



ST. JOSEPH PARISH

NATIVITY OF THE BVM PARISH

PARISH NEWSLETTER

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By NATHAN FRANKART

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FEBRUARY 2025

MEET PARISHIONER *Alissa Van Dress* *Reawakened in Faith, Blessed to Share Talents with God and Parish*

It is a common theme for many young people navigating the difficult teenage years. Alissa Van Dress had fallen away from her faith during high school. But today, she is closer to Christ and the Church than ever. Now a vibrant and thriving college student, her inspiring story of rediscovering the Catholic faith serves as an example of God’s loving pursuit of His children no matter what age or stage of life.

“It’s a miracle that I came back to St. Joseph,” she says. “The Lord led me here, there’s no doubt. I’ve always loved music, and He connected me to the people who love music, too. He brought me back to my family. I am blessed to have St. Joseph as my safety net. I will never leave my home again. I believe God wants me to share my story to glorify Him.”

Alissa was born and raised Catholic and lived in Michigan until the age of 5. Even though she was very young, she remembers loving the music at the local parish.

“Music has always connected me with God,” she says.

Alissa attended Catholic school from kindergarten through fifth grade. It was at that time when her family experienced multiple hardships and Alissa had to navigate some complex situations.



In sharing her story, Alissa Van Dress wants others to see and understand God’s faithfulness.

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Meet Parishioner Alissa Van Dress *continued from front cover*

“I didn’t feel like I fit in at school,” she says. “My parents separated and within two years of the divorce, my grandfather passed away. I wanted to transfer to public school because I didn’t feel like I belonged in private school.”

After graduating in 2021, Alissa says she placed her relationship with God and the Church on the back burner.

“I went to church occasionally, but I decided to go my own way,” she says. “I believed in God, but I didn’t know if I believed in the Church. I didn’t see it for what it is.”

Then as a global pandemic disrupted the world’s way of life, Alissa’s faith and zeal for Christ was reignited amidst the isolating shutdowns. When she was accepted to John Carroll University, she immediately knew God wanted her to be there.

“Prior to going to John Carroll, I was seeking attention and seeking to be filled with all the wrong things,” Alissa says. “I wanted to know the Truth. I intentionally wanted to go to John Carroll University to deepen my faith. I wanted the Truth. I just knew I needed to be there — I had that supernatural feeling. My parents didn’t know how they were going to pay for it, but the Lord provided.”

Alissa says that during this time, God led her back to her home parish of St. Joseph, the very place where she initially experienced so much confusion during that tumultuous chapter of her family life. And in a redemptive series of events, it was her childhood love of music that became the reason for her return.

“The choir director, Christina Dupre, was hired at St. Joseph the year I went to John Carroll,” Alissa says. “My mom joined the choir and invited me to sing with her whenever I was home from school because she knew I loved music and had been in choirs since elementary school. I still sing with my mom in the choir, but I also sing on my own as a cantor now.

“I didn’t think I would come back to Amherst and St. Joseph Church,” she adds. “But I’ve been lecturing and cantoring the entirety of my collegiate career. Now I truly feel like I belong.”

Even with a full schedule as an English major, Alissa makes time to help out with other ministries at St. Joseph.

“I volunteer whenever I can, including youth group and the Parish School of Religion,” she says. I attend Eucharistic Adoration at the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and I try to go to one weekday Mass each week. It’s difficult, but I love starting my day with Mass.”

Through all the ups and downs of her faith journey, Alissa remains grateful for her family and God’s gentle, yet persistent call back to St. Joseph.

“I am truly grateful for my family,” Alissa says. “Everything we went through strengthened us. I love my family. I love my church. I took both of them for granted and have since realized after coming to know Christ that they are foundational. Family is a true gift from God.”

