to navigate her retirement years. She urged those in attendance to always remember that women are called to witness the community that Jesus created. In encountering change, which is a constant in our lives, in our Church, and in our world, Sr. Maureen counseled the women to seek a profound relationship with Jesus anchored firmly in the Gospel. She recommended the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius as a framework for discernment in times of change. Finally, she challenged everyone to remember the beautiful message of Vatican II: The Church is the people of God.

Nancy Sullivan



JOIN US ON OUR GREAT ADVENTURE

St. Christopher Parish is thrilled to be presenting *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation* offered by Ascension Press. Some of our neighboring churches have used it and the reviews are very good.

It will be offered on Wednesday evenings at 7-8:30 p.m. in the St. Christopher School Atrium beginning January 8 until April 1. There will be no session on Ash Wednesday, February 26.

Reading the Bible should bring us closer to Christ, but many people have given up saying, "they just don't get it." *The Bible Timeline* was designed so that anyone can make sense of the Bible and experience the life changing power of God's Word. There is a running story through the seventy-three books of the Bible that ties all of Scripture together and helps us make sense of our lives as well.

The Bible Timeline will help all of us to grasp the "big picture," the readings at Mass will make more sense, our Scripture reading and study will come to life, and we will see how our lives fit into God's loving plan.

With DVD, workbooks and group discussion we will all gain a better understanding of how the Old Testament lays the foundation for the New Testament and the mission and ministry of Jesus.

Robin Imbrigiotta

SURVEY UPDATE

The Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Pastoral Staff continue to develop plans to respond to the Parish Survey that we did in the fall of 2018. The survey is part of the planning process as we approach our centennial in 2022 entitled: *St. Christopher: A New Century of Service*. The last issue of the Belltower Beacon listed the seven goals that evolved from the survey along with action steps under each goal.

Progress on the action steps thus far includes:

- A welcoming committee has been formed by the Pastoral Council to explore our process of welcoming and hospitality in the parish.
- Two new Pastoral Staff Members have been hired to meet some of the suggestions that surfaced in the survey.
- A Joyfully Gifted program was offered in November to encourage greater involvement in the life of the parish.
- A new Music Ministry Director was hired to address some of the concerns in our liturgical worship.
- Efforts continue to improve communication to parishioners with an expanded bulletin, new website (coming soon) and a greater social media presence.
- Confirmation is in process of moving from 9th to 8th grade.

As action steps continue to move forward we will keep you posted. Let me know if you have any questions or concerns (jchlebo@stchrisparish.com or (440) 331-4255, ext. 114).

Thanks, Fr. John

ST. CHRISTOPHER YOUTH CHOIR 2019-2020 SEASON



Calling ALL children of the parish! Open to ALL children, grades two and up, regardless of school affiliation. Email rmcmurray@stchrisparish.com or call (440) 331-4255, ext. 201 to register and for rehearsal times and Mass schedule.

Bob McMurray



JOYFULLY GIFTED

A Joyfully Gifted retreat was held here at St. Christopher on Saturday, November 16. Joyfully Gifted is a program offered to parishes by the Diocese of Cleveland.

The day was facilitated by Melissa Keegan and Michael Schwark. The 35 participants enjoyed the half day retreat learning that each baptized person has a vocation to be discerned, a mission to fulfill or a task to perform which is given to no one else – just YOU. This gift is called a charism.

St. John Paul II wrote in *Christifideles Laici*, “This call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world ...” It was inspiring to learn that our spiritual gifts are focused outward as we become the “hands, heart, and feet” of the Body of Christ for the benefit of others.

Participants took a Spiritual Gifts Inventory to assess their giftedness. There were 20 gifts used in the inventory. This process is useful in helping us in discerning what’s next for us in life and in our parish community. We all have a calling deep inside that many times we ignore. Joyfully Gifted offers a whole new way to look at ourselves and one another.

Through discussion, small and large groups and the Inventory many members of St. Christopher began to understand how God is calling each of them.

