



Winter 2015

Pastor's Reflections Of Christmas



I found Advent to be a Season of special grace for me this year. Being available for more confession opportunities was a wonderful spiritual experience of conferring God's light and mercy into hearts yearning for peace. I particularly found my quiet hours in the chapel before the Eucharistic Lord as soul-nourishing, particularly as I read the "Office of Readings" and lingered over the visions of Isaiah and commentaries by the Fathers of the Church. I also enjoyed reading over the words to the Advent hymns. As I have often mentioned, the words to the hymns are theological, poetic and inspiring. Even if you think you cannot sing, at least read the lyrics to the song texts at Mass anyway – and let your heart and mind be nurtured with their content.

At Christmas, I enjoy giving gifts to nieces, nephews and now great-nieces and nephews. Since I do not get to spend lots of time with them, I try to get them a religious gift which might make some small inspirational impact, or else a gift which might bring them some delight through the years. I surprised my two sisters who accompanied us on our parish pilgrimage to Lourdes and Fatima with some Paris scarves and some framed tiles of St. Anthony of Padua (found in the church of his birthplace in Lisbon) and of the three little sheers with Our Lady of Fatima. My sisters in turn surprised me with a cork cap which I had admired in Portugal, as well as a framed picture of me offering Mass at the Grotto of Lourdes and a photo of me with Maria dos Santos, niece of Sr. Lucia of Fatima. These brought back memories of a wonderful Marian pilgrimage.

The parish Masses of Christmas were magnificent – each Mass different in its own way. The Vigil Mass gospel is about Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecies and as the

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MISSION STATEMENT

We are

**St. Thomas More Parish,
members of the
living body of Christ,
born again in Baptism and
strengthened through the
Eucharist to promote the
Gospel values of our
Catholic faith.**



Youth Ministry

St. Thomas More and Lourdes Hospital to partner

Ast summer, 23 pilgrims embarked on a spiritual journey to Europe. You may remember reading about the trip in the last issue of *The Word*. From that trip has grown a desire to do more, and bring a similar experience to the youth of St. Thomas More.

This desire sprung from a conversation in the car on the trip back from the Nashville airport to Paducah. Everyone was so moved by the time they spent at Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto and they felt strongly that a service trip by our parish youth would strengthen their spiritual growth.

"But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

- John 3:17

Coincidentally, St. Thomas More Directory of Youth Ministry, **Matt Rochette** had participated in a service trip to Lourdes in college. The trip was organized by the North American Lourdes Volunteer Organization.

Matt was able to contact the group and has worked with them on a plan to take 15 - 20 St. Thomas More youth to Lourdes, France, this June.

St. Thomas More's youth will spend a week caring for the sick and needy who travel to one of the most visited holy sites in the world. They will help cook meals and volunteer in the hospital, all while deepening their

Catholic faith and understanding.

Of course, to make this service trip a reality, funding becomes a primary concern.

Students wishing to attend will be called upon to raise a portion of the money on their own, thus demonstrating a commitment and a willingness to serve. But without the help of the Catholic community as a whole, the trip would not be possible.

St. Thomas More decided the church needed to show the same commitment to serve the youth who wanted to go.

Realizing we have our very own "Lourdes" right here in our community, we approached Lourdes Hospital with the project.

Steven Grinnell, a St. Thomas More parishioner and President and CEO of Lourdes Hospital, jumped on board with a commitment from the hospital to help underwrite a significant portion of the cost of the trip.

Steve said, "We couldn't think of a more perfect fit! Lourdes Hospital's mission is to heal and serve. How could we better demonstrate that commitment than to foster that spirit in the youth of our Catholic community?"

