

# THE **CRITERION**

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*Rejoice!*  
*Our Savior is Born!*



MADONNA AND CHILD—A serene Mary and the baby Jesus are depicted in this 16th-century Italian Renaissance painting entitled "The Madonna of the Carnation." The

artist was Bernardino Luini (1480-1532). (CNS photo from National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Samuel H. Kress Collection)

## FROM THE EDITOR

## Here were some of the top stories of 1989

by John F. Fink

Another year is about ready to pass into history and it's time to list one man's opinions about the top religious stories of 1989, at the national, international and archdiocesan levels.

It was easy to select the top international story—all the things that have happened in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe this year, culminating with the visit of Mikhail Gorbachev to the Vatican to meet with Pope John Paul. This category includes the new governments in Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia along with the new religious freedoms that have been part and parcel of all this. This story has to be the top story not only of the year but of the decade.

The top national story also seemed easy—the abortion issue. This was the year the Supreme Court decided that states could put some restrictions on abortion-on-demand, thus arousing the new battleground and making state legislatures the new battleground. Meanwhile, Operation Rescue tactics added to the debate.

**WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH** there were three top stories, led by the March 8-11 meeting of 35 U.S. archbishops with Pope John Paul and top officials of the curia. This meeting was planned at a time when there seemed to be some friction between the U.S. hierarchy and the Holy See and it resulted in a much better climate of understanding and cooperation.

The second top intra-church story concerned theologians in the church: The Cologne declaration of German theologians that criticized the Vatican's exercise of authority sparked similar protests from other theologians; a judge found Catholic University within its rights in the



Father Curran case, and the U.S. bishops approved a document aimed at improving bishop-theologian relations.

Black Catholics provided a third big story in the church this year. Father George Stallings was suspended after announcing plans to form his own black Catholic church; the U.S. bishops approved a national black Catholic pastoral plan; and the Vatican issued a document on racism.

Catholic-Jewish relations were much in the news: the controversy over the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz; the Catholic leaders' support of the Palestinian intifada against Israeli occupation in the Holy Land; efforts made to try to improve relations between the two religions.

Other top stories included the murder of the six Jesuits in El Salvador, the civil war and assassination of the new president in Lebanon, the crushing of the pro-democracy movement in China, and the controversy over the bishops' statements on AIDS. It was a busy year.

**IT WAS ALSO A BUSY** year in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis. In addition to the normal hectic activities of archdiocesan agencies, I found these stories of more than usual importance:

The priests of the archdiocese considered 13 extensive proposals concerning pastor assignments and related matters, and Archbishop O'Meara ratified their revised proposals. These will have far-reaching effects when they take effect next year.

Parishes will also be affected by the decision to use parish life coordinators in parishes where there are no priests. This story and the continued development of lay ministers were important stories.

Related to this is Archbishop O'Meara's decision to accept the recommendation of the Council of Priests not to have permanent deacons in the archdiocese. That decision actually was made at the end of 1988, but it wasn't made public until Jan. 5, 1989, so it's included here.

Another event that happened at the end of 1988 but

wasn't reported until the first issue in 1989 was the response of women's groups in the archdiocese to the first draft of the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter on women's concerns. The response was overwhelmingly negative.

Something that was generally positive was the series of programs on Catholic-Jewish relations held at the Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation, a series that culminated in a sermon delivered by Archbishop O'Meara during a Friday evening Shabbat service. There were some testy moments during the series, though, as both Catholics and Jews talked frankly about disagreements.

The success of last December's first collection for retired religious was reported this year—\$410,893, the most successful collection in the history of the archdiocese. Then later in the year it was reported that the congregations with headquarters in Indiana that serve the archdiocese received \$574,592 from that collection.

Another big story this year was the progress made by the Urban Parish Cooperative to make sure the parishes that serve the center city of Indianapolis not only survive but thrive.

**PEOPLE MADE THE NEWS** this year, too. Archbishop O'Meara continued his important leadership of Catholic Relief Services and he was also intimately involved in the meeting of the pope with U.S. archbishops. It was big news when the archdiocese's vicar general, Msgr. Gerald A. Gettelinger, was appointed Bishop of Evansville.

Just the week before Bishop Gettelinger's appointment, it was announced that Joe Hornett was the archdiocese's new chief financial officer, replacing Msgr. Gettelinger in that position. Later Providence Sister Loretta Schafer made history when she became the first woman to be appointed chancellor for the archdiocese. At the same time, Father David Coats was named the new vicar general and Father Paul Koetter assistant chancellor.

It will be interesting to see what the new year will bring.

## Training for lay pastoral ministry developers begins

Holy Names Sister Louise Bond, ministry development consultant for the archdiocese, attended a Dec. 3-8 training session at the Institute for Pastoral Life (IPL) in Kansas City, Mo.

It was the first in a series of workshops that archdiocesan lay ministry developers

will be attending during the next two years. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is currently participating in the Diocesan Directors' Training Program of the IPL.

The Kansas City sessions offer workshops on Scripture, theology, spirituality,

skills and faith development, education, management and planning. The unique needs of the local church are addressed and plans are formed to respond to them.

Sister Louise said that she will use the resources of IPL to address the pastoral needs of rural parishes, to develop competencies for lay ministers, and to prepare both volunteers and professionals for pastoral service.

The IPL is a national institute for lay ministry which helps dioceses design and

implement plans for lay ministry development and training so that lay persons are prepared to serve parishes in pastoral and administrative work.

The institute also acts as a clearinghouse for models of lay ministry formation and as a network linking ministry directors, dioceses, and parish personnel.

The institute is funded primarily by the Catholic Church Extension Society. The society met in 1982 with a group of U.S. bishops to discuss the future needs of Catholics in home mission dioceses. The development of lay ministry surfaced as a priority and the institute was established as a response to this need.



**PLANNERS**—Catherine Jantsch Butel (from left), associate director of the Institute for Pastoral Life talks with ministry development consultant Holy Names Sister Louise Bond and Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara. (Photo by Margaret Nelson)

## New pro-life group organized

by Mary Ann Wyand

Members of Indiana Citizens for Life, a recently incorporated statewide pro-life organization, plan to begin the new decade with intensive lobbying efforts to promote respect for life.

"We will promote respect for the worth and dignity of all human life, including the life of the unborn child, from the moment of conception until natural death," Mary-Catherine Skripsky, legislative coordinator and office manager, said. "We will also promote, encourage, and sponsor such amendatory and statutory measures which provide protection for human life before and after birth."

With 20 statewide affiliations, Skripsky said Indiana Citizens for Life, Inc. will gather momentum as a new organization by working closely with those community-based right-to-life groups.

Six pro-life organizations within the Archdiocese of Indianapolis that have

affiliated with Indiana Citizens for Life are Right to Life of Indianapolis and pro-life groups in Vigo, Hancock, Lawrence, Perry, and Decatur counties.

As legislative coordinator, Skripsky noted, "We're very enthusiastic about the acceptance and endorsement of the Indiana Citizens for Life legislative agenda by many influential pro-life senators and representatives at the statehouse."

The newly incorporated pro-life group has established a state office at 429 N. Pennsylvania St. in Indianapolis. Their telephone number is 317-637-6186.

Kim Ledbetter, president of Right to Life of Indianapolis, told *The Criterion* that the Marion County group is "excited about working with Indiana Citizens for Life, and we're very excited about the number of county organizations that have affiliated in just six weeks of existence."

Looking ahead, Ledbetter emphasized, "We're also looking forward to a successful legislative session during 1990 and a strong statewide pro-life group in the future."

## Catholic Charities to be changed

by John F. Fink

Indianapolis Archdiocesan Catholic Charities will soon undergo a slight reorganization.

Dr. Robert Riegel has been appointed director of Catholic Charities and will relinquish his duties as director of Indianapolis Catholic Social Services (CSS). He has been serving as both secretary of Catholic Charities and director of CSS.

A search for a new director of CSS has been undertaken and that person will be announced early in 1990. Riegel will continue as CSS director until then.

Catholic Charities is the umbrella organization for the human services organizations in the archdiocese.

In making the announcement, Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara said that the change "is in recognition of the increasing commitment of the archdiocese to meet the human needs of our own members and the members of the community at large. Catholic Charities is now operating, at least at some level, in each of the 11 deaneries of the archdiocese. It has a great complexity of programs as well as a complexity of funding sources."

Parts of Catholic Charities now are funded by four different United Way organizations in the archdiocese, by fees and from archdiocesan funds.

The new director of CSS will report to Riegel, as will the directors of Catholic Charities or Catholic Social Services in the seven deaneries outside Marion County. Also reporting to Riegel, as they do now, are the directors of St. Mary's Child Center, St. Elizabeth, and the Campaign for Human Development.

CSS provides counseling and outreach services to families and children, the



Dr. Robert Riegel

aging, and those in need of emergency and special help in the four Indianapolis deaneries.

When it was announced that Riegel would be stepping down as director of CSS, he said that it had become increasingly apparent that he had two full-time jobs. He will now be able to concentrate on one.

He said that his goals for Catholic Charities will be to continue the development of Catholic Charities and Catholic Social Services in the deaneries, especially those not now adequately covered; to provide more contact with parishes and parish staffs; and to increase his relationships with outside human relations groups.

# Salvadoran delegation briefs pope, Jesuits

by Cindy Wooden

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—An eight-member delegation from the government of El Salvador briefed Pope John Paul II on the murder of six Jesuit priests and two of their employees.

The delegation, which had a private audience with the pope Dec. 15, was led by Col. Juan Antonio Martínez Varela, senior minister to Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani and member of a commission for dialogue with the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front.

The pope has condemned the murders as "barbaric" and has pleaded for an end to the civil war in El Salvador.

The delegation also met Dec. 14 with Jesuit Father Joseph Pittau, acting head of Jesuit headquarters while Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, Jesuit superior general, was traveling. Also at the meeting was Jesuit Father Alvaro Restrepo, Father Kolvenbach's assistant for Latin America.

Members of the delegation briefed the Jesuits on the investigation into the murders of the priests, said Jesuit Father Johannes Gerhartz, an official at the Jesuit headquarters.

The delegation also handed out copies of a reward poster that had been distributed in El Salvador. It promised \$250,000—in U.S. currency—for help in finding "the assassins of the Jesuit priests, their cook and daughter."

Father Restrepo told Catholic News

Service that he and Father Pittau mostly listened to the delegation, which was on an "information mission" to Italy, the Vatican and Spain. Five of the murdered Jesuits were naturalized Salvadoran citizens of Spanish birth.

"We clearly insisted that this investigation be carried out correctly," Father Restrepo said.

He said it was a positive sign that the Salvadoran government has asked for technical assistance in the investigation from the United States, Canada, Spain and England.

During a Dec. 15 press conference in Rome, Martínez Varela said the investigation is being conducted seriously because the government wants to restore faith in Cristiani's leadership and in El Salvador's justice system.

The recent events, he said, are obscuring the accomplishments and "tolerance" exhibited during Cristiani's first several months in office.

Martínez Varela said Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador was assassinated "in completely different circumstances" from that of the Jesuits. Since 1980, when Archbishop Romero was killed, there have been six popular elections in the country, he said.

He said the pope told the delegation that he was continually praying for peace in El Salvador.

The Salvadoran delegation included Julio Adolfo Rey Prendes, vice president of the legislative assembly; Rina Escalante de Rey Prendes, Salvadoran attorney general;

and Guillermo Paz Larín, El Salvador's ambassador to Italy.

Controversy erupted about the treatment of an eyewitness to the incident, Lucia Barrera de Cerna, who was taken under heavy security to the United States Nov. 23 and questioned by FBI and Salvadoran agents.

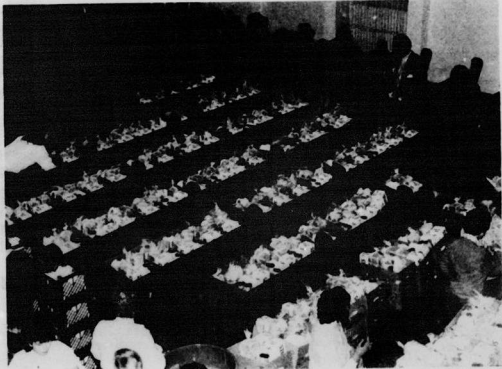
Archbishop Arturo Rivera Damas of San Salvador and Jesuit officials in the United States accused the FBI of intimidating Mrs. Cerna. The U.S. ambassador to El Salvador and President Bush denied the claims.

