



VOICE OF ST. MARY'S

Parish Newsletter

Pastor

Rev. Joseph A. Baker

Permanent Deacons

Deacon Jim Wallace

Deacon Ray White

Vicar Forane

Rev. David Sabel

Parish Secretary

Patti Zehr

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Contributors -

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ADVENT PENANCE SERVICE



St. Mary's, Pontiac—Tuesday, December 19 at 6:30pm
St. Joseph, Chenoa—Wednesday, December 20 at 6:30pm
Sts. Peter & Paul, Chatsworth—Thursday, December 21 at 6:30pm
Multiple priests will be available at these services.

CHRISTMAS MASSES

Sunday, December 24 at 4pm & 8pm

Monday, December 25 at 7am & 9:30am

With Christmas on a Monday, you need to attend Mass twice, once for the 4th Sunday of Advent (our regular weekend schedule), and once for Christmas (Mass times listed above).



Happy
NEW Year

On New Year's Eve, Fr. Joe will have the church open from 9pm-midnight for Adoration and then he will offer Mass at midnight to ring in the New Year with our Lord. Champagne and cookies will be available after. January 1st is NOT a Holy Day this year but Father will also have Mass on New Year's Day at 9:30am.

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



I've been reflecting lately on how we are all so closely connected with one another through our prayers. Two weekends ago I was at a visitation and I had the opportunity to tell someone who had suffered a tragic loss of a loved one, "I'm so sorry. I've been praying so much for you and your family." The response of the individual was immediate:

"Your prayers are felt," he said with confidence.

As I left that visitation, his words remained with me: "Your prayers are felt." I thought about the power of prayer, in particular of intercessory prayer. I thought of all the prayers I've offered for others throughout my life, and I thought especially of all the prayers others have offered for me. Of course, this side of Heaven I have no idea of knowing all these prayers, yet I've been told by so many people, "Father, I pray for you every night," "Father, you're on my daily list of prayers," "Father, I know how badly you and all the priests need prayers. I'm always praying for you," etc. Every time someone says something like this to me I simply say, "Thank you, I really need those prayers." So I look forward to my entrance into Heaven when all things will be made clear, and at that time it will be evident to me how significant the prayers of so many others were in my life, in giving me the strength to persevere in my vocation as a priest... The power of prayer! It's overwhelming to think of.

Recently (11/29), as some of you know, my family laid to rest my great aunt, Dolores (Dolly/Doll) Roberts, who would have been 98 at the end of this month. Like so many others, my family is less than perfect. I'm sad to say that my grandmother was not someone who was a part of my life, but to fill the void, her sister, my Aunt Dolly, took the place of a grandmother in the lives of myself and my siblings. Aunt Doll was present at all the major events of my life and was a significant figure in my family. Although she was just shy of 90 at the time, she traveled all the way to Maryland in 2014 to visit me in the seminary in my final year before being ordained a priest. She even bought my first vestments for me when I was ordained at the end of that school year!

On the topic of intercessory prayer, though, what I'd like to share is that when I was a very small child, 2 or 3 years old, unbeknownst to me, my Aunt Dolly told my mom, "Joey (what my family called me at the time) is going to be a priest." As I got older my Aunt Dolly continued to tell my mom, "Joe is going to be a priest." By the time I was in high school, 16, 17, 18 year old, I was very far from the Catholic Church, yet my Aunt Dolly persisted in telling my mom in all

those years, "Joe is going to be a priest." I knew nothing of this until several years later. After encountering our faith in a profound manner when I was in college I decided to enter the seminary in 2009 to further discern the vocation to the priesthood. It was some years after that in which my mom finally told me Aunt Doll had been telling her my entire life I was going to be a priest. I had no idea, and for many years there was nothing within me that resembled someone who would one day be a priest

As I approached my ordination to the priesthood in May 2015 I marveled at the insight of my Aunt Dolly, but even more so at the power of her prayer. She had clearly prayed for me my entire life. Since my ordination I have often wondered, "How did Aunt Doll know I would be a priest?" My only answer is that she didn't actually know, but she had prayed for me for so long. I think she wanted a priest in her family, and God answered her prayer.

