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Monthly Newsletter

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CHRISTMAS: a Fulfillment of Hope

the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica

On January 6, 2026, Pope Leo XIV will close the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and unless there are special circumstances, this door will not be reopened for another 25 years. This closing signifies the end of our Jubilee Year, when we, who have been journeying as Pilgrims of Hope, will find our fulfillment in Christmastime, the season of hope and joy.

Hope grows during December through the anticipation of the holiday activities, Christmas gifts, and family gatherings. But Christmas hope is different. Ardent hope does not come from desires or wishes but from God, ***"And the word became flesh and lived among us."*** (John 1:14). Several of the traditional Christmas carols express this hope and remind us to look beyond present circumstances. In *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus* written by Charles Wesley in 1744 we sing the words: "Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the world thou art" and *O Little Town of Bethlehem* written by Phillip Brooks in 1857, expresses the sentiment, "the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

During the Advent season we light the four candles symbolizing hope, peace, joy and love, all symbols of renewal and light in a world longing for connection and compassion. Reflecting on this, we are reminded of bringing light to a world in need. Our world today is marked by division, conflict and uncertainty. Amid such challenges, the values of Christmas – hope, peace, joy and love – are not merely comforting, they are essential. Let the candles of hope, peace, joy and love inspire you to embrace the season not as a single event but as a way of living. Think what it means to live with hope. It is more than wishing for better days, it is believing in the possibility of renewal and working towards it. When we carry the light of Christmas in our hearts, we become beacons of hope in a world yearning for unity and healing. Together we can create a world where everyday feels like Christmas. As we move forward into the new year of 2026 let us carry the light of Christmas no longer as Pilgrims but Ambassadors of hope in all that we do. May this season be a time of reflection, renewal, and recommitment to the principles that make Christmas such a special and transformative time.

By Pat Waters

St. Juan Diego – First Indigenous Saint of the Americas

(1474 – 1548)
Feast Day: December 9
Patron Saint of: Indigenous Peoples of the Americas

Bishop Zumarraga and 12 other Franciscan friars from Spain arrived in 1524 in what is now Mexico. This was just a couple of years after the Spanish conquest in which the conquistadors had killed or captured many natives. These missionaries had come to preach the Gospel but they encountered much resistance. Many of the Indigenous were pagans and the conquistadors, although Catholic, were greedy for Aztec gold. These religious prayed daily to the Blessed Virgin Mary for help in bringing the native people to the Catholic faith and a number of years later, their prayers would be answered.

Juan Diego and his wife (they did not have any children) were one of the first Indigenous to convert to Christianity shortly after the arrival of the religious friars. On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego, who was now a widower, was on his way to Mass when he heard a young woman calling his name in his native language. He ran up Tepeyac Hill (in what is now Mexico City) where he found himself before the most beautiful Aztec woman that he had ever seen!

She introduced herself as the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Mary asked Juan to go to Bishop Zumarraga and to tell him that she wanted a church built on that hill. Keep in mind that before the arrival of the conquistadors and missionaries, this same hill had been used to offer human sacrifices to pagan gods.

So Juan went immediately to the bishop with Mary's request and although the bishop believed him, he told Juan that he would need to think about it. Juan returned the same day to Our Lady with the bishop's response. Mary then instructed Juan to go the next day to the bishop and to tell him that it was a request from the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God.

Once again, Juan met with the bishop but this time the bishop told Juan to ask Our Lady for a sign. By now, Juan was feeling that he had failed Our Blessed Mother, but she kindly instructed him to go to the top of the hill, gather the flowers that were blooming there and to take them to the bishop.

Juan filled his tilma (a cloak made from cactus fibers) with these flowers and brought them to the bishop. When Juan opened his tilma and the flowers spilled out, Bishop Zumarraga stared in amazement. These flowers were roses which would not be blooming in December and they were Castilian roses that only grew in a region of Spain where the bishop was from.

