



# CATHEDRAL of SAINT PETER

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## Christmas Liturgical Music Touches Our Hearts to *Bring Us to Christ*

The traditional music we hear at Christmas — the familiar, beautiful carols — can help us make a deep, emotional connection to the Liturgy and help us come closer to Christ as we celebrate this joyful time.

For Richard Thompson, our Music Director, the lyrics of the carols themselves don't have the impact that the melody, or the music, bring to our experience at Mass.

“The music should be powerful, and uplifting,” he says. “I'm looking for a more holistic experience than just what the words say. The point of the music is to make an emotional connection that will evolve to a reflection of faith, hope, and charity.”

To facilitate this connection, he has planned to bring brass instruments, flute,



choir, and organ to both our Christmas Eve Masses and Christmas Day Mass.

One of the carols played only at this time is “What Child Is This?” and will include an organ prelude. The celebration will open with “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” and close with “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.”

“These carols are special because they've been used for each year, and are associated with it,” Richard says.

As we celebrate Masses during Advent, we will be able to hear the difference in the power of the music.

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# The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

## *A Lesson in Catholic Stewardship*

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**T**he Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated on Dec. 8, holds a special place in the hearts of Catholics worldwide. It commemorates the belief that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was conceived without original sin. Beyond its theological significance, this feast offers essential lessons on Catholic stewardship and discipleship.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was preserved from original sin from the very moment of her conception. This means that Mary's soul was without blemish, making her the perfect vessel to carry and nurture the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception underscores Mary's unique role in the salvation of humanity and her exceptional purity, highlighting her as a model of discipleship.

**Stewardship of God's Grace** — Catholic stewardship is about recognizing that everything we have, including our talents, time, and resources, is a gift from God. Mary's Immaculate Conception is a reminder that we are called to be stewards of God's grace. Just as Mary's purity was a divine gift, so are the talents and resources we possess. Stewardship encourages us to use these gifts for the greater good, just as Mary used her life to serve God's plan.

**Imitating Mary's Fiat** — One of the most significant aspects of the Immaculate Conception story is Mary's fiat, her "yes" to God's plan. When the angel Gabriel announced that she would become the Mother of the Savior, Mary replied, "Let it be done to me according to your word." This act of surrender exemplifies the essence of discipleship. As Catholic disciples, we are called to emulate Mary's obedience, saying "yes" to God's will in our lives.

**The Call to Holiness** — The Immaculate Conception reminds us of the call to holiness in our daily lives. Mary's exceptional purity points to the possibility of leading a life free from sin. While this may seem unattainable, it emphasizes the importance of continuous conversion and striving for holiness as part of our discipleship journey. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception invites us to make choices that align with our faith and values, drawing us closer to God.

**Mary as the Advocate** — In the Catholic tradition, Mary



is often venerated as the Advocate, the one who intercedes on our behalf. Her role as the Immaculate Conception reinforces her unique ability to bridge the gap between humanity and God. In our stewardship and discipleship, we can turn to Mary as a source of inspiration and guidance. Just as she interceded at the Wedding at Cana, we can trust in her prayers as we navigate life's challenges and joys.

**Caring for God's Creation** — Catholic stewardship extends beyond our personal talents and resources; it also encompasses our responsibility to care for God's creation. Mary's purity and grace reflect the beauty and purity of the world that God has entrusted to our care. Discipleship includes protecting and preserving the environment, recognizing it as a precious gift from God.

**Service to Others** — Mary's life was marked by her service to others. From her humble acceptance of her role as the Mother of God to her support of Jesus throughout His ministry, Mary embodies selfless service. Catholic stewardship encourages us to follow her example by serving our communities and those in need.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception holds a deep significance in the Catholic Church, serving as a reminder of Mary's purity, her fiat, and her unique role in God's plan for humanity. It provides a powerful lesson on stewardship, prompting us to recognize and use the gifts God has given us. Mary's example of discipleship, her holiness, and her advocacy for us further strengthen our commitment to following Christ. As we celebrate this feast, let us be inspired to say "yes" to God's plan, strive for holiness, and serve others with love and humility, just as Mary did.