I think back to what I was told at the visitation I attended two weeks ago: "Your prayers are felt." It's a great mystery how our prayers have power in the lives of others, yet we know they do. Jesus has told us to ask, to seek, to never hesitate in knocking on his door. We know He doesn't always answer our prayers according to our desires, but sometimes He does! And in those occasions in which He answers our prayers according to our desires, we are left speechless, grateful we have a God who loves us so much, who cares about us so much that He listens to our prayers.

As we creep toward Christmas in this Year of Our Lord 2023, one recommendation I offer you is to simply think about your deepest desires. What do you want from God more than anything else? Offer Him those prayers every day, and don't give up, even when it seems hopeless. I think our faithfulness when it seems most hopeless is sometimes what most inspires God to act on our behalf. Of course He's not going to answer the prayers of all those who are reading these words according to each of our desires, but He may just answer the prayers of one person, and that may be enough for the world to be changed, as the prayers of my Aunt Dolly were answered and now we have one more priest in our Church.

The gentlemen at the visitation I recently attended said to me, "Your prayers are felt." Our prayers are never wasted, and it is by the prayers we offer for one another that our faith is made strong and our community is built. In this Advent and Christmas season I pray for each one of you, that Jesus will enter your life, as He entered our world at Bethlehem, and may He make you the saints He wants you to be. Amen.

Fr. Joe



ENCOUNTERING THE EUCHARIST

Eucharistic Congress: July 17-21, 2024 at Lucas Oil Stadium Indianapolis
<https://www.eucharisticcongress.org>

Day Passes will be available in January and there may be day travel arrangements from the Diocese - stay tuned for further information on travel/housing/events.

Daily Theme:

Day 1: From the Four Corners
Day 2: The Greatest Love Story
Day 3: Into Gethsemane
Day 4: This Is My Body
Day 5: To the Ends of the Earth

Speakers:

Bishop Robert Barron
Sr. Miriam James Heidland
Fr. Mike Schmitz
Gloria Purvis
Bishop Andrew Cozzens and many more

EWTN and Relevant Radio will be there

If you have any questions, please contact our Parish Representatives of the Eucharistic Revival, Deb Bromberk (815-844-6149 or auntiedeb@frontier.com) or Dcn. Ray White (815-674-5520 or deacon.ray@stmaryspontiac.org)



St. Mary's Church uses Flocknote to keep our parishioners informed of special Masses and events and any changes or cancellations that may occur. If you do not receive texts or emails from us, there are two ways to sign up. Text the word PONTIAC to 84576 OR click the Flocknote link at the bottom of the homepage of our website: church.stmaryspontiac.org

ST. MARY'S PARISH
SEPTEMBER 2023



*"They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which he has given you."
~ Deuteronomy 16:16-17*

WE THANK YOU

We continue to be truly humbled by the generosity of our parishioners. We invite you to support our church and school to the best of your ability, sharing the gifts that God has given you. Every contribution is greatly appreciated. Prayerfully consider the impact you can have.

A QUARTERLY UPDATE ON OUR FINANCIAL JOURNEY

	Previous Fiscal Year July 1 - Sept. 30, 2022	Current Fiscal Year July 1 - Sept. 30, 2023
REVENUES	\$477,469.15	\$471,647.74
EXPENSES	\$424,189.98	\$398,796.18
GAIN/(LOSS)	\$53,279.17	\$72,851.56

- Report covers both Church and School Operations

While income was down slightly compared to the same time last year, our expenses were also down quite a bit giving us a healthy bottom line to start the fiscal year.

We continue to rely on your prayers and generosity to provide what we need to run our operations, and we work hard to be good stewards with the gifts we have been given. We kindly ask everyone to use your weekly envelopes or use Online Giving through our website: www.stmaryspontiac.org. Memorials and Planned Giving are also great ways to support our parish. Every contribution is greatly appreciated.



