



# ST. JOSEPH PARISH

## NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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**MAY 2023**

## MEET PARISHIONER Ashley Moran

### *Reflecting on the Joys of the RCIA Process and Entering into the Catholic Faith*

When it comes to families, parents usually lead their children to the faith. But for Ashley Moran, it happened the opposite way.

Ashley and her husband, James, have two daughters — Jordyn and Sawyer, both students at St. Joseph Parish School. At one Friday school Mass, Jordyn was blessed to witness a classmate’s Baptism.

“Jordyn watched someone be baptized at school at Friday Mass and was interested in being baptized,” Ashley says. “Being a younger sister, Sawyer also wanted to be baptized.”

When Ashley — who had been baptized Lutheran — started looking into Baptism for her daughters, she decided to become fully initiated into the Catholic faith herself. So, she started the Monday night RCIA classes this past fall, with Jordyn also attending.

RCIA proved to be a positive experience for Ashley, as she embraced the opportunity to jump in and learn about the faith.

“It’s been interesting opening the Bible for the first time since I was younger and going to Sunday school,” she says. “I am



*Ashley Moran with her husband, James, and their daughters, Jordyn and Sawyer*

doing it willingly and understanding what I’m reading.”

For Ashley, a particular highlight of RCIA has been learning about the saints — she didn’t know anything about the saints before she started RCIA, and was inspired to choose St. Joan of Arc as her Confirmation saint. She has also enjoyed getting to know the RCIA catechists, as well as having her longtime friend Beth Clegg serve as her sponsor. She is so impressed by how warm and welcoming everyone has been.

“Everyone who leads the classes goes out of their way to find the

*continued on page 7*



# Mothers AND STEWARDSHIP

**W**e celebrate the month of Mary during May, and during this month, we also celebrate Mother's Day. It seems fitting that we honor our mothers during May, since Mary is given to us by God as the example of true Christian motherhood.

Those who are called to be mothers have been blessed by God and called to fulfill a very important responsibility. Mothers are the vehicle through which God brings new life into this world. When we talk about Christian stewardship, we talk about sacrificially returning to God what we have been given. What can more clearly be a demonstration of complete sacrifice than the relationship between mother and child during the nine months of growth in the womb? During these nine months, the child's life depends on the actions of the mother as her energy and nourishment goes directly to the growing baby.

Although this relationship may change to some extent after the child is born, a mother's sacrifice for her child is far from over after the birth. The role of the mother is critical in the child's development — both spiritually and physically — throughout life. Mothers provide the comfort, nurture and support necessary for their children to become productive citizens and responsible Christians.

The job of a mother is not an easy one. This is a fact that Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew very well. She worried when her young Son appeared to be lost, only to find Him later in His Father's house. She was probably concerned as Jesus began His public ministry — not knowing what difficulties and rejections He would encounter along the way. And, Mary must have experienced great anguish as she watched her Son's body being crucified to a cross.

May all mothers look to Mary as their model for motherhood and ask her intercession as they strive to fulfill their God-given role in their children's lives. During the month of May, let us all take some time to express our appreciation to our mothers for allowing us to come into this world, for loving us, and for serving as an example of what it means to be a steward for life.

A Letter from Our Pastor

## Honoring Our Lady in May

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

**M**ay is Mary's month. For centuries, Catholics throughout the world have included special devotions to the Blessed Mother in their activities during May. Best known, I'm sure, are the Rosary and the widespread and ever-popular practice of crowning an image of Our Lady with flowers during this month that is dedicated to her.

May is a beautiful month, full of renewal and hope. The March winds and the April showers have done their work, and the spring flowers are in bloom. Even though the earliest signs of spring have passed, May doesn't quite have the look or feel of summer. It is spring at its finest! And it's not only the flowers or trees that show new life in May. For many students, May is the month to prepare for graduations, and these students will soon move on to new phases in their lives.

