

#### PARISH NEWSLETTER

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**FEBRUARY 2024** 

# Music Ministry's Lenten Programs Uniting Community in Faith and Harmony

he Lenten season is almost upon us, bringing with it the talents of our Music Ministry as its members prepare to present beautiful works during this liturgical season. Christina Dupre, Worship and Liturgy Coordinator at St. Joseph Parish, is looking forward to seeing the efforts of this ministry coming to fruition this Lent.

"Our largest production, *The Answer*, is a full show with over 85 cast members plus the production team and tells the story of Christ's Passion," Christina says. "People of all ages participate — full families with little ones up to senior citizens. They volunteer their time and join us for rehearsals every Sunday. In some ways, our rehearsals are a living Bible study the group engages in each week."

Auditions for *The Answer* occurred the last weekend of January. Rehearsals will take place throughout February and March in anticipation of the three performance weekends. This year, Christina is excited to present *The Answer* at three other parishes in the Diocese of Cleveland. The show is free to attend but donations are accepted.

"This incredible show would not be possible without our volunteers," Christina



Cast members from our parish Music Ministry putting on a production of The Answer the Musical in 2023

says. "They give of their time to ensure a memorable performance. After every show, we have audience members asking how they can help and support. Many of them give financially to cover the expenses of this production. Others have given of their talents and joined our cast or production team the following year."

Christina also eagerly anticipates the Taize music and prayer that will accompany the Stations of the Cross on Good Friday.

"Taize music has a gentle cadence that leads you to meditation," she says. "This beautiful form of prayer is common in

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## Embracing Stewardship During Lent

ent, the 40-day season of reflection and preparation leading up to Easter, is a time of spiritual growth,

self-examination, and deepening one's relationship with God. Central to the Lenten experience is the connection to stewardship and recommitting to our commitments of time, talent, and treasure during Lent, so that we can truly embody the spirit of this season of sacrifice and renewal.

Time is one of God's most precious gifts to us. During Lent, consider how you can commit more of your time to prayer and service. This could involve setting aside a specific time each day for prayer and reflection, attending daily Mass, or participating in additional religious activities such as Stations of the Cross or adoration. By dedicating more of your time to God during Lent, you deepen your connection with Him and grow in your understanding of what it means to be a steward of the gift of time.

When it comes to talent, each of us possesses unique skills, and these gifts are to be used for the greater good. Lent is an excellent time to reflect on how you can commit your talents to serve others and glorify God. Consider volunteering at your parish or a local charitable organization, sharing your skills with those in need, or using your talents to enhance your church community. This act of giving not only benefits those you serve, but also strengthens your own sense of purpose and connection to your faith.

Stewardship of treasure is also an integral part of living a faithful life. Lent provides an opportunity to evaluate how you use your financial resources and make commitments to give generously. You might choose to increase your contributions to your parish or donate to a charitable cause that aligns with your values. Also, consider making financial sacrifices during Lent, such as giving up a luxury or non-essential expense, and redirecting those funds towards acts of charity and kindness. These financial commitments reflect your understanding that all your material blessings are from God, and you are called to use them responsibly and generously.

As you make these Lenten commitments of time, talent, and treasure during Lent, it's crucial to incorporate prayer and reflection into your journey. Spend time in prayer, asking God for guidance and strength to fulfill your commitments. Reflect on your progress, celebrate your successes, and acknowledge areas where you can improve. This self-examination is a fundamental aspect of Catholic stewardship and is an integral part of the Lenten experience.

Lent is traditionally a season of sacrifice, symbolizing the 40 days that Jesus spent in the wilderness. By committing your time, talent, and treasure, you are making a conscious choice to embrace sacrifice as a path to renewal. The sacrifices you make during this season help you grow closer to God, and in the process, you experience a spiritual rebirth that prepares you for the celebration of Easter.