Then Bishop Zumarraga sank to his knees. On Juan's tilma was a beautiful imprint of Our Blessed Mother as she appeared to Juan! Now believing the sign, the bishop asked Juan if he could keep his tilma until the church was built. To this day, this cloak has been perfectly preserved and is on display at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Tepeyac Hill, Mexico City.

As for Juan, he moved into a small house by the church, living a life of prayer and work, and caring for the pilgrims who came to the shrine. Although Juan never thought himself important enough to relay Mary's request, his faith guided him not to give up. He died on May 30, 1548, but his feast day is December 9, the date of the first apparition. Juan Diego was both beatified (May 6, 1990) and canonized (July 31, 2002) by Pope St. John Paul II. Today, St. Juan Diego is one of the most popular saints in Mexico.

St. Juan Diego, help us to be strong in our faith and to be open to God's will in our lives.

By Angela Van Kralingen

In Memoriam

We remember the recently departed faithful of our parish:

David Cole

Joëlle Toal

Let Us Pray:

God, our Father, in company with Christ, who died and now lives, may Your faithful servants rejoice in Your kingdom, where all tears are wiped away. Unite us again in one family, to sing Your praise forever and ever. Amen.

The Pope's Prayer Intention for December

For Christians in Areas of Conflict:

Let us pray that Christians living in areas of war or conflict, ...might be seeds of peace, reconciliation and hope.

To read more of the Pope's Prayer Intentions, visit

https://www.popesprayer.va/popes-prayer-intentions-for-2025/

PRAYER for DECEMBER

Oh God,
who through the precious blood of Your Son reconciled the world to Yourself:
today we pray for Christians who live in contexts of war or conflict.

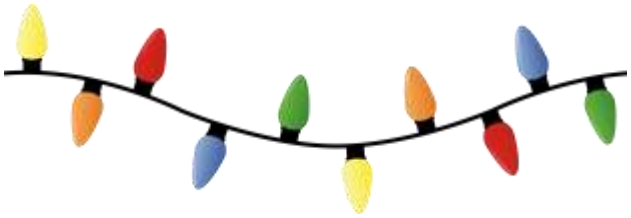
May they be seeds of reconciliation, showing mercy and seeking justice, building bridges between divided communities and always forgiving, as they have been forgiven by you.

May their presence and testimony contribute to reconciliation, to heal wounds and inspire others to build and follow a path towards peace.

Lord Jesus, who called peacemakers blessed, help us to become active instruments of peace in our communities, even when surrounded by violence and division.

Holy Spirit, guarantor of true hope: help Christians to be beacons of hope, keeping an unwavering faith and working tirelessly for a more just and peaceful world, trusting that a future of peace is possible with the Lord's help.

Amen.



Why do we decorate with lights?---

Jesus is the light of the world...and Christmas is the perfect time to celebrate this fact with beautiful lights.

From Christmas trees to window candles, these Christmas decorations symbolize the light of Jesus shining through the darkness of sin and death.

Today's strings of electric Christmas lights evolved from candles. During the 1500s, Christians used candles to decorate their Christmas trees. The flickering glow of the small flames amid the evergreen branches created a beautiful image of hope, but it was definitely a fire hazard. In 1882, Thomas Edison's friend, Edward H. Johnson, created the first string of electric Christmas lights, making it much safer for people to light their trees.

JUBILEE 2025
CALENDAR OF MAJOR EVENTS

DECEMBER 2025

14 December
Jubilee of Prisoners

www.iubilaeum2025.va

Holy Door Closing Dates

December 28, 2025: Basilicas of
St. John Lateran
St. Mary Major
St. Paul Outside the Walls

January 6, 2026: Basilica of St. Peter's

Holy Year Pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome - The Portiuncula

The medieval hill town of Assisi still clings tenaciously to the steep sides of Mount Subasio. From the Monastero Sant'Andrea where we stayed in Assisi on our pilgrimage, (Oct 16-24, 2025,) our window looked down onto **the valley far below where the tiny chapel of St Mary of the Angels still sits**.