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— Alissa Van Dress

A Letter from Our Pastor

Reflecting on the Beauty of the Family During *National Marriage Week*



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

As we approach February, we are reminded of the many blessings of love and family, particularly during National Marriage Week, celebrated from February 7-14. This week offers us an opportunity to reflect on the beauty and sacredness of the Sacrament of Matrimony and the vital role marriage and family play in the life of the Church.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reminds us in their teachings that the marriage of a man and a woman is not merely a human institution but a divine vocation — a sacramental bond that mirrors Christ's love for His bride, the Church. The grace of this sacrament strengthens husbands and wives to love each other selflessly and to serve as the foundation of the domestic church, the family. In their document *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, the bishops write:

"Marriage is a unique communion of persons, a sharing of the whole of life. It calls for fidelity and openness to new life, both of which flow from the very nature of the marital covenant."

In a world that often challenges the permanence and sanctity of marriage, the Church invites us to bear witness to God's enduring love. For married couples, this witness begins in the home — through shared prayer, sacrificial love, and the nurturing of children in the faith. Families, then, become schools of virtue and communities of life and love, radiating Christ's presence in the world.

During National Marriage Week, I encourage our community to celebrate and support marriage in a number of ways. Couples might take this time to renew their vows, pray together, or attend Mass with their families. For those discerning marriage, this is a moment to reflect on God's call and seek His

guidance. And as parishes, let us pray for all married couples, for those facing challenges in their relationships, and for families striving to grow in holiness.

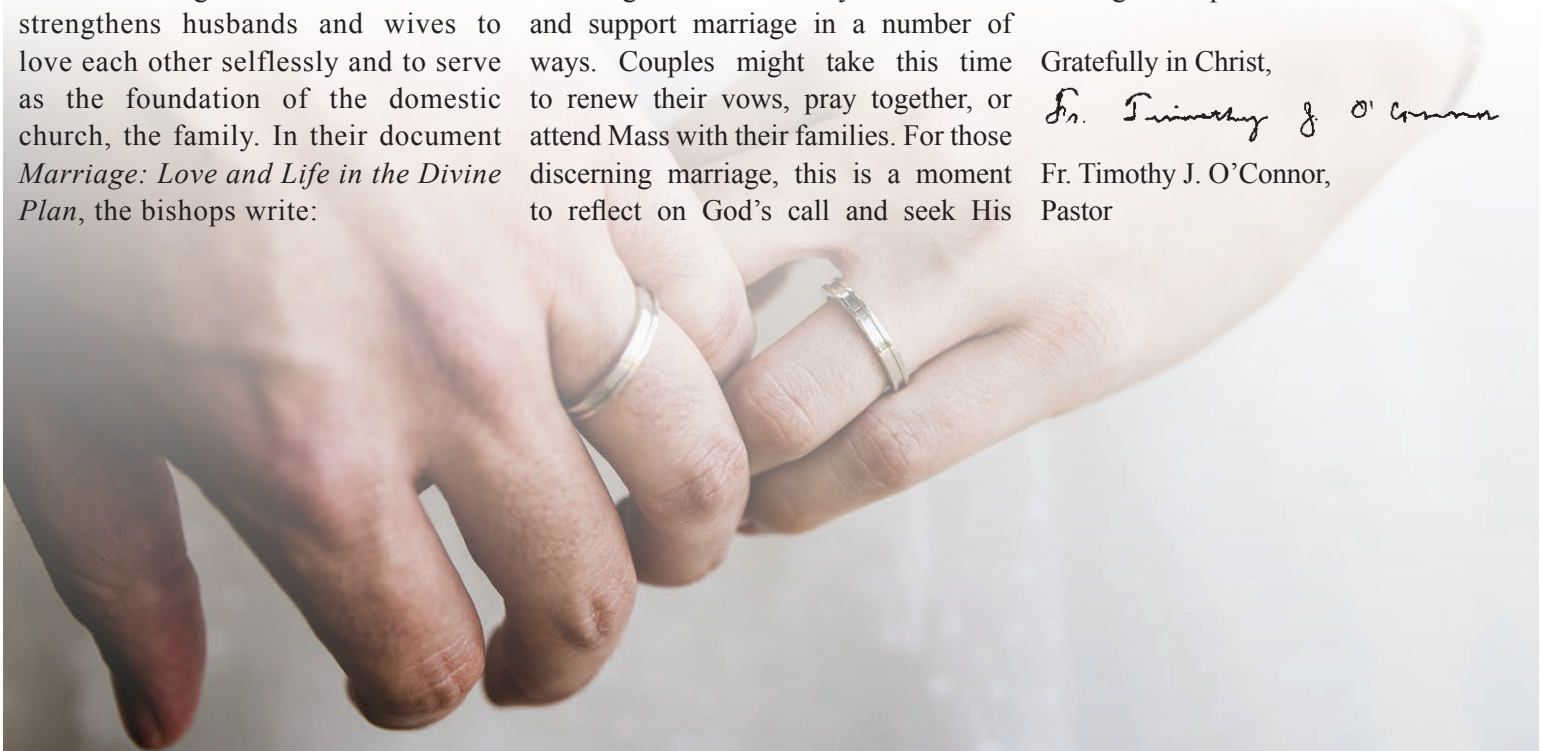
As Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia*, "The strength of the family lies in its capacity to love and to teach how to love." Let us strive to strengthen our families, making them places of peace, joy, and faith where God's love can flourish.