Acts of mercy and kindness are a tangible expression of your commitments during Lent. By giving your time in prayer, sharing your talents with others, and sharing your treasure with the parish and those in need, you embody the love and compassion of Christ. Your actions become a testament to the principles of stewardship, and they have a positive impact on your community and the world at large.

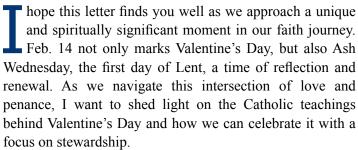
By focusing on stewardship with your commitments of time, talent, and treasure, you can fully embrace the spirit of Lent and grow in your faith. This approach transforms the season into a time of deeper self-examination, spiritual growth, and a genuine connection to God's gifts. It is a reminder that living as a faithful steward is not a one-time commitment, but a way of life — one that extends far beyond the Lenten season.



A Letter from Our Pastor

## Celebrating Valentine's Day Through Acts of Stewardship

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



Valentine's Day is named after St. Valentine, a thirdcentury Roman martyr who upheld the values of love,
self-sacrifice, and Christian faith. He defied the Roman
Empire's ban on marriage for young soldiers, believing in
the sanctity of love and the Sacrament of Marriage. His
devotion to love, even in the face of persecution, serves as
an inspiration to us all.

This year, Valentine's Day coincides with Ash Wednesday, a day of fasting, prayer, and repentance. We can celebrate this unique alignment of love and devotion by embracing Catholic stewardship. Here are ways to do so:

- Lenten Sacrifice of Love: Instead of traditional Valentine's Day gifts, consider giving something more meaningful. Make a Lenten sacrifice, such as giving up a favorite treat, luxury, or habit, and donate the money saved to a charitable cause. This act of almsgiving, rooted in love, reflects St. Valentine's commitment to those in need.
- Acts of Love and Kindness: Throughout Lent, perform daily acts of love and kindness. These gestures need not be grand; a simple act like calling a friend in need, helping a neighbor, or showing appreciation to a family member can be a profound expression of love and stewardship.
- Prayer and Reflection: On this Ash Wednesday, attend Mass and receive ashes as a visible sign of your

- commitment to repentance and renewal. Dedicate time to prayer and reflection, considering the ways you can deepen your relationship with God and with one another.
- Service to the Community: Serve our community by participating in charitable activities or volunteering your time. Lent is a time for selflessness and giving. Join initiatives in our parish or engage in community service to extend your love to those in need.
- Marriage and Family Enrichment: On this day of love, focus on enriching your marriage and family relationships. Attend marriage counseling, pray together as a couple, or engage in family activities that promote unity and love.
- Renewal of Stewardship Commitments: Use this time
  to review and renew your stewardship commitments
  of time, talent, and treasure to our parish community.
  Reflect on how you can contribute to the growth and
  vibrancy of our faith family.

By celebrating Valentine's Day on Ash Wednesday through acts of stewardship, we can infuse this day with the deep love and commitment that our faith encourages. This unique confluence reminds us that love and self-sacrifice are at the heart of our faith, as exemplified by St. Valentine's dedication to love and Christian values.

May this Valentine's Day be a profound and spiritually rich experience, allowing us to renew our love for God, one another, and our commitment to stewardship as a way of life.

Gratefully in Christ.

Fr. Twining & O' Comm

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor, Pastor



s we journey through Lent towards Good Friday and Easter, we are invited to enter more deeply into the suffering of Christ. The Stations of the Cross have traditionally been a way for Catholics to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and to meditate on His road to Calvary. The Stations take us on a pilgrimage with Christ to the cross. A unique way to enter into this meditation is through the eyes of Christ's mother, Mary.

Mary's role is to draw us closer to her Son and, like the Rosary, *Mary's Way of the Cross*, written by Fr. Richard Furey, brings us up close and personal with the profound love between Mary and Jesus. Since 2015, the women of our parish have offered *Mary's Way of the Cross* during Lent to bring us a new perspective. Sue Cotton has been a part of it since the beginning.

