



SAINT TIMOTHY CATHOLIC CHURCH



Holiday Hugs: Bringing Tidings of Great Joy to the Homebound

The Christmas season is filled with many opportunities for cheer and traditions. From Christmas parties, concerts and caroling, to baking cookies, giving gifts and so much more, the ability to participate in any number of experiences truly makes for a season of excitement. For some, the ability to get out and enjoy these festivities is limited. And for this reason, the youth group at St. Timothy has spent the last six years spreading holiday cheer to those who need it most.

Holiday Hugs is all about bringing the spirit of Christmas to the homebound in the parish and community.

"Holiday Hugs is a way for students to reach out to those who are homebound," says youth minister Justin Lantz, who started this activity at the parish. "During the holiday season, there is a lot of loneliness and this is one way that we are able to do something about that. The students deliver gifts, visit and carol."

The students get together for a youth event and put together gift packages and make Christmas cards. Gifts include handmade cards, Christmas cookies, small crafts, or candles that



Holiday Hugs is all about bringing the spirit of Christmas to the homebound in the parish and community.

the students have made. Last year, 175 students worked together to make cards and gifts. A group of about 10-20 students then delivers the packages and sings Christmas carols at the homes visited.

"It is great to see the students sharing their talents with others," Justin says. "Whether they are creative and making handmade cards or singing carols, it is a great opportunity for them to give back."

continued on back cover

December 2021

In this Issue

- 2 Christmastime Stewardship
How We Can Bring His Son to the World
- 3 Dec. 12: Our Lady of Guadalupe
- 4 Meet The Sarkis Family: Keeping Christ at the Center of Life
- 6 The Origin and Beauty of the Nativity Scene
- 7 The Bell Choir:
Joyously Ringing and Bringing Glory to God

17512 Lakeshore Rd.
Lutz, FL 33558
www.sainttims.org



Christmastime Stewardship

How We Can Bring His Son to the World

It is not uncommon to give gifts during Advent and Christmas, but it is never enough just to leave it at that. Jesus gave *Himself* to us at the first Christmas so we should strive to imitate Him by giving of *ourselves* in some way as we celebrate the anniversary of His birth. But there is a way to give even more than just ourselves — by giving the gift of Christ to others. The seasons of Advent and Christmas are perfect opportunities to share the love and message of Jesus with others in a beautiful way.

Of course, giving of ourselves in imitation of Jesus is a beautiful thing. But it is just as important to remember that, as human beings, we bear the likeness of God. As Christians, Jesus Himself inhabits our very souls. As Catholics, our Lord literally dwells within us when we receive Him in the Eucharist. Based upon this logic, we do so much more than imitate Jesus when we selflessly give of ourselves to others. Indeed, just as Mary carried Christ in her womb when she visited her cousin, Elizabeth, and just as she brought Him in her arms to Simeon as a newborn child, we can also literally bring Jesus Christ to the world.

What a profound task Our Lord has laid out for us this season! As He grew in Mary's womb, Jesus could only go where Mary chose to take Him. And of course, He also couldn't speak. Mary became His hands and feet, and voice. Mary could have stayed at home during her pregnancy, resting and preparing for life with a newborn, but instead, the Blessed Mother helped her Son begin His mission by bringing Him to her cousin, Elizabeth. Today, in much the same way, Christ invites us to share Him with the rest of the world. He chooses to make His presence known through us. And so, as the spiritual writer Caryl Houselander beautifully stated, "We must carry Jesus in our hearts wherever He wants us to go, and there are many places to which He may never go unless we take Him."

How do we bring Jesus to those in our parish and community? There are many ways. We might visit with a sick parishioner over the holidays, providing fellowship and support in their time of need. We may consider serving at a local soup kitchen or food bank, and doing our part to make sure that the hungry are fed. We can sing Christmas carols for our neighbors, bringing true joy and love to their homes. Perhaps we could help a tired friend clean her house, making her life a little bit easier during this busy season, or we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. We might even try going to work with a cheery disposition, or donating money, so that a starving child in a poor country can have something to eat. These are just a few examples of how we can practice stewardship.

We may sometimes feel as if our efforts are in vain — especially when it is hard to see the effects of our evangelization. This temptation is particularly strong when we offer our treasure as a gift to God. The positive effects of monetary gifts aren't always as visible as gifts of time or talent. But when we give of our treasure, the love of Jesus can travel to places we could never go. While our gift may not directly affect someone in a positive way, it very well may enable someone else to do it for us. Sometimes, God doesn't just ask *us* to be His hands and feet, but to enable *someone else* to be them, as well.