May this National Marriage Week be a time of renewal and grace for all married couples and families in our parishes. Together, let us uphold the beauty and dignity of the Sacrament of Matrimony as a sign of hope for the world.

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Fr. Timothy J. O'Connor,
Pastor



A CLOSER LOOK AT THE

Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle:

FEB. 22

On the liturgical calendar, the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle on Feb. 22 commemorates the foundational role of St. Peter in the establishment of the Church and the unbroken apostolic succession. It is a day to reflect on the authority and leadership entrusted to St. Peter and his successors, the popes, in guiding the Church.

The term “Cathedra” is derived from the Latin word for “chair” and symbolizes the seat of authority, making this feast a unique and meaningful celebration, as it is a celebration of the authority given to St. Peter by Jesus Himself.

In the Gospel of Matthew (16:18-19), Jesus tells Peter, “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” This passage underscores Peter’s unique role as the Rock upon which the Church is built and his authority to guide the faithful.

The feast also serves as a symbol of unity. St. Peter, as the first pope, is seen as the unifying figure who connects the Church’s past, present, and future. The Chair of St. Peter represents the unbroken line of apostolic succession, linking the current pope to the authority given to Peter by Jesus. This continuity is a powerful reminder that the Church is one body, guided by a line of spiritual fathers who share the same faith and teachings.

On this day, Catholics are encouraged to reflect on the

role of St. Peter and his successors in the life of the Church. It is a time to consider the impact of the pope’s leadership and teaching on the global Catholic community. Many also offer prayers of gratitude for the guidance provided by the pope and for the Church’s unity.

The Chair of St. Peter is a symbol of the papal office and its spiritual authority. This symbol, typically adorned with sculptures and artwork, can be found in St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, where the pope presides over significant liturgical celebrations. The chair is often associated with teaching, as the pope is considered the chief teacher of the faith.

While the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter highlights the authority of the pope, it also serves as a reminder of the pope’s role as a servant leader. Just as Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as a sign of humility and service, the pope is called to lead with humility and serve the Church with love and compassion. This feast encourages Catholics to pray for the pope as he carries out his challenging responsibilities.

Let us be mindful of this special day, as the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle is a significant celebration, commemorating the authority and leadership entrusted to St. Peter by Jesus, the unbroken apostolic succession, and the unity of the Church. It also serves as a time for reflection, prayer, and gratitude for the pope’s role as the spiritual leader of the Church. As Catholics celebrate this feast, they are reminded of the foundational role of St. Peter and the enduring importance of the papal office in guiding the Church.

The Feast of the Chair of St. Peter the Apostle is a significant celebration, commemorating the authority and leadership entrusted to St. Peter by Jesus, the unbroken apostolic succession, and the unity of the Church. It also serves as a time for reflection, prayer, and gratitude for the pope’s role as the spiritual leader of the Church.

Sacred Sisters Offering Valuable Place for Women to Share in Faith and Fellowship

These days, it can be all too easy to simply stay home in front of a screen and not interact with anyone else. But it's important to build community with those in our parishes. We can't do that by staring at a TV, computer, or phone screen in our homes. This is why the Sacred Sisters Ministry offers women the opportunity to gather each week for fellowship and faith.