"It has been very moving to go through the Stations of the Cross through Mary's eyes," Sue says. "Two years ago, one of our sons passed away and this has carried me through my grief in many ways. It has been a wonderful way for my faith to grow stronger."

Sue shares her experience of grief with two of the ladies who help to put on *Mary's Way of the Cross*. But everyone,

whether they are a mother or not, can gain something from Mary's perspective. In fact, Sue and the others began to offer these stations outside of the parish. First, they visited other parishes, to present the stations and share the booklet. In 2018, they presented the stations at the prison in Grafton for the first time.

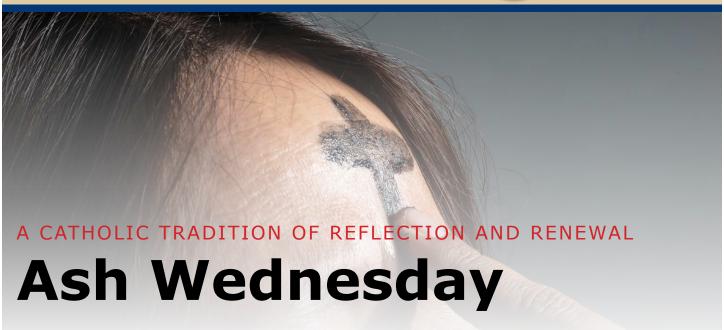
"We couldn't take anything in with us," Sue says. "But we were allowed to bring food to them, and one time we actually served them a meal. We are women who are all moms and they were very respectful and very appreciative."

Sue credits Dodie Kolhoff with introducing *Mary's Way* of the *Cross* to the parish. Dodie saw the stations at a parish in Alabama and knew that our parish would benefit from this meditation as well. So Sue brought the group of women together. They keep it very simple so that the focus is on the meditations.

"It's a new viewpoint — many of us haven't viewed the stations through Mary's eyes," Sue says. "It's a new way of looking at Christ going to be crucified for us. Fr. Furey gives a short description of the station and a prayer to connect it to us here and now. Then we end each station with an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be with the whole parish together. It's neat to hear our united voices."

This year, *Mary's Way of the Cross* will be held at 7 p.m. on Feb. 16.

All are welcome. Check the bulletin for more details.



solemn day that marks the beginning of Lent, Ash Wednesday holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics worldwide. Rooted in centuries-old traditions, this observance is laden with symbolism and significance, providing a profound opportunity for spiritual reflection and renewal.

Ash Wednesday falls 40 days before Easter Sunday, excluding Sundays, and serves as a period of penance, fasting, and prayer, mirroring the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert. The name itself is derived from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful in the sign of the cross. This year, it falls on Feb. 14.

The history of Ash Wednesday can be traced back to the ancient Jewish tradition of penance and fasting, symbolized in Judaism by the sprinkling of ashes on the head. This practice was later adopted by early Christians as a public expression of repentance. The ashes used on this day are typically derived from the burned palms blessed on the previous year's Palm Sunday, symbolizing the connection between death, repentance, and the promise of resurrection.

The liturgy of Ash Wednesday is profound and poignant, emphasizing humility and mortality. The priest applies ashes in the shape of a cross to the foreheads of the faithful, saying the words, "Remember that you are dust,

and to dust you shall return," or "Repent, and believe in the Gospel." This ritual serves as a stark reminder of the brevity of human life and the need for repentance and conversion.

The significance of Ash Wednesday extends beyond the symbolic act of ash imposition. It heralds the beginning of Lent, a period of self-examination, prayer, and fasting. Catholics are called to reflect on their lives, identify areas of sin, and strive for spiritual growth. Fasting and abstinence from certain pleasures during Lent are seen as a way to detach from worldly distractions and draw closer to God.

The 40 days of Lent are symbolic of the time Jesus spent fasting in the desert, facing temptations from the devil. Through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity, we seek to emulate Christ's journey, fostering a deeper connection with their faith.