A Dec. 12 statement from the Jesuits' Central American province said Mrs. Cerna was being treated more like a suspect than a witness, that the methods of questioning were "abusive, unjust and unlawful," and that Mrs. Cerna would not have been subject to such an interrogation had she been a U.S. citizen.

The statement, released by Jesuit headquarters in Rome Dec. 15, said all the evidence suggested that members of the armed forces were responsible for the murders.

## No issue next week

In accordance with our usual practice, *The Criterion* will not be published next week, the Friday following Christmas. The next issue will be dated Jan. 5.



CHRISTMAS FOOD—The pews of Holy Cross once again contain food, as parishioners and others help more than 1,000 families to receive food at the site on the Tuesday before the holy day. (File photo by Margaret Nelson)

## ARCHDIOCESAN CATHOLIC CHARITIES

# Birthline practices what church preaches: that life is important

by Grace Hayes

It requires volunteers and donors; it communicates to all that the Catholic Church practices what it preaches; it says, "Life is important. Let's begin our care at the beginning." It's Birthline.

Presently sponsored through Indianapolis Catholic Social Services, Birthline was begun in 1974 in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis by Catholic Charities. It is often confused with Birthright, a similar program that originated in Canada.

The main purpose of Birthline is to provide direct counseling to women who are contemplating abortion to reflect on, not only the act of abortion, but also the alternatives that exist for the child and the mother.

Other services provided by Birthline are the provision of infant and maternity clothing and referrals to resources that address other needs and concerns expressed by those who contact Birthline.

The initial contact between the person seeking a solution to a problem and the volunteer is made by phone. The volunteers, each of whom must be willing to spend at least eight hours a month on call, receive the phone calls in their homes by way of a forwarding system. If the caller indicates that she is considering abortion, the volunteer counsels her at that time. There are no referrals made to another agency or person.

In many cases, this moment will be the only time the caller is gently challenged to know exactly what she is considering, to have someone talk with her about the alternatives to abortion, and the resources and positive possibilities that exist to help her.

If the caller is calling for reasons other than abortion, such as assistance in obtaining infant or maternity clothing, the volunteer obtains the necessary information and passes it on to another volunteer who handles clothing. This volunteer contacts the caller, discusses her needs,

and tells her when clothing and/or other articles can be picked up at the Catholic Center. Other material needs that are often requested are food (especially formula), cribs, carseats, playpens, highchairs and strollers. All of these items are available whenever they are donated.

Donations come to Birthline year-round. Many schools have specific times when the children give infant clothing to Birthline. Many parishes participate in the Birthline Clothing Drive sponsored by the Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women in January.

These donations allow material assistance to be given to approximately 350 persons annually. Most of them receive layettes that consist of a crib blanket, receiving blankets, sleeping gowns, undershirts, socks, sweater and cap, cloth diapers and bottles (if requested), and four outerwear outfits. The majority of the women who request clothing are referred to Birthline by clinics, social service agencies, and St. Vincent de Paul.

The counseling volunteers are usually scheduled every other week, although some are on duty every week. Those who prepare the layettes do so on a biweekly basis unless an emergency exists.

A key factor stressed during the volunteers' initial training is to let the callers know that they are concerned about them and their awareness of the realities of abortion and pre-natal development.

Three years ago an auxiliary for Birthline was formed. The Birthline Guild's main intent, at this time, is to raise funds for the cost of telephone directory advertising. Remaining funds are used for purchase of maternity clothes and infant items. Membership in the Guild involves annual dues of \$5 and support for the fund-raiser which will be a fashion show in the spring of 1990.

If you wish further information about Birthline or the Guild you can contact Grace Hayes at 317-226-1550.

## Bush, U.S. cardinals attend gala dinner for Catholic U. centennial

by Jerry Filteau

WASHINGTON (CNS)—President Bush, six U.S. cardinals, and some 1,300 guests attended a gala black-tie affair at the U.S. Pension Building, the final event in centennial observances of The Catholic University of America, Dec. 12.

In his talk, Bush vowed to "do everything we can to bring to justice" the killers of six prominent Jesuits in El Salvador.

Bush also called for protection in America of "the basic freedom—the right to life," a constitutional amendment to permit "voluntary social prayer" because "we need the faith of our fathers in the schools," and the right of parents to send their children "to the care centers of their choice," which "includes and must include" church-sponsored centers.

Bush's 20-minute appearance with his wife, Barbara, was the highlight of the \$1,008-a-plate "First American Cardinals Dinner," designed to raise money for Catholic University and honor the nation's cardinals.

Retired Cardinal John J. Krol of Philadelphia and all the active residential cardinals of the country—Cardinals Joseph L. Bernardin of Chicago, James A. Hickey

of Washington, Bernard F. Law of Boston, John J. O'Connor of New York and Edmund C. Szoka of Detroit—attended the dinner in full regalia, forming a bright red line to receive guests for a full hour before the meal began.

In a heavy snowfall outside, about 30 protesters, critical of church teachings on homosexuality, artificial birth control and abortion, carried signs with messages such as "Keep your rosaries off my ovaries" and shouted slogans criticizing the church and Cardinal O'Connor. The cardinal, who in November was elected chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, had been the target of a similar demonstration two days earlier that disrupted his celebration of Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York.

Catholic University's board of regents, an advisory group on development which sponsored the dinner, said proceeds from the event, about \$14 million, would be used to benefit the university's academic program.

Earlier the cardinals, led by Cardinal Hickey and joined by about 45 bishops and priests, consecrated a Mass closing the centenary with 400 people in attendance in the crypt church of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on the university campus.



SHARING TREE—St. Roch parishioners Mike and Diane Schloegl help their grandchildren, Natasha and Billy Bangel select tags for the needy from the Christmas Sharing Tree. This year, the parish, with help from non-parishioners, collected 2,600 gifts, which Santa's helpers delivered to St. Augustine Home, St. Elizabeth, Ronald McDonald House, DAMAR Home for the handicapped, the Southside Work Center and 33 families.



# Commentary

## THE BOTTOM LINE

### My brother's Christmas vocation: Tuna tins

by Antoinette Bosco

I was recently on the phone talking with my mother, who was so proud of my brother Joe. She had just seen a photo of him in an area newspaper with Matilda Cuomo, wife of the governor of New York.

The photo showed them at work, preparing to raise a lot of money for what they have come to call the annual Holiday Hunger Appeal. Last year Mrs. Cuomo, my brother and co-workers raised nearly \$50,000 in December for the



needy. This year they expect an even larger total.

"We'll make it, Ann," he told me, "if I have to end up on a street corner with a bell in one hand and a bag in the other."

The Christmas appeal is special, but it is only part of the job Joe has taken on. Five years ago he and the Regional Food Bank in the area around Albany, N.Y. discovered each other when someone at the food bank asked him to help get prizes for a raffle. He found out then that the food bank is a non-profit clearinghouse for surplus and donated food, which it redistributes to more than 300 programs feeding the hungry in east-central New York.

At that time Joe was very ill with a rare cancer called hairy cell leukemia. But a concern for feeding others was long ingrained in him from working in our

father's meat market as a youngster. Neither of us has forgotten what our late father taught us.

When people come into the store without much money, or with none at all, "I always give them something," he used to say. Our dad could not stand to see anyone hungry. He always remembered his youth when he knew the pain of an empty stomach, and he made it a daily commitment never to turn a hungry person away.

In spite of his illness, diagnosed as terminal, Joe began his fund-raising efforts for the food bank, volunteering more than 50 hours a month. Then a miracle happened. A drug called Interferon "cured" his leukemia and gave him a new lease on life.

With new vigor Joe got, as he put it, really serious about the food bank. Somehow he found the courage to go directly to the state legislature to request more funds, and he told the members the story of our dad. He asked them to make the same commitment.

To his credit, the legislature followed suit, responding by allocating \$400,000 to help the food bank move to a spacious warehouse in Latham, N.Y. My brother has not stopped working ever since to make this a thriving enterprise.

It is in the Christmas season that it becomes crystal clear that Joe's true vocation can be found in a warehouse of hamburger, tuna, tins and canned peaches. He knows these dollars given at Christmastime will stretch to help the needy long after the holidays are gone. "The hungry will still be here in August," he says.



For God so loved the world.

My brother's unique definition of the hungry has always stuck in my memory: "They are just people who have too much money left at the end of their money."

Because Joe has stretched out his hand to feed the hungry, others have noticed and joined him. One has been Mrs. Cuomo, a generous and lovely lady. And so, again in this sacred season, Matilda and Joe's "Merry Christmas" will ring out—its vibrations felt long after the holiday season ends.

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## TO TALK OF MANY THINGS

### How to request 'Christian Affirmation of Life'

by Dale Francis

The insidious movement towards acceptance of euthanasia in our society is rightly seen as a present evil. The concept that proposes that those with terminal illness should be assisted in ending their lives comes more easily in a society that, by accepting legalized abortion, has already established the principle that life is disposable.

But in recognizing the evil of euthanasia, Catholics should understand that it is not necessary that Catholics use every possible means to keep from death. Many years ago, Pope Pius XII noted that it was not necessary that extraordinary means be used to sustain life when possibility of recovery did not exist.

The Catholic Health Association of the United States, believing it important that



individuals make known in advance preferences for treatment during a terminal illness, has prepared a *Christian Affirmation of Faith*. It has been reviewed carefully and it represents a Catholic viewpoint. This is how it reads:

"Christians believe that in death life is transformed by the power of Christ's death and resurrection into eternal life. Because of this belief, it is not always necessary to use every possible means to resist death. Persons who are dying should be given whatever support they desire to alleviate pain and to prepare for death, but they have no obligation to endure medical interventions that unduly prolong their dying without offering them reasonable benefit.

"Persons who are terminally ill have the right and the primary responsibility to decide to what extent they will receive treatment. In order that they can exercise this responsibility, they should be fully advised of the diagnosis, the prognosis, the proposed treatment, other available options, and the risks and benefits of each course of action.

"When a person is unable to make decisions regarding treatment, others, usually the next of kin, will do so, but they must make these judgments in accordance with the person's legitimate wishes, if they are known. The *Christian Affirmation of Life* is provided as a means of indicating one's desires regarding treatment at the time of terminal illness. It is not intended as a legal document, but one of moral persuasion. However, it may have legal effect in some states, so the advice of an attorney is encouraged."

The *Christian Affirmation of Life* to which the statement refers is a direction for treatment, available in wallet size, that you sign and carry with you, addressed to your family, friends, pastor, physician. It reads:

"Because of my Christian belief in the dignity of the human person and my eternal destiny in God, I ask that if I become terminally ill I be fully informed of the fact so that I can prepare myself emotionally and spiritually to die.

"I have a right to make my own decisions concerning treatments that might unduly prolong the dying process. If I

become unable to make these decisions and have no reasonable expectation of recovery, then I request that no ethically extraordinary treatment be used to prolong my life but that my pain be alleviated if it becomes unbearable, even if this results in shortening my life. (Ethically extraordinary treatment is treatment that does not offer a reasonable hope of benefit to me or that cannot be accomplished without excessive expense, pain or other grave burden.) However, no treatment should be used with the intention of shortening my life.

"I request that my family, my friends and the Christian community join me in prayer as I prepare for death. I request that after my death others continue to pray for me so that I will, with God's grace, enjoy eternal life."

The Catholic Health Association has distributed more than a million copies of *The Christian Affirmation of Life* since 1973. You can get a wallet-size copy by sending a quarter with a self-addressed stamped envelope to The Catholic Health Association, 4455 Woodland Rd., St. Louis, Mo. 63134-0889.

## EVERYDAY FAITH

### Recapture the magic of childhood on Christmas

by Lou Jacquet

Have you ever noticed that nothing said about Christmas even begins to approach the magic of the day?