Advent and Christmas give us the opportunity to reflect on Jesus' call to live as stewards and disciples of His Word. God has put us in a particular place, given us a certain amount of time, and asked us to perform particular tasks and selflessly share a portion of our gifts. This is all for a singular purpose — to bring His Son into the world, and make Christ's presence just as real as when He first became man more than 2,000 years ago.

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTOR

DECEMBER 12: OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE



Dear Friends in Christ,

One of the great feasts we celebrate during the Advent season is the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12.

This feast day recalls the apparitions of Mary on the hill of Tepeyac, Mexico from Dec. 9-12, 1531 to the native convert St. Juan Diego. When Our Lady appeared to the humble peasant, she told Juan to go to the local bishop and request that a church be built on this site. Juan faithfully carried out Our Lady's wishes, but the bishop did not believe him. The bishop asked for a "sign" from heaven to validate Juan's story. On Dec. 12, 1531, the bishop received the sign. That morning, Juan encountered Mary on the hill, and she asked him to pick some flowers on the hilltop to take to the bishop. Juan thought the flowers would be the "sign" because they were in full bloom out of season. Juan cradled the flowers in his poncho, also known as a tilma, and eagerly went to see the bishop. He told the bishop that he had again seen the Lady and made her request known. Opening his tilma, the flowers cascaded to the floor, but to Juan's surprise, the bishop was not staring at the floor, but directly at him. For on his tilma was imprinted the image of Our Lady. This indeed was the sign from heaven. The bishop, now believing Juan's story, heeded Mary's request and built a church on the site.

The beautiful Lady on Tepeyac Hill whose heavenly image is now enshrined on St. Juan Diego's humble tilma is known as Our Lady of Guadalupe. You can go to Guadalupe, Mexico today and see St. Juan's tilma with the miraculous image still imprinted on it. What's amazing is that the tilma (almost 500 years old and made from cactus fibers) should have deteriorated long ago, but it is still intact. Regarding the miraculous image



itself, scientists have been unable to identify the coloration found on the tilma from which the image was made. Also, no brush strokes are recognizable. It truly is a sign from heaven and a beautiful gift from Our Lady, not only to Juan Diego and the people of Mexico, but it is a gift given to each one of us. Pope Pius XII declared Our Lady of Guadalupe the Patroness of the Americas.

Also of great significance is that Our Lady appeared to St. Juan Diego pregnant, bearing the Christ Child in her womb. This is evidenced in the holy image by the black maternity belt that Mary is wearing along with a jasmine flower centered over her womb. The Aztec symbolism on the image clearly shows Mary's unborn child to be the divine center of the cosmos. As such, Our Lady of Guadalupe has been a powerful intercessor in promoting and defending the sacredness and dignity of human life from the very moment of conception in the womb. In 1999, St. John Paul II declared Our Lady of Guadalupe to be the patroness of the unborn.

Our Lady reminded St. Juan Diego that she is and always will be his spiritual mother. Mary wants all of us to know that she is our spiritual mother too. As we continue our Advent pilgrimage, may we know the tender, motherly love of Mary in our lives today and every day.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Fr. John Blum, Pastor



MEET THE **SARKIS** FAMILY: KEEPING **CHRIST** **CENTER**



When Alfred Sarkis has a major decision to make, he always talks it over with his best, eternal friend.

“I love going to adoration — it has been a very big part of my faith for many years,” Alfred says. “It has been such a special place for me to go and pray, and receive wisdom. Whenever I have something I am worried about or need guidance, I always make sure I go and spend time with Jesus.”

Over the years, his wife, Caren, has been touched by Alfred’s tender devotion to Christ, really and truly

present in the Holy Eucharist. She is also thankful for the impact it makes on their four boys — Robert, 8; John Paul, 6; and 4-year-old twins William and Andrew.

“I love the witness that Alfred gives to our boys when he shows them that he wants to be with Jesus in order to help him make a big decision,” Caren says.

Thankfully, this beautiful example of spiritual fatherhood is just one of many that Alfred freely offers to his family.

“As a husband and father, I try to make sure we all pray together every night before bed,” Alfred says. “I truly believe that families that pray together, stay together. This is something I strongly believe I should pass on to my children, so that they may grow up to be strong, faithful men.”

He and Caren are also deeply grateful for our parish, to which they have belonged since 2014, and all of the ways it nurtures their spiritual life as a family.

“I love our parish community,” he says. “It is a big parish, and I really like that adoration is available every day in the little chapel. I really enjoy having donuts and fellowship after Mass and spending time talking to my fellow parishioners. We have made a lot of friends here, and we are so thankful there are so many other families at the parish with young children as well.”