And, of course, May is a month of joy for all of us who claim the Church as our spiritual home. We spend the whole month this year in the Easter season, which closes with Pentecost on May 28. The joy of the Resurrection, the

glory of the Ascension, and the descent of the Holy Spirit are the themes that fill our Christian calendar.

But as we rejoice with Mary at her Son's triumph over sin, Satan, and death, we remember her faithfulness to God's will throughout her life. Indeed, she can be viewed as the model Christian steward. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops pointed to her in its pastoral letter on stewardship: "After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense" (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 41).

Let us follow her example of total dedication to God as we rejoice in the blessings He gives us this month!

Gratefully in Christ,



Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,  
Pastor



"After Jesus, it is the Blessed Virgin Mary who by her example most perfectly teaches the meaning of discipleship and stewardship in their fullest sense" (*Stewardship: A Disciple's Response*, 41).



# The Patron Saint of Impossible Causes: **St. Rita**

## *Feast Day, May 22*

**S**t. Rita of Cascia is an important saint in the Catholic Church, revered for her steadfast faith, exemplary life of stewardship and discipleship, and her miraculous intercession.

Born Margherita Lotti in 1381 in Roccaporena, Italy, St. Rita lived during a time of great turmoil, marked by conflicts between rival Italian city-states and the Papal States, as well as widespread poverty, disease, and lawlessness.

Despite these challenges, St. Rita was raised in a devout Catholic family, and from an early age, she exhibited a deep love for God and a desire to serve Him. As a young girl, Rita desired to become a nun. However, her parents arranged for her to marry a man named Paolo Mancini. Paolo was known for his violent temper and abusive behavior towards Rita. Despite this, Rita remained patient and forgiving, even as she endured physical and emotional abuse from her husband.

Eventually, her husband was killed in a feud between rival families, and St. Rita was left a widow with two young sons. She faced many trials during her widowhood, especially when her late husband's brother continued the feud and hoped to convince Rita's sons to seek revenge. As her sons grew, they wished to avenge their father's murder. Fearing her sons would lose their souls, she tried to dissuade them from retaliating to no avail. She asked God to remove her sons from the cycle of vendettas and prevent mortal sin and murder. Her sons died of dysentery a year later, which pious Catholics believe was God's answer to her prayer, taking them by natural death rather than risk them committing a mortal sin punishable by Hell.

After the death of her sons, St. Rita was free to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a nun. However, the convent



she wished to join had a strict rule that only women who had never been married could enter. St. Rita prayed for three days, asking for a sign from God, and on the third day, a miracle occurred. She heard a knock on the door, and when she opened it, she found herself surrounded by a group of nuns who took her into the convent without question.

St. Rita lived the rest of her life as a nun, dedicating herself to prayer, penance, and service to others. She lived a life of true stewardship, exemplified by her work caring for the sick and poor. Her life of service and dedication to God has made her an important

figure in the Catholic Church.

She is known for her ability to intercede on behalf of those facing impossible situations, and is best known for her association with roses, which often are used as a symbol of her life and legacy. It is said that as she neared the end of her life, Rita was bedridden from tuberculosis. It was then that she asked a cousin who had come to visit for a rose from the garden in her old home. As it was January, her cousin did not expect to find any roses, but there was a single rose in bloom, which was brought back to Rita at the convent. Rita passed away four months later, on May 22, 1457. Following her death, she was buried at the Basilica of Cascia.

Today, St. Rita is venerated as the patron saint of several causes, including desperate and impossible situations, abuse victims, and marital problems. Rita was beatified by Pope Urban VIII in 1627 and canonized by Pope Leo XIII on May 24, 1900. Her feast day is celebrated on May 22.

As we look to St. Rita's life and example, we can learn much about what it means to be a disciple of Christ in our own time. We can strive to emulate her virtues of compassion, forgiveness, and humility, seeking to serve others and live a life that reflects our faith.

## First Saturday Rosary

*Fulfilling the Prayer Desires of Our Blessed Mother  
and Drawing Closer to Her Son*

**A**s Mary has appeared across the centuries, a common theme is her desire for prayer, penance, and fasting. In many apparitions, she has asked the person or people to whom she appeared to pray the Rosary. At Fatima, she promised that praying the Rosary would bring peace to the world.

