

Messenger

St. Mary of the Assumption
Roman Catholic Church

Winter 2017
Vol. 8 No. 4

From the Pastor ... The Ongoing Question

The question of God's existence has been raised by many throughout the centuries. The growing tension between religion and science, between faith and fact, between firm believers in the Divine and convinced Skeptics, invites various old and new responses to certain abiding human questions, such as "Where did we come from?" and "Where are we going?"

For instance, has science discovered the true origins of the human experience, as suggested in the recent novel *Origins* by Dan Brown, or is the Hebrew Psalmist and Wisdom teacher correct in attributing creation as the work of a masterful divine artist?

As much as we would like everything to be clearly explained with scientifically-proven evidence, the answers we seek may only be found through faith. Perhaps it is not an issue of either-or, but of both-and. Religion and science are two different and distinct realms. A faith-based science is as much a contradiction as scientific religion. Faith cannot give scientific answers, and science cannot give religious answers. By its very definition, faith – to believe – is something that you cannot scientifically prove. It is based on trust. Religious beliefs must be trusted, not proven.

It is important to learn from the discoveries of science and the great benefits that come from them. God, however, remains the stuff we can't comprehend. We are invited "to seek the Lord" and "forsake our ways and thoughts for loftier ones." Since thinking *like* God may be impossible, we might consider thinking *with* God as something we can learn to do. Creation is a place for all to live in and enjoy. A balanced appreciation of the insights of human understanding and faith's trust may lead us together into the Mystery ... the Source ... the Question ... and Who truly is important to know and love.



- Fr. Paul

From the St. Mary's Photo Album ...



It's been a busy year at St. Mary's, with autumn events including the parish's annual Pet Blessing to celebrate the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Mary's Elementary School students supporting the City Mission, and the Junior Ladies of Charity and St. Vincent de Paul Society collaborating on their fall clothing and household goods drive.

Thank you for your continued support of parish ministries and programs! A Blessed Christmas and Happy New Year to you and your loved ones!



Advent & Christmas at St. Mary's

Advent Communal Penance Service

At St. Mary's

Monday, December 18
3 p.m. & 7 p.m.
Church

Christmas Eve Masses

Sunday, December 24

4 p.m. (Church), 4 p.m. (School),
6 p.m. (Church), Midnight (Church)

Christmas Day Masses

Monday, December 25

8 a.m., 10 a.m. & Noon (Church)

New Year's Eve Mass

Sunday, December 31

4:30 p.m. (Church)

New Year's Day Masses

Monday, January 1

8 a.m. & Noon

Angel Mass

In Remembrance of Deceased Loved
Ones Named on the
Tree of Remembrance
Monday, January 8
12 Noon (Church)



Joy to the World!

St. Mary's Elementary School will present *Joy to the World! A Living Nativity Christmas Celebration* on Saturday, December 16 at 7 p.m. The Living Nativity will follow the SME Christmas Concert, which begins at 6 p.m.

Students will be singing and acting with a backdrop of the manger, including live animals. *Joy to the World* takes place in the school gym. Please plan to join fellow parishioners and guests for this special holiday event!

Christmas Wafers Available

Oplatek (Christmas wafers), are available at Church entrances for \$1 during December.

These unleavened wafers are used as reminders of the Body of Christ. Family members and friends break off small pieces and give them to one another, along with a blessing. This tradition is a symbol of forgiveness and is meant to remind participants of the importance of Christmas, God and family.



Parishioners Bound for Nicaragua

2018 will mark the year of a momentous experience for a group of St. Mary's parishioners, as they embark on a mission trip to Nicaragua from February 13 to 23. They will be hosted by Ann Marie Zon, who comes to Western New York each summer to conduct mission appeals and pack numerous trailers with items that are shipped to Nicaragua weekly.



During their trip, parishioners will see first-hand the water projects, farms, housing, schools, orphanages, clinics, and daily life of the people of Nicaragua. It's hard to imagine everyday life without refrigerators, freezers, TVs, phones and other items we often take for granted. Please pray for our mission team as they take this journey and discover which gifts they can share - and how they can help.

Volunteer Brunch Set for January 7

Anyone who has volunteered at St. Mary's Parish during the past year is invited to the Volunteer Brunch on Sunday, January 7, 2018 from 1 to 3 p.m. in the Parish Center. The brunch coincides with the celebration of the Epiphany.

This is our annual opportunity to thank the hundreds of volunteers whose dedicated service has helped advance our parish and the Gospel message within our community. Please RSVP by calling the Rectory at (716) 683-6445 if you plan to attend. **See you there!**

St. Mary's of Lancaster

3rd ANNUAL

MEGA RAFFLE

\$25,000

Grand Prize

LIVE DRAWING ON FRIDAY, JUNE 1, 2018

Doors open at 6:30PM, Grand prize drawing at 9:00PM



Ticket includes admission for 2 (aged 21+) and 2 drinks.
Pizza, soda and water provided.
Additional beer and wine will be available for purchase.
No outside beverages allowed.