*A Letter from Our Cathedral Rector*

# Advent: Receiving Gratefully and Sharing Generously as His Disciples

Dear Parishioners,

A few weeks ago, we changed our clocks from Daylight Savings Time to Standard Time. For us, that meant moving our clocks back an hour on a Saturday night before going to bed. Though we now have light earlier in the day, each day we are losing some more daylight.

As we live through these darkest days of the year, our Church also celebrates Advent and Christmas this month. Advent is a time of hopeful anticipation of what is to come — the Second Coming of Christ and the celebration of His birth. As Advent moves us to the darkest day of the year, we embrace the themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. As the amount of light in each day begins to grow, we celebrate that the Light entered into its creation in the birth of Jesus.

Each Sunday is an opportunity, as we light a new candle on the Advent wreath, to reflect on how these four themes are lived out in our lives as disciples.

**Hope** — No matter what comes in our life, can we live in a spirit of hope in our Lord who is always with us? Can our confidence in God’s amazing and generous love sustain us even in the darkest moments of life?

**Peace** — So many things can try to rob us of peace: the death of a loved one, job loss, busyness, economic uncertainty, and success to name a few. Can we trust the Prince of Peace enough to know that we are not alone,



that both God and His people are with us in all times?

**Joy** — This Advent, instead of looking for external sources of joy, can we give time to our Lord in prayer, forming a deeper relationship with Christ and allowing Him to become our fountain of joy?

**Love** — Can we take time this Advent to savor the many loving relationships of our life, especially our relationship with Jesus, the Father, the Holy Spirit, the saints, our parish community, and our loved ones?

Embracing this love will help us to look forward with joyful anticipation to the fullness of the Kingdom of God that awaits us.

God did not make us for darkness but rather for His light. May this Advent and Christmas fill us with hope, peace, joy, and love so that we live every day as children of God’s light with a renewed spirit, receiving gratefully and sharing generously as disciples of Jesus.

Peace,

*Fr Godfrey OSB*

Very Rev. Godfrey Mullen, OSB  
Cathedral Rector



# SPONSOR COUPLE

## *A Personal and Profound Experience*



*Casey and Natalie Pavlak (pictured with their children, Emma Ann and Elaina) serve as a sponsor couple in the marriage preparation program.*

**F**ive years ago, when Casey and Natalie Pavlak were engaged, they traveled to another parish in our diocese for a day of Pre Cana talks and discussions. It got the job done, but as Natalie remembers it, it wasn't the most intimate or engaging method of marriage preparation.

"We were in a room with 30 couples," Natalie says. "It wasn't a very personal or intimate experience, but that was our only option."

So, Casey and Natalie were thrilled when Fr. Godfrey asked them to serve as a sponsor couple in the one-on-one marriage preparation program he was bringing back to the Cathedral of St. Peter.

"When I was little, my grandparents ran the Sponsor Couples program here," Natalie says. "It was back in the '80s and '90s, and I still get people coming up to me and telling me that my grandparents were their sponsor couple. It's amazing that their impact on marriages is still felt today, and Casey and I are honored to be a part of this ministry ourselves now."

The Sponsor Couples program is a couple-to-couple-based, pre-marriage counseling of sorts. The sponsor couple meets with the engaged couple in the sponsor couple's home, and together they discuss the many different aspects of married life.

"The idea is to assure, as much as possible, that the couples have discussed the primary topics that affect and direct married couples every day to avoid surprises and some difficulties in their married life," Fr. Godfrey says.

The sponsor couple uses the same workbook that is used at the diocesan Pre Cana workshops, but this couple-to-couple approach offers the engaged couple an opportunity to address important topics in a more personal way as they prepare to live out their marriage.

"This approach to marriage preparation allows both couples to be more open than you would be in a room of 30," Natalie says. "As a sponsor couple, we air some of our dirty laundry and help the engaged couple see that while we do have disagreements, we are able to resolve them by being on the same page about our priorities. In turn, the engaged couple is more open about their questions and concerns."