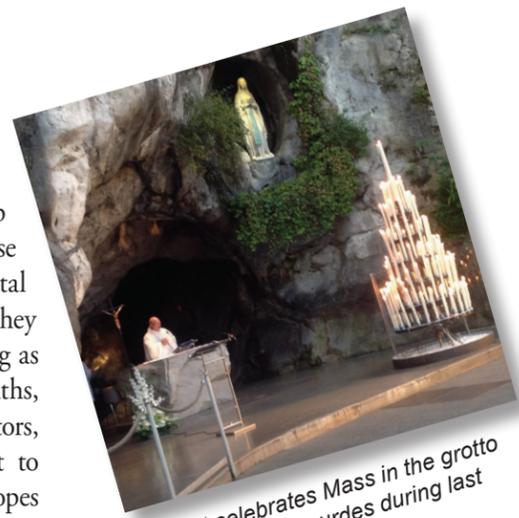
However, the hospital didn't want to stop there. They went a step further. Because of the special bond Lourdes Hospital feels with the site at Lourdes, France, they decided the trip should be one of healing as well as service. Over the coming months, Lourdes Hospital will request their doctors, nurses and other staff to also commit to volunteering for the trip. Lourdes hopes to send medical volunteers on the journey with the students, thus bridging the spirit of

healing between youth and adults.

Aligning so closely with Lourdes Hospital's mission of extending the healing ministry of Jesus, the service trip will be a concrete example of just what that means.

St. Thomas More is so pleased to welcome Lourdes Hospital on this special journey of service and healing and we encourage you to do the same.

In the coming weeks, you will read about individual students planning to make the trip and you will be given the opportunity to help sponsor a student. We ask you prayerfully consider what you can do to help make the trip a reality for these students. ☕



Fr. Pat celebrates Mass in the grotto at Our Lady of Lourdes during last summer's visit to Europe.

Living The Faith

St. Mary senior puts faith into action every day

From an early age, **Ben Hopper**, a parishioner at St. Thomas More parish, has seen his faith as an integral part of his life. While some youth might zip into Mass on Sunday and zip out again, not to return for another week, Ben puts his faith into action every day.

As a St. Mary High School senior, the role of faith in life is constantly reinforced. Whether it is a prayer before lunch or time saying the Rosary in the St. Mary Chapel, the benefit of attending a Catholic school is not lost on Ben.

When reflecting on how school reinforces the faith life he experiences at St. Thomas More, Ben said, "The Mass experience at St. Thomas More truly deepens my relationship with God. And, to have the opportunity to attend Mass at school as well, broadens my understanding of our faith."

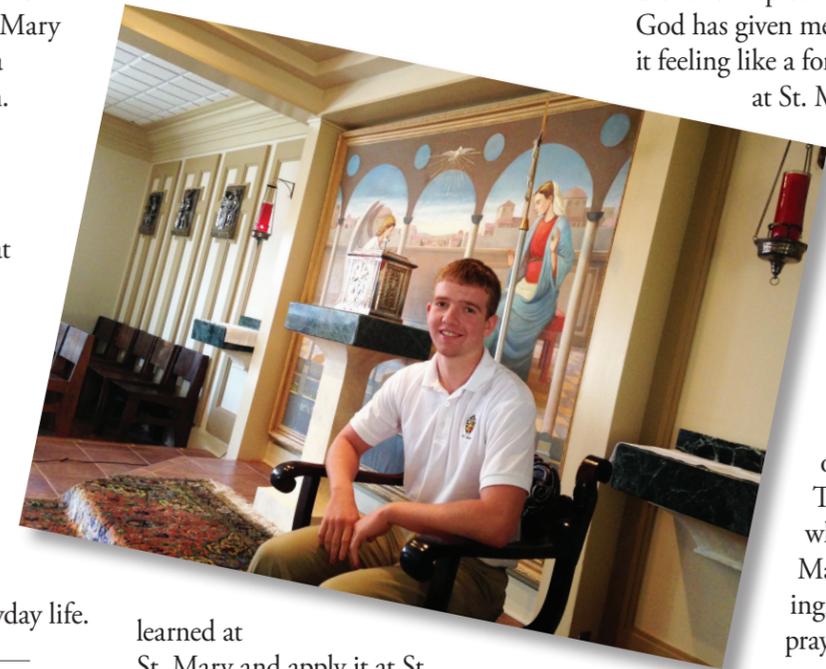
Ben is not alone. Many Catholic youth who are parishioners at St. Thomas More see the connection between church, school and everyday life.