Patricia Ashker moved to this area in 2020 and had formerly been a parishioner at St. Joseph's in White Cloud, Mich. She was so pleased when she joined St. Joseph Parish to learn that there was an existing Rosary group — the First Saturday Rosary — having always been involved in a Rosary group in White Cloud.

The Rosary is very important to Patricia. She prays at least one Rosary a day.

“The Rosary is prayers of faith, hope, and charity,” she says. “It’s such an important prayer that we should all be praying.”

Kathleen Kelley has been part of the First Saturday Rosary group at St. Joseph's for about 50 years. The Rosary is an important part of her life — she prays it at least once per day, often praying along with it on television.

“We pray together on the First Saturday to honor Mary at Fatima,” Kathleen says.

The group gathers at St. Joseph Church at 9 a.m. to pray a Rosary — praying all 20 decades. It takes the group until about 10:30 a.m. to complete the prayer. Sometimes it’s a large group, and other times it’s just Kathleen and Patricia.

Kathleen enjoys gathering with others at least once a month to pray together. There’s power in numbers.

“The Rosary has always been part of my life,” she says. “When I was working as a registered nurse, I always had my Rosary with me.”



*(From left) Stephanie Sierra, Kathleen Kelley, Pat Ashker, and Mary Kay Werth*

Patricia’s devotion to the Rosary became stronger when she was in the convent as a young woman. She left the convent a month before taking her final vows as she felt the call to marriage.

“I always kept a Rosary under my pillow,” she says. “When I couldn’t sleep, I would pray the Rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.”

Patricia has seen how Mary has been with her through many difficult times. Each Rosary, we call on Mary 53 times. Patricia and Kathleen know that when we call on her, she hears us.

“Mary always leads us to Jesus,” Patricia says. “If we want to ask Jesus something, we go first to Mary.”

Following the four rosaries, the group also prays the Chaplet of Divine Mercy and the Litany of Loreto.

“I want to let people know that Mary is the perfect example of faith, hope, and charity,” Patricia says. “We can trust her to take our needs to Jesus.”

**All are invited to come to St. Joseph's at 9 a.m. on the  
First Saturday of the month to pray the Rosary.**

# Wonderful Women Ministry

## *Offers a Place to Share in Faith, Fellowship and Fun*

Every other month, women in our parish community gather for an evening of fun, faith and fellowship. Olivia Toney leads the Wonderful Women Ministry, which seeks to provide an uplifting and fun environment for the participants.



*February's guest speaker, Elizabeth Gonzalez*

“We meet to enrich our faith life through presentations, music, and discussion,” Olivia says.

The Wonderful Women Ministry meets on a Tuesday at 7 p.m. every other month in the Social Hall at St. Joseph Parish.

“The ministry is open to anyone seeking to continue strengthening their relationship with God in new ways and to connect with other women,” Olivia says.

Having attended the Women’s Renewal and serving on the team for two years, Olivia wanted to find a way to continue the momentum with some of the other women.

“I had also developed a program called Faith is Fun that I wrote to present at St. Joe’s in the past,” she says. “After praying about it, Wonderful Women came about and I pray it fits what I was hoping to facilitate for other women like me.”

More than 150 women have attended the various gatherings since the ministry started a few years ago. The events are open to women of all ages, and newcomers are also welcome. The ministry provides an opportunity for women to gather and be together, enjoying each other’s company.

“I think this ministry is important because we give love and service in and outside of the church in so many ways,” Olivia says. “Wonderful Women is an opportunity for ladies to just show up whenever you can make it and recharge. There is no commitment necessary or work to be done for those attending.”

Olivia hopes the group helps to deepen the spiritual lives of those involved, as they take the time to connect with other women of faith and learn from the presenters.

“It was important to me from the beginning to welcome all ages and religious walks of life to Wonderful Women,”



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## Wonderful Women Ministry *continued from page 6*

she says. “Sometimes the ladies bring their children, and I love trying to connect with and inspire them as well. I know I get so much out of them being there and I hope the others do as well.”