**** ONLY 650 TICKETS SOLD ** 450 MUST BE SOLD BEFORE 5-31-18 or REFUNDS WILL BE ISSUED ****

TEN PRIZES AWARDED:

\$25,000 Grand Prize

1 - \$1,000 PRIZE ** 2 - \$500 PRIZES ** 2 - \$250 PRIZES ** 4 - \$150 PRIZES

Your Chances to WIN A PRIZE: 10 in 650!

CALL 253-7880 FOR MORE INFORMATION

Annual Before Cana Program Scheduled for March 3

Once a year, St. Mary's hosts a day-long Before Cana program for couples preparing for marriage in the Catholic Church. Our 2018 program will take place on Saturday, March 3 from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the Parish Center - concluding with 4:30 p.m. Mass in Church.

Before Cana is a Buffalo diocesan requirement prior to being married in the Church. Through this guided encounter, engaged couples spend time alone, as well as in larger groups, focusing on such topics as the meaning of marriage as a sacrament, communication, commitment and fidelity, and sexuality in marriage. Before Cana was established at the parish level so that engaged couples could meet fellow parishioners as they fostered their faith experience.

For more information, please contact Deacon John Owczarczak at (716) 683-3269 or johno@stmarysonthehill.org.

Welcome New Parishioners

A warm welcome to these new parishioners who registered at St. Mary's between August and October 2017:

Darren & Jennifer Blahowicz & Family

Nicole Cammarata & Family

Nancy Chinski & Family

Zackary DeMaio

Wanda DiCenzo

Patrick & Jennifer Dressel & Family

Jeffrey & Marie Fehr & Family

John & Rosalie Jerackas

Stephanie Karaszewski

Teresa Karnyski

Eric & Jennifer Krajewski & Family

Robert & Jenny Mecca & Family

David & Traci Roll

Ryan & Jennifer Smith & Family

Do Your Holiday Shopping With SCRIP & Amazon Smile

As you make your Christmas gift list and check it twice ... please consider purchasing SCRIP or shopping through Amazon Smile, to benefit St. Mary's.

SCRIP enables you to purchase cards from local and national vendors, for your own use or as gifts. A percentage of every purchase comes back to the parish. There are no added fees. A wide variety of stores, restaurants and other vendors take part in the SCRIP program.



You can order SCRIP and track your rebates online, as well as check your account activity, cre-

ate a personalized favorites list, and reload SCRIP cards that you already own.

SCRIP may be purchased at the Rectory on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; at St. Mary's Elementary School on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 8 to 10 a.m., and after most Masses, near the main entrance to Church. While some SCRIP cards are kept on hand, doz-

ens of others can be ordered and picked up within a week. Locked boxes are located at the Church and at St. Mary's Elementary for ordering purposes.

For more information, please call (716) 683-2112, ext. 312 or email SCRIP@smeschool.com.

If you shop Amazon Smile at <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/16-0764775>, Amazon will donate 0.5 percent of eligible purchases to St. Mary's. Amazon Smile is the same Amazon or Amazon Prime that you already know: the same products, prices and services.

Millions of products on Amazon Smile are eligible. You will see these products marked "Eligible for Amazon Smile donation" on their product detail pages. Amazon will remember your initial selection of St. Mary's as an organization to support, and then every eligible purchase you make will result in a donation.

More information on both SCRIP and Amazon Smile is available at www.stmarysonthehill.com.



"The Word, Who found a dwelling in Mary's womb, comes to knock on the heart of every person with singular intensity this Christmas."

- St. John Paul II

Improvements Continue at St. Mary's Cemetery



It's not easy to become an Eagle Scout. In fact, only about 5 percent of Boy Scouts reach this ranking.

St. Mary's parishioner Matt Dobiesz is among this elite group - and as his Eagle Scout project this past summer, he worked with St. Mary's Cemetery Director Danny Rinow to redo landscaping and replace concrete border blocks around the cemetery mausoleum. This involved planning new landscape layouts and

organizing teams to weed, remove old plantings, and complete concrete work.

This represents the latest in improvements at St. Mary's Cemetery, including the recent installation of 160 new mausoleum niches. The niches offer a cost-effective alternative to in-ground burial, and benefit the environment as they save on ground use. Each niche holds two cremated remains. While many have already been sold, a limited number are still available. If you are interested in purchasing a niche, you have the option of making a 10 percent down payment and then paying your remaining balance in monthly installments.