2024-2025 REGISTRATION



Kindergarten and PreK4 registration for new families begins January 10, 2024.

We are...

- combining Catholic faith and teachings with academic excellence.
- providing a safe and welcoming environment for all students.
- partnering with parents in the faith formation of their children.
- setting high standards for student achievement.
- preparing students to be productive citizens and future leaders.
- instilling the value of service to others in our students.

ST. MARY'S SCHOOL

Why choose us?

- Full, state private school recognition
- Certified teachers
- Scholarships available
- PK - 8 building, one class of each
- Eureka math curriculum, which has been the most successful amongst Diocesan schools
- Music, Art, PE, and Computers
- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program
- Teacher-Student Ratio 1:14
- Flexible tuition payment plans

LITTLE DISCIPLES PRESCHOOL

Why choose us?

- Full-day 8:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
- Combined 3 and 4-year old classroom*
- Certified teachers
- Structured and creative playtime
- Music, Art, PE, and technology
- Minimum one hour daily rest time
- Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program
- Teacher-Student Ratio 1:10
- Flexible tuition payment plans

*Age as of September 1.

CONTACT US TODAY:

St. Mary's School
(815) 844-6585
school.stmaryspontiac.org

**St. Mary's School
Annual Fund Drive
is underway and we've
already raised more
than \$25,000!**

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

**Please help us reach
our \$36,000 goal!**
school.stmaryspontiac.org

From the Principal's Desk



Merry Christmas! As we get closer to Christmas, it is easy to get caught up in the stress of the holiday, shopping, wrapping gifts, baking cookies, the list goes on and on. However, we should focus on what is really important. We are awaiting the birth of Jesus! This is what we should be preparing for! In all of the busy-ness of our lives, how many times have we stopped and thought about Advent or what Mary and Joseph were going through?



Mrs. Karen Jones

Here at school, we kicked off Advent with an Atrium event where children and parents could learn about "Purple is for Preparation". We also had our Nativity Walk. What a beautiful sight to see so many different nativities and learn the stories behind them. Students are also learning about the significance of the Jesse Tree. The Jesse tree helps us connect the custom of decorating Christmas trees to the events leading to Jesus' birth. The Jesse tree is named from Isaiah 11:1: "A shoot shall come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Jesse was the father of King David. We adorn a Jesse tree with illustrated ornaments that represent the people, prophesies, and events leading up to the birth of Jesus. The ornaments of the Jesse tree tell the story of God in the Old Testament, connecting the Advent season with the faithfulness of God across four thousand years of history. (Loyola Press)

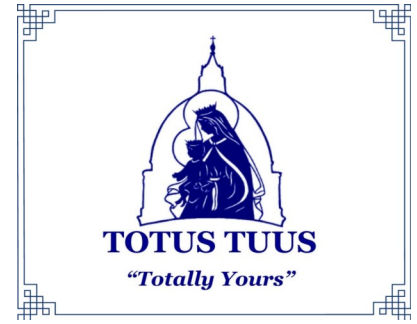
No matter when you celebrate Christmas with your family, I hope it is full of love and laughter.

I pray that you and your family will have a very Merry Christmas. Many blessings to each of you in the new year.

I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13



MONTHLY Holy Hour for VOCATIONS



St. Mary's is looking for a coordinator for the Totus Tuus program for summer 2024. The coordinator handles communication and registrations and makes sure the team has all the supplies they need for the program. You would also organize lodging and food for the team for the week. Our previous coordinator will be available to help get you started. If interested, please talk to Fr. Joe.