That's true on two levels. First, there's the unparalleled excitement and anticipation when loved ones exchange gifts. But above all there's the mystery: the deeper religious meaning of the events that changed our relationship with God forever.

Even if we weren't celebrating the birth of a Savior, a holiday like Christmas would have had to be invented. For children everywhere, it's the unquestioned highlight of the year. And as years go by and middle age approaches, memories of those childhood Christmases become ever more precious. Little else that we do as adults can match the wonder and the sheer joy we knew as small children coming down the stairs on Christmas morning.

But in childhood, we had little understanding of the feast, beyond the knowl-

edge that we were celebrating the Christ Child's birth. That fact faded into the background of a holiday that was simply more fun to celebrate than any other. The food, the visits from family members, the

adults playing with our toys—all made for a day that seemed to stretch beyond its allotted 24 hours through some magical expansion of time.

It's impossible for an adult to enjoy Christmas on that level, except perhaps vicariously through the eyes of our children. But we come to the feast with a different and deeper understanding. Those ancient shepherds, that crude stable, the Child who would change the world though he was born in the humblest of surroundings—we understand now how that one birth changed everything that would come thereafter.

Soon enough, that Infant would grow and prosper and one day call his followers to flesh out a way of living that was at once a burden and a joy. But for now, it is enough to know that this Child was the one solitary hope that humanity would ever have of making something better of life than a few short decades of struggle and sorrow, signifying nothing.

That birth still makes us grasp hopelessly for words. How can we respond to such a gift—the Incarnation of God, our very salvation? How can we possibly begin to fathom what this event means to us? If mere words are the measure of our understanding, we can't. But we can learn from our childhood memories and from the example

of our kids. We can be awestruck, delighted that something so incredible has happened to us as a pure gift from the Lord.

If we cannot recapture the magic of childhood on a Christmas morning, we can take heart: We have something more wondrous than even a child's delight. We have "born to us this day a Savior."



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# To the Editor

## We cannot choose whom to love

In the Dec. 8 issue a letter to the editor disagreed with the National Council of Catholic Bishops' policy that states that all human beings should have enough food, etc. The writer quoted a lone Bible passage. This points out the danger of taking one or more verses and using them alone or out of context to serve a true or false, intended or unintended, purpose. Familiarity with the New Testament includes the new covenant

and allows us to understand that we cannot pick and choose whom to love.

Can we judge who is to eat and who is to starve according to merit? Do we cast off those who, because of malnutrition and environment, are listless and might be incapable of defining, let alone having, "purpose"? For some, drugs and alcohol are the only things they know that give them relief and make them feel good. Many of these people have never known love or discipline. Would you hire or work next to them to help them learn self-respect, food and housing?

Most of us have been helped by

education, discipline, or a good word to a prospective employer. Our faith calls us to help all others. People can need help or welfare for reasons within or beyond their control, or both. We can share more than food. Schooling, dignity, trust and love are also needed. There are those who will take advantage of this help but that is between them and God. The important thing is that God knows that you have seen his face in others and have helped. If we shut these people out we have not listened to the message of Jesus Christ.

I challenge anyone to refrain from eating for two or three days and then decide who should have that terrifying feeling of starvation.

Dan Logan

Indianapolis

## 'Life Goes On' not all there is to it

My son Danny is 20 years old. He has Down Syndrome. Danny is very different from most people who are mentally handicapped with Down Syndrome. He has a central nervous system dysfunction that, in essence, gives him the mental and physical capabilities of a 3- to 6-month-old infant. In other words, he is severely and profoundly retarded.

It has been very popular and fashionable in recent months to talk about and focus on mental retardation. Television has had numerous stories about the mentally handicapped including the new series "Life Goes On" that features an actor who has Down Syndrome playing the part of a teen-ager with Down Syndrome. This show joins the show "L.A. Law" in bringing to the public's attention that mental retardation is a part of life.

While all this attention given to the mentally handicapped is commendable in one respect, it has done my son and others who are severely and profoundly

The Criterion welcomes letters from its readers. Its policy is that readers will be free to express their opinions on a wide range of issues as long as those opinions are relevant, well-expressed, temperate in tone, and within space limitations.

Letters must be signed and contain the writer's full address, although his/her name may be withheld for a good reason. The editor reserves the right to select the letters to be published and will resist demands that letters be published. The editor may also edit letters for length, grammar and style.

Letters for publication should be sent to The Criterion, P.O. Box 1717, Indpls., IN 46206.

retarded a great disservice and even injustice. Without exception, all of the TV shows fail to inform their audiences that there is a very low functioning level of mental retardation that requires special consideration.

A large proportion of the severe and profoundly retarded are medically fragile. They require very skilled care. There are less than 20 professional and non-professional departments cooperating and coordinating around-the-clock care for Danny and others like him in their home, Hazelwood Hospital, ICF/MR Institutional Facility in Louisville.

Parents and family members of the severe and profoundly retarded consider the walls of Hazelwood protective walls, not structures of isolation. The dedication and devotion of the employees to the work they do providing care and services to our loved ones cannot be measured in cold hard facts, but rather human terms like peace of mind, tenderness and sensitivity.

I would like the public to know about the other mentally retarded children, the ones with devastated brains and misshapen bodies. The parents and families of these children are struggling on two fronts—state and federal—to save our children's home. The last thing we need is a misinformed public.

Judith A. Dyer

Corydon

# Point of View

## Testimonial to the power of goodness

by Winifred Pushor

The people of Eastern Europe and Russia will celebrate Christmas this year with more freedom than they have experienced for more than half a century.

This Christmas of '89 offers a testimony to the power of goodness. It bespeaks the triumph of goodness over evil as wrought by the actions of good men and women who prevailed because they sacrificed, fought and suffered on the side of good.

"Goodness is the only investment that never fails," said Henry David Thoreau.

Goodness is celebrated each Christmas by massive outpourings of good will, charitable deeds, love and caring toward fellow man in commemoration of the birth of Jesus, but also because of the good example set by one good man born centuries ago in Asia Minor. The legend of this good man, St. Nicholas, and his legendary good deeds has been passed on to people from century to century and from country to country.

This power of goodness is lent support by the words of Thomas Carlyle who said, "Nothing that was worthy in the past departs; no truth or goodness realized by

man ever dies or can die; but is still here and there, recognized or not, lives and works through endless changes."

The legend of St. Nicholas has worked its way through endless changes. He has been renamed Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, St. Nick, and Santa Claus. He has changed his mode of transportation from ships to sleds, horses, reindeer, and even helicopters, but his message of doing good has not been lost.

Truly, as Shakespeare said, "How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a naughty world."

Year after year the legend of St. Nicholas brightens the weary days of winter and makes joyous our most beloved feast of Christmas by his overriding and unrelenting image of goodness over evil. During past weeks we have seen tyrants topple, atheistic communism discredited, corrupt leaders deposed and have witnessed beyond doubt that only the truly good can be truly great.

The new prophets of the last part of the 20th century are most certainly Pope John Paul II, Lech Walesa, Mikhail Gorbachev, Alexander Dubcek, Vaclav Havel and the countless other martyrs who sacrificed their very lives in the fight against evil.

They join the ranks of St. Nick, Tiny Tim, the Salvation Army bell ringers, and all those who do good and strive to make "peace on earth, good will to men" a reality each Christmas.

some legitimate good out of love for your neighbor, you delight Almighty God.

Delight is pleasure at high tide. By God's grace we humans have the power to be intimate with the Lord.

St. Clare, writing to St. Agnes of Prague, wrote this passage which leaves little to the imagination: "Consider also his indescribable delights, his sigh for your heart's content as you cry out: 'Draw me on! Your left hand rests under my head, your right arm joyfully embraces me, and you kiss me with the sweet kiss of your lips.'"

God responds to every gesture of love. As you celebrate the Lord's birthday, this Christmas let your heart's desire expand to new heights. Delight the Lord, through your careful attention to little actions performed lovingly for him and for your neighbor. "Truly I say to you, as you did it for one of the least of these my brethren, you did it for me" (Mt. 25:40).

Jesus Christ entered the world as an infant not only to give us a message about God's love, but to communicate Love itself. When we become carriers of divine love, we give pleasure to God himself.

(For a free copy of the *Christopher News Notes*, "The Gifts We Give," send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48 St., New York, N.Y. 10017.

Father Catoir's "Christopher Close-Up" can be seen at 6:30 a.m. every Sunday on WISH-TV, channel 8 in Indianapolis.)

## LIGHT ONE CANDLE

## The joy of Christmas

by Fr. John Catoir  
Director, The Christophers

There is more joy in giving than in receiving. That's one reason why the Christmas season is a good time to think about giving something back to God. You have the power to please Almighty God not only by your actions, but by your good intentions and holy desires. Your desire to please him already delights his heart.

"The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holiness. You do not yet see what you long for, but the very act of desiring prepares you . . . to be utterly satisfied" (St. Augustine).

The joys of heaven are the object of Christian hope, but it's possible here and now for you to experience the joy of delighting the Lord. Delight is pleasure quickened by a specific event or circumstance. When I speak of God's delight I fast that God reacts warmly to every gesture of love offered to him.

When you desire to do God's will, you please him. When you act joyfully, you delight him. When you endure your cross courageously or when you sacrifice



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## CORNUCOPIA

# Christmas in the Tropics

by Cynthia Dewes

Next time we get to sit on Santa's knee, let's hit him with some substantive questions. I mean, let's forget "I want a baseball bat," and try to dig up some real answers for a change.

Like: Will Santa fly if the snow don't? Can Dancer and Prancer, Comet and Cupid, Dunder and Blitzen find their way through lemon groves as they do the frozen tundra?

Dashing through the surf, on a Bonzi Pipeline ride, O'er the waves we go, laughing all the way.

Is it possible for Christmas to happen if the outside temperature hits 80 degrees? After all, popular wisdom, Charles Dickens and Hallmark greeting cards all point to a Christmas of snowy landscapes and fir trees. And they ought to know.

Besides, we all understand that the Midwest, New England and Western mountain scenes illustrate the Christmases of our imaginations. It's Rudolph, a red-nosed reindeer who flies the friendly December skies, not some seagull who hangs out in Key West.

Bells on palm trees ring, making spirits bright.

What fun it is to ride and sing a surfing song tonight.

Snowbirds who flee to lotus lands during the winter are startled to find that Christmas does come to tropical climes. People in San Diego and Honolulu and Marcos Island sing Christmas carols and bake gingerbread men just like the rest of us!

Warm climate Santas really do boom, "Ho! Ho! Ho!" and not "Surf's Up!" as we might imagine. Kids hang up their Christmas stockings over fake fireplaces, and practice their Christmas pagents outdoors, but the results are the same.

Santa still crams the stockings with goodies, and the story of Baby Jesus is told once again.

So, go for it. String colored lights on the cacti and ice the eggnog. Weave holly through the hibiscus bushes and hang mistletoe on the diving board.

Yes, Virginia, Christmas does come to the tropics.

## check-it-out...

The alumnae office of St. Mary of the Woods College will explore the heritage of the school and its founders, the Sisters of Providence, during a trip to France this summer. Highlights of the trip, scheduled

June 19-28, include visits to Paris, Versailles, Mont Saint-Michel, Claude Monet's home at Giverny, and the Loire Valley. Other excursions to Sur-Mer-Etapes, birthplace of Mother Theodore Guerin, St. Mary of the Woods founder, and Ruille-sur-Loir, home of the Sisters of Providence, will add historical insight. Anyone interested in joining the special tour should contact the alumnae office at 812-535-5212 for registration information.

The deadline is Jan. 8, 1990, for registration for a new Indianapolis North Deanery Board of Education program for children aged seven to 12 with learning disabilities. **Achievement Center for Excellence**, to be held at Christ the King School next fall. Those interested should call Mickey Lentz at the Office of Catholic Education, 317-236-1438. The principal's office at 317-257-9366 will not be open until Jan. 8.)