"Prayer and faith are everywhere..."
- Ben Hopper

Being immersed in our Catholic faith helps to build young people into future parish leaders. Many St. Thomas More Pastoral Council members attended St. Mary High School in their youth, thus proving the axiom true. This includes

Ben's family. **Terry and Amy Sullivan** are active members of St. Thomas More as well as being very involved parents at St. Mary.

Not only are future leaders being cultivated, but also leaders that are well informed. Ben said, "Religion classes at St. Mary have taught me so much about our faith. I am lucky to get to use what I have



learned at St. Mary and apply it at St. Thomas More. Plus, because St. Thomas More's priests spend so much time at St. Mary, I feel very comfortable discussing with them what I have learned."

St. Thomas More's Pastor, **Rev. J. Patrick Reynolds, JCL**, and Parochial Vicar, **Rev. Brandon Williams**, both see their commitment to St. Mary as a calling to deepen the faith of young parishioners. "Students like Ben are a joy to be around. They have a deep understanding of our

faith and because of their instruction at St. Mary, they yearn to be involved at St. Thomas More," said Fr. Brandon.

Ben echoed Fr. Brandon's thoughts, "Because St. Mary is such a God-conscious community, I am reminded of my

commitment to others everyday. I have a desire to help others and use the talents God has given me. And, I say that without it feeling like a forced platitude. Everyday,

at St. Mary, something 'magical' happens and I am reminded of God's presence in ordinary life."

Ben further explained the presence of God in his everyday life. "It doesn't just go away when church is over on Sunday at St. Thomas More or even when the bell rings at St. Mary. Prayer and faith are ingrained in my life. We pray before every sports game, we pray before an

Academic Team Meet, we pray before school even begins. Prayer and faith are everywhere, and I don't think I would have that if I didn't attend a Catholic school."

Ben puts his faith into action as well. He is a member of Y-Disciple, St. Thomas More's youth program, as well as a member of the EDGE Core Team. EDGE is St. Thomas More's youth group

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Christmas At St. Thomas More

A special time of year



Christmas is always a special time of year for families at St. Thomas More. Each year, it is a time to come together, look over the blessings of the year and be thankful to God for all that has been given, especially for the birth of his son Jesus to the Virgin Mary.

We celebrate the Season in many ways, each with our own traditions and prayers. The time with our family, both at home and our Parish Family, brings a focus of gratefulness that lasts throughout the year.

At St. Thomas More, the traditions are rich as well. Our children's Mass in the late afternoon offers a unique perspective on the birth of Christ for our younger members and gives them a prominent place in the Celebration of the Mass.

Later, the Vigil Mass is filled with song and beauty to announce the arrival of the Son of Man. Incense burns, candles glow and the Holy Spirit can truly be felt throughout the faithful who attend.

Morning Masses offer yet another "feel" of the miracle with a sun brightened church and even brighter singing all in the Glory of God.

All of these Masses and traditions for families, while different, are ultimately the same. We come to celebrate God's gift of Jesus to mankind. We do this to remember and to give thanks.

St. Thomas More families also demonstrate that thanks and joy in giving of themselves to others. This year, more than 500 families were assisted with our annual Giving Tree. Even more were shown the spirit of the season with volunteers from St. Thomas More serving the less fortunate at local homeless shelters or simply taking an hour out of their day to ring the bell for the Salvation Army.