In 1210, it was a tiny broken down chapel, dating back to the fourth century, owned by the Benedictines. It was one of the three chapels that Francis and his companions rebuilt by hand around 1208 - literally obeying the command "*Francis go and rebuild my church which as you can see is falling into ruin.*" The early brothers called this chapel the 'Portiuncula' or 'little portion' - or little place of God.

The 'Portiuncula' later became, in Francis' own words, the birthplace of the Franciscan orders - and the place where he died. The first companions gathered there after they received permission to form an order. There Francis heard the Gospel message read at Mass, "*Acquire no gold or silver or copper for your belts, no bag for the journey, or two tunics, or sandals...*" (Matthew 10:9–10) and declared "*This, is what I desire, yea, this is what I long for with my whole heart.*" When his death was near in 1226, he asked to be carried there to die. St Bonaventure summarized its importance, "*This place the holy man loved more than other places in the world; for here he began humbly, here he progressed virtuously, here he ended happily. This place he entrusted to his brothers at his death as the most beloved of the Virgin*". Major Life. 2, 8 In those days the chapel looked like this historically accurate **reconstruction of it on the campus of the Franciscan University at Steubenville, Ohio**.

Between 1569 and 1679 **the immense Papal Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels** was completed enclosing the original chapel in the valley below Assisi - **encapsulating and dwarfing the Portiuncula**. Some think its grandeur contradicts the Franciscan ideal of Gospel poverty, but not so.

The tiny chapel within the huge basilica is a powerful symbol. The historical charisms of the orders (in this instance Franciscan, but the same is true for Carmelite, Benedictine, Augustinian, Ursuline, Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate, and all) are inside the Church - not exterior to it. They enliven and illuminate the Church from within not from without. This was Francis' genius - not to criticize and splinter the Church, but to love the Church and to rebuild it from within.

The symbol is powerful in reverse too. Just as the Universal Church is incomplete without the distinct charisms of its many religious orders, the orders would not survive without the protection and leadership of the Church. When Francis settled his new community back at the Portiuncula, in 1209, he and his brothers had just walked to Rome and back to obtain the blessing and approval of Pope Innocent III for their order. And St. Clare - who came to religious life at that same Portiuncula in 1212 - spent her remaining years petitioning the Holy See to approve her rule of life - and finally obtained her request for a life of total poverty.

As individuals we are each a tiny votive light within a magnificent Church - shining within it - revealing its beauty. Without its surrounding and protecting embrace we would be extinguished.

ST. CARDINAL JOHN HENRY NEWMAN: Doctor of the Church

On November 1, 2025, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed St. Cardinal John Henry Newman a Doctor of the Church. Joining the ranks of 37 saints who already share this title, he was also named co-patron of Catholic Education sharing this title with St. Thomas Aquinas. A ***Doctor of the Church*** is a title bestowed on a saint whose writings, or preaching are considered to have significantly advanced theology and doctrine, or who have advanced the knowledge of God through their writing, spirituality and defense of the faith. In the words of Bishop Barron, St. John Newman was a definitive teacher who advanced the development of Doctrine. He explained this by saying that to St John Newman "Ideas are unfolding as minds consider them." He was committed to the truth and expressed his teachings through 40 books and 21,000 letters which are still available today.

John Newman's life spanned the better part of the 19th century. Born in London in 1801 he would rise to become a prominent leader in the Anglican Oxford Movement. He sought to revive Catholic elements within the Church of England which resulted in his entering into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1845. In 1846 he travelled to Italy to undertake his studies as a humble seminarian – despite being a theologian and thinker of international renown in the Church of England. During these months he became deeply drawn to the figure of St. Philip Neri so upon completion of his studies the Pope encouraged him to return to England and found an oratory there. He faced many difficulties in establishing Catholic institutions in his homeland many of which seemed at first to falter. Still, his mind continued to produce brilliant writings in defense and support of Catholicism – even under fierce attack. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII named him a Cardinal. He died on August 11, 1890 and in 2019 was canonized by Pope Frances.