Ash Wednesday serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative journey toward Easter, where the faithful celebrate the resurrection of Christ. It invites Catholics to embark on a period of introspection, penance, and spiritual growth, fostering a renewed commitment to their faith. As the ashes are traced on foreheads, the faithful are reminded not only of their mortality but also of the eternal hope found in Christ's sacrifice. In this season of Lent, we are encouraged to embrace the call to repentance, turning away from sin and towards a life of holiness and grace.

## Nativity's Christine Gentile Experiences

lifelong member of Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, Christine Gentile has always treasured our parish as an integral part of her life. She remembers going to Mass with her parents and siblings as a young girl and receiving all of her sacraments here. In truth, Nativity is home for Christine.

"Ours is a small, homey parish," Christine says. "I think that's why I've stayed. This church is home for me."

And when Christine began serving as a lector five years ago, she says her experience as a member of Nativity took on a depth the likes of which she could not have imagined.

"Before I got involved, going to Mass was kind of routine for me," Christine says. "I didn't connect the way I do now. Being a lector makes me feel closer to God, and I pay more attention to the Mass."

As Christine continues to explain how her life has changed since getting more involved in the parish, it is clear that the faith-filled connection she's experienced extends beyond the church walls. After volunteering to



Christine Gentile with the baby clothes the diocesesponsored group brought to El Salvador



Residents who came out of their mountain home to attend a prayer service

serve as a lector, Christine got more involved. She now also serves our Church Dinners Ministry and lends a hand whenever baking is needed for one thing or another.

"I help out wherever I can," Christine says. "It has been so satisfying and enjoyable to get more and more involved. It is great fellowship with other parishioners, some of whom I wouldn't know otherwise."

Even more still, Christine's stewardship extends beyond our local community. She has found herself seeking out ways to serve others far and wide! And in April of last year, she — along with a few other Nativity and St. Joseph parishioners — ventured down to El Salvador to serve the poorest of the poor in the region.

"It was a diocesan-sponsored mission, and our Altar and Rosary Society generously donated money for us to spend on the poorest of the poor in El Salvador," Christine says. "And when I say these people are poor, I honestly didn't realize that people still lived the way these people do!"



## Faith-Filled Connections Rooted in Stewardship "This Church Is Home for Me"

It was bone-chillingly humbling for Christine as she walked through the villages and witnessed people living in houses for which piles of branches pass as walls!

"Their floors are dirt — and not smooth dirt!" Christine says. "Some of the people live in homes put up by a company started by a couple from Amherst, but even



One of the residents who received rice and beans and a rosary from the mission team

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— Christine Gentile

those houses are not houses like we know. They are simply concrete pads and blocks topped with metal roofs."

And yet, as Christine recalls her time in El Salvador, she says that the thing that sticks out most in her mind is the gratitude of the people there.

"We brought them bags of rice and beans, and the families were so grateful," Christine says. "I remember watching as these people who live in conditions like I'd never seen before walked to Mass. They live in such poverty, and they were coming out of the hills and walking to church to thank God for their blessings. Witnessing how spiritual the people of El Salvador are made a tremendous impact on me."

Today, as Christine continues to live a life of stewardship here at Nativity, she says she carries that experience with her. It has enhanced her awareness of the many blessings God has given her. It has reaffirmed her commitment to live a life of faith rooted in gratitude for the One who gives us everything! May we all take note of our gifts and spend our lives giving back to the One who gives! In everything, may God be praised!



Fr. John, our host, at St. Peter the Apostle School

## **Strengthening Your Catholic Faith:**

## A Guide to Spiritual Growth and Faith Formation

he journey of faith is a lifelong commitment, a continuous process of deepening our relationship with Christ and understanding the teachings of the Church. To improve your faith life and foster a closer connection with Christ, it's essential to engage in meaningful practices and explore Catholic literature that can provide spiritual nourishment. Here are some ideas to help you enhance your faith and some insightful Catholic-based books to read.

#### DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Building a strong connection with God starts with prayer and reflection. Setting aside time each day for prayer, whether it's the Rosary, the *Liturgy of the Hours*, or simply speaking from the heart, allows you to commune with the Divine. To complement your daily prayer, consider reading *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, a classic work that guides Catholics in developing a deeper prayer life and drawing closer to Christ.

#### ATTEND MASS REGULARLY

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Catholic faith. Regular attendance at Mass is crucial to growing closer to Christ. It's not just about fulfilling an obligation — it's an opportunity to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior. For a deeper understanding of the Mass, *The Lamb's Supper* by Scott Hahn offers insights into the biblical roots of the Eucharist and its significance.

#### STUDY THE BIBLE

The Word of God is a rich source of spiritual growth. Dive into the Scriptures, attend Bible studies, or join a Catholic reading group to explore the teachings of the Church. *The Catholic Study Bible* with commentary is an excellent resource for gaining a deeper understanding of the Bible's teachings and how they relate to your faith. Utilize the United

States Conference of Catholic Bishops' New American Bible online at www.bible.usccb.org/bible.

#### **ENGAGE IN FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMS**

Your local parish may offer faith formation programs, which can provide a structured way to learn about the teachings of the Church. These programs can include courses on Catholic theology, morality, and the history of the Church. Ask your parish for information about available opportunities to deepen your faith and understanding.

#### READ CATHOLIC LITERATURE

Immersing yourself in Catholic literature is a powerful way to improve your faith formation. *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales is a classic that offers practical guidance for leading a life of holiness. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis is a thought-provoking work that explores the Christian faith from a broader perspective.

#### SEEK SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Having a spiritual director or mentor can be immensely beneficial in your faith journey. They can offer guidance, support, and insights that help you grow spiritually. Consider reading *Spiritual Direction: A Guide for Sharing the Father's Love* by Fr. Thomas Acklin and Fr. Boniface Hicks to understand the role of a spiritual director in your life.

Improving your faith life and growing closer to Christ is an ongoing process. By incorporating these practices and exploring Catholic literature, you can deepen your understanding of Church teachings and develop a more profound relationship with our Lord.

Remember that faith formation is a personal journey, and it is never too late to start or continue on the path to spiritual growth.

## Intention By NATHAN FRANKART, Seminarian

eace of Christ to you! The season of Lent is many things. Yes, it is a sacrifice. Yes, it is a desert journey to arrive at the joy of Easter. Yes, it is dying to self. But fundamentally, intention is the foundation upon which the entire liturgical season rests.

Jesus, after His Baptism, is driven into the desert by the suggestion of the Holy Spirit. That sentence is doing a lot of heavy lifting that can pass us by if left unpacked. The way that it's phrased almost seems as though Jesus doesn't have much choice in the matter. The Holy Spirit pushed Him into a new place, a new environment where there is great distress and difficulty, and Jesus responded with a "yes."

The truth of the matter is this — it required great intention on the part of our Lord in order to say "yes." The "yes" was not produced from coercion or persuasion. It came from Jesus' consideration and reflection on what would be asked of Him at the beginning of His public ministry. The only way to properly reflect and prepare His heart for His job on earth was to intentionally seek a place of difficulty that would mirror His future struggles and

trials. That is the importance of intention — it paves our hearts for what comes next.

The self-imposed disciplines that we practice are not primarily aimed at changing our lives because we do something new for 40 days, but that we shape our intentions specifically. To be very plain, the act of not eating chocolate for 40 days is nowhere near as important as the process of coming up with that intention, its reasons, and attempting to be faithful to it.

This process reflects the entirety of our Christian journey. We are called to be the continuation of God's kingdom and work here on earth, and we are not judged on the quality of our work alone. We are not measured by the amount of people we evangelized or Holy Hours we prayed. In a much larger part, we are measured by the meaningfulness of our intention, our desire to live it out, and our attempt to be faithful to it. You can fail at your Lenten discipline multiple times and still have a fantastic Lent. The question will be this — how did it change your heart?