Robin Imbrigiotta



RECONCILIATION

On November 18 and 19, ninety second grade students celebrated their First Reconciliation with their families. The students have been preparing for this Sacrament for the past eight weeks in their classrooms. We learned the story of Jesus the Good Shepherd – He always welcomes us back into the fold after we have sinned. All of the second graders made a sheep to place under a tapestry of the Good Shepherd after going to Reconciliation for the first time with their parents. It was a beautiful prayer service with music, scripture and prayers. Thank you to the second grade teachers who helped prepare the students: Robin Seedhouse, Shannon Gould, Lindsay Barbicas, and Marilu Norena and to the parents for supporting the students on their journey to the Eucharist in May.

Sharon Armstrong



CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

You are invited to celebrate “The Reason for the Season” at the Parish School of Religion Christmas Pageant on Sunday, December 15 at 9 a.m. or 10:30 a.m. in the Parish Center. The students in PSR grades Kindergarten through fourth grade will be presenting their version of the First Christmas. Fifth and sixth graders will be lending their talents by providing leadership for the project. It is sure to be a success with a great committee of parents who helped create this first annual PSR Christmas Pageant. All are welcome!!!

Sharon Armstrong



ST. CHRISTOPHER YOUNG ADULTS SEEK "NEW GROUND"

As part of St. Christopher ministry expansion initiative in response to last year's parish survey, the parish has invested in the formation of a new young adult ministry for Christians in their 20s and 30s. A core team of young adults broke bread in October to discuss the formation of this ministry at our parish. The core group included individuals of many different relationship, age, and ethnic backgrounds. The diversity of this group is representative of the broad demographics at St. Christopher. The goal of this ministry is to meet the variety of spiritual, emotional, and social needs of young adults at our parish.

The desire of our young adults appears to be unified: many of them are searching for small communities where they can share faith, food, and fellowship among their peers. These groups allow for personal reflection and friendship to grow organically in a welcoming environment. With a world of increasing pressure, stress, selfishness, and exploitation, offering individuals a community of friends to share struggles and celebrate joys enables young adults to enter the Christian community with a greater sense of meaning and belonging. Our small faith-sharing communities hope to gather together around established community events, such as Theology on Tap, in order to consciously remind us of the importance of greater Christian community. Integration with other parish ministries will help provide St. Christopher young adults with opportunities to utilize their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the parish.

The formation of the new young adult ministry at St. Christopher shares many things in common with the early church. Gathering in small groups together in a single house, early Christian communities would share fellowship over a common meal and discuss the stories and parables of Jesus Christ. By returning to this model of church, our parish young adults hope to foster a stronger sense of purpose and belonging as they replicate this model among themselves. The ministry plans to expand parish-wide in January 2020 with the goal of inviting all young adults to participate in finding "Terranova," or "New Ground" for their faith lives.

Anyone interested in participating in young adult ministry is encouraged to contact Logan Feldkamp, Pastoral Minister, at (440) 331-4255, ext. 102 or email lfeldkamp@stchrisparish.com.

Logan Feldkamp

PARISH COMMUNICATION UPDATE

As we continue to work with Cristine Terek, President of CMT Consulting, we have made a lot of progress. Soon, we will be launching our website with a brand new look, and with the Church, School and Religious Education Office all under one site. In addition, we have completed rebranding the website to bring a look of consistency and continuity. Soon you will be seeing the new branding in our bulletins and Belltower Beacon publications. Through Cristine's guidance, St. Christopher social media platforms are also being addressed. To-date, we have already improved the Facebook and Instagram pages for both St. Christopher Church and School with timely and relevant postings.

Our next step will be to develop a calendar of communication topics, which encompass pertinent messaging from all of our ministries in an effort to keep you informed. As you start to see the changes, we will be eager to hear your feedback.

Joe Williams



FINDING A NEW NORMAL FOR THE HOLIDAYS AFTER A LOSS

When any family is shaken to its core by the loss of a loved one, nothing makes sense. We are robbed of concentration, patience, sleep, and peace. Everything is abnormal and thinking of the holidays (Thanksgiving-Christmas) increases the anxiety and fear.

To provide some insight and support to grieving families, St. Christopher parish offered two sessions of *Finding a New Normal* for the Holidays.

The goal of the program was to provide participants with information on self-care as well as common pitfalls for the bereaved during the holidays.

Communication with family and friends is paramount during this time. Let everyone know your limits; we all know how hard it is to tell someone that we cannot do something. But during the first 12-18 months after the death of a loved one we are severely limited by the stress and pain of the loss.