St. John Henry Newman' s legacy and influence lives on today through Newman Centres, Newman Houses, Newman Clubs or Newman Communities which are Catholic campus ministry centres at secular universities worldwide. These centres may include residential living space or may be actual houses close to the campus with or without a chapel. Activities vary among centres but usually include both spiritual worship like Sunday mass and Eucharistic adoration, as well as social get-togethers and group outings. The first Newman Club was established at Oxford University in 1878. There are over 2,000 Newman Centres on College campuses in the United States. In Canada there are two Newman Centres. In Toronto, the centre is housed in the historical W.D. Matthews House and is under the direction of the Archdiocese of Toronto and associated with St. Thomas Aquinas Church. The Newman centre in Montreal serves McGill University and the Archdiocese of Montreal and is located on McGill College Avenue.

By Pat Waters

Confirmation

We pray for the newly confirmed students from our Parish schools:

St. Ann students confirmed on November 18th,

and St. Teresa of Calcutta students confirmed on November 20th.

Confirmation Prayer

Heavenly Father, God of power and of love,
We pray for all who have received the Sacrament of Confirmation.
May Your Holy Spirit help them to grow in faith, hope and love and may they come to know You as the one true God who loves them without limit.
May their hearts welcome You gladly;
May their ears hear Your voice in the scriptures;
May their eyes see You in all things;
And may they proclaim Your glory as they walk in the ways of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.
Amen.

Parish Missional Health Survey Results and Rationale

Earlier this year, each parish in the diocese was given a Parish Missional Health Survey to give an idea of the strengths and weaknesses and the overall "missional" level of our faith community. For the past three years, our bishop and his pastoral council have hosted training sessions led by Ron Huntley who specializes in the field of forming parish leaders who will implement a vision aimed at forming Christian disciples. The priests and deacons of our diocese received training during annual study days and retreats. In addition, members of the laity, often individuals serving on parish pastoral councils twice attended daylong workshops held at Gethsemene Centre in Wellandport. To get input from the broadest group of stakeholders, the Parish Survey was given out during Mass where it was to be filled out and collected right after. Parishioners were also given the opportunity to complete the survey online using a link provided in the bulletin. The completed forms were then forwarded to Ron Huntley for evaluation and later sent to the respective parishes as a guide and a catalyst for better implementation of the parish vision.

Here are the categories and our overall scores:

Five Systems: Discipleship –79%; Evangelization –74%; Fellowship –74%; Worship –78%; Service –78%. **Average: 77%**

Two Foundational Elements: Administration –80%; Support –75%. **Average: 77%**

Four Skills: Effectiveness—75%; Invitation—78%; Leadership—74%; Vision—80%. **Average: 77%**

Next, we take the overall score and place it alongside the Scoring Key:

90% and above – Aligned for mission
80% and above—Making progress
70% and above—Stagnant
Less than 70%—In decline

Given that we are on the high end of 70%, just below the "making progress" mark, we should feel reasonably pleased about how we are doing. Obviously, there is room for improvement and our parish pastoral council is working with me to see how we can do better at evangelization and fellowship, while progressing in effectiveness and leadership. Certainly the cultural changes of the past few decades have impacted church attendance and the transmission of the faith to succeeding generations. In the past, the family played a much more pronounced role in both. What we have been too often seeing is an outlook which includes some aspects of the Catholic faith, such as rites of passage, but little sense of the parish as a spiritual home where the faithful return week after week to worship and receive guidance to live their call to discipleship in a fuller way. These are not easy challenges to overcome. But the call of Christ remains the same: to make disciples of all nations. Thus, we continue, supported by you, who have taken the time to share your input and help us to identify areas where we need to become more intentional. Praise to God for our beautiful parish and its long track record of worship and service and to each of you for your commitment, prayers and support as we move to become ever more missional!

Fr. Richard Kowalchuk, pastor

Advent Craft Family Workshop at Star of the Sea

Linda Dirks starting the afternoon with a presentation on the meaning of Advent.

Saturday, November 22, 2025
1:00–3:30 PM

Fr. Richard blessing the Advent wreaths, Nativity lanterns, and Jesse tree ornaments.

at Star of the Sea
on **Thursdays from September 18 – October 30**
Hosted by: Sisters of Our Lady Immaculate

Our parish has once again been blessed to have been able to offer Adult Faith Formation classes instructed by the SOLI Sisters.