These small acts of giving, kindness and love always seem to be prevalent during the holiday season, but tend to fade away with the dawn of the New Year. St. Thomas More and our Catholic faith should challenge each of us to extend the thankfulness of the Christmas Season throughout the year. All the while, remembering that everything we have materially and spiritually are gifts from God. ⊕

Pastor's Reflections of Christmas (from page one)

descendant of King David. Of course the children's Nativity pageant brings joy to the heart. The Jubilate Children's Choir added much beauty. And of course one can feel the energy from the 700 plus people present. The late Mass at 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve is always highlighted by our choral concert, instrumentalists, the blessing of the Nativity scene, and the proclamation of Luke's story of Christ's birth. It was great to see so many of our collegians and visiting relatives present for this Mass. I decided to have an early (and quieter) Mass at 7 a.m. on Christmas Morning, called the Mass at Dawn or the Mass of the Shepherds. It was celebrated in the chapel with a good crowd, singing some traditional hymns and the reading of the gospel of the shepherds going out to evangelize, telling all of the good news of the new-born King. The later morning Mass is still quite festive with organ and trumpets. The Gospel for that Mass is from the first chapter of Saint John, the most 'theological' of the Christmas gospels highlighting Jesus as the very Word of God humbling himself in the act of the Incarnation. Jesus is the true Light and

fullness of God's revelation to the world. The focus and tempo of each of the four Masses is a little different -- all extremely beautiful in their own way.

I will miss Father Brandon as he leaves to be temporary Administrator of Saint Joseph Parish in Bowling Green. I have many relatives in that parish and I've told them they better be good to him! I hope the assignment might not be too long or difficult, and that he would find his way back to us at Saint Thomas More. But God's Will be done. Several parishioners told me after his announcement, "Father Pat, count on me to help you out." Or, "Just let us know what we can do for you since you will be by yourself." I said to one, "You have confessions next Saturday." And, to another, "You're preaching the last weekend of the month." They replied, "Oh, well I suppose there are those areas where we cannot help you!" So, please continue to pray for and encourage vocations to the priesthood. ⊕



Make A Spiritual Resolution

We're all familiar with the usual New Year's resolutions: eating healthier, exercising, getting rid of clutter. This year, why not make a spiritual resolution? Resolve to deepen your relationship with God by living as a Christian steward all year through.

Stewardship is a reminder to count our blessings, acknowledge that God is the Giver of ALL gifts, and express our gratitude by returning a generous portion of those gifts. We show our gratitude through spending time in prayer, sharing our talents in service, and giving of financial treasure.

Whether we lose the extra pounds or use that new gym membership, what is certain for 2015 (and always) is that God is with us every day regardless of circumstances. Let us draw closer to Him through prayer and give back in thankfulness for His many blessings. ⊕

Four Stewardship Tips For The New Year

- ⊕ What are you grateful for? Keep a daily gratitude journal.
- ⊕ Make prayer a daily priority. If you're too busy to pray, you're too busy!
- ⊕ Use and share your talents: The woods would be silent if no birds sang except for those that sang best.
- ⊕ Give generously and according to your means. No one is ever poorer for giving to God, who is so rich in love, mercy and goodness. God cannot be outdone in generosity!

Hispanic Ministry

St. Mary honors Our Lady of Guadalupe

Antonio Barraza, a parishioner at St. Thomas More and a junior at St. Mary High School, woke up for school on Friday, December 12, and did something out of the ordinary. Instead of donning his St. Mary High School uniform, he put on white linen pants with an intricate design around the hem, and slipped a white tunic over his head. Then, even more out of the ordinary, he headed to St. Mary Elementary instead of the High School.

He joined other Spanish Club members for what will surely become a new tradition on December 12 – the Celebration of Mass in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Spanish.

Our Lady of Guadalupe holds a special place in the hearts of the Hispanic community and each year Latinos, notably Latinos of Mexican descent, celebrate the day much like a second Christmas. Special Masses are said and the sense of a community rooted in culture, history and faith is prevalent.