We will be starting a grief support group in late February on Thursdays after 11 a.m. Mass. If you are interested or would like a group on an evening or Sunday, please call Robin in the parish office at (440) 331-4255, ext. 105.

Robin Imbrigiotta



A PRAYERFUL FALL WITH OUR YOUTH

As the seasons have shifted from Summer to Autumn, youth group is in full swing! After welcoming our eighth graders with a fun-filled kick off party, we began to explore the power of prayer. Our adult leaders shared some of their own insights and testimonies and teens explored several ways that we can spend time with God in conversation. On a chilly October night, we even had an outdoor prayer service around a fire. During this season of giving thanks, it is important for us to remember to spend time in prayer with the one who blesses our lives in so many ways. I am thankful for the opportunity to work with the teens in this parish. Please continue to keep us in your prayers!

Eric Perusek



Pet Blessing

THIRD ANNUAL LADIES NIGHT OUT

What a great night! With an attendance that doubled last year's, the parish center was buzzing with chatter and excitement as the winners of the Chinese auction were announced. The event, which benefitted The Moriah House Family Shelter, raised \$4,000 this year – a wonderful blessing on top of the \$2,700 raised last year! Delicious food was provided by Nomad Culinary. The wine tasting featured delicious local wines from CLE Urban Winery. Destiny Burns presented each wine with the most fun and unique pairings, one of which was Doritos! Thank you to all those who attended as well as the organizing committee for another successful event.

Amy Gressell



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD 2019

Making Advent wreaths, creating a Jesse Tree, and decorating Christmas trees are long held holiday traditions. A popular holiday tradition at St. Christopher School is for the entire school community to participate in the Operation Christmas Child service project. Each year the school sends gift shoeboxes to needy children throughout the world. This year over 120 boxes were sent to children in South America and Africa. Each box contains school supplies, personal hygiene items, a Christmas greeting, and (of course) toys!

This year's event began with the start of school back in August. Families dropped off shoeboxes along with their children's school supplies. Collection week was at the start of November. Each grade level was responsible for bringing in different items to go into the shoeboxes. School staff members brought in wrapping paper and packing supplies. On November 7, students earned a dress down day by making a free will donation to help cover the cost of shipping the shoeboxes (approximately \$9 a box). The biggest day of all, however, was November 12 – shoebox assembly day. On this day, the entire school gathers in the Parish Center to pack and wrap the shoeboxes. Each box also includes a handmade Christmas card, expressing a well wish for the recipient.

Assembly Day is always one of the highlights of the school year. The entire school comes together, working cooperatively, to prepare the shoeboxes for shipment. Although the atmosphere is festive, with caroling and holiday music filling the air, the students work hard throughout the morning. It's especially heartwarming to see the older students mentoring the younger ones, guiding and supporting them in their efforts. While parent volunteers and staff provide supervision and overall guidance, Operation Christmas Child is primarily a student-driven service project.

Students consistently share that the Operation Christmas Child day is one of the most memorable events of the school year. The opportunity to make someone else's life a little better and to spread the message of Christmas really resonates with our students. They also enjoy the "hands on" nature of the project and working together, as a school, across the grade levels. It is for these reasons that Operation Christmas Child will remain a holiday tradition at St. Christopher School for years to come.

Scott Raiff





Trunk or Treat



DR. TERRY HUNT REVERSE RAFFLE

For the past eight years the St. Christopher Athletic Association has held a Men's Stag Night Reverse Raffle to raise money for the athletic programs at the school. This was born from the vision and leadership of Dr. Terry Hunt, a lifelong resident and dentist in Rocky River. He was the driving force behind this event and took on most of the responsibilities each year with a tremendous supporting cast the night of the event. In total, the event raised over \$80,000 during those eight years to help offset/reduce the cost of sports program participation at the school and provided the funds to replace the old gym floor and old uniforms, etc.

Unfortunately, Dr. Hunt passed away unexpectedly earlier this year. However, the Athletic Association was committed to keeping his spirit alive with the event. In 2019, in honor of Dr. Hunt's incredible contributions to the school and his leadership for this event, we renamed it the Dr. Terry Hunt Men's Stag Night Reverse Raffle. This year's event, like in prior years, had wonderful food, plenty of beer and blackjack, and of course the raffle and sideboards with over 200 tickets sold. This year we raised over \$17,000 for the athletic programs! This can be attributed to the generosity of the many participants who support the event each year, but also

certainly to the desire to make Dr. Hunt proud. We had a number of people donate all or a portion of their winnings back to the event and we sold all of our main board tickets which was, at times, a challenge in the past.