One of the key goals for Olivia is to create a fun setting in the context of a faith group. She is grateful to the parish community for the positive response and their involvement so far.

“My faith is such a huge part of my life and I want to enjoy it as much as possible,” she says. “I love that we can all come together to pray, but also laugh because the life God gives us is such a gift and I believe He wants us to enjoy it. What a fun way to show Him we are thankful by being happy!”



**Information about the gatherings are posted in the church bulletins. To receive updates and reminders, email Olivia Toney at [olivia.sliman@gmail.com](mailto:olivia.sliman@gmail.com).**

## Ashley Moran *continued from front cover*

answer if they don't know the answer,” Ashley says. “Developing a closer relationship with God has been really, really cool.”

Ashley made a Profession of Faith and received the Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation at the Easter Vigil. Since going through the RCIA process and receiving the sacraments, Ashley has learned so much about the Catholic faith. She also recognizes that she can better handle stressful situations.

“I think about those ‘What Would Jesus Do?’ bracelets,” she says. “I've learned how to better deal with things — take a deep breath and get through it.”

For anyone who is thinking about becoming Catholic or has previously considered it, Ashley recommends giving RCIA a try.

“The first time I went, they welcomed me like a sister,” she says. “Just go, and you will want to come back for more. The classes are so interesting, and there is so much to learn.”

Having received First Holy Communion and Confirmation, Ashley looks forward to Jordyn and Sawyer receiving the Sacrament of Baptism at a Friday Mass before the end of the school year. The Morans initially sent Jordyn to St. Joseph Parish School for the preschool program, and it felt natural to continue at the school. Ashley has since served as an assistant coach for the cross country and track programs at St. Joseph's.

In their free time, Ashley and James keep busy by attending their daughters' sporting events. Ashley is also a 4-H advisor. The family enjoys camping, hiking, and being outside.

## CELEBRATING THE CORONATION OF MARY

# The May Crowning

For many Catholics, May Crownings of statues or icons of the Blessed Mother have become rites of spring. Like flowers blooming or Mother's Day, this annual Marian devotion reminds us that the cold of winter is behind us, and it ushers in a month during which the Catholic Church pays special homage to Mary as the Queen of Heaven and Mother of God.

Generally taking place during the first weekend of the month, May Crownings bring children — often, recent First Communicants — out in their Sunday best to participate in processions and adorn statues of the Blessed Mother with crowns of flowers or actual gold crowns. Additionally, the children often place roses at her feet, and Catholics carry out similar practices in their homes by placing roses around statues of the Blessed Virgin, or even adding ornamentation to images of Mary. But where did this practice come from, and how did it develop into the tradition that we currently know and love?

The Coronation of Mary had been a popular subject in European art and literature for centuries, but the tradition of the May Crowning can be most accurately traced back to the late 16th century. Perhaps inspired by the practice of adding ornamentation to Marian icons that had been carried out by some Eastern churches, Pope Clement VIII added two crowns to the icon of Mary with the Infant Jesus in the St. Mary Major Basilica in Rome. The crowns were eventually lost, but were replaced by Gregory XVI in 1837 in a rite that was to become the standard practice for crowning.

While the May Crowning is not an official liturgical celebration on the Church calendar, it is an important practice in honoring Mary as the Queen of the Universe, and its imagery is especially influential in the faith formation of children. As Liz Kelly writes in *May Crowning, Mass, and Merton and Other Reasons I Love Being Catholic*, "One of the defining aspects of being Catholic is devotion to Mary. I favor no Marian celebration more highly than May Crowning, the feast that recognizes Mary as queen of heaven and earth. To a person of any age, this is a mighty big title, but to a child of five or six or seven, it expands to enchanting, magical proportions. How many queens does one get a chance to meet in a lifetime, much less crown?"

This year, make a special effort to honor the coronation of Mary through participation in a personal or public May Crowning devotion.