Carol Shinsky, Stephanie Sierra, and Carol Solak are all members — in total, about 30 women are part of Sacred Sisters. The group meets every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. at the Nondenominational Old Stone Evangelical Church. The Sacred Sisters group has been around for about 20 years, having grown from about five members.

"This group consists of women who wish to grow closer to God through fellowship, Scripture, book studies, prayer, and community service," Stephanie says.

The women always pray together. Sometimes, they go through a video or book series. They also help with the community meals at the Old Stone Church. Each month, a member sends bereavement cards to those who have recently lost a loved one. Furthermore, the women pray a monthly Rosary and make occasional social outings to a member's home or a restaurant. They have also taken trips to religious sites and conferences over the years. Recently, they made jars of soup for the homebound.

"We are all at different knowledge levels with our faith," says Carol Shinsky. "Anyone is welcome to come, Catholics and non-Catholics, no matter how much you know about the faith or don't know."

All three women appreciate being a part of this ministry. It's been an important part of their lives, and they're grateful for the support they've received through the ups and downs.

"Through loving each other in Christ, we grow stronger and learn all things are in God's hands," says Carol Shinsky. "We accept His will, not ours. In doing so, we turn to Him in our time of need, surrender to His will, and become more loving and passionate mothers and friends."

The three women liken this group to a sisterhood — it's more than just a ministry.

"We are family," says Carol Shinsky. "We feel the love of family and have a strong relationship through God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit."

"Our common bond is that we want to grow together in faith," Stephanie adds.

All are welcome to attend Sacred Sisters, and the members would love to have more women join.

"Anyone who wants to learn more about God and be with other women can come," says Carol Shinsky.

The Sacred Sisters meet at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays at the Nondenominational Old Stone Evangelical Church.



How We Can Intentionally *Live Lent*

Embracing Opportunities for

Ash Wednesday, March 5th Mass Schedule

9:00 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph Church
12:00 Noon Mass at Nativity B.V.M. Church
7:00 p.m. Mass at St. Joseph Church

Stations of the Cross on Fridays during Lent at 7:00 p.m.

March 7th - Mary's Way of the Cross at Nativity Church
March 14th - Stations of the Cross at Nativity Church
March 28th - Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph Church
April 4th - Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph Church
April 11th - Stations of the Cross at Nativity Church
Good Friday April 18th - Taizé Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph Church

Diocesan Wide "Evening of Confession"

Date and time TBD

First Friday and First Saturday Rosary

11:00 a.m. on Friday, April 4th at Nativity Church
9:00 a.m. on Saturday, April 5th at St. Joseph Church

"The Answer"

Friday and Saturday, March 21st and 22nd - 7:30 p.m. at St. Joseph Church

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at Nativity of the B.V.M. Parish

Monday through Friday 11:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.
For information on Adoration, please call Josie Tornabene at 440-396-5429

Reconciliation (Confession) at St. Joseph Parish

Saturdays of Lent from 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Thursdays following the 7:00 p.m. Mass until 8:30 p.m. - exception Holy Thursday
Good Friday following the Noon Liturgy until 3:00 p.m.
Holy Saturday from 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Reconciliation (Confession) at Nativity B.V.M. Parish

Holy Thursday following the 7:00 p.m. Mass until 9:00 p.m.

For 40 days, we enter into the desert with Jesus. Through fasting, almsgiving, and intensified prayer, we unite ourselves with Him and the 40 days He spent in the desert preparing for His public ministry and subsequent passion. We prepare ourselves, throughout the season of Lent, to celebrate the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection.

This Lent, we encourage all St. Joseph and Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parishioners to actively enter into the season through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. There are many opportunities to do so right here in our parish.

Kim Frankart, Communications Coordinator, encourages all of us to intentionally live out this season by participating in some of these opportunities. For Kim, every Lenten season during which she has intentionally prepared for Easter has brought with it its own special blessings.

