Parish wins first prize & hearts in outreach effort

DECEMBER 17, 2021

Categories: News
Tags: Featured, Parish Life

Sharing the Good News in New Castle.
Taking the church out to the people.

The parish float viewed from behind.
Fr. Mac, altar servers and his dog Ailis.

Making new friends along the parade route.
Maitlyn Widelko in front of the Nativity at the Hometown Holiday Market.

Fr. Mac blesses a rosary.

Members of Holy Spirit Parish have been taking the Good News to the street—and recently, actually brought some of their churches with them.
Volunteers built a parade float on a flatbed trailer depicting the inside of a church and entered it in New Castle's annual Hometown Holiday Parade on November 20. It featured five pews, an altar, Nativity scene and Christmas trees.

The 42-foot float was filled with parishioners, two servers, the pastor, Father Joseph McCaffrey, and his faithful dog Ailis.

The float won first prize and made a big impression around town.

“IT was a fabulous experience,” Father McCaffrey said. “IT was a powerful example of what John Paul II called the New Evangelization.”

Sponsored by Friends of Catholic Education and supported by Bobosky Concrete, the float represented “the joy, comfort, peace, love and service we aim to provide here in Lawrence County,” said organizer and spokesperson Melanie Widelko. The group also hosted a Christmas Festival & Craft show nearby.

On December 10-12, Holy Spirit Parish took part in New Castle’s first Hometown Holiday Market in Cascade Galleria. They set up a beautiful Nativity scene and gave away more than 300 rosaries, nearly 200 ornaments with Bible quotes, and Christmas Mass schedules.

Fathers McCaffrey, Brendan Dawson, and Benjamin Barr and Sister Annie Bremmer were out greeting the community. Many rosaries were blessed during the event.
We're looking forward to celebrating the birth of Christ with you in churches across the diocese this Christmas!

Click here to for a list of Masses held on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2021, in the diocese.

For the most up-to-date Christmas Eve Mass schedule, please check your parish bulletin or website.
Bridging the Gap

Some of you, my readers, are like myself—part of the senior generations. And I suspect that those of you who, like me, had parents or grandparents in the “greatest generation” can confess taking an inventory of successes that are a part of the mosaic of your life. Of course, this eventually brings to mind the mistakes made over the years.

The latter has been my preoccupation of late—looking at mistaken decisions; having different priorities; regretting missed opportunities; remembering relationships that have gone into the memory box. You get the picture.

Recently, in one of our daily Advent Masses, we heard Saint Mathew’s Gospel about the two sons whose father asked them to go and to do some work in his vineyard. The first said “no,” but had second thoughts and a change of heart. The second said “yes” but dropped the ball.

In my reflection on that Gospel and its application today, I came upon a commentary that related this teaching of Jesus to a human response that is surely not unfamiliar to most of us.

The “Yes…BUT” syndrome.

You know those moments.

Those times when we really do intend to call a friend with whom we haven’t spoken for a while…but don’t.

Those times when we should visit a shut-in neighbor…but don’t.
Those times when we know we should apologize to someone whom we've hurt...but don't.

Those times when we promise to pray for someone...but don't.

To be perfectly honest, sometimes my best intentions fall by the wayside, with understandable excuses. These excuses that can slide into a regular practice.

The Advent and Christmas seasons remind us that “Jesus is the reason for the season”—words that are more than a clever slogan. Advent and Christmas tickle our hearts, prompting us to put into action the life and love of Jesus through our own words and deeds.

To use a fifty-dollar word, Christmas is all about the Incarnation. It is about God taking on our flesh, our humanity in all things but sin, so that we in our humanity can become much more like God.

Perhaps the number one item on your Christmas wish list and mine should be to do good and be better at our personal intentions.

You will remember the oft quoted phrase: “The way to hell is paved with good intentions.” The way to heaven is paved with intentions fulfilled.

Christmas is all about the Incarnation—the coming of Jesus to earth in the little town of Bethlehem.

But the Incarnation also means Jesus coming to earth today—through you and me—in what we do and how we do it; in what we say and how we say it.

Christmas is especially a time of precious memories, not only for us seniors but for all intentional “do-gooders,” followers of Jesus, in 2021.

So, is there any intention in your life that is currently shelved as a “Yes...BUT”? Advent and Christmas provide the perfect time to take it off the shelf and make good on it.

Going back to the commentary I referenced earlier in this reflection, let’s make every effort to turn our “Yes...BUT” to a solid “YES!”
No one at Serra Catholic High School could ever forget Coach Bill Cleary. His girls basketball teams’ accomplishments are legendary. But officials wanted a permanent remembrance of their now retired educator and mentor.

On Dec. 10, former and current players, faculty, staff, family, friends and fans gathered in the gymnasium where so many nets were cut down and banners hung. It was time for one last celebration.

That special place is now called William J. Cleary Court.

Over the course of 34 seasons, Cleary became one of the most successful coaches in WPIAL history. His teams won 18 section titles, four WPIAL crowns and a PIAA state championship in 2005. The girls never had a losing season under his direction.

He finished his career with a 657-196 record, with the Eagles going undefeated in his final regular season. He called it “just magical.”

Cleary also served as Serra Catholic’s athletic director for 38 years, helping to more than double the number of sports offered.

And, he taught at the school for 41 years, retiring from teaching three years ago.