This session's topic was The Nicene Creed on its 1700th anniversary. This Creed was drafted during the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 A.D. Each week either Sr. Marie Therese or Sr. Mary Isidore would take a portion of the Creed and instruct the participants on the history and meaning.

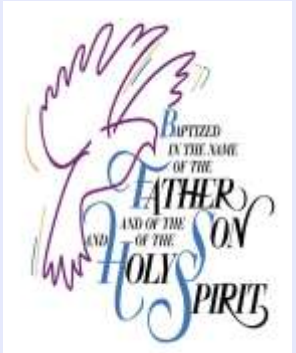
Thank you to all who participated, those who prepared the hall and refreshments, and the SOLI Sisters for sharing their time, knowledge and friendship. We look forward to the next faith formation!

Sr. Marie Therese

Sr. Mary Isidore

We welcome the newest members of our parish family who were baptized in November:

Scarlet Marie Fiedorek
Dalia Mary Sipos
Sebastian David Sipos
Luke Giancarlo Colosimo
Tatum Joseph Dubon
Myla Ronnie McGarr



Prayer for Child's Baptism:

Heavenly Father, grant that these children grow in grace and love. May they learn to follow Jesus through the influence of the Holy Spirit. They are true children of Yours, and we pray that they serve You faithfully all their days. We pray for guidance and strength for the parents and families of these children. May their example, wise counsel, and loving lead them to live a life of strength, righteousness, faith, love, joy, and peace. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

12 Prayers of Christmas

Christmas is a glorious time of year. God brings us face to face once again with His design for and redemption of mankind. His intentions toward us are for life lived abundantly. His plans for the kingdom are victorious!

But for many people, the holidays can be filled with unrealistic expectations. Old hurts are sometimes revisited and new ones inflicted. Hope can go deferred and result in heartsickness. In the midst of the tinsel, lights and shopping, let's remember what the season is really about. Let's pray for a spirit of *all things Christmas* for ourselves and our loved ones.

1. **Love** – Lord, help us follow the way of love – let the love of Christ compel us.
2. **Joy** – Restore the joy of Your salvation to us; let us experience the joy of Your presence.
3. **Peace** – Let Your peace rule and guard our hearts; give us more of You, Jesus – You are our peace.
4. **Hope** – Enlighten the eyes of our heart so that we may know the hope You called us to.
5. **Favour** – Let Your favour rest in us.
6. **Life** – Shine Your light of life on us; help us to walk in it.
7. **Salvation** – Help us to hear You so we can unlock the treasure of Your salvation.
8. **Selflessness** – Keep us from self-seeking attitudes that reject truth.
9. **Generosity** – Make us rich in ways that result in generosity on our part so You will be praised.
10. **Receiving** – Help us receive Your kingdom, Your Spirit, and Your grace.
11. **Seeking** – Encourage us to seek Your face with all our hearts,
12. **Praise** – We ascribe glory to Your name, Lord; we come before You in worship for You are holy.

Articles on this page shared by Wilma Vanderzwaag

The **Feast of Epiphany** is celebrated on January 4th, 2026. On Epiphany, it is traditional for families to bless their homes, remembering the hospitality of the Holy Family to the Wise Men and asking for protection and blessing on the home and all who enter.

The home blessing is done by writing on the door or door frame with chalk the symbols **20+C+M+B+26**.

The **20** and **26** represent the current year.

The **+** reminds us of the cross on which our Saviour died.

The **C, M, and B** stand for the traditional names of the Wise Men, Caspar, Melchoir and Balthasar, as well as an abbreviation for the Latin phrase **"Christus mansionem benedicat"** which means **"Christ bless this house".**

After you chalk your door or door frame say the following prayer:

Lord God of heaven and earth, you revealed your only-begotten Son to every nation by the guidance of a star. Bless this house and all who inhabit it. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our concern for others may reflect your love. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.