"Every Lenten season is a little bit different for me," Kim says. "Each time, I experience something different. I hear the Lord differently. But if I'm not going to things, if I'm not doing things and putting

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at Our Parish

Prayer, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Spiritual Reflection

myself in a place to hear Him, I'm not going to hear Him. I don't want to miss out on the blessings He has for me. So I find it very important to actively participate throughout Lent."

We will have Stations of the Cross every Friday, offering an opportunity to pray through and reflect on Christ's passion. On Saturdays, Thursdays, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday, we will offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and we encourage all parishioners to partake. Additionally, we will have a diocese-wide "Evening of Confession" taking place during Lent — keep an eye out for more details. There is also Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Monday through Friday.

One unique way we all can actively enter into the season of Lent this year is by attending "The Answer." This production, written and directed by St. Joseph Music Director Christina Dupre, offers us an opportunity to see the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ played out through performance.

"I created this production 10 years ago as a way to bring the Scriptures to life through performing art," Christina says. "For three years now, we have been presenting this production at churches all over with our cast of 85."

Christina and the cast will present "The Answer" here at St. Joseph on March 21 and 22 at 7:30 p.m. — we encourage and invite everyone to attend.

"This is a great way for us to study the Scriptures — both

parents and kids," Christina says. "And Lent is a perfect time for it. It helps us enter into the Lenten season. The production is very powerful."

Christina says she is sure those who come will emerge with a deeper connection to Christ and their faith.

"We have seen it impact many people," she says. "It has enhanced their faith and they have become more involved in the Church and more excited to go out and evangelize."

This Lent, make it a goal to grow deeper in your faith. Spend time praying, fasting, and almsgiving in appreciation for what Christ has done. Join us for "The Answer," as well as the many other activities throughout Lent, and let's embrace the season with grateful hearts as we look forward to the Easter season to come.



ST. SCHOLASTICA:

A SAINT OF LOVE AND DEVOTION



When looking at her life, her unwavering faith, and her deep love for God and her brother, St. Benedict, St. Scholastica is a remarkable example for all Catholics to honor and emulate. As we approach her feast day on Feb. 10, let us delve into the history and importance of St. Scholastica in the Catholic Church.

Born in Nursia, Italy, around the year 480, St. Scholastica is best known for her close relationship with her twin brother, St. Benedict, who is considered the father of Western monasticism. Raised in a Christian family, the siblings were inseparable throughout their childhood. However, as they grew older, they chose different paths — Benedict became a monk and founded the famous Monte Cassino monastery, while Scholastica embraced the monastic life in a convent located nearby. Despite the geographical separation, their spiritual connection remained unbreakable.

St. Scholastica's life teaches us the importance of nurturing one's spiritual journey. Her deep commitment to the monastic life exemplifies how individuals can find their own paths to God. By dedicating herself to prayer and contemplation, Scholastica became an inspiration for those seeking to deepen their faith and grow closer to the Divine.

Her story is a testament to the power of sibling love, as well as a profound love for God. Her famous encounter with

St. Benedict shortly before her death is a poignant example. On that night, the two siblings met for their annual spiritual rendezvous. As they conversed about matters of the soul, Scholastica implored her brother to stay with her, as she had a premonition that it would be their last meeting. When Benedict refused due to his monastic rule, Scholastica fervently prayed for a downpour. Miraculously, her prayers were answered, and a thunderstorm prevented Benedict from leaving. Three days later, Scholastica passed away, and Benedict saw her soul ascending to heaven in the form of a dove. This story encapsulates the pure and selfless love that we should all strive for in our relationships, both with our loved ones and with God.

St. Scholastica also stands as an advocate for women in the Church, proving that their spiritual contributions are equally valuable. As the founder of a Benedictine convent, she demonstrated that women could lead a life of dedication and prayer within the monastic tradition. Her legacy endures in the many women who have followed her example and become devout sisters and nuns, contributing significantly to the Church's spiritual growth and service to society.

St. Scholastica's feast day on Feb. 10 is a time for Catholics to reflect on the virtues she embodied and to seek her intercession in their lives. Her love for God, her profound spirituality, and her dedication to the monastic life make her a beacon of inspiration for Catholics. Honoring her reminds us to cultivate our spiritual lives, deepen our relationship with God, and embrace the powerful bonds of love with our family and community.