The deadline is Jan. 5 for registration in a Jan. 12-14 weekend retreat at St. Mary of the Woods College (SMWC). "Walking with Jesus through Scripture." Presenters will be the SMWC president, Providence Sister Barbara Doherty and Passionist Father Donald Senior, president of Catholic Theological Union. Sessions will include: "The Humanity of Jesus as Found in Scripture," "The Gospel Portrayal of Jesus as Teacher and Healer," "Jesus in Conflict," "Death and Resurrection in One's Own Life," "Faith" and "Discipleship." Those interested should call the Office of Continuing Education at 812-535-5148.

The combined choirs of Sacred Heart Catholic Church and St. Mark Lutheran Church will perform a new cantata, "A Christmas Festival," on Jan. 7 at 11:30 a.m. at Sacred Heart. The performance is free. Guests are welcome to have coffee and doughnuts before the cantata, at 11 a.m. in the parish hall.

The Morning for Moms Renew group at St. Malachy, Brownsburg, is collecting clothing for the poor by using a Christmas tree in the vestibule of the church. Hats, scarves, gloves, mittens and socks are placed on the tree. These will be distributed to the Holy Family Shelter and St. Vincent de Paul Society. Another Renew group is collecting food for the Holy Cross Food Pantry, as well as clothing and toys for charitable groups.

"The Nativity," a Christmas special airing at 10 p.m. Dec. 24 on WTTV Channel 4, offers beautiful scenery and an accurate biblical perspective of the story of Mary and Joseph's courtship in Galilee.

Benedictine Father Keith McClellan will conduct a retreat on "Everyone a Monk: The Life of St. Benedict as Everyone's Story" on the weekend of January 12-14 at

St. Jude Guest House on St. Meinrad Seminary campus. The retreat theme will address the dialogues of St. Gregory the Great. Call 812-357-6585 for reservations.

An up-to-date documentary on Medjugorje, narrated by Martin Sheen and produced by Caritas, will be aired from 2 to 3 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 31 on the cable television Arts and Entertainment Network. The program was first shown last July.

## vips...

Father Marty Peter was elected chairperson and Father Jeff Godecker, vice-chairperson of the Priest's Personnel Board at its November meeting.

Travis Campbell, eighth grade student at St. Mary School, North Vernon, was co-winner of an essay contest, "Your Meal Tonight—Produced by Indiana Farmers," which was open to all eighth grade students in the state. She received a \$50 savings bond at the Farm Bureau state convention on Dec. 3.

Mr. and Mrs. Norbert Artmeier of Jasper will celebrate their 50th Wedding Anniversary with a Mass of Thanksgiving and reception beginning at 1 p.m. Dec. 30 at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Jasper. They were married on Dec. 30, 1939, by Father Joseph Dailey at St. Thomas Church in Cincinnati. Norbert and Frances Schepers Artmeier are the parents of a son, Robert, also of Jasper, and three daughters, Mary Lou Blessinger of Jasper, Jo Ann Schramm of Fortville, and Judy Blake, also of Fortville. They have eight grandchildren.



CONCERT FARE—Arthur Davis (left) and Anthony Childress, sixth grade students at Holy Angels School, Indianapolis, make and sell popcorn during their lunch hour. The class planned the project so students could purchase tickets for the recent Clowes Hall concert by the Boys Choir of Ireland. (Photo by Margaret Nelson)

## Season's Greetings

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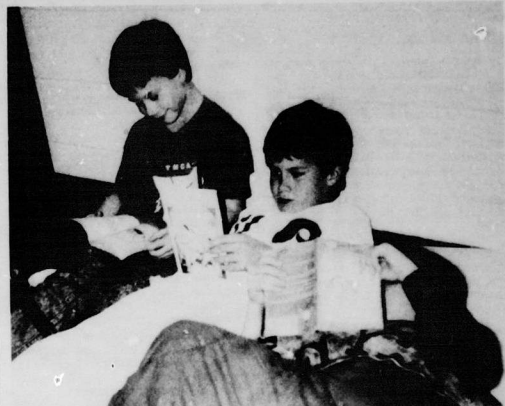
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1) Anyone can enter "The Ad Game" with the exception of employees of the Criterion and their families.  
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The Solution and Name of the Winning Entry will be Published in two weeks



BOOK-IT NIGHT—Brandon Heck (left) and Christ Chisler, students at St. Michael School, Greenfield, were among 27 fourth graders who spent the night in their classroom as part of a Book-It overnight. The young people alternated 30 minutes of silent reading with periods of playing games and using computers. The reading program continues until the end of February and encourages everyone to read and to develop a camaraderie among classmates. (Photo by Christ Dowling, fourth grade teacher)

# Jeffersonville kitchen feeds 100 hungry daily

by Dorothy L. Lutz LaGrange

The sign over the serving tables at the Community Kitchen of Jeffersonville reads, "God doesn't make junk."

But some of those who file past the food tables may have times when they feel like society has "junked" them.

The people who come to the soup kitchen's door for a free meal share a common link—life has dealt them a tough hand. Some are homeless, some are unemployed, some are on disability and some have incomes that fail to stretch far enough. Others simply fall between the cracks of public assistance programs and have no income at all.

More than 18,813 meals have been consumed in the Community Kitchen since the first meal was served there almost a year ago.

The idea of opening the kitchen met with instant support from caring people in the community. But two parishioners from Sacred Heart Church, Therese Wheatley and Dan Rodden, were the force behind its founding.

Wheatley described an experience that impelled her to do something to help Christ's command to feed the hungry. She said she was riding in a truck with a Jeffersonville charitable organization, gathering things for the poor. "I went in a home where there were children and saw an empty refrigerator. That stark refrigerator burned a hole right through my heart," she said.

The sight of that empty refrigerator spawned the project that has grown from the three meals served the first day—Jan. 4, 1989—to nearly 150 in recent days.

Rodden, a Jeffersonville police officer, located the Jayco Building site. The parks department donated the space and pays the utilities. But the kitchen operates entirely on donations. There is no connection with any government agency.

Volunteers and contributions come from Clark County individuals, businesses, police and fire departments, social groups and churches of several denominations.

The kitchen staff is all volunteers, many of them senior citizens. They all join in prayer before the meal is served. There is something to do for all those willing to help. The volunteers speak as one about their reward. "It's very satisfying. You feel good at the end of the day."

One woman who volunteers has been paralyzed on her left side since she had a stroke at age 23. She raised four children alone and now gives her time and strength

to help feed the poor. On a recent snowy day, she walked four blocks to deliver dish towels she had laundered. "She smiles all the time," said another kitchen volunteer.

"There's a lot of love that goes with the food," Wheatley said. Many of the regular diners are greeted by their first names amid much laughing and joking from the staff.

"This is not a Catholic Church project," said Father Harold Kneuen, pastor of St. Augustine Church. He serves on the board of directors and provides what he calls "moral support."

Though the staff tries to serve hot balanced meals, that depends on what there is to cook. Early one July morning, there was no bread, no money and a two-day supply of meat. Wheatley said, "Well, Lord, you'll have to provide." By 10:30 a.m., someone had donated \$250 and dinner was served on time.

The pain of being on the receiving end sometimes surfaces. "I'm not a bum," said a man passing through the food line. "If you need sweeping or cleaning, I'll help."

Phil, an articulate man in his late 40s, talks freely. "I never thought I'd end up here." He explained that just a few years ago he was working as a welder for a railroad, making \$26,000 a year. Suddenly, he said there were five discs protruding into his spine.

According to Phil, the doctors told him they could not operate. He couldn't work because of the pain. His income dropped to \$9,000 a year and then to nothing. Though the doctors said he was 100 percent disabled, Social Security claimed his disability is 40 to 60 percent. So he is ineligible for assistance.

"In six months or a year, anyone can be here," Phil said. "Two or three bad things happen to you and you can be on the street."

Future plans for the Jeffersonville Community Kitchen include converting an empty room into a new kitchen to handle the increased volume. A local company has donated kitchen equipment, but a commercial mixer is needed. Commercial pots, pans, ladles, now borrowed from St. Augustine, would be welcome donations.

A memorial fund was recently initiated. Contributions are taken to honor people on birthdays, anniversaries, at retirement or in memory of a deceased person. Names will be inscribed in a memorial register. Envelopes for this purpose are available at St. Augustine and Sacred Heart churches.



KITCHEN VOLUNTEERS—Dorothy Hinkle (from left), Minerva Donohoo, Father Harold Kneuen and Hazel Greer relax after the hot lunch has been served at the Jeffersonville Community Kitchen. (Photo by Dorothy Lutz LaGrange)

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## An ageless dilemma

by Alice Dailey

A young woman was becoming more and more certain each passing day that she was pregnant.

Married to a decent, upright man, how could she explain to him that the child she carried was not his? But of course he would realize that because their marriage had never been consummated. Soon her pregnancy would become visible. What was she to do?

This case had all the elements society

deems proper for "interrupting" a pregnancy: the youth of the mother, poverty, the question of paternity and threat to a marriage.

The girl could have taken the "easy" way out. There were strong medicines that could destroy life in the womb and few would be the wiser.

But placing great trust in God to solve all problems, she carried her baby full term and gave birth to a healthy, bonny boy.

The girl was Mary. The husband, Joseph.

Christmas Gospel in story form. The children will be encouraged to ask questions and to dialogue.

Besides the offertory bread and wine, the children in this procession will bring warm hats, gloves or socks. These will be gifts from the St. Philip assembly to be distributed to needy people.

Afterwards, everyone will go to the St. Philip preschool for a birthday party for Jesus, complete with cake and balloons.

At Our Lady of the Greenwood, the Cub Scout Troop will place 250 luminaria along the fence near the church before the 5:30 p.m. Mass Christmas Eve.

## Churches plan for Christmas Eve

At St. Philip Neri, Indianapolis, there will be a 5:30 liturgy on Christmas Eve for preschool through fourth grade children from the parish, school and preschool. The preschool staff will host the Mass and assist the children.

The youngsters will sing "The Friendly Beasts" as they join St. Philip pastor Father Glenn O'Connor in the procession. A wagon will carry the statue of the Christ Child to the altar. The students will place stuffed toys in the stable before they join their families in church.

Preschool director Linda Kaser will invite all the children to come forward and sit around a rocking chair. She will tell the





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# Today's Faith

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## Christmas is a season of love, faith, and hope

by Fr. Eugene LaVerdiere

The word "care" has an extraordinary number of meanings.

►It can refer to anxieties, as when we speak of someone's cares and troubles.

►It can refer to personal concern for someone. In this sense, we speak of people who are deserving of our care.

►It can describe someone who is attentive to others, as when we refer to someone as a caring person.

When we think of Christmas as a season of care, we mean that it is a time to reach out and help the needy and forgotten. In this sense, caring is a profoundly human quality.

For Christians, caring is an aspect of love, one of the three fundamental attitudes of a good Christian, along with faith and hope.

The best way to grasp this last meaning of care is to find examples of people who exemplify it in their lives.

We can begin with Jesus. As one who died for sinners, Jesus is the ultimate caring person. The attitude of caring characterizes all his ministry.

There was the time, for example, when Jesus called the disciples to join him for some rest and quiet. But when they went to a place they thought would be deserted, a huge crowd was waiting for them.

Mark's Gospel says that Jesus' heart went out to them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

On that occasion, Jesus' care for the crowd was expressed in his teaching. He began to teach them and later he saw to it that they received the nourishment they needed.

Care can be pretty tough. It even can be expressed in anger, as when Jesus berated some Pharisees for hypocrisy. Had he not cared, he would not have done that.

Jesus' care also was courageous, as we see so clearly when he stood up for the woman who was caught in adultery. It took courage to tell a violent and enraged crowd, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7).

For a second example of a caring person, we need look no further than Mary, the mother of Jesus.

A young pregnant woman who travels across the hills and deep valleys of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea to visit a relative who is pregnant is someone who cares.

The ultimate expression of Mary's care, of course, was at the foot of the

cross on which her son was dying, the same son she had wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger some 30 years earlier.

When I think of caring people, I also think of many people around me, family, friends, fellow priests and brother—not to mention Mary, my secretary, and Gigi, my travel agent.

Christmas is a time to notice and express appreciation for all the care with which all these people surround us.