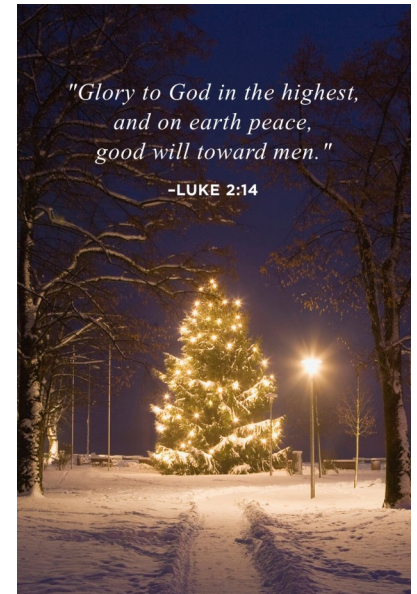
Back in early November, when we had our Holy Hour with the Diocesan Traveling Monstrance, Fr. Joe shared his wish to have a monthly Holy Hour to specifically pray for Vocations within our church and community. Father has done this at a number of his other parishes.

Beginning in 2024, we will have a monthly Holy Hour at 6:30pm in the church, some on Tuesdays, some on Thursdays. The Holy Hour will include time for quiet prayer in front of the Blessed Sacrament, group prayers for Vocations, and will conclude with Benediction.

Dates for the Holy Hours will be:

January 16	February 22	March 21
April 18	May 14	June 18

Our diocese and our world need many good, holy priests and consecrated men and women, in addition to faithful marriages, to continue God's mission on this earth. Please join us to pray for all vocations.



St. Mary's will host Life Line Screenings on Wednesday, January 3rd at St. Mary's Parish Hall. Have you ever thought about the following?

- I want to see my grandchildren grow up.
- I want to continue living independently.
- I don't want to be a burden on my family.

Preventive screenings can help and we have partnered with Life Line Screening to provide these valuable screenings.

The mission of Life Line Screening is to provide advance, yet affordable and convenient health screenings that supplement your traditional healthcare.

They can help make you aware of a previously silent, unrecognized problem that can now get treated at an early stage, or confirm that you are on the right path and should continue your healthy habits.

Don't let heart disease and stroke get in your way of the life you love. These 4 vital screenings take 60-90 minutes to complete. Register by calling toll free 1-844-591-7160, text the word "circle" to 216-279-1607 or online at <https://llsa.social/HC>

PRAY FOR OUR PARISH FAMILIES THIS YEAR

We ask everyone to pray for specific church and school families each week-day. Please remember these families in your prayers each day for them to grow in their faith this year. Thank you.



Mon Dec 18	Mark & Kelli Trainor Family Isaac & Cameron Mackinson Family	Fri Jan 19	Rita Wakey Family Mary Helen McCorvie Family
Tues Dec 19	Mary Lou Tronc Family Palmer, Callum & Eva Masching Family	Mon Jan 22	Chuck & Lisa Vitzthum Family Marcia Hill Family
Wed Dec 20	John Trainor Family Beckett Legner Family	Tues Jan 23	Dcn. Jim & Laura Wallace Family Dianne Hanley Family
Thurs Dec 21	Pat & Vicki Trainor Family Briggs Yantis Family	Wed Jan 24	Sarah Walters Family John Mackinson Family
Fri Dec 22	Albert & Anne Trost Family Bryson Hall Family	Thurs Jan 25	Judy Weber Family Margaret Legner Family
Mon Dec 25	Joseph & Lindsey Trainor Family Smith & Stella Doran Family	Fri Jan 26	Rita Washko Family Judy Donze Family
Tues Dec 26	Steve & Sue Trainor Family Eli & Ava Faber Family	Mon Jan 29	Larry & Marla Weber Family Linda Rhodes Family
Wed Dec 27	Debra Trost Family Lydia & Owen Kelly Family	Tues Jan 30	Mike & Jean Ann Wenger Family Fr. Joe Baker Family
Thurs Dec 28	Zac & Stacie Travis Family Kevin & Jack MacZura Family	Wed Jan 31	Ron & Lynn Watson Family Fr. David Sabel Family
Fri Dec 29	Joyce Trunk Family Sara Murphy Family	Thurs Feb 1	Ed & Karen Doughan Family Adam Lawrence Family
Mon Jan 1	Mike Vallow Family Gemma Bagnell Family	Fri Feb 2	Leo & Rita Weller Family Carol Hepner Family
Tues Jan 2	Don Verdun Family Marcos Borrego Family	Mon Feb 5	Kristine Wertz Family Karen Jones Family
Wed Jan 3	Nick Vogt Family Angelene Wertz Family	Tues Feb 6	Marissa Weaver Family Heidi Legner Family
Thurs Jan 4	John Vanek Family Ben Ehr Gott Family	Wed Feb 7	Gary & Val Wellman Family Carol Duffy Family
Fri Jan 5	Don & Susan Verdun Family Leo Kapper Family	Thurs Feb 8	Betty Weber Family Ellen Yedinak Family
Mon Jan 8	Carole Voigts Family Taelynn Limberg Family	Fri Feb 9	Erika Wells Family Amanda Lauritsen Family
Tues Jan 9	Mike VanSickle Family Ava & Emma Lind Family	Mon Feb 12	Lance & Lendy Aranas Family Ashley Folkerts Family
Wed Jan 10	Nancy Verdun Family Kloey Wagner Family	Tues Feb 13	Bob & Debi Wesselhoff Family Denise Plenert Family
Thurs Jan 11	Mary Beth Voigts Family Leleu Thurston Family	Wed Feb 14	Greg Weber Family Jordi Cavanagh Family
Fri Jan 12	Mark & Sharon Vaughn Family Talon Simmons Family	Thurs Feb 15	Diane Welshans Family Tory Farney Family
Mon Jan 15	Jack Vietti Family Avery Van Waes Family	Fri Feb 16	Ted Whittle Family Mick Peterson Family
Tues Jan 16	Dean & Karen Wahls Family Marilyn Hoke Family		
Wed Jan 17	Kenneth & Cecilia Velez Family Rita Mackinson Family		
Thurs Jan 18	Bill & Debra Vietti Family Val Wellman Family		