Both Alfred and Caren have wonderful testimonies of God’s power at work in their lives.

Alfred experienced a deep renewal in his relationship with Christ after moving to the United States in 2004 from Cairo, Egypt, where he was raised.

“It was my first time living alone and trying to find purpose in my life,”

continued on page 5

AT THE OF LIFE

he says. “At that time, I started praying the Rosary, which led me to go to Confession and get more involved in the parish I was attending at the time.”

Interestingly, Caren found her way to the Catholic faith mainly through theological research and prayer.

“I grew up Protestant, and while I was earning my Masters of Divinity degree, I found that the more I learned about Church history, the more I realized that the Catholic faith was the only thing that really made sense,” Caren says. “Because of my background as a convert, I can appreciate certain things about the faith because I wasn’t just raised with them — I had to discover them myself.”

Both of their faith journeys have led them to a point where they savor profound spiritual lives and enjoy being very active in our parish.

“I love that we live right next to the parish, and there is always something neat going on, such as the

Fall Festival,” Caren says. “In the past, before the onset of COVID, I taught Faith Formation. We have also really enjoyed doing Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, and I appreciate that there are a lot of programs going on for the older children as well.”

Above all, Caren loves fostering a love for the Eucharist in the hearts of her children by taking them to daily Mass regularly.

“We homeschool, so we are able to do it!” Caren says. “It is so wonderful, and it helps the children get used to sitting through Mass. The people are very encouraging and welcoming to us. Parents can be hesitant or self-conscious about bringing their small children to Mass, but they shouldn’t feel that way at our parish. The parishioners have always been so appreciative and affirmative of our children, and the older generation is encouraged by having young families at Mass.”



Alfred and Caren Sarkis with their four sons, Robert (8), John Paul (6), and twins William and Andrew (4)

“I love our parish community. It is a big parish, and I really like that adoration is available every day in the little chapel. I really enjoy having donuts and fellowship after Mass and spending time talking to my fellow parishioners. We have made a lot of friends here, and we are so thankful there are so many other families at the parish with young children as well.” — ALFRED SARKIS



The Origin and Beauty of the Nativity Scene

With all the commercialism surrounding Christmas-time, it's far too easy for us to lose sight of the true reason behind the season. Overwhelmed by our endless to-do lists and the hustle and bustle of last-minute shopping, our focus quickly shifts away from the Christ Child's birth. And yet, hidden amongst the holly wreaths and garlands, the Christmas Nativity remains a tangible reminder of the Incarnation, pulling us back in time for a moment as we reflect upon the incredible gift of Christ's birth.

Interestingly, it was circumstances much like our own today which first led St. Francis of Assisi to recreate the Nativity scene nearly 800 years ago. Frustrated with the growing materialism and greed that seemed to pervade 13th century Italy, St. Francis wanted a way to visually remind people of Christ's humble beginnings — to show them that Christmas isn't about pomp and circumstance or material goods, but rather about unselfish love. Describing the idea to his friend Giovanni, St. Francis wrote, "I want to do something that will recall the memory of that child who was born in Bethlehem, to see with bodily eyes the inconveniences of his infancy, how he lay in the manger..."

And so St. Francis' idea took form on Christmas Eve in 1223. This original Nativity scene was a living one, even including live animals. Villagers were deeply moved by the silent display of humble beauty, and the Nativity tradition soon spread throughout Italy and surrounding Europe. It is a tradition that remains today in nearly every Christian church and in many homes. In fact, it's hard to imagine Christmas without a Nativity scene somewhere.

Coming in various sizes and styles, each Nativity replica continues to focus our hearts on the true meaning of Christmas — to help us remember that Christmas isn't about the amount of gifts under the tree or the festive decorations, but rather about celebrating Christ's birth. Many families have a tradition of hiding the Infant Jesus, only placing Him in the crib on Christmas morning. This helps build anticipation during the Advent season as we anxiously await the Divine's birth. Others go a step further, actually wrapping up the Christ Child to be opened as the very first gift of Christmas.

Yet, whatever your family's particular traditions, we hope that the Christmas Nativity continues to draw your heart heavenward this Christmas season — to center us all on the greatest gift ever given, our Incarnate Lord.



The Bell Choir: Joyously Ringing and Bringing Glory to God

We are blessed at St. Timothy's to have a wide array of music at our Masses. One group that brings a beautifully unique sound to that music is the Bell Choir.

Under the direction of Marianne Mackey-Smith, the Bell Choir practices each week and plays at about one Mass per month. Marianne not only directs, but she also plays with the 10 other ringers for Mass. The bell choir has three full octaves of bells, after recently adding another octave.