St. Mary's Cemetery could use your time, talent and expertise in keeping its historic legacy alive. The cemetery has served the parish and the Lancaster community since the 1830s. From ongoing gardening and maintenance to historical research, volunteer assistance is needed.

For more information, contact Danny Rinow at (716) 683-6445, extension 34, or dannyr@stmarysonthehill.org.



"A Heart for God"

St. Mary's To Host 2018 Lenten Program

St. Mary's will host a Lenten retreat program in February 2018, in collaboration with three other area parishes: Our Lady of Pompeii, St. Martha and Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta.



A Heart for God will take place Monday, February 26 and Wednesday, February 28 from 7 to 8:15 p.m. in Church. Presenting the program will be Michelle Castelli of the Rochester Diocese. The author of a book entitled *A Heart for God*, her ministry work includes spiritual direction, adult and youth faith formation, and Bible study. In her role as a pastoral associate and mental health counselor, Michelle has been able

to share her journey with the Lord with many people in a gentle, wise and compassionate way.

Monday evening's program will be entitled *Love Received* and Wednesday evening's program will be entitled *Love Returned*. Mark your calendar and watch for more information!

Coats for Kids Is Ongoing

The St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Mary's is collecting Coats for Kids throughout the holiday season and on into the New Year. Rather than placing a limited time frame on donations, they may be made at any time.

Please label items (which may include mittens, hats and scarves, as well as children's outerwear) "Coats for Kids" and leave them in the SVDP drop boxes in the Church parking lot. Thank you for your help in spreading warmth and comfort where it's needed most!

St. José Luis Sánchez del Rio: A Martyr at 14

by Barbara Owczarczak, Pastoral Minister

José Luis Sánchez del Rio was born on March 28, 1913 to Marcario Sánchez and Maria del Rio, devout Catholics who were cattle ranchers in Sahuayo, Michoacán de Ocampo, Mexico. He went to school in his home town, and later in Guadalajara, Jalisco.

The Cristero war broke out in 1926, when the Mexican government began attacking the Catholic Church throughout the country, following anti-clerical laws written into the Mexican Constitution. President Plutarco Elias Calles focused the persecution on the Roman Catholic Church, which led to the seizure of Church property, the closing of religious schools and convents, and the exile or execution of priests.

This tyrannical Marxist government sought to eliminate the Catholic Church and the organizations affiliated with it, and to suppress religious celebrations in local communities. A massive rural uprising was tacitly supported by Church hierarchy and aided by urban Catholic support. José's older brothers joined the rebellion, but his mother refused to allow the 12-year old to take part.

The region where José lived was a stronghold of the Cristeros, however, and a year later, his parents relented. But, the local general did not. So José traveled 20 miles away to the next town, Cotija, where he presented himself to the Cristero commander, Prudencio Mendoza. When asked what a boy so small

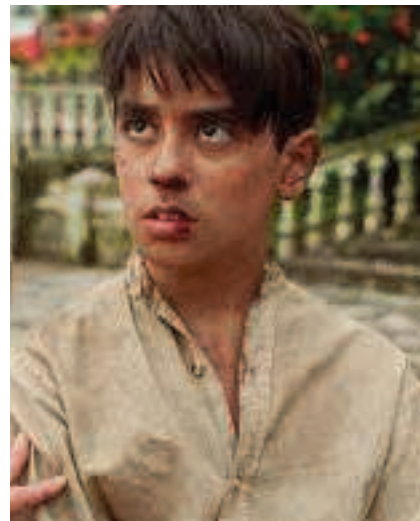
could add to the effort, he responded, "I ride well. I know how to tend horses, clean weapons and spurs, and cook and fry beans."

Mendoza was inspired by the boy's resolution, and placed him under local commander General Rubén Guízar Morfin. From the beginning, José showed himself ready and willing to serve, earning the respect and admiration of his fellow Cristeros. Impressed by José's religious fervor and intrepid spirit, Morfin made him the troop's bugler and flag bearer.

On February 5, 1928, the Cristeros engaged in a fierce battle with federal forces. The Cristeros were outnumbered 10 to 1, and ran out of ammunition for their rifles. They were in retreat when the general's horse was shot dead. Seeing this, José jumped from his own mount and offered it to his chief, with these words, "My general, here is my horse. Save yourself. If they kill me, I am not needed, but you are."

Shortly thereafter, José was captured along with other Cristeros, including a friend Lazarus, a few years older than he. Normally, the federal soldiers shot all the Cristeros they captured alive, or hung them from trees in the square or on telegraph poles. But, this was not the fate of José and Lazarus. Because of their youth, their captors hoped to frighten and intimidate the boys into abandoning the Cristero fight. They took the boys and marched them to Cotija, their hands tied behind them. Along the way, the soldiers

insulted and hit them, saying, "Let's see what kind of men you are."