Some of the funds raised this year and going forward will be set aside to provide some specific support in the name of Dr. Hunt and his family to St. Christopher student athletes and we will work through exactly how that will work with the Hunt Family and the Athletic Association. Plans are already underway for the event in 2020.

Bill Murphy



CHURCH CHATTER

BIRTHDAY WISHES

Fr. Tim Daw celebrates his birthday on December 2. Eric Perusek, our Youth Minister, has a birthday on January 9. Please shower them with salutations and prayers.

ADMINISTRATIVE JUDGE

Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court Judge, Brendan J. Sheehan, has been elected to be the next Administrative Judge of the Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court General Division. The Administrative Judge is responsible for overseeing Court operations, appointing committees, presiding over the Court's docket, and speaking about Court policy. He begins his two-year term in January. "I am honored that my colleagues are entrusting me with this responsibility," says Judge Sheehan. Brendan serves the parish as a Eucharistic minister.

STELLA MARIS

In 1948, Stella Maris was established. Its mission is to provide quality chemical dependency treatment and mental health services to our community, regardless of race, gender, religion or ability to pay. Parishioner Susan Goecke is its current president and is pleased to announce that on September 9 they broke ground for a new detox facility. Along with her husband, Tom Goecke, they are working on the New Century of Service Campaign committee. Parishioners since 1992, their four children also attended St. Christopher School: Alec ('03), Andrew ('08), Adam ('12) and Anna ('18).

SOCIAL ACTION

Jeanette Nappier and John Hosek of the Social Concerns Committee will also be serving on the Catholic Commission of the Diocesan Social Action Office. Its main goal is to help advance social justice within the Diocese. Best wishes as they serve our community.

SACRAMENTS

Our second graders received the Sacrament of Reconciliation on November 18 and 19. Please keep them in your prayers, as they continue to prepare for the Sacrament of the Eucharist this coming May. Also, remember our eighth and ninth graders as they prepare for Confirmation, to be celebrated in May 2020 and also in the fall 2020.

TAIZE

Taize is an hour service, featuring music, silence, candlelight and Scripture. It is a simple, yet powerful experience of Christian prayer for young and old alike. Taizé is a monastic community located in Taizé, France and was founded in the 1940s by Brother Roger. On December 3 and 22, Taize services will be held at River's Edge, in conjunction with Advent and Christmas. Go to riversedgecleveland.com for more information.

DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY

Congratulations to Tom and Maggie Johnson who celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at Mass on Sunday, November 17. The Parish wishes them many more happy, healthy years to come!



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

December 4, 11, 18	ADVENT BIBLE STUDY	February 22	PATHS FUNDRAISER NIGHT AT THE RACES
December 7	CONFIRMATION SERVICE SATURDAY	February 23	BLOODMOBILE
December 7	ADVENT FAMILY NIGHT	February 28	SOCIAL CLUB LUNCHEON
December 8	CHRISTMAS FAMILY EVENT	February 29	8TH GRADE CONFIRMATION SERVICE SATURDAY
December 18	ADVENT PENANCE SERVICE AT ST. ANGELA	February 29	LENTEN FAMILY NIGHT
December 20	SOCIAL CLUB LUNCHEON		
January 8, 15, 22, 29			
February 5, 12, 19	BIBLE STUDY		
January 10	DONUT SUNDAY		
January 26-31	CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK		
January 30	LADIES GUILD WINTER SOCIAL		
January 31	SOCIAL CLUB LUNCHEON		
February 1	BOY SCOUT SPAGHETTI DINNER		
February 8	CONFIRMATION RETREAT		

CHRISTMAS MASS SCHEDULE

Tuesday, December 24	4 p.m. in Church, Parish Center & Gym 6 p.m. in Church 10 p.m. in Church with Prelude of Carols at 9:30 p.m.
Wednesday, December 25	10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. in Church

NEW YEAR'S MASS SCHEDULE (Feast of Mary, Mother of God)

Tuesday, December 31	5 p.m.
Wednesday, January 1	11 a.m.