# COUPLES PROGRAM: *Friendship for Our Engaged Couples*

Marriage is a beautiful vocation, but it isn't an easy one, and through the Sponsor Couples Ministry, Fr. Godfrey hopes to equip engaged couples with the tools they need to thrive through the difficult times.

What's more, both Fr. Godfrey and Natalie emphasize the beauty of this program for the personal bonds it creates.

"It allows the engaged couple to form a friendship with another couple who is walking through marriage alongside them," Natalie says. "It helps them see that they can and should work as a team, and they know they can always reach out to us for help."

"Occasionally after a couple is married and they hit a tough spot, they will reach out to their sponsor couple for support," Fr. Godfrey adds. "The relationship having already been established, they have somewhere to go to engage in conversation."

If you are engaged, both Fr. Godfrey and Natalie say

they would encourage you to consider participating in the Sponsor Couples program. It is a wonderful way to ensure you are best prepared for married life. Meetings with sponsor couples are completely dependent on engaged couples' needs. Typically, the two couples will meet in the sponsor couple's home two to three times, but the where, the when, and the frequency are completely dependent on the couple's needs and schedule.

*For marriage preparation through our Sponsor Couples program, contact the parish office at 618-234-1166, and you will be connected with a sponsor couple to get you started.*

## Christmas Liturgical Music continued from front cover

"At this time, the organ is a little more subdued, as Advent is a time of anticipation," Richard says.

He further explains the impact of music on the Christmas Masses.

"Music is effective because of the power of music to tap into our feelings, our hearts," he says. "What you believe in your heart is what motivates you. It brings us into the presence of Christ in our community, the Eucharist, and we're given the opportunity to be better, with Christ, through the power of music."

Although the music played during Christmas is powerful, the planning for the season is not complicated.

"Through the season there are expectations," Richard

says. "It's kind of like Thanksgiving dinner — you don't have to plan it today. You know what's on the menu. You have your recipes set. And one of the things about Thanksgiving is you know what to expect — and this major season is the same. There is a sense of coming home, and how we do Advent and Christmas. This is not a time for a challenge. The music can draw us more deeply into a reflection of the Liturgy. It makes it easy to achieve."

If anyone is interested in joining our choir and musicians, there are no age limitations. Prior choir experience is preferred, as is the ability to read music. There also are required rehearsals.

*For more information, please contact Richard Thompson at 618-558-7465.*

# Greeters Ministry Creates a Welcoming Environment for All at Mass

## *“Someone Cares That They Are Here”*

As parishioners and guests enter the Cathedral of St. Peter and prepare for the sacrifice of the Holy Mass, it is important that they feel welcomed into the parish community. Mass is not a solitary experience, and being greeted at the door is one way that we can help everyone feel comfortable.

Sister Tess Markus is the coordinator of the greeters. She trains them and does the scheduling each month. She shares why it is especially important to have greeters at the Cathedral.

“We are a Cathedral, and we get many visitors to our Cathedral,” Sr. Tess says. “We have a very large church, and I believe greeters can help them to feel more comfortable. Even if you have been in the parish for a long time, when someone greets you, it immediately makes you feel better. A smile and a greeting may be what a person needs at the time — to feel that someone cares that they are here.”

Greeters are asked to arrive about a half hour before Mass. During this time they welcome people to the Cathedral, distribute bulletins, and assist guests with any questions or needs that they may have. After Mass, they help straighten the pews.

“If people feel welcomed, they are more likely to enjoy their experience and continue to come back,” says Karen Lanter, who has been a greeter for a year. “You never know what people are going through and sometimes a friendly welcome might just brighten their day. My hope is that it makes them feel more connected, and a part of the parish community.”

In addition to creating a welcoming environment for guests, being a greeter provides a great opportunity to be involved and get to know other parishioners.

“I like having the opportunity to chat and learn more about my fellow parishioners,” Karen says. “I am more connected to my fellow parishioners because every week that I greet, I get to learn a little more about them. Also, when volunteering at other parish events, I am working with fellow parishioners that are no longer just a face I see at Mass, but someone that I have had regular interactions with.”