St. Joseph Parish School will celebrate May Devotional on Friday, May 12, at 10 a.m. at St. Joseph Church. Nativity Parish will celebrate May Crowning on Sunday, May 7, at 2 p.m. at Nativity Church.





## Pope Francis' Address to St. Mary Seminarians BY NATHAN FRANKART

**P**ease of Christ to you! I'm sure you've seen this photo more than once, but perhaps you haven't read this yet. This is my favorite excerpt from our private audience with Pope Francis during our 175th-anniversary trip for St. Mary Seminary. The Holy Father wished for us to know this above everything else as we continue on in formation with an eye toward serving the people of this diocese.

“Your time of seminary formation is an opportunity to deepen the spirit of fraternal communion, not only among yourselves, but also with your bishop, the presbyterate of the local Church, those living the consecrated life and the lay faithful, as well as with the universal Church. We should recognize that we are part of one great people which has received God's promises as a **gift, not as a privilege**. In the same way, your vocation is a gift to be placed at the service of building of the body of Christ (cf. *Eph* 4:12).

“Indeed, the good shepherd walks with the flock: sometimes ahead, to mark the way; sometimes in the midst, to encourage them and sometimes behind, to accompany those who may be struggling. Always remember how important it is to walk with the flock, never apart from it. You must walk with **everyone, everyone, everyone**... It is my hope that the years spent in the seminary will prepare you to give yourselves completely, in celibate love and with an undivided heart, to God and his holy people. The Church needs your enthusiasm, generosity and zeal in order to show everyone that God is always with us, in every circumstance of life. I pray that, in the various educational and charitable apostolates in which you are already engaged, you will always be signs of a Church that goes forth (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 20), bearing witness to and sharing the merciful love of Jesus with all in the human family, especially the poor and those in need.”

Of course, I added some bolded words here, mostly because this is where Pope Francis gave specific and purposeful emphasis. These were the moments that I especially held on to, and I will continue to recall moving forward in ministry.



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## 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

### Hospitality Tuesday

Tuesday, May 2 — following the 8:30 a.m. Mass, Nativity Parish Hall

### Altar and Rosary Society presents President's Wives — All are invited

Tuesday, May 2 — 6:30 p.m., Nativity Parish Hall

### First Friday Rosary

Friday, May 5 — 11 a.m., Nativity Parish Church and Hall

### First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, May 6 — 9 a.m., St. Joseph Church

### Parish Health and Wellness Blood Pressure checks

Saturday, May 6 and Sunday, May 7 — following the 4 p.m., 8:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Masses (St. Joseph Church)

### SJS Parent Club Coming Together Fundraiser

Saturday, May 6 — 6 p.m., Amherst Eagles

### Altar and Rosary Society May Crowning

Sunday, May 7 — 2 p.m., Nativity Church

### Parent Club Meeting

Tuesday, May 9 — 7 p.m., School MPR

### SJS May Devotional

Friday, May 12 — 10 a.m., St. Joseph Church

### SJS Father-Daughter Dance

Saturday, May 13 — 6 p.m., school gym

### Altar and Rosary Society Mother's Day Bake Sale

Saturday, May 13 — 6:30 p.m. (after Mass), Nativity Parish Hall

### Happy Mother's Day

Sunday, May 14

### SJS Spring Concert

Friday, May 19 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Church

### Baccalaureate Mass

Sunday, May 21 — 11 a.m., St. Joseph Church

### Knights of Columbus Meeting

Tuesday, May 23 — 7 p.m., School MPR

### Pentecost Sunday

Sunday, May 28

### Memorial Day

Monday, May 29 — No school and parish offices closed

### Men's Group Meeting

Tuesday, May 2 and 16 — 7 p.m., St. Joseph Social Hall

### Vincentians Meeting

Thursday, May 4 and 18 — 9 a.m., Conference Room

### Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesdays and Thursdays in May — 9:30 a.m., Nativity Parish Hall **until May 16<sup>th</sup>** when it will then move to Mill Hollow.