An elderly woman, now deceased, stands out among all the caring people I have known. Her last name was Salomone but everyone called her Mama Bessie.

Her husband, of whom she always spoke lovingly, had died quite young. A barber, he was able to leave her a house in Cleveland and a modest income.

With no children of her own, Mama Bessie adopted our whole seminary, including the faculty. That was way back in the 1950s and 1960s, when small seminaries had not yet merged to form the larger seminaries of today.

Having a whole seminary full of "children" made for some interesting stories.

Once, while Mama was visiting with people at a funeral parlor, she referred to her children and someone asked how many she had.

Pausing to think, she answered with the musical intonation of her native Napoli, "about 40."

The person who asked turned around and walked away.

Mama Bessie loved to make spaghetti and meatballs. She had a little machine to make her own pasta. It was quite a production, but a month did not pass without Mama spending the better part of a day and a half making and serving spaghetti to her children at the seminary.

Everyone who met Mama remembers her and she often comes up in the conversations of those whose eyes rolled as she overloaded their plates. What remains of those meals—each one an event—is Mama's warmth, humor, smile, and love.

Caring people like Jesus, Mary, and Mama Bessie (she would laugh to see herself included in such exalted company!) are very creative.

To know them is to become better human beings. Those who benefit from their care actually become caring people themselves.



CARING SEASON—Christmas is the season of care. When we reach out to the needy and the forgotten, our caring has a profoundly human quality. (CNS photo by Gene Plaisted of wall plaque in Holy Trinity Church at Coventry, England)

## True believers communicate the spirit of Christmas

by Fr. Robert Kinast

In the early Middle Ages, there was a wealthy count named Gerald. Instead of distributing alms through one of his staff members, he traveled the countryside himself, seeking out the poor and personally getting to know those he helped.

Because he knew the poor, he always invited some to his banquets, mixed them with dignitaries, and asked them to speak first in the table discussions he conducted.

### This Week in Focus

Christmas is a season of care, a time to reach out and help the needy and the forgotten. Caring is a profoundly human quality and is also an aspect of love, along with faith and hope, that form the three fundamental Christian attitudes. The spirit of caring associated with Advent and Christmas extends well back into history, as evidenced by the origins of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. And this spirit of caring is particularly important to those who grieve. At no other time of the year does grief over a loved one's death strike so forceful a blow as at Christmas. Fortunately, there are many ways to show care and concern during the holidays.

I would say that he had the spirit of Christmas. But what is that?

St. John summed it up with deceptive simplicity: "The Word became flesh." The Word enters human life because God cares about each person. This care prompts God to get as close as possible rather than remaining at a safe distance outside the sphere of human existence.

There may be a lot of cultural and commercial distractions from this meaning, but true believers in Christmas have never lost sight of it.

No less caring than Count Gerald, for example, or less willing to use her royal position, was Margaret, Queen of Scotland, who lived in the 11th century. She insisted that all the people of her husband's realm be educated—unheard of in those days. She established hostels for travelers, hospitals for the poor, and funds to ransom captives.

Margaret also brought women together to study Scripture, and she modernized church practices through a synod over which she presided. Gerald and Margaret were influential enough not to run any personal risks in demonstrating their care. It was different for Edmund Campion in 16th-century England. A rising intellectual at Oxford University with deep ties to the Church of England, Edmund decided to become a Roman Catholic and immediately began resisting Queen Elizabeth I.

He had to leave England for a time, but he returned to serve his persecuted countrymen, traveling among them in many disguises, hiding out wherever he could until an informant turned him in.

While in prison, Edmund was visited by the informant, who now feared for his own life. Edmund arranged for him

to escape from England and gave him a letter of recommendation to a German nobleman.

Equally bold was Catherine of Siena. Her influence began with her remarkable care of plague victims, who afterward clustered around her as their leader, despite her youth.

She soon was called upon by kings for advice, got warring parties to stop fighting, and then drew up treaties of peace. She even persuaded the pope, residing in France at the time, to return to Rome, and she withstood French opposition to the move.

Catherine was young, but not as young as Pauline Jaricot and Frederic Ozanam, who lived after the French Revolution. Pauline worked with poor girls in the local hospital. To show her identification with them, she wore their simple clothing.

Concerned about a larger, suffering world, she asked each of them to find nine others, who once a week would contribute the smallest coin they had for the foreign missions. This "widow's mite" was the beginning of our modern Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Ozanam was beginning his studies for a law career when an agnostic student challenged him to really put the teachings of Jesus into practice. Frederic and a few friends did, seeking out the poor, discovering from them their real needs, and finding ways to help them. Out of this personal caring came the formation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Getting back to the real meaning of Christmas isn't so hard once you go back in history and meet some of the people who have let the Word become flesh through them.

# Take the time to reach out to those who grieve at Christmas

by Cindy Liebhart McCormack

Terri and I dread the idea of Christmas. Just getting through each anguished day is struggle enough for the young couple whose only child, Michael, died in June, two weeks before his second birthday. The specter of Christmas without him is almost too painful to bear. Terri wishes they could just sleep through it.

At no other time of the year does grief over a loved one's death strike so forceful a blow as at Christmas. Suddenly the cherished traditions of the season become a kind of juggernaut, an emotional minefield.

A wife sees the perfect gift for her husband in a department store window, and then remembers he is gone. A father hears the Christmas carol he taught his daughter to sing so many years ago, and realizes he will never hear her voice again.

And everywhere, the image of the intact family—decorating the Christmas tree, baking cookies, attending Midnight Mass, eating Christmas dinner—reminds the grieving that their family is no longer whole.

It is precisely the family nature of Christmas that makes it so difficult for people who have lost a loved one, according to Anne Keough, director of family life ministry at Holy Spirit Parish in Duncanville, Texas.

The parish sponsors a support group, "Grief and Belief," to help teen-agers and adults work through the grieving process.

"Christmas is synonymous with family," Keough said. "Add to that the fact that society tells us Christmas is not a time when you intrude on other families and suddenly people who are grieving become acutely aware of the emptiness, the loneliness, the void in their lives."

For the Christian community, whose stories and symbols at Christmas center on birth and life and light, the call to care for those who mourn presents a special challenge. Keough suggested several concrete ways the community can extend its love and support to grieving members during the holidays.

► Actively seek out community members who have experienced a death during the past year—at church, at work, at the store, when picking children up from school. "Don't be afraid to ask how they're doing," she said. "Then be prepared to listen and to respond sincerely... Help them to share their memories of that person, happy or painful."

Keough cautioned against using clichés such as, "John would have wanted you to be happy."

But, she added, "If you forget and wish them a Merry Christmas, don't be embarrassed about it. Just follow up your holiday greeting with a question, like 'Is this turning out to be a hard time for you?'"

► Invite a grieving person or family to join you on Christmas, even for a brief visit.

"We need to examine our own attitudes about Christmas being strictly a family time," she said, "and become sensitive to people in our community who may be alone, who may be afraid to ask to join us."

Keough recommended inviting the person or family for a specific time and activity, such as Mass and breakfast afterward, that would allow for companionship.

"You ask a lot of the person if you ask him or her to be there from the time your family opens gifts in the morning until the time you finish dinner dishes," she said. "Set some parameters so the person is not overwhelmed."

And be open to the possibility of rejection. The person may not feel up to spending Christmas with others. Even here, though, she suggests leaving an opening for people: "If you change your mind, dinner is at three o'clock. You're welcome to join us for the entire meal or for coffee and dessert."

► Send a Christmas card along with a handwritten note. If you know the person who died, share a memory of him or her in the note.

► On the parish level, offer special liturgies or prayer services during the holidays to commemorate community deaths during the past year. The feast of the Holy Family on

*The family nature of Christmas makes it difficult for people who have lost a loved one*



**PAINFUL TIME**—People who are grieving over the loss of loved ones often dread the holiday season. At no other time of the year does grief over a loved one's death strike so forceful a blow as at Christmas.

the Sunday after Christmas provides an especially appropriate liturgical framework in which to remember the deaths of parishioners.

Family members or friends could be asked to bring something they have that is a special symbol of the deceased—a picture, a letter, a favorite book, a toy—to place before the altar.

Keough also suggests that parishes remember people who have lost loved ones during the year in the prayers of the faithful on Christmas Day and in parish bulletin reminders.

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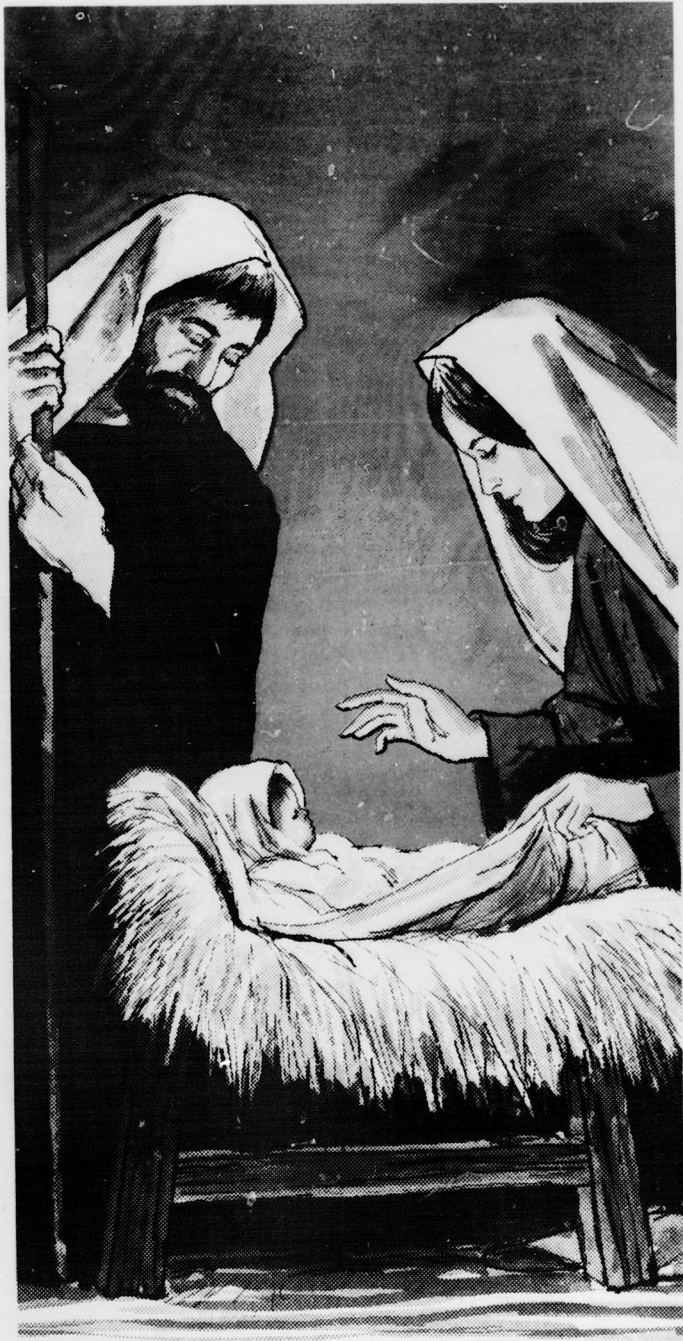
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# Christmas Supplement

DECEMBER 22, 1989

## The Word became flesh and dwelt among us



by John F. Fink

We are all familiar with St. Luke's story of the birth of Jesus, and it is this Gospel that is read at two of the three Masses said on Christmas. Luke explains that Mary and Joseph had to be in Bethlehem to register for the census ordered by Caesar Augustus and that while they were there Mary "gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."

It's a nice story that has been the basis for millions of paintings, creches, and other signs of devotion through the centuries. But it falls short of offering an explanation of what we really celebrate on Christmas—the Incarnation, the central mystery of Christianity.

For that we go to the Gospel reading for the third Mass of Christmas—the prologue to the Gospel of John. The author doesn't mention the birth of a baby in Bethlehem but he gives the theology behind the most amazing event in all history—that God assumed human nature.

"The Word became flesh," he says, thus summarizing the doctrine that the supreme manifestation of God's self-communication, identical to God himself (the Word) assumed human nature, including a human body, a human soul and all human characteristics except sin.