## Music Ministry's Lenten Programs continued from front cover

Eucharistic Adoration. We've invited the community at St. Peter Parish to join us on Good Friday for Taize and Stations."

These initiatives of the Music Ministry are a testament to the participation of the community and our families that foster both a love of the faith and performance.

"I am always blown away by the dedication of our parishioners," Christina says. "Children in our youth choir want to be a part of our high school and adult choirs because they enjoy it so much. So many of our high school and college-aged parishioners also participate. These ministries continue to grow because they want to do it and invest their time. I look back on Advent when choir volunteers were rehearsing two hours a day twice a week in preparation for the Christmas liturgies. That same devotion is evident in all those performing in *The Answer* and for that, I'm extremely grateful."

## All performances will occur at 7:30 p.m. and are as follows:

- March 8 and 9 at St. Ladislas Church in Westlake (Friday and Saturday performances)
- March 14 and 15 at St. Peter Parish in Lorain (Thursday and Friday performances)
- March 22 and 23 at St. Albert the Great Parish in North Royalton (Friday and Saturday performances)

## **AD SPACE**



## **AD SPACE**

#### This newsletter brought to you by the Catholic Communities of:

# ST. JOSEPH PARISH NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

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200 Saint Joseph Drive, Amherst, OH 44001

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

#### **FIRST FRIDAY ROSARY**

Friday, Feb. 2 — 11 a.m., Nativity Parish

#### **FIRST SATURDAY ROSARY**

Saturday, Feb. 3 — 9 a.m., St. Joseph Church

## FIRST COMMUNION PARENT MEETING

Sunday, Feb. 4 — 12 p.m., St. Joseph Church (following 11 a.m. Mass)

#### **HOSPITALITY TUESDAY**

Tuesday, Feb. 6 — 8:30 a.m., Nativity Church and Hall

#### **PARENT CLUB MEETING**

Tuesday, Feb. 6 — 7 p.m., School MPR

## ALTAR AND ROSARY SOCIETY MEETING

Tuesday, Feb. 6 — 6:30 p.m., Nativity Parish Hall

#### **ASH WEDNESDAY**

Wednesday, Feb. 14 — Masses as follows: 9 a.m. at St. Joseph Church 12 p.m. at Nativity Church 7 p.m. at St. Joseph Church

#### **EARLY DISMISSAL/NO SCHOOL**

Thursday, Feb. 15 — early dismissal at 1:15 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16 — no school Monday, Feb. 19 — no school

#### **MARY'S WAY OF THE CROSS**

Friday, Feb. 16 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Church

#### **WONDERFUL WOMEN**

Tuesday, Feb. 20 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

#### STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Friday, Feb. 23 — 7 p.m., location TBD

## KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS MEETING

Tuesday, Feb. 27 — 7 p.m. School MPR

## DIOCESAN-WIDE EVENING OF CONFESSION

Wednesday, Feb. 28 — 5 p.m., St. Joseph Parish

#### **HOLY GROUND YOUTH GROUP**

Sunday, Feb. 4, 18, 25 — 6 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

#### **RCIA MEETINGS**

Monday, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26 — 7 p.m., Nativity Parish Hall

#### **MEN'S GROUP**

Tuesday, Feb. 6 and 20 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

#### **PSR CLASSES**

Wednesday, Feb. 7, 14, 21, 28 — 5:30 p.m., St. Joseph School

#### **VINCENTIANS MEETING**

Thursday, Feb. 8 and 22 — 9 a.m., St. Joseph Conference Room

#### **DINNERS ON THE GO**

Tuesday, Feb. 13 and 27 — 5 p.m., Nativity Parish Hall

## FAITHFULLY FIT YOGA CLASSES

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