



ST. JOSEPH PARISH

NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 2023

GET TO KNOW ST. JOSEPH'S

Parishioner Suzanne Strader

Grateful for God's Comfort and Support of Our Faith Community

In October 2013, Suzanne Strader had the opportunity to attend a women's retreat at St. Joseph's. Initially, she looked for all the reasons to skip the retreat, but she still ended up going — and it changed her life. The day-long retreat solidified her relationship with the Lord and the Holy Spirit.

Suzanne didn't realize until after attending the retreat how much she would need her faith in the coming months and years. The month after the retreat, her father was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away about a month later. Then, her son Johnny became ill and succumbed to depression in 2014.

This was understandably hard on Suzanne and her other son, Dylan.

"During that time, I really found strength in my parish family," Suzanne says.

Suzanne and Dylan's lives have changed since that time, but they are both doing well. When times are difficult, they can lean on the support of those around them. Suzanne has been married to her husband, Jim, for 14 years and has worked as a nurse at Mercy Health in Lorain since 2009, spending the



Suzanne Strader with her son, Dylan, and husband, Jim

last seven years in risk management. Dylan now lives in Rocky River.

At St. Joseph's, Suzanne finds joy in serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, and she brings the Eucharist to nursing homes. She also serves on the Stewardship Council and Picnic Committee. In addition, she is involved with the Mary's Way of the Cross Ministry. Recently, Suzanne started helping with decorating the church for Christmas, Lent, and Easter.

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Stewardship: *Becoming Fishers of Men and Women*

Whether you hold a high-profile position, such as parish council president, or have more of a behind-the-scenes role as a coordinator of a parish ministry, God has called you – as a parish leader – to help build His Church.

This challenge is just as important as the call of any other Catholic leader, including the earliest disciples.

When Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, He urged a group of fishermen, “Come follow me.” Jesus promised if they laid down their nets and followed Him, He would make them fishers of men. These men were among His original disciples, and they knew Christ’s call was so important that they left their secular occupation to follow Him.

Just as He did with the fishermen, Jesus calls each of us today. He is not necessarily asking us to leave our secular careers, but He is asking us to put Him first in our lives and to share His message of love with others.

God truly wants us to serve Him and to build His Church through the secular occupations we have chosen. It is through the Church that new disciples are born, and it is in the Church that disciples continue to mature. Forming disciples of Christ is the most important work that can be done on earth, and each of us has been called to play an active role in this work.

So, how do we go about building the Church? Where do we find the plans?

Some people mistakenly think that building the Church – in particular, building our own parish or diocese – is no different than building a successful business. Indeed, the purpose of building the Church is to change hearts – a goal that only God can accomplish.

Secular society has not prepared us for this work. However, the Holy Spirit – sometimes referred to as the “Architect of the Church” – has the plan. In order to implement this plan, we must become good listeners. We must open ourselves to the workings of the Holy Spirit as He transforms us and guides us to carry out God’s work and



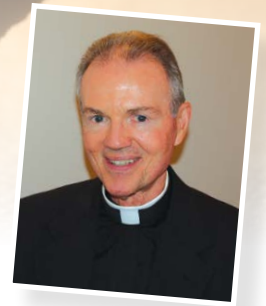
to serve as His instruments on earth, building the Church together with Him.

This is where spiritual exercises, such as retreats, come into play. A retreat offers the individual an opportunity to spend time alone with the Lord, allowing God to draw the person deeper into the mystery of who He is, who we are and what He is doing in our lives. Stewardship retreats can offer parish leaders the opportunity each year to spend time with the Lord as He directs them in the ways of discipleship. As leaders, we must take time to meditate on the Scriptures and allow Jesus to open up His Word to us. Then, as we grow deeper in our understanding of what God wants of us, we can exclaim, just as the first disciples did on the road to Emmaus, “Our hearts are burning within us” (Lk 24:32).

God has placed an extremely important call on the lives of all parish leaders, no matter how big or small the role. It is vital to understand how we, as parish leaders, can best answer His call. What, in particular, is the Lord calling each one of us to do? He most likely is not asking us to drop our nets, but to pick them up and become “fishers of men.” We must discern how we can most effectively cast our nets for Him.