Principal Tim Chirdon and associate principal and athletic director Robert Childs spoke at the dedication ceremony about Coach Cleary achievements, and his stewardship of the athletic program.
The former coach expressed his gratitude for the honor of having the gymnasium named after him, and thanked all who have supported him over the decades.
Three days that should affect us deeply

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By Father Matthew Hawkins
Parochial vicar, St. Benedict the Moor & St. Mary Magdalene parishes

On the weekend of December 25, we celebrate the Nativity of the Lord and the Feast of the Holy Family. On December 28 we commemorate the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. These three days are compressed on this year’s liturgical calendar and present us with stark contrasts. The moving images of the birth of Jesus Christ and the tightly knit union of the Holy Family are quickly followed by heart-wrenching images of the blood of newly born infants and toddlers.

It is remarkable when we reflect on the figure of the vulnerable baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes in the stillness of the night in the small town of Bethlehem. We are reminded that we often cannot hear the voice of the Lord when we are in the middle of the bombast of the city or in the courtyard of powerful men. The Creator of the universe entered into our humanity as a helpless baby who initially was homeless, and was soon to become, with his family, a refugee in a foreign land.

It is in the stillness of these humble beginnings that God made His presence known to us. The Gospel of Matthew quotes Micah, the prophet who foresaw in Bethlehem, something great that would happen despite its small size: “And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler, who is to shepherd my people Israel.” (Mt 2:6)

The shepherds, who were the first to hear the proclamation of angels, were considered the least of the inhabitants of Israel because they were ritualistically “unclean.” Even though they tended livestock for wealthier people to purchase for their own ritual sacrifice, the shepherds lacked the time or the resources to purify...
themselves so that they could offer sacrifices on their own behalf. Moreover, their work made them outsiders and ruffians in the eyes of those who could afford to keep within the prescriptions of the ritual. Yet these shepherds were the first to genuflect and gaze into the face of the Lord in an act of adoration.

When the Holy Family was forced to flee from Jewish Palestine because of the king of Judea, Herod’s, burning jealousy of a mere child, we are reminded that the family is the domestic church and the “school of charity.” As the Holy Family fled into exile, we are reminded that even in trying times when there is pressure on our families we learn to depend on one another and to think about more than just ourselves. We learn how to be charitable toward our neighbor and the stranger, and we learn how to become gifts to the world. We can feel the intensity and the intimacy of the Holy Family.

But then there was the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, which was an inexplicable horror. We would like to journey through life without problems or pain; we would like to live in a world without suffering and sorrow. Our faith, however, is not an invitation to a flight into fantasy or escapism. Incomprehensible tragedies that weigh on our hearts and that bring us to tears surround us. Problems that we cannot solve under our own power confront us.

Speculation and rationalizations about why God allows tragedies to happen will not make them easier to bear. Instead, in our stillness, in our smallness, in our humility and often within the domestic church of the family, that intimate school of charity, we must allow our hearts to be strengthened and nurtured so that we might become instruments of God’s love in a suffering world.
Catholic at Home
Jennifer Antkowiak

Do you know what a Cricut machine is? It's an electronic cutting machine that allows you to design and cut a variety of materials with an intricacy and precision that would be hard to duplicate by hand.

I received a Cricut as a Christmas gift last year, and I've loved using it to get back into crafting. Working with my hands to create unique cards and gifts is emotionally rewarding. It also normally provides some valuable stress relief.

One evening earlier this week, however, recognizing how quickly December seems to be flying by, I sat at my Cricut machine, after a long day at work, determined to get as many cards and gifts made as I could in the small amount of time I had.

The usual creative, relaxing work of designing templates, selecting papers, and hand-embossing and inking projects was lost in the rush, and in the pressure I felt to get things done.

The Cricut machine I use connects to my laptop via bluetooth. To make matters worse, there was some kind of internet issue, and wireless connection was weak. I kept getting kicked off, which added to my frustration. I didn't have time for that!

There are different models of the Cricut machine — the Joy, the Explore, and the one I have is called the Cricut Maker. Each time I was dumped, an alert message popped up on the screen:

To continue, please connect your Maker
The more I was hit with that message, the more I began to smile—even laugh a little, and read it as, “To continue, please connect to your Maker.”

I took it as a sign to stop, take a breath, and slow down. I was not joyful in my haste to get my crafting done. And, these things were going to be gifts! That’s not the energy I wanted behind sharing something handmade with someone I care about.

Bigger than that, I lost touch with the meaning and purpose of Advent and Christmas. I truly needed to reconnect to my Maker!

The BLESSING of a weak internet signal allowed me to do that. In just a few minutes, I felt more peace, and more happiness in my heart. I reeled it all in, and set more manageable expectations for myself. I stopped rushing and started focusing on the person I was making the gift for, and why.

Since then, I’ve given time to making just a couple of projects a night. The feeling of joy is back. And, once again, I look forward to the time to unwind and create things I hope will bring smiles to the faces of those I care about.

These last days leading up to Christmas can start to feel hectic. We can start to burn out, and that puts us at risk of not being able to be fully present to enjoy all the beauty of this holy time. I share this story with you, hoping that the lesson I learned from my Maker will help you to slow things down a little, and focus on the bigger meaning of the season.

Merry Christmas and a Happy, Healthy New Year to you and those you love.