*Being a greeter is a wonderful way to get involved in the Cathedral.  
To get involved, contact Sister Tess Markus at 618-234-1166.*





## Debunking Myths and Celebrating THE REAL ST. NICHOLAS

The world's leading academics collaborated to answer a simple question wondered by children around the world — what did St. Nicholas actually look like?

Using all available skeletal and historical records, Professor Caroline Wilkinson, a facial anthropologist, constructed a model in 2004, which was subsequently updated in 2014 at the Face Lab at the Liverpool School of Art and Design. In a fitting gesture, the students at Liverpool's St. Nicholas Catholic Primary School were the first eyes to behold this image of the “real face of Santa Claus.”

Nearly all historical accounts of the fourth-century bishop remain deeply colored by myth and legend. Embellished stories of St. Nicholas of Myra spread first through oral traditions and then non-biblical plays throughout the Middle Ages. By the sixth century, St. Nicholas had a sort of cult following in the East, but few reliable records of his life exist.

As Catholics today, we can reclaim the tradition of St. Nicholas in many ways, beginning with teaching ourselves and our children about this saint and how his life encourages us to give and to reach out to others during the Advent and Christmas season.

Bert Ghezzi in *Voices of the Saints* writes that all we definitively know about St. Nicholas is that a man of that

name became bishop of Myra, now in modern Turkey, during the fourth century, and then after his death he was buried in the cathedral there.

Tradition holds that St. Nicholas was born to Greek Christian parents in a Turkish city on the Mediterranean Sea. After St. Nicholas became the bishop of Myra, stories of his generosity to the poor and the persecuted proliferated.

Some records include St. Nicholas on the list of attendees at the First Council of Nicaea (325), where issues regarding the relationship of the Father and the Son were debated and resolved. Stories have suggested that St. Nicholas became incensed during the debates and actually struck Arius, who emphasized the divinity of God the Father over God the Son.

St. Nicholas most likely suffered persecution during the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, and he may have been exiled or imprisoned. The image of St. Nicholas that Professor Wilkinson's research yielded shows a middle-aged man with a broken nose, which potentially supports this account of St. Nicholas' suffering.

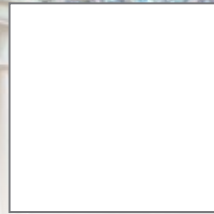
After his death, St. Nicholas' remains were buried in his cathedral in Myra, but in 1087 sailors seized the remains, fearing they would be desecrated during this tumultuous period of history. They are now interred partially in the Basilica di San Nicola in Bari, Italy, and

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# CATHEDRAL of SAINT PETER

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## The Real St. Nicholas *continued from page 7*

partially in the church San Nicolò al Lido in Venice.

A wealth of stories about St. Nicholas offer rich accounts of his legendary kindness. In the most popular legend, St. Nicholas heard that a poor father couldn't afford dowries, food or clothing for his three daughters. To save the family from destitution and the daughters from potential slavery, St. Nicholas deposited three bags full of gold to be used for the three daughters' dowries. Some

accounts share that he tossed these bags through the window and may have even sent the last bag down the chimney.

Particularly during the Christmas season, we can begin Advent by re-centering our families on Christ and teaching them of the real St. Nicholas by celebrating his feast day on Dec. 6. On the eve of this feast, children have traditionally left shoes outside their doors to receive small gifts, coins or candy canes, representing the bishop's staff, in the morning.

*As Catholics today, we can reclaim the tradition of St. Nicholas in many ways, beginning with teaching ourselves and our children about this saint and how his life encourages us to give and to reach out to others during the Advent and Christmas season.*

### MASS TIMES

*Saturday Vigil Mass: 4:00 p.m. | Sunday: 8:00 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 5:00 p.m.  
Weekdays: Monday-Wednesday & Friday 6:45 a.m., Thursday School Mass 8:15 a.m.*

### SACRAMENT OF PENANCE (CONFESSIONS)

*Monday-Wednesday & Friday: 7:15-7:30 a.m. | Thursday 6:00-7:00 p.m. | Saturday 3:00-3:45 p.m.*