A Letter from Our Pastor

The Word of God: *Hearing It and Responding to It*



Dear Members of St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parishes,

A few short weeks ago, we completed the Christmas season. We are now in what we call Ordinary Time. But as the month of February winds down, we will begin the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday on Feb. 22.

The Gospel of John begins with this statement, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We speak often of the Word of God in the Church. The first major part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Word. The second major part is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist. And they are book-ended with two minor parts called the Introductory Rites and the Concluding Rites.

My focus in this reflection is on this first major part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word. The Sunday Mass components are: a First Reading, a Responsorial Psalm, a Second Reading, a Gospel, a Homily, the Profession of Faith, and the Universal Prayer [or Prayers of the Faithful].

We draw on Holy Scripture from the Bible for the readings. As Catholics, we do not consider these readings as simply about God, or about the Church, or about our faith, or a history lesson, or a nice story from long ago. We consider them to be God speaking directly to us. And so our attentiveness to what is being proclaimed is important. Are we listening? Do we hear? And then do we respond in our lives? All of these should be facets of how we approach the Word of God. If we pay attention and

truly listen, God will nourish our spirit, and Christ will be more present to us.

With the Responsorial Psalm, we respond to God’s Word with God’s Word from the Book of Psalms. The Homily is to explain God’s Word and apply it to our daily lives. The Profession of Faith serves as our acceptance of God’s Word. And the Universal Prayer – or Prayers of the Faithful – concludes the Liturgy of the Word by the offering of our prayers to the Lord and taking Him at His Word that He will receive and answer our petitions according to His providential will for us.

The question for us is, “How do we respond to the Word of God?” Does it change our lives? Does it bring us to the ongoing conversion necessary for growing as disciples of Jesus and living lives of stewardship and service?

The task is not an easy one, I know. Being able to listen, to hear and then to act requires time, practice and commitment. That is one of my prayers for us: that we can hear the Word of God, and that we can welcome it to take root in our lives and in the lives of others.

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor".

Fr. Timothy J. O’Connor,
Pastor

The “Other Saints” of Valentine’s Day

Feb. 14: Feast Day of Sts. Cyril and Methodius

Everyone knows Feb. 14 is the Feast of St. Valentine and, of course, the secular, commercialized day of romance known as Valentine’s Day.

But for the Catholic Church, this day devoted to love is also the Feast of Sts. Cyril and Methodius — two ninth-century Greek missionaries known as the apostles of the Slavic peoples.

So, who were Cyril and Methodius?

Brothers from a wealthy senatorial family in Thessalonica, Cyril and Methodius became Christian missionaries to the region of present-day Czech Republic. In 815 and 826 respectively, Sts. Cyril and Methodius renounced their wealth and status and became priests. Both were living in a monastery on the Bosphorus — now known as the Istanbul strait that separates Europe and Asia — when the authorities from the Khazar Empire summoned Constantinople for a Christian missionary. Cyril was chosen and was accompanied by his brother. Both learned the Khazar language and converted many of the people.

Soon after the Khazar mission, there was a request from officials in Moravia (a region in the present-day Czech Republic) for missionaries who could preach and celebrate liturgical services in the local dialect. Although German missionaries had already labored among the people for some time, they had little success.

To fulfill this mission, Cyril and Methodius adapted the Greek alphabet into a script for the Slavonic language. The result was the “Cyrillic” alphabet, which was first used to translate the Bible and liturgical books. It also became the primary means of written communication for large portions of the world, including modern-day Russia.

The two labored in Moravia for four years until 868, achieving greater success than the German missionaries. After being summoned to Rome, they met with Pope Adrian II, who warmly approved of their methods. They were commended by the pope for their missionary activity and ordained bishops. Yet Cyril would not return to Moravia and died in Rome in 869.

To further Methodius’ work in Moravia, Pope Adrian II appointed him archbishop of a new archdiocese in the territory,

independent from the German church. Unfortunately, this had the effect of angering his German critics, who had him deposed and imprisoned for three years.