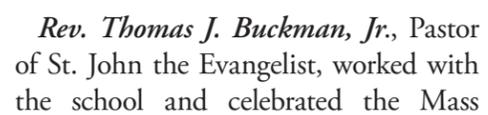
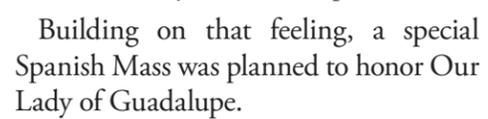
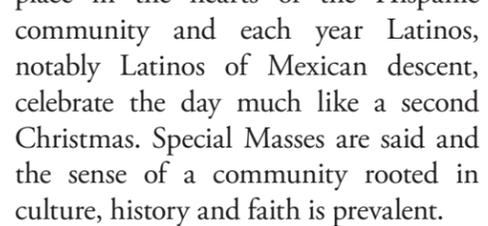
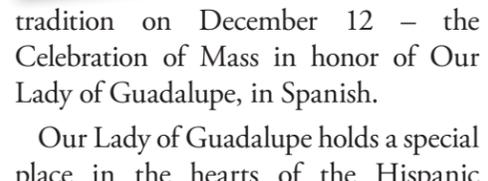
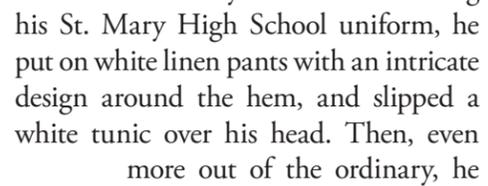
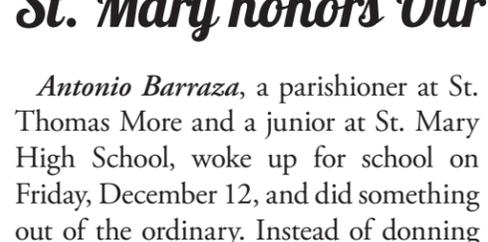
Building on that feeling, a special Spanish Mass was planned to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Rev. Thomas J. Buckman, Jr., Pastor of St. John the Evangelist, worked with the school and celebrated the Mass

mostly in Spanish. Joining Fr. Tom, St. Mary's High School Spanish Club read scripture in Spanish and elementary school teachers worked with students prior to Mass teaching them many of the standard responses in Spanish.

Antonio played a dual role. In addition to reading scripture, he also portrayed Juan Diego in a short play following Mass. The play told the story of Juan Diego and his encounter with the Most Holy Virgin Mary on a hill on the outskirts of what is now Mexico City.

When asked about the play and his role, Antonio said, "It was great to give young kids an opportunity to really experience what Juan Diego saw. You can tell a story, but to show someone a story is much more effective."



St. Thomas More celebrates late-night Mass for Our Lady

The Hispanic community at St. Thomas More is certainly a demonstration of faith that gives example to all.

Throughout the year, the Hispanic members of the parish take part in special activities that honor the culture and history that is such a deep part of their commitment to God.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, as you can imagine, holds a special place in the hearts of Latinos, especially those of Mexican descent.

The celebration of the Feast began with the Holy Rosary followed by the Guadalupe Novena. Mass was celebrated at 10 p.m. and was followed by the tradition of children performing a play depicting the appearance of Mary to Juan Diego.

The night was filled with the rich heritage and culture of St. Thomas More's Hispanic community and demonstrated the love of God's children for the Mother to us all.



Living The Faith

Being active at church translates to a Christ-centered life

When Melisa Mast's daughter Lindsay began high school about 10 years ago, Melisa stepped in, rolled up her sleeves and asked to help prepare her daughter's class for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Next year, Melisa's second daughter, Ashleigh, will be preparing to receive the Sacrament and, like every other year, Melisa will be leading the preparation classes.



Before leading Confirmation classes, Melisa began her service work teaching Faith Formation Classes for students who were not attending Catholic school. After a year or two, she took on the additional challenge of preparing young adults for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

"It has become a true vocation for me," Melisa said, when asked what keeps her coming back year after year.

"I've always enjoyed working with the young members of our parish. It keeps me young! And, I try not to talk to them like a Mom, but more like a partner on their journey to being Confirmed in the Church."