Marianne especially loves all the Bell Choir music this time of year.

"It's always amazing to be able to ring bells for Christmas Eve Mass because we know they used bells in ancient liturgies," she says.

For weekend Masses, the Bell Choir often does a prelude and songs to accompany the congregation. They also play some songs with no congregational singing.

"We don't get to play as often at Mass, because there's a lot of preparation that goes into each song," Marianne says. "Each ringer has a lot of responsibility."

Marianne and several Bell Choir members have traveled to the Florida State Handbell Festival in past years, where they learned handbell techniques and had a lot of fun.

"Everybody has their own recipe to put the song together," Marianne says. "You have to work together differently. It's cooperative learning, and it's fulfilling when you accomplish a song together."

Director of Music Chase White is thankful for all Marianne has done to take the Bell Choir to the next level. Her passion for the group is infectious.

"Marianne has worked so hard for this group," Chase says. "Marianne won't tolerate anything but positive attitudes and that's a big part of this group's success."

Chase loves what the Bell Choir adds to our celebration of the Mass.

"Bells add so much when they play with hymns," Chase says. "We are really excited to do 'Joy to the World' on Christmas Eve."

Both Chase and Marianne love witnessing the fellowship among the Bell Choir members. They are a family, all there for one another through the ups and downs of life.



Bell Choir members gathered for a recent practice – (front row, from left) Sina Taylor, Jane LaRose, Liz Kambach, Kathy Kambach; (middle row, from left) Marianne Mackey-Smith, Viviana Companaro, Ana Robins, Daria Magee, Vicki Reidy; (top row, from left) Katie LaRose, Kristy Behrens

"This group is a great example of what a small Christian community should look like in a Christian church," Chase says. "They truly love each other."

Marianne invites parishioners to come sit in on a rehearsal to hear what the Bell Choir is all about. Anyone with a basic sheet music reading background can learn handbells. The group practices from 7 to 9 p.m. on Tuesday nights. Attendance for practice is essential since each person has their own set of bells. January is a perfect time to begin, as the Bell Choir will be focusing on Easter and Lent music.

*If you would like to learn more about our Bell Choir,
please contact Marianne Mackey-Smith at marianne.mackeys@sainttims.org.*



SAINT TIMOTHY

CATHOLIC CHURCH

17512 Lakeshore Road
Lutz, FL 33558
813-968-1077
www.sainttims.org

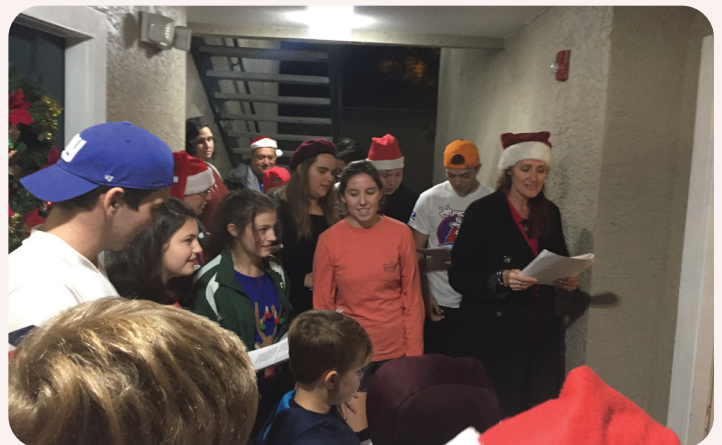
Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Tampa, FL
Permit No. 3311

Holiday Hugs *continued from front cover*

"It is also a great way to be involved and get the service hours that many students need for different things," he adds.

Initially, the deliveries took place over three days. On the first two days, the students would drop off the gifts, ring the doorbell and run away. On the last day, they would stay and sing carols and visit with the people. This year, students will deliver gifts one day and sing carols the second day, with all visiting taking place outside. The event takes place the week before Christmas.

"Whether or not our carols are very good, it really brings joy to the people," Justin says. "You just see their eyes light up, the neighbors will even come outside. You can see that they are so happy to see the teenagers coming to their homes with good tidings!"



The youth group at St. Timothy's has spent the last six years spreading holiday cheer to those who need it most.

If you know of anyone who could use a Holiday Hug, please contact Jen Linder at jen.linder@sainttims.org or call 813-968-1077, ext. 240.

• • • Mass Schedule • • •

Saturday Vigil: 5:30 p.m. • Sunday: 7:30, 9, 11 a.m. & 5:30 p.m. • Daily: Mon-Sat 9 a.m., Wed 6 p.m. • Holy Days: 9 a.m. & 7 p.m. Vigil: 7 p.m.