Pope Adrian’s successor, John VIII, managed to have Methodius freed and had him reinstated as archbishop, after which he expanded his work to incorporate the region of modern-day Poland. The new Pope continued to support Methodius’ use of the Slavic languages in worship and his translations of the Bible, despite continuing controversy with some elements of the German church.

Eventually, with the assistance of several Greek priests, he translated the entire Bible into the language that is known today as Church Slavonic. He chose his successor from among the native Moravian Slavs whom he had evangelized and died on April 6, 885.

Patrons of Moravia, and specially venerated by Catholic Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians, Orthodox Serbians and Bulgarians, Cyril and Methodius are eminently fitted to guard the long-desired unity of East and West. In 1980, St. Pope John Paul II named them additional co-patrons of Europe.



HOLY GROUND YOUTH GROUP

Young Parishioners Join Together as a Vital Community of Faith

In his apostolic exhortation, *Christus vivit*, Pope Francis tells us, “Each young person’s heart should thus be considered ‘holy ground,’ a bearer of seeds of divine life, before which we must take off our shoes in order to draw near and enter more deeply into the mystery” (67).

Kailey Baca, Director of Youth Activities, picked up on this quote and knew that Holy Ground would be a good name for the youth group, which she started up again in September of 2022. Formerly known as Immersion, the Holy Ground Youth Group meets at 6 p.m. on Sunday nights in the social hall at St. Joseph’s. It is open to seventh to 12th-grade students.

The evenings include a meal, a game, or an activity and a faith topic. Last year, the students talked about purpose, thanksgiving, and having a relationship with the Lord, to name a few topics.

For Kailey, presenting a faith topic is the highlight of the night.

“When I give my talk, I hope it helps to plant seeds,” Kailey says. “I can speak the Word of God to them. I hope that will stick with them far into the future.”

Kailey would love to see more youth attend the Holy Ground Youth Group gatherings. It’s a great way to make new friends who share the same faith.

“We are here to build a new community and have fun with others,” Kailey says. “It’s fun and modern while keeping to the tenets of our faith.”

Kailey says that the youth group needs to go beyond playing games and having fun, though. It is important in laying a foundation for young people far into the future.



“Faith in God is something that we want the kids to understand,” Kailey says. “It’s not just part of their life — God is their life. Without Him, they wouldn’t be here. We are nothing apart from God. With that understanding, it changes how they walk through life and how they interact with others and God.”

The group has also watched *The Chosen* together at the theater.

“Come join our community,” Kailey says. “It will enrich your life. If you can learn how to get out of your comfort zone, your life will be more freeing.”

Adult leaders are also needed for the Holy Ground Youth Group. Kailey hopes to hold retreats in the future.

“To build up this community of youth, I need a bigger community of those centered on living in Jesus to walk with these young people,” Kailey says.

To learn more about Holy Ground Youth Group, or to get involved as a leader, contact Kailey Baca at 440-876-7345 or kbaca@stjosephamherst.com.

“The Answer: the Musical”

Production Shines Spotlight on the Truth of Christ

With the opening of St. Joseph’s Performing Arts Center in early 2023, we are excited to share the new theatrical world debut of *The Answer: the Musical*. Under the leadership and creative talent of Christina Dupre, our parish has become a center for religious-themed productions. *Compassion: the Musical* and *Ha Seepor* have blessed our church with an opportunity for our parishioners to be involved in the productions, as well as having the opportunity to attend these productions and see the stories of our Lord brought to life before our eyes. The Performing Arts Center is an opportunity to have professional teachers and artists come and instruct in instruments and drama.

This Lenten season, our community is coming together for the production of *The Answer: the Musical*.

“This story is focused back in time on the stories of the Gospels,” Christina says. “It portrays scenes where the apostles ask Jesus the important questions of our faith. These questions ultimately lead up to THE answer — Jesus.”

With St. Joseph’s Performing Arts Center now serving as an active facility, our parishioners have the opportunity this Lent to participate in the production of *The Answer*, in turn opening up the life of Christ in a whole different way.

“The focus of this ministry is family,” Christina says. “We welcome entire families — adults, teens, and kids — to audition for this production. We have seen families



get involved and it is a great spiritual experience for them. Families share their faith along with their time and talents. They do something together and they grow in faith.”