THE PARISH DIRECTORIES ARE HERE!!

*If you had your picture taken, you can pick up
your free directory at the parish office,
Monday-Thursday 9am to 4pm, Friday 9am to noon.
Extra copies are available to purchase for \$20 each.*

From The Back Page

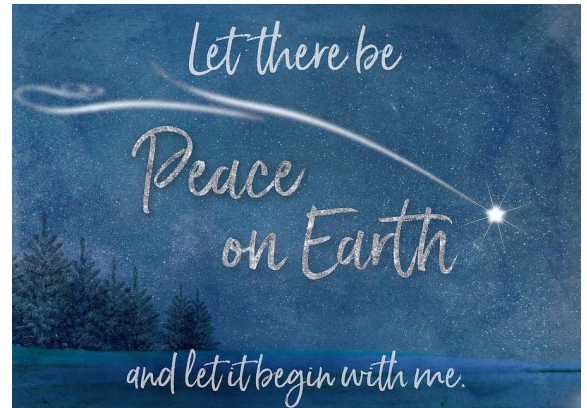
by Margo Law

As we enjoy the warmth and joys of being with family and friends during the holidays, I wonder what concrete things—tangible things—we can do to promote peace on Earth. Here are a few thoughts which I hope will ignite your own ideas and spur you on to action for we are clearly in great need of peace.

1. Decrease unnecessary noise.
2. Use acquired silence to listen for Jesus' voice.
3. Talk with Jesus. Share with Him those things that upset you and discourage you. Hand them over to Jesus and let Him take care of everything.
4. Look carefully at what may be disturbing your conscience and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, for to be reconciled with God is a great peace for you and those around you.
5. Give a full day for the Holy Spirit to design and manage.
6. Open Holy Scripture, especially the New Testament, and listen for a word or two that touches your heart. Then let it enter your heart and rest there.
7. Pray for world peace often and with confidence.

A final thought: During Christmas and New Year's, let's see each other as gifts given specifically to each of us from God our Father. He has graciously and purposely placed the people in our lives to enjoy, to learn from, to teach, and to help "make us saints." As you welcome them with hugs and send them off with smiles and waves, be sure to pray for their peace.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus be with you, yours, and our world that hungers for Him and His love. Merry Christmas and have a joy-filled New Year!



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