The preparation for the Sacrament is arguably the most in-depth study of one's faith and beliefs. Running from May to September, classes meet monthly to work through questions of faith. Small groups are formed at the beginning of

the program and those groups are held intact throughout the course.

Melisa said, "Tight bonds are formed within the groups and because they become so familiar with one another, a sense of ease develops. As the year progresses, the kids really begin to open up."

"And, nothing is off limits! We cover everything from Church history to the Beatitudes! It is a very in-depth look at our spiritual lives," she said.

Melisa is extra excited about this year's study plans. "We have changed the program to be more 'savvy,' more 'up-to-date' with the way kids learn today." She said.

Melisa went on to say, "We have more videos and more interactive elements in the program.



There is a lot less of me or Father just standing in the front of the room talking."

The new program is much more fast-paced but

still carries the same message. These young adults are encouraged to question their faith and truly understand to what they are committing. Sponsors and parents are encouraged to be at every class. In addition, St. Thomas More's pastor, Rev. J. Patrick Reynolds, JCL, or Parochial Vicar, Rev. Brandon Williams, are always on hand to answer questions

and help guide students in Confirming their faith.

Melisa laughed as she talked about the highlight of the nine months of intense

"I've always enjoyed working with the young members of our parish. It keeps me young!"

– Melisa Mast



study. "We study all year long, but in the end, it always comes down to the Confirmation Retreat," she said. "It is not just a great time, but it also seems to be where the most growth happens."

"I'm not sure if it is the more relaxed environment or the fact that the retreat is at the end of the lessons and the kids have just gotten more comfortable with one another," she continued. "But every retreat, at least once, I find myself marveling at the power of God in these young kids' lives. You can almost see that 'aha' moment when they just 'get it.'"

Melisa believes the Sacrament of Confirmation is perhaps the most important step someone can make in his or her faith life. She begins every new year by telling the students two things: "I get as much from this journey we are taking together as I hope you will," and "This is the time for you to choose. Go with your heart. Listen to God speak to you."

God certainly has spoken to Melisa. He has called her to serve, and she has found her place mentoring tomorrow's leaders today. ⊕



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Masses

Monday & Thursday 6:00 pm
Tuesday & Friday 7:00 am
Saturday 5:30 pm
Sunday 9:00 am, 11:00 am
Mass in Spanish 1:00 pm

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Living The Faith (from page three)

for middle school students. As a Core Team member, Ben is instrumental in helping structure the activities of these younger parishioners.

Ben also is a Lector and Altar Server at St. Thomas More. His commitment to putting faith into action doesn't stop at the doors of St. Thomas More. He is equally involved at school. Ben is a member of the National Honor Society and involved in St. Mary's Catholic Youth Leaders group.

St. Mary's Catholic Youth Leaders is a student-initiated council formed about a year ago. The council is designed to focus on faith life at school and helps plan retreats for each grade along with putting together the weekly Masses at school and special activities such as praying the Rosary or Eucharistic Adoration.

The group doesn't shy away from the issues either. In the spring, several St. Mary athletic teams were asked to be part of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. Upon learning that money donated to the National ALS Association helped fund stem-cell research, the Youth Leaders at St. Mary - recognizing the Church does not support stem-cell research - took it upon themselves to research the topic, and found an alternative. They all participated in the challenge and funds were instead donated to research at the John Paul II Medical Research Institute in Iowa where research is done while still honoring the sanctity of life. ☺

Coming Up...

January 22 A Day of Rosary Commemorating Roe -v- Wade Decision

January 23 Rev. J. Patrick Reynolds 35th Ordination Anniversary

February 18 Ash Wednesday

March Stewardship of Giving Annual Renewal

For information on these and other important dates, contact the Parish Office or visit our website at www.StMore.org.



The Word is published by St. Thomas More Catholic Church for parishioners and those interested in the Catholic faith.

If you know someone who would like to be added to our mailing list, contact Lois Bell by email at lois@StMore.org

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