But before announcing the Incarnation, he tells us much more about the Word. In the first verse he tells us that the Word always was, that he was in God's presence, and that he was God. He starts this Gospel with the same words as the beginning of the Book of Genesis ("In the beginning"), but, whereas Genesis starts with the creation, the author of this prologue starts even before that.

This is important because the heresy of Arianism, which was to divide the Christ in world in the fourth century, taught that Christ came forth from the Father and was created by him. Not so, says this prologue.

Furthermore, it says, the Word was intimately involved in the act of creation, usually associated with God the Father: "Through him all things came into being, and apart from him nothing came to be." In this the Gospel agrees with St. Paul, who told the Colossians, in referring to Christ, "In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues to be." (Col. 1:16-17).

John's Gospel's prologue emphasizes again that the Word was the creator when it says, "He was in the world, and through him the world was made, yet the world did not know who he was."

It goes on to state that "to his own he came, yet his own (the Jewish people) did not accept him. Any who did accept him he empowered to become children of God. These are they who believe in his name—who were begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by man's willing it, but by God." In other words, no human agency, male or female, begets God's children. That is done through baptism and the Holy Spirit.

Then the author tells us, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Thus there was united in one person two natures, the divine and human, a union known as the hypostatic union. A perfect God humbled himself to take on the imperfect nature of humanity.

This is commemorated in our liturgies during the preparation of the gifts. As a drop of water is added to the wine, the priest says, "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we be made worthy to share in the divinity of Christ as he humbled himself to share in our humanity."

St. Paul emphasizes this humility in this passage from his letter to the Philippians: "Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8).

St. Paul thus neatly ties in the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption. For this is why the Word became flesh, in order to achieve the salvation of all humankind.

# Our readers' special Christmas memories

We received an overwhelming response from our readers this year when we asked them to send us stories about their memorable Christmases. Here are many of the stories received:

## The straws were near baby Jesus

by Teresa Royer

I spent most of my childhood years in the small town of Martin, Ky. The Sisters of Divine Providence operated the local hospital and our tiny Catholic school.

My grandmother worked at the hospital in the medical records department, and was a very close friend of the sisters and priest.

Our family was poor financially, but rich in the many special times spent with the sisters, Father, and the brothers. They always planned the most wonderful things for us.

At school, Sister had a box in the front of our room. Every time we did something extra special at home, above and beyond what we were supposed to do, we would be allowed to put a straw into the box.

During Advent, we would go to the hospital to sing for the people who could not be home on Christmas. Afterward, the sisters took us through the winding hospital corridors and past two heavy wooden doors into a room with a table that looked a mile long.

Everything was decorated so beautifully and sparkled like a magical fairyland. Every child received ice cream shaped like a Christmas tree or St. Nicholas. To small eyes, they looked enormous and ever so lovely. The sisters then proceeded to fill us with every kind of delicious treat.

Then the most wonderful thing of all happened! We walked outside and stopped at the life-sized Nativity, which was surrounded by soft, glowing lights. There in the manger, along with Jesus, were the straws that we had put into the box!

I realized then that by being especially good I had helped to keep the baby Jesus warm, and a warm feeling swept over me. As we began to sing "Joy to the World," I felt like the angels were singing with us. An overwhelming joy filled my heart, which I felt had indeed prepared him room.

## The birth of our Christmas Carole

by Roberta Feltman

My most memorable Christmas was the year of 1939. The family was not anticipating a very happy holiday since our young brother had been killed in a car accident that spring.

I was expecting my fourth child at the first of the year, but Christmas afternoon found me at St. Vincent Hospital. And after three sons, I delivered a baby girl.

Our sorrows were forgotten in the birth of our beautiful Christmas Carole.

## It was the least we could do

by Kathleen Malley MacGill

It snowed that Christmas; I remember it being very nice. We would come into the house with rosy cheeks and numb fingers—laughing, shivering, hungry. Mom had a blazing fire crackling in the fireplace,

decorated gingerbread men in the cookie jar, and hot chocolate on the stove. We quickly undressed, stuck our wet feet next to the fire and looked out the window at our snowman.

Our tree was full and tall; it reached to the ceiling. The pine scent filtered through the house. I always looked forward to Christmas Eve when friends, neighbors and relatives, and lots of kids, came by. Cakes, cookies, and all kinds of food were prepared for the affair.

Dad came home that Christmas Eve a little later than usual. He told my sister and me to run upstairs and bring down some toys. "Not your favorite ones," he said, "but all in good condition. Now hurry."

Puzzled, we quickly ran up the stairs. There were games, stuffed animals and toys. I never realized we had so much.

"Get bundled up," Dad said. "We're going out."

We drove in complete silence for about five minutes. Dad pulled into a grocery store and began to unload.

I was at the grocery today when Mrs. Roberts called. In tears she told me her husband is in the tank for the night, her nine children are hungry, there's no food in the house, and they've been without heat for about seven days.

I remember shuddering at the thought. I was young and couldn't imagine anyone going without Christmas. We went into the store and bought fruits, vegetables, canned goods, milk, bread, and a huge turkey. Dad looked at me. "Forget anything?"

"Cookies," I whispered. Again we got into the car and drove for about 10 minutes. Finally Dad said, "This is it."

Outside the door, in bright orange, were painted the letters "C.V." Later I found out it meant condemned within. No wonder. The staircase ended halfway up because the house once had caught fire. Three large tires on the floor served as beds for the smaller ones. And it was so cold inside; the windows were cracked and the wind blew in.

Dad helped light the stove with the fuel we had brought. Mrs. Roberts' eyes lit up and I saw a tear fall from her cheek.

We went home that night to a warm house, lots of food, and a big Christmas party. It must have been fun as usual. I really can't remember. I was quiet that night. All I thought about were the Roberts; how happy they were with so little, yet how sad they would be tomorrow.

I'll never forget that Christmas, the smiles on the children's faces when the heater was lit, the food was seen, the toys unwrapped. Nor will I ever forget the tear of joy that fell from Mrs. Roberts' cheek as she looked at us in gratitude.

But it was the least we could do.

## Edward's heartfelt gift, still cherished

by Elizabeth Kent

I taught seventh grade English in Savannah, Ga., for more than four years. One year, my classes consisted of both rich and poor students.

Therefore, I asked the students in each class not to give me Christmas gifts. I

needed nothing, and I did not want anyone to be embarrassed at being unable to match others' offerings. The students agreed. Thinking the matter was settled, I said nothing more about it, nor did the students.

Lo and behold, on the last day before the holidays, the students covered my desk with gifts. Although touched by their generosity and apparent liking for me, I was a bit annoyed that they had not respected my request.

Oh, I received some lovely things, including a set of silver salt and pepper shakers, a gold pen and pencil set, several beautiful scarves, perfumes, and a leather wallet. I considered many of the gifts too expensive for the occasion and the recipient, but I had to accept them since I felt that they came from their givers' hearts and to reject them would hurt countless feelings.

As I was unwrapping the colorful packages and exclaiming about the beauty or usefulness of each gift, a very small and rather little boy approached me hesitantly. Edward was academically deficient; this fact was evidenced by his inability to read simple sentences or to write legibly. I also knew that his family, which consisted of his widowed father, four brothers and sisters, and Edward himself, subsisted on a monthly welfare check amounting to \$40.

"Miss Kent," he stammered so softly that I could barely hear him, "this is for you; it's all I could bring. I hope you like it."

Having said his piece, he returned to his desk, as usual avoiding his classmates, most of whom ridiculed him. Then I looked at what he had thrust into my hand. It was a small item wrapped crudely in a sheet of school tablet paper. On it was printed, "To Miss Kent—From Edward M." When I opened the gift, I found a used, one-size bag of soap. No doubt the only soap available to his whole family that month.

I excused myself from the class, mumbling something about having to go to the office to see about some report or other. Instead, I proceeded to the faculty lounge, where I sat down and wept. And I am not one to weep freely or openly.

After collecting myself, I returned to my classroom, where I quietly told Edward that of all the gifts I had received that day, his meant the most to me and would remain with me always. I added that I would keep it as a constant reminder of the true spirit of Christmas. He beamed from ear to ear, then responded in typical childlike innocence, "We can spare it."

This incident occurred in 1963—a year that is becoming increasingly difficult for me to recall. Through the intervening years, the silver salt and pepper shakers disappeared, as did the gold pen and pencil set; the scarves wore out. I used up the perfumes; and the leather wallet finally gave up the ghost.

In fact, I am sure that I no longer possess any of the gifts I received from my students that Christmas—except one: a small package crudely wrapped in a sheet of school tablet paper. I still look at it once in a while and realize anew why my years of teaching meant so much to me and what the true meaning of Christmas is.

Thank you, Edward, wherever you are today.

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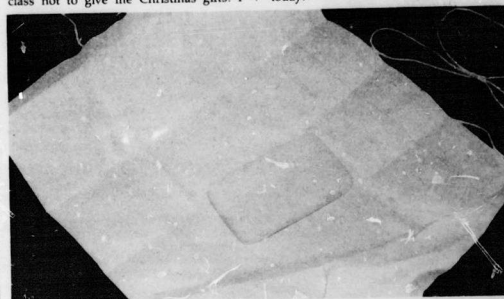
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## Santas bring their share of surprises

by Marie Hatch

It was about 1928. All the younger children of our Vermont village gathered in the Grange Hall to welcome Santa.

His imminent arrival, announced by the hand jingling of borrowed sleigh bells just outside the back door, pleased the adults as much as the children because the place was frigid. (The heat had been turned on just prior to the event!)

Santa, vaguely recognizable, was dressed in a cheese cloth vest mail-order red cotton suit. The cotton bathing mustache and beard combination attached to his glasses needed frequent realignment, but he was not a threatening figure.

When we all dutifully confided our simple Christmas wishes, he rewarded us with small white paper sacks filled with shiny hard Christmas candies.

Twenty years later, I was living in Indianapolis. The war had ended, and I had married, relocated to a new home, and was the mother of a small daughter.

Long before Christmas Eve, we boarded the bus for a trip downtown to Charles Mayer and Sons, where we feasted our eyes on their whole array of F.A.O. Schwartz toys, then capped the outing with a visit to their Santa.

Santas, I discovered, had been considerably upgraded between 1928 and 1951. This one was resplendent in thick red velvet trimmed in real fur. His curled flowing white beard might have been fashioned from real human hair.

Quite overwhelmed by such opulence, my three-year-old daughter had to be coaxed to sit on his knee, but she eventually did so and even managed to bashfully mention a single Christmas item.

"Is there anything else?" Santa inquired in the tone of a priest in the confessional.

"Yes," she replied, and proceeded to name all the toys she had just seen in the toy department. "Young lady," he announced loudly as he set her down on her feet, "you've got a bad case of the Gimmies!"

Outraged by his insensitivity, I mumbled something about his having probably been a vagrant that they had just hired off the street. "Clearly, he doesn't care about children," I concluded. In 1951, that was the ultimate accusation.

The mid-1950s brought another memorable Christmas excursion. This time I drove three young family members downtown in our large nine-passenger wagon.

On the busiest Saturday of the holiday season, it took nearly an hour just to park the car. So many children were waiting at L. S. Ayres that we crossed the street to H. P. Wasson's, where Santa was less occupied.

Although he wore the traditional costume, he was somehow different. Perhaps it was because his eyebrows were thick and black above his heavy white beard. He was definitely leaner than all the other Santas we had previously encountered.

After carefully listening to my children's

lists, he circled them in his arms to pose for the traditional paid-for-in-advance photograph with Santa Claus.

But before dismissing them, I noticed that he whispered something into my oldest daughter's ear.

"What did he say to you?" I asked her a little suspiciously as soon as the children rejoined me.

"Oh," she said, "Santa said to be sure to tell my Mommy that he thought she was really pretty."

## 'Poppa' missed Santa Claus!

by Pauline Dauty

It was the year of 1908. I was the eldest of five living with our parents on a small, isolated farm. I had just had my eighth birthday on Dec. 11.

On Christmas Eve, there was a knock on the door. Mother opened the door, and there stood Santa Claus with a few switches in his hand. Mother, of course, invited Santa Claus in.

Santa was calling all of us children by name and shaking our hands. He had us recite our prayers and gave each of us a gift. He called our attention to the small cedar tree in the corner of the room, decorated with colorful paper chains and garlands of popcorn.

As Santa was leaving, he handed Mother a switch. Suddenly, I became upset. Where was Poppa? He was missing! All of this!

Shortly after Santa left, my Poppa came into the house and I told him he had just missed Santa Claus. I asked Poppa where he had been. He explained that he had been taking care of a sick horse in the barn. So I informed Poppa about all that had happened and how he had missed all the excitement.

Poor Poppa!

## What was behind that memory door?

by Rosemary Robinson

This is a Christmas story about "the good old days." Picture the time in the late 20s and early '30s.

About three days before Christmas, Daddy would bring a door down from the attic where it had been stored and hang it on the living room doorway. Then he would lock it, because Santa Claus would be coming soon.

Now, many times in those few days my brother and I would stick our noses under it and smell the scent of pine. Needless to say, we also tried to peek through the keyhole.

We could hardly wait, but at last it was Christmas Eve. The supper menu was always hot potato soup with cinnamon-sugar toast, as it was the vigil of Christmas. There was no time for dessert, for we had to watch Daddy take the door down off the hinges.

The moment had come. Santa had

been there and left. Oh, what a beautiful tree! Of course there would be presents—not too many, but sufficient, because remember these were the Depression years.

We always received something special, a doll for me and then the time my brother received a big chunk of coal all wrapped up! "He had been bad," so they said.

Daddy always did have a clever sense of humor. A nice gift always followed, like the chemistry set that produced "stink bombs."

And now it was time for Daddy's homemade eggnog and springerles. I still haven't acquired a taste for them!

All of this was done for us by Mother and Daddy every year, and never did the procedure vary. Because if it had, I never would be able to hold these memories so dearly in my heart.

God bless them and keep them in their Christmas heaven.

## The day of the heaviest snow

by Irma A. Linton

The most memorable Christmas in my life happened in Indianapolis during a winter with deep snow, December of 1950 and the eight weeks following.

As an expectant mother with 14 years' teaching experience in the elementary schools, the term "career parent to-be"

was clearly more accurate than "young mother-to-be." My husband was in a similar age bracket. In fact his mother remarked that we were too old to be parents, knowing that our infant would likely be over-prompted.

Teachers in 1950 were required to go on maternity leave or resign in the fifth month of pregnancy. Shortly after I took my leave that autumn my father was hospitalized. We rented our first house to be with him during convalescence. My duties assisting in his home kept me so active that uncomfortable leg cramps happened often.

When Christmas approached I chose to drive a neighbor to midnight Mass. Leaving Mass on that cold and snowy night I felt a warm glow spiritually as I knew that in the next few weeks my baby would be born, hopefully the son we both longed for.

So often did we have deep snow on the following days that my husband was busy each evening after work keeping a path clear for us to get to the hospital.

The day our son was born, the Indianapolis Star headline noted it was the heaviest snow of the winter. Thomas was baptized in St. Joan of Arc Church.

This poem that I received expressed the glad news we felt:

*"Let Christmas come into our world  
and bring us warmth and cheer.  
Bring us faith in place of doubt,  
and strength in place of fear.  
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LAPFUL—Santa Claus listens to Brian Allen describe his Christmas wish list while cousin Karie Allen waits her turn during a "Breakfast With Santa" party at St. Roch Parish in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mary Ann Wyand)



# Christmas memories

## The case of the 'missing' child

by Carol Eagan

I am a Protestant and have a limited knowledge of Catholicism. In 1986 I was employed in the security department at St. Vincent's Carmel hospital.

One morning early in December, I was on patrol of the facility. Workers were everywhere hanging Christmas wreaths, decorating small pine trees with colorful ornaments, and erecting a huge nativity scene in the lobby.

I watched the carpenters as they built the manger and arranged Mary, Joseph, the angels, the wise men, the shepherds, the animals and baby Jesus artfully in the nativity.

When they were finished, we all stood back, looked at the scene and gauged the effect it would have on the patients and visitors. The unanimous opinion was that it was beautiful. The workers packed up their tools and left.

I passed the scene several times that day. Each time I stopped to admire the intricate beauty of the baby and other figures in the display.

The next day, while I was on patrol, I discovered that the Christ Child was missing!

I wondered what kind of individual would steal baby Jesus. I investigated the incident and found the answers. But I wrote an unofficial report that went something like this:

### Incident report

Dec. 6, 1986, at approximately 0700 hours, I, Carol Eagan, a security officer at St. Vincent Carmel Hospital, started my routine morning tour of the building. When I approached the nativity

scene I discovered that baby Jesus was missing.

I recalled that he was in his crib yesterday and appeared to be resting peacefully.

After questioning the three wise men and the shepherds, I had a long session with Mary and Joseph. They did not appear to be nervous and denied any knowledge about the child's disappearance. They repeatedly claimed that the child had gone to the synagogue. (However, we all know that he didn't go there until he was twelve years old.)

During my interrogation, one of the sheep told me that he had noticed a slender female in a dark dress and shawl hanging around the manger yesterday about noon, but he lost interest in her and returned to his grazing.

At 1800 hours, I returned to my office. No ransom note or telephone demands had been received.

Foul play is suspected, but there is no physical evidence that the child has been harmed. I have no choice but to notify the director of nursing, Cindy Leigh.

Leigh informed me that it is the custom of Catholics to leave the manger empty and that (Daughters of Charity) Sister Mary Elizabeth (Cullen) had taken baby Jesus into custody. Leigh assured me that baby Jesus would be released on Dec. 24 in time for his birthday celebration.

## Child's memories become treasures

by Cindy Ann (Meyers) Schmitt

My sisters and I were blessed by having our aunt and uncle as our next-door neighbors. And we were the closest thing to being their own children.

For many reasons, it was a memorable



relationship. There were Sunday visits to Grandpa's house, eating take-out chicken on the bedroom floor, watching Lawrence Welk with Uncle Leroy, and kitchen table birthday parties. All of these things and so much more. We have pictures to remind us of nearly every occasion we spent together. And the memories of Christmas Eves past will never fade from my mind and heart.

Their front door was decorated with three fair-haired angels nicknamed Christy, Cindy and Connie. Inside, there were thoughtfully-placed knickknacks, tumbling elves, foil-wrapped packages and the Nativity scene.

At the first sign of dusk, we'd hop into Aunt Janice's car and drive around the brightly-lit neighborhood. The glowing lights and plastic snowmen could hardly keep us from thinking that Santa was coming to our house that very hour.

As we drove down our street, we'd pray that the living room shade would be raised. For if the shade was still drawn, Santa was still busy inside. Walking across the front yard to the door was too exciting for words. The flood light from Dad's 8 mm movie camera illuminated the living room as we came in and found every toy we could have dreamed of having.

Now that I am older, I realize the toys we found there could not compare with the enduring company of Aunt Janice. For all the Christmases you made so uniquely special for me, I thank you, Aunt Janice.

## The tiny, special Christmas star

by Mary Ann Wyard

Christmas time at Holy Cross, as in so many parishes, overflows with seasonal memories of joyous times with friends.

For the children of Holy Cross Central School in Indianapolis, Advent always means rehearsals for the school's annual

Christmas program scheduled just before vacation. Excitement builds as practice after practice lead to the festive evening of holiday songs and skits.

Providence Sister Ann Brendan Burget liked to design elaborate costumes for the children in her kindergarten class. The year that she taught my son, it was decided that each child would wear a very large star-shaped mask trimmed in tinsel and glitter.

My son wasn't looking forward to wearing the star mask, but his little sister thought it was lovely. I remarked that the kindergarten students would definitely be the "stars" of the show. He didn't laugh, but she smiled.

At the start of the program, the kindergartners sang their Christmas songs as rehearsed, then removed the star masks and retired to the bleachers to watch the rest of the program. It was delightful, of course, as class after class in holiday costume expertly entertained parents and grandparents with music.

My daughter watched the show with great interest, then quietly slipped from her seat in the darkened auditorium just as Providence Sister Barbara McClelland, the principal, stepped up to the podium to conclude the program with "thank you" and wishes for happy holidays.

Sister Barbara was praising all of the school children for their hard work when my daughter suddenly appeared beside her on the stage!

Amazingly, that determined little girl, who was not quite three years old, walked right out to the center of the stage. She was holding one of the large tinsel stars against the front of her dress, and it was so big that only her head and legs were visible.

Everyone smiled at the sight of this tiny child, nearly covered by the tinsel star, alone in the center of a very big stage. It was obvious that she had made up her mind to participate in the show.

Smiling broadly, Sister Barbara offered an introduction. "And here," she said, "is a special Christmas star."



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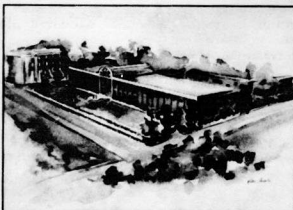


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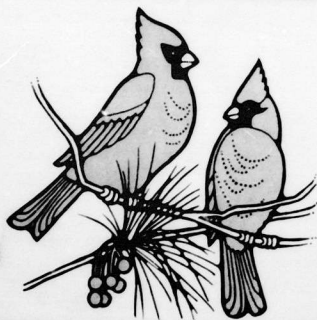
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# Christmas memories

## Birth and death often linked

by Jerry K. Finn

Birth and death. How ironic that they are so often linked together. As I looked through the doorway at the end of the hall and saw him lying there, so small and thin in his bed among the mass of sheets, I couldn't help but think of how the little Christ Child must have looked as he lay on his bed of hay. I began to wonder why I ever volunteered to do this as the other nurse was giving the final instructions before she left for home.

When I had heard someone talking about needing volunteers to take care of Father Tom Stumph during the holidays it didn't seem so bad. He needed round-the-clock nursing care and with my busy schedule I hadn't been able to do much for him. So I thought that this would be something I could do.

He was a special person in my life, and since I had no kids of my own, it seemed the least I could do to spend Christmas Eve taking care of him so that the other nurses could spend the time at home with their

children. But then, several weeks ago it wasn't Christmas Eve.

As I counted the methodic drips in the IV tubing, I heard the bells of Christmas striking the hour in the steeple nearby and my mind was a million miles away. I could see the candles, hear the music and almost smell the pine in the darkened church at midnight Mass. Christmas Mass at midnight was something I never missed. I was thinking of how nice it would be with someone you love, sharing Christmas and opening gifts. Still feeling sorry for myself, I looked down.

I was startled to see him smiling up at me. A million thoughts went through my head at once. Here before me was Christ Incarnate. Without suspecting anything, I found my Christmas gift wrapped in white. I felt all of the feelings that must have overwhelmed the magi and the shepherds so long ago. I saw the stars of Bethlehem in his eyes, a message of peace on earth and goodwill to all. Here, wrapped ever so loosely before me, was all the love in the world. In the still of the night as I looked down at him, there lay the tiny Christ Child looking back at me.

It was through that look of peace in his eyes and the impish grin that spread across his face that I was gifted that Christmas. Despite his pain, in a voice barely audible, I heard him say, "Merry Christmas." But

in those two words he said much, much more. In his eyes he said "embrace life." Though we both knew that he was dying, he was still grateful for the short time he still had.

I thought back on the many times prior to this that I had spent with him—lots of activities with the kids in our deanery, sitting in the autumn woods talking about the highs and lows in our lives, spending time in prayer and liturgy together. He gave his life and the love of it to everyone who came in contact with him. I thought of the many times I had seen him giving young people the gift of their own self-esteem and self-worth. I then realized that he was the one who had given me the understanding that I had to get working with young people too. I thought of the many times that he gently encouraged me, never pushing, but always loving.

As I sat there beside him, with his hand in mine, I understood the true meaning of peace and grace. I realized the importance of a just world to attaining that peace. His eyes were closed, his bow and his breathing was ever so rhythmic as he slept while I went about my business taking care of things. In the quiet of the Christmas night, I whispered a prayer of gratitude to my Infant Lord for this precious, silent, and holy night.

(Jerry Finn is director of youth ministry for the New Albany Deanery. Father Tom Stumph died Jan. 27, 1981.)

## Candles in the windows at night

by Anna-Margaret O'Sullivan

Back in the 1920s, my brother Carroll and I borrowed the European custom of burning a candle in the window "to light the Christ Child on his way." We interpreted it to mean four candles shedding light in each of the four directions, and prevailed on mother to let us set the candles on the windowsills and light them at dusk on Christmas Eve.

Each year she had to be persuaded all over again: the candles would catch fire, the house would burn down, we would fall victim to pneumonia while monitoring our candles in the icy hall and unheated rooms. Fortunately, none of these dire possibilities ever became reality.

Without fail, Carroll and I wrapped up like mummies and braved the cold to admire our candles, burning vividly in all directions. The only usable window to the north was in the upstairs hall. We had to circle the house and reach a vantage point in the middle of the back yard in order to see it. We then toured the village, often in soft swirling snow, seeking other candles in other windows. I hope we weren't secretly disappointed if we saw one!

We took a great deal of pleasure in commenting on the pagan state of people who "wouldn't even light a candle for the Christ Child." At the same time, of course, we were comfortably aware of our own depth of devotion. We didn't always see another candle. When we did, we expressed delight, and would have been agast had anyone suggested we were hypocrites.

I no longer consider it my business who lights a candle and who does not, but those who do not are missing a lovely ritual. I still cherish the Christmas legend and on Christmas Eve I still burn a candle in each direction to light the Christ Child on his way, be it north, south, east or west.

## Christmas without my daughter

by Beverly Jones

There was a time in my life when I looked forward to the Christmas season like any other grown-up "child." This all changed in 1973.

In May of that year, my family and I went to Chicago for a weekend trip. When we arrived home, my daughter complained of not feeling well and of having a headache. We took her to the doctor.

After the doctor had examined her, my daughter was hospitalized immediately. We were told the dreadful news that she had meningitis and the prognosis was not good. We were devastated.

My precious daughter never came home to us again. She died the next day.

Though she was dying on life-support systems, testing failed to show brain-wave activity and the medical support was discontinued. We had lost our only child at five years of age!

I could never understand why the Lord was punishing us by taking this little person away from us. He took her away from us and didn't seem to care!

My husband and I went through the grieving period. He seemed to be bearing up much better than I.

I prayed daily for the strength that I needed to get through the day, and I can say that the Lord never failed to bring me over the rough days.

As Christmas approached, I reluctantly tried to prepare for the holiday, but I dreaded this time of the year. There was no "Lynne" to be here and share Christmas ... no noise, no laughter, no excitement, no nothing!

I tried to get into the spirit, but could not give 100 percent. Nothing could relieve my grief. But as I prayed daily, it dawned on me that I was being helped and the answer was there. The Lord was giving me the strength to bear this loss, and I should have known that the Lord would never give me more than I could bear.

I had the peace that I needed to accept the death of my child, but I just had not taken the time to listen. I also had another source of peace, for we were blessed with another child approximately five months after "Lynne" died.

Now I have another daughter. She adds joy to my life but can never replace her sister.

The bells that rang to tell of the birth of Christ were symbolic to me, for I felt that I had indeed been born again and renewed as well.

## Setting priorities at Christmas

by Margaret Nelson

Even though it happened 18 years ago, my five children and I still remember the December of 1971.

The oldest girl was 13; the next daughter was 11; we had a boy, 10; a daughter, 8; and the youngest son had just turned 6.

Because the oldest four attended St. Andrew School and had Dec. 8 off for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we went Christmas shopping. I remember that 13-year-old Maureen spent all the money she had for a special gift for her dad.

The next morning, their father must have made a valiant effort to get up to see the children off to school. (It had been months since my husband arose that early, and moving around the house had been difficult after he suffered his first heart attack in May of that year. He struggled to follow the doctor's orders to get more exercise, but kept having physical setbacks.)

On that morning of Dec. 9, he cheerfully asked the children how things were going in school and what their goals were.

After Patrick, 6, left for kindergarten that morning, I went to Mass and then to the grocery store. By the time Patrick and I returned our father-in-law had died from his second heart attack.

I'll always remember the way the four older children clung to each other in the principal's office that December day.

Later while friends and neighbors visited, the other children thought it would be a fun diversion for Patrick to call the "Santa Claus" phone number. (Every year they heard the story of St. Nicholas and celebrated his Dec. 6 feast day. We downplayed the commercialism and always had a birthday cake for Jesus on Christmas.) This seemed to be a time to loosen up. It was pretty heart-tugging when we heard the "jolly old fellow" say that Patrick should be sure to tell his father what he wanted, too.

Parishioners, neighbors, friends and family went out of their way to provide support for us that Christmas season.

But one of the brightest moments came when Maureen told me, "Mom, we can have the food and decorations we usually have, but we don't need presents for Christmas. Being together is the most important thing."

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## Two sons in the military service

by Bernardine Purcell

It was October, 1968 when I needed to do some Christmas shopping really early for the first time. Both of my sons had been called up for the service of their country. It was the result of the Pueblo incident. It was possible that the younger son could be scheduled for a Christmas pass but the older son was stationed in Korea that year.

I wanted him to receive his Christmas box in time, so I advised that it must be ready for shipping in October.

There were no signs of Christmas in the stores so I relied on our family supply of Christmas ornaments and decorations to add to the color of Christmas. The home-baked cookies were individually wrapped in tin foil before packing them in the tin coffee can. The gift-wrapped presents and everything else were carefully packed by my husband in a durable box that we found at our local grocery store. The box was mailed two days before the deadline.

October seemed too early to be thinking about Christmas. After all, Halloween was still to come as well as Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving would not be the same knowing that my sons would not be home. I busied myself in prayer for their safety and worked hard to keep my mind occupied on the things I could control.

In December I was happy to learn that our younger son would be home for Christmas. It eased the tension and put a little more spark into my work as I prepared for the coming holidays.

Two days before Christmas, the phone rang. It was our older son. He had saved his leave time and was issued a pass. He was in Hawaii, U.S.A. and he would be home for Christmas.



## The year my rings were lost

by Anne Eacret

It was a cold, snowy evening in 1973, a few days before Christmas, when I decided to do some last minute shopping. The snow was getting deeper outside as I hurried through the store. When I climbed into my car, other shoppers were driving slowly through the slippery parking lot. I tried to back up, but I was stuck in the snow. When I dug around the tires with my hands, my gloves were too slippery and I pulled them off.

At last, bare pavement! I maneuvered the car slowly onto the lot. Suddenly I missed my rings. My wedding and engagement rings were missing. They must have come off when I pulled off my gloves. I felt inside my glove, nothing was there. I was pulling into my driveway now. How would I tell my husband, Jerry, I had lost them?

I stood inside the door and explained in a tearful voice what had happened. "Come on," Jerry said, "we'll go back and look for them."

We returned to the exact spot. The snow was coming down heavier now. We looked, but to no avail. My rings were lost. On the way back home Jerry said, "Don't worry, Anne, I'll buy you another set." But I felt empty and hollow inside. My rings meant so much to me. They were a symbol of our love. I remembered how special I felt when Jerry slipped the engagement ring on my finger. They were a precious gift from someone who loves me. "Oh Lord," I prayed, "please help us find them."

Christmas day arrived. My parents were visiting from New York. Jerry's parents were there too. The sun was shining, and my grief was melting like the snow outside. We were enjoying a nice visit, when Jerry said, "Now would be a perfect time to go look for Anne's rings. The snow is melting." So he and my Dad and my father-in-law went back to the parking lot.

I was busy when they returned. Jerry walked up behind me and said, "We found your rings."

I turned in surprise. "You can't be serious!" I said in disbelief. But there in his hand were my rings, scraped on the side, but totally intact. How wonderful I felt inside! My heart was full of joy.

My father-in-law had stepped over a snow bank and there they were! Evidently when the parking lot had been plowed, the plow had pushed them on top of the snow bank. How fortunate for me that Someone Else loves me too.

## The joy of being 'discovered'

by Therese Dailey

My most joyous Christmas happened in 1983. A few years prior to that, I had written a story that had run through my head. It wasn't anything special. A lot of irrelevant items seem to come to the surface when you are, say, cleaning out closets, trunks and chest of drawers.

This old story I had written I felt had a message. It was about a gentleman in a nursing home comparable to the one where my dad used to put on Bingos with other Legion of Mary members without fail for the patients. I also helped him. The three stories the old gentleman told were warmed over and told without a single word missing. Since it was nearing Christmas time and this news publication seemed to run the kind of heartwarming stories, I decided to send mine this year. The editor had not solicited any, so I told the editor if he wished to use it, fine, and if not no harm done.

A would-be author is always hoping her talent will be "discovered." After watching the news for several days, my contribution to this publication did not return.

One Friday afternoon I was getting ready to go away and my mother came into the room and said, "Therese, look at the cartoon on page 23." When I had a chance to look at the paper I noticed there was no cartoon on page 23. Instead right there was MY story. Talk about being "discovered," I thought I was the next best thing to Erma Bombeck, Teresa Bloomingdale or another woman whose articles appear in print ever so often.

(Therese Dailey is the daughter of Alice Dailey, a regular contributor to The Criterion.)

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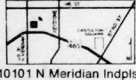
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# Remembrances

## A Christmas tradition that didn't work out

by Frank Mitev

At our house, getting the Christmas tree up was my chore. I bought the tree, with guidance from the three girls—Myrna, Sandy and Peggy Jo. They were energetic and vocal helpers. Also I erected the tree and strung the lights and placed the high ornaments. From that point, there were enough other hands to finish the tree.

One year in early December I said: "I'm going to save some money on this year's Christmas tree by buying my tree at a tree farm. We live way out in this bedroom community so we are near tree farms."

From the girls:  
"Good idea, Dad."  
"Get a big tree."  
"Get a tree 10 feet tall."

That last remark was from Peggy Jo. (We had 8-foot ceilings.)

So that next Saturday I set out to find a tree farm. I had the addresses of three such farms.

The first two had the same story: "You're too late. All our good trees were sold in October. People come out and pick their trees while it's still warm out, they mark their trees and we cut them for them when they want them."

"What a revolting development! No good trees at all!"

"None."

"What do we do now, Grandpa?"

This came from my oldest grandson, who had pleaded to accompany me and help with the big-tree selection.

"Michael, we're going to go into the next place and cut down somebody's good tree and say it's ours."

"You can't do that, Grandpa, because I'll tell everybody."

"Michael, you've inspired a terrific idea. Instead of one large tree we'll get two. No, we'll get three trees. If we can't have one tall one we will have three wide ones."

"Nobody has three trees, Grandpa."

"You are witnessing a first in Christmas traditions. You watch me Michael." He did and I did.

One tree was a little over five feet and the other two were a few inches under five feet.

When we returned no one was home. Alone, Good, I could set up the trees before anyone had an opportunity to object. We had a sliding glass door on the west side of the living room. The three panels of the door measured nine feet. When bunched together, the trees were seven and a half feet wide. I moved the television set slightly, and the trees fit perfectly. I was placing the angel on the center tree when the family returned.

"You can't do that."

"Where is the real tree?"

"Nobody in their right mind has three trees."

"Dad, you have to buy a normal tree."

"What will my friends think?"

"You can't have three angels."

"I'm not going to help decorate."

"Dad, you're weird."

"I like it," I said. "I'm going out to buy a couple of toppers for the two short trees."

I came back from the hardware store with two ornaments for the tops of the small trees.

I trimmed the three trees, all except the icicles. The girls pitched in and helped with the tinsel.

"You know, it does look good. Maybe our friends won't laugh."

"I hope nobody visits us."

"This is the first year we have used all the ornaments."

"Three trees hold a lot of lights."

"This takes a ton of tinsel."

"Three trees. How different. How quaint."

"Beautiful." From me.

"Beautiful, but different."

"Dad, this is the last year you get to buy the Christmas tree."

"Two of you don't even live here any more."

"Doesn't matter, Dad, from now on