Once in Cotija, Federal General Guerrero threatened the boys with a firing squad, hoping to force them to renounce their faith. He then put them in prison, in the sacristy of a local church. José sent his mother an emotional letter, telling her he had accepted that he would die rather than renounce his faith. He continued to pray his Rosary, his faith unbroken, even when forced to witness the hanging of Lazarus.

On February 10, 1928, when the government saw it could not break his resolve, they cut the soles off his feet and forced José to walk around town to the cemetery. Along the way, José was cut with a machete until he was bleeding from several wounds. He cried and moaned with pain, but did not give in. At times they stopped him and said, "If you shout, 'Death to Christ the King!' we will spare your life."

José shouted, "I (cont'd on p. 7)

Faith Formation Update

The following is an update on some of our current Faith Formation developments at St. Mary's:

- **Moving Faith Beyond the Classroom:** The Diocese of Buffalo recently adopted a new religion curriculum for parishes and schools. St. Mary's is in the process of implementing this curriculum, which calls for moving faith beyond the classroom. This is being done in various ways. Each week, children are asked to have a discussion at home about religion, usually based on the Gospel. For instance, when the Gospel addressed the Great Commandment, they were encouraged to name someone they found hard to love, and then practice that love during the week. When Confirmation was celebrated at St. Mary's in November, youngsters asked their parents about their Confirmation, including the name and sponsor that they chose.

- **Celebrating Sunday for Catholic Families:** Using a book with

St. José Luis Sánchez del Rio (cont'd from p. 6)

will never give in! Viva Cristo Rey!
Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe!"

When they reached the place of execution, his captors stabbed José numerous times with bayonets. Moments before his death, the boy drew a cross in the dirt and kissed it. The commander was so furious that he pulled out his pistol and shot José. A martyr at age 14, José was canonized October 16, 2016.

this title, Family Faith Formation participants are offered a reflection on each weekend's readings, as well as suggestions for how to live the Word during the coming week. A question for discussion in the car on the way to Mass, and a second one for the way home, are included.

- **High School Students to Participate in Youth Convention:** High School Faith Formation students will participate in the Buffalo Diocesan Youth Convention during the weekend of March 2-4, 2018. Parishioners are asked to sponsor a student for the convention. This \$75 gift will provide what could turn out to be a life-changing experience for a young Christian. Please send checks to the Rectory, and note that they are for this purpose. Checks may be made payable to St. Mary's or to the Buffalo Diocese.

- **Liturgy of the Word for Children:** This summer, Liturgy of the Word for Children took place during the Sunday 10 a.m. Mass. Children processed from Church to the Pavilion, following the opening prayer. In the Pavilion, two readings were proclaimed and the children were asked to describe what they had heard. Each conversation ended with practical applications of the Word for the following week. The children then prayed the Creed together and offered their spontaneous petitions, before returning to Church for the remainder of Mass.

For more information, please visit our parish website at www.st-marysonthehill.com.

Confirmation Celebrated at St. Mary's

Congratulations to the following students, who received the Sacrament of Confirmation at St. Mary's on All Saints Day, November 1:

Samuel Auria
Vincent Barile
Derek Bauer
Evan Benz
Gabriella Berardi
Nicholas Dowling
Alexander Duman
Conor Dunne
Sarah Filion
Brandon Goodwin
Korissa Gozdziaik
Ashlyn Guarasci
Logan Hudson
Christian Kowalski
Jordan Kryszczuk
Anthony LaRosa
Santo Lima
Anna Lucci
Michael McCombs
John Meyer
Parker Myers
Brady O'Brien
Brady Owczarczak
Brianna Propis
Nicholas Sugg
Jonathan Surdej
Matthew Vallone
Julia Vanaskie
Tara Wanat
Aline Weber
Michael Wolford
Jayden Zajac



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Rev. Paul W. Steller, Pastor
Rev. Msgr. W. Jerome Sullivan, Weekend Associate
Dr. David Jerome, Permanent Deacon
John Owczarczak, Permanent Deacon

Diane Zwirecki, APR, Editor
Ray Milkowski, Sr., Photographer



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Use the QR code to download our free parish app.



St. Mary's Mass Schedule

Daily Masses:

8:30 a.m. Tuesday, Thursday (School Chapel)
12 Noon Monday, Wednesday, Friday (School Chapel)

*During the school year, there is also an 8:30 a.m. Mass on Fridays in the Church.
Please call the Rectory or visit the website for holy day information.*

Weekend Masses:

Saturday

4:30 p.m.
7 p.m.

Sunday

8 a.m.
10 a.m.
12 Noon

Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession):
Saturday 3:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.
*Appointments can be made for the Sacrament
by calling the Rectory at 683-6445.*