Auditions take place the first week of February. Practices occur on Sundays in February and March.

The Answer: the Musical will debut at St. Joseph’s on March 18-19. There will be two other locations in northern Ohio where the musical will be performed as well, for a total of three weekends.

While this musical is debuting in English this Lent, it is also being developed as a bilingual production, at the request of the Hispanic community.

“We are working with Damaris Thillet who works with Archbishop Perez of Philadelphia on the translation and development of this,” Christina says. “The bilingual production will debut in Baltimore in 2024.”

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Auditions take place the first week of February. Practices are Sundays in February and March. Performances at St. Joseph’s will take place on March 18-19.

The Answer: the Musical *continued from page 6*

Compassion: the Musical focused on the love and compassion that Christ had for us that led Him to the cross to die for us. *The Answer: the Musical* is diving deeper into the questions that we have of our faith that lead us back to Christ.

“In a world spinning out of control, Jesus Christ is THE answer,” Christina says. “We see that everyone is looking for something, often looking in all the wrong places. This production is seeking to be a little more profound and show people where the answer lies. The solution is committing to Jesus and seeking Him in all things.”

This Lent, prayerfully consider taking part in the production of this musical, which will bless those in attendance with the opportunity to see the life of Christ brought to life. It is an opportunity to move the hearts

of others. In addition, all parishioners are encouraged to attend one of the performances.



Parishioner Suzanne Strader *continued from front cover*

“It’s rewarding to sit at Mass and admire how it all looks,” Suzanne says.

In particular, Suzanne most enjoys the Stewardship Council because it gets her exposed to other ministries of the parish. The community at our parishes is essential to Suzanne’s life. She feels so blessed to have the chance to attend Mass. Sometimes, Mass moves her to tears.

“Stewardship is a way of life for me,” she says. “I intend to continue to be engaged in parish life, and I hope to serve in an additional capacity as I contemplate and pray on the best time to retire.”

For Suzanne, going to Mass is only the start of being involved in the faith. We can all receive so much by getting involved beyond weekly Mass attendance.

“The more you are engaged, the more you want to be engaged,” she says. “It means so much to me to be involved. How didn’t I get that before?”

Suzanne appreciates the people at our parishes who have surrounded her through her life’s challenges. She was amazed by how many parish members attended her mother’s funeral in 2017.

“I would be in a very different place without my faith,” she says.

Suzanne doesn’t believe anything in her life has been a coincidence — only a “God-incidence.” She truly believes that God helps you handle what you are given.

“I try to always see the beauty in nature — the moon, stars, and sun,” she says. “That helps you have a more positive outlook on life.”

In her free time, Suzanne loves to travel and hike. She also enjoys spending time with her family.



Suzanne Strader with her husband, Jim



Lenten Practices: *Penance and Abstinence*

For many Catholics, the practice of fasting and abstinence during Lent is as much a part of our faith as is our sacred liturgy. Catholics know that when Lent arrives, it's time to say “goodbye” to meat on Fridays and “hello” to fish sticks and bean burritos. It's almost as if our Lenten obligations were hard-wired into our biological clock at the moment we were baptized.

If there is one thing that Catholics definitely understand, it's adhering to the laws of tradition. Indeed, the tradition of fasting and abstaining from meat during Lent draws its lineage from the early days of the faith.

But why, exactly, do we fast and abstain from meat during Lent? And what are the Church's guidelines for this tradition?

In November 1966, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a pastoral statement on penance and abstinence. The statement outlines the Scriptural significance behind fasting and abstinence, and directs the faithful on when it is encouraged and appropriate to do so.

According to the statement, there are four main points the Church wants to make about the tradition of penance and abstinence.

First, all humans are sinners. Second, penance and abstinence are ways to turn away from sin and back to God. Third, the Church is constantly in a stage of ongoing renewal and penance. And finally, Advent, Lent and the vigils of certain feasts are the primary penitential seasons of the Church.