As we celebrate her feast day, let us remember her legacy and seek to emulate her example of selfless love, commitment to God, and dedication to the monastic life. St. Scholastica's life continues to inspire Catholics, reminding us of the profound impact one person can have on the faith and devotion of many.



Scholastica Monastery

The Way of Life

By NATHAN FRANKART

The bishop then asks the following question, “Do you resolve to confirm your way of life to the example of Christ, whose Body and Blood you are a minister at the altar?”

The candidate responds, “I do, with the help of God.”

What more is there to be said that hasn’t been said already? For years, I’ve had this inherent mission to put on Christ in an ever-deepening way, for my own spiritual benefit and for the love of the world. Likewise, you too received this call within your Baptism, to live as an example of Christ.

What’s different now is the public nature of that commitment. A public minister represents the faith in a very tangible way, from where I celebrate the

Mass in the sanctuary and the clerics that I will wear in the midst of ministry. There’s a promise of authority taking place here, the authority to represent the Church in liturgy and outside it.

If you think that is enticing, believe me, it isn’t. I don’t feel powerful or emboldened when considering this promise, to be a public-facing minister. I feel like a disciple, but before the resurrection of Christ. You remember how the disciples were in Jesus’s ministry, right? They weren’t exactly pinnacles of courage and virtue. To quote one of my professors as we studied the disciples in the Passion narratives, “They were cowards that became something more.”

I don’t think of myself as a

coward, but I do sense I am in need of something more. To rightfully serve the Body and Blood of Jesus requires something more than I can produce in my prayer or effort. I am insufficient to complete the task of ministry with a heavy dose of God’s prevailing grace. I need it like how the disciples needed the courage to preach the Risen Lord on encountering Him. We all need such courage, a prevailing grace found in the power of the Spirit, to accomplish this shared mission of ours.

Whether it be an ordained minister or a baptized member of Christ’s body, we call upon the Holy Spirit to enliven us to conform our way of life to the example of Christ. Amen. Veni Sancte Spiritus, Come Holy Spirit!



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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

First Saturday Rosary

Saturday, Feb. 1 — 9 a.m.,
St. Joseph Church

Hospitality Tuesday

Tuesday, Feb. 4 — 8:30 a.m., Nativity
Church (following 8 a.m. Mass)

First Friday Rosary

Friday, Feb. 7 — 11 a.m.,
Nativity Church

First Communion Parent Meeting

Sunday, Feb. 9 — following the 11 a.m.
Mass, St. Joseph Church

Dinners on the Go pick-up

Tuesday, Feb. 11 and 25 — 5 p.m.,
Nativity Parish Hall
(drive-thru service only)

Parent Club Meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 11 — 7 p.m., School MPR

Early Dismissal

Thursday, Feb. 13 — 1:15 p.m.,
Winter Conferences

No School

Friday, Feb. 14 and Monday, Feb. 17 —
Presidents' Day weekend

Knights of Columbus meeting

Tuesday, Feb. 25 — 7 p.m.,
St. Joseph School MPR

Holy Ground Youth Group

Sunday, February 2 and 16 — 6 p.m.,
St. Joseph Social Hall
(Event begins with 5 p.m. Mass —
meet near the choir prior to Mass)

OCIA (formerly RCIA)

Monday, Feb. 3, 10, 17, 24 — 7 p.m.,
Nativity Parish Hall

Men's Group

Tuesday, Feb. 4 and 18 — 7 p.m.,
St. Joseph Social Hall

PSR

Wednesday, Feb. 5, 12, and 19 —
5:30 p.m., St. Joseph School
(Note: no classes on Feb. 26)

**Sacred Sisters Prayer
and Study Group**

Wednesday, Feb. 5, 12, 19, and 26 —
6:30 p.m., O.S.E. Community Center

Vincentians Meeting

Thursday, Feb. 6 and 20 — 9 a.m.,
St. Joseph Conference Room

Faithfully Fit Yoga Classes

Tuesday and Thursday in February —
9:30 a.m., Nativity Parish Hall