The statement makes clear that the practices of penance and abstinence are tools created to help lead us to Christ — they are not stringent laws designed to cause discomfort and pain. Fasting, abstinence and penance help us to reflect on,

and in some way understand, the suffering and selflessness our Lord experienced during His passion and death.

Traditionally, Catholics must fast and abstain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday, which falls on Feb. 22 this year, and Good Friday, falling this year on April 7. And, because Christ died on a Friday, the Church asks us to also abstain from meat on all Fridays during the season of Lent.

Lent is also a time of penance. In preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church encourages all Catholics to seek forgiveness from sins and to renew their spirits in accordance with the Father's spirit. The overarching goal of all Christians is to become “one with the Father,” and penance and abstinence help us attempt to do that.

But Lent isn't just about what we aren't “allowed” to do. The Church encourages us all to seek ways to alleviate the pain and suffering of others — just as Christ lifted the burden of sin from the spirit of humankind — “by special solicitude for the sick, the poor, the underprivileged, the imprisoned, the bedridden, the discouraged, the stranger, the lonely, and persons of other color, nationalities, or backgrounds than our own” (Pastoral Statement on Penance and Abstinence, 15).

This Lent, as the world prepares for the anniversary of Christ's death and resurrection, take on a few Lenten practices of your own. In addition to abstaining from meat on Fridays and fasting and abstaining from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, find a way to share the love of Christ with others through gifts of time, talent and treasure. The life of a disciple, as outlined in the Gospels, requires a renewed heart and a penitent soul. Seek to understand this Lent, in some small way, the magnitude of our Lord's suffering and love.

Ash Wednesday: Feb. 22 — Mass times as follows:

9 a.m. at St. Joseph Church ■ 12 noon at Nativity Church ■ 7 p.m. at St. Joseph Church

II Theology, Round II

By Nathan Frankart

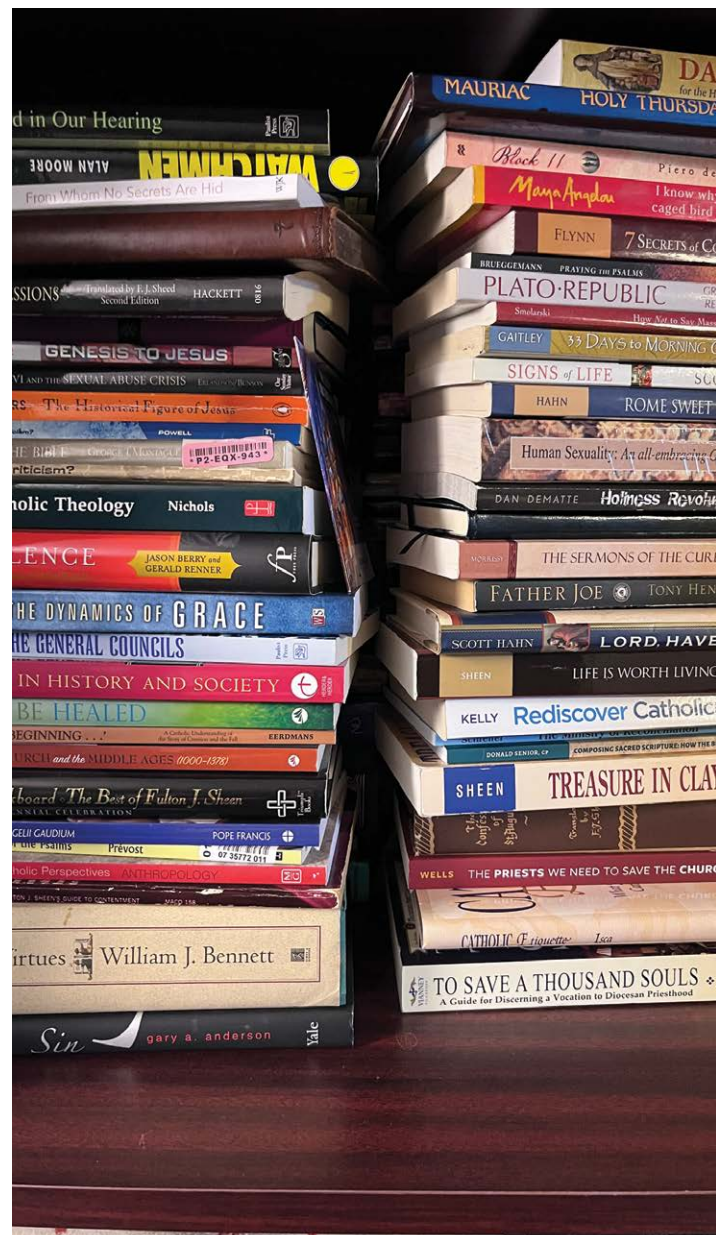
Peace of Christ to you! It has been a while since I have done a general description of what my courses and classes currently look like at the seminary. This past semester was certainly full of announcements and challenges, and I think it will be a nice change of pace to simply describe to you the second semester of II Theology.

This is my last semester of academic work before I begin my pastoral internship, which will take place during all of III Theology, so perhaps this is why the classes are pretty intensely layered on for this semester! For my systematics courses, I will be taking graduate-level moral theology and ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is essential to the study of the theology of the nature of the Catholic Church... you know, it's very straightforward. In addition to this, I will be studying my Pauline Literature Scripture course, a dive into the letters and books of the New Testament attributed to St. Paul. These three classes make up about nine credits for the spring semester, or to put it another way, half of my course load.

The other half consists of pastoral and practical classes that are relevant to ministry. These include my liturgical preaching course, my evangelization, and spirituality of evangelization course, my field education course (this semester I am teaching in Catholic Schools in the Euclid area), and finally my Liturgy and the Art of the Ritual course. I would love to explain what this course entails, but after sitting through a few lectures, I am still not entirely sure what the point is yet. I'm sure I'll get there at some point. One thing is for certain, I have plenty of books to read for this year!

This is the reality of my life as a seminarian, and in many ways, this is preparing me for the life of priesthood. The ministry of priests does not consist of preparing a homily once a week and waiting for the weekend Masses. The responsibilities, activities, preparations, Masses, sacraments, and prayer life of a priest are almost impossible to capture in words. The taxing workload that I experience now is not

meant to grind down myself or my fellow seminarians, but to prepare us for the all-encompassing beautiful life of being a priest of Jesus Christ.



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Address Service Requested

Fr. Tim O'Connor Serving Both Parishes

Mass:

Monday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*
Tuesday, 8:00 a.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*
Thursday, 7:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*
Friday, 9:00 a.m. - *St. Joseph*
Saturday, 4:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*
5:30 p.m. - *Nativity of the BVM*
Sunday, 8:30 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 5:00 p.m. - *St. Joseph*

Confession at St. Joseph:

Thursday - Individual Reconciliation 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Saturday - Individual Reconciliation 11:00 a.m. - noon

Eucharistic Adoration (Chapel) at Nativity of the BVM:

Monday-Friday 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Upcoming Activities and Events

Catholic Schools Week

Jan. 29 — Feb. 3 at St. Joseph School

First Friday Rosary

Friday, Feb. 3 — 11 a.m., Nativity Church

First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, Feb. 4 — 9 a.m., St. Joseph Church

Hospitality Tuesday

Tuesday, Feb. 7 — 8:30 a.m., Nativity Church

Altar and Rosary Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 7 — 6:30 p.m., Nativity Church

Parent Club Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 7 — 7 p.m., School MPR

Wonderful Women

Tuesday, Feb. 7 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

Vincentian Meeting

Thursdays, Feb. 9 and 23 — 9 a.m., Conference Room

Early School Dismissal — Parent Teacher Conferences

Thursday, Feb. 16 — 1:15 p.m.

No School

Friday, Feb. 17 and 20

Men's Group Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 21 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 28 — 7 p.m., School MPR

R.C.I.A. Meetings

Mondays, Feb. 6, 13, 20, 27 — 7 p.m., Nativity Parish Hall

PSR Classes

Wednesdays, Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22 — 5:30 p.m., School

Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesdays and Thursdays in February — 9:30 a.m., Nativity Parish Hall

Youth Group Meetings

Sundays of Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26 — St. Joseph Social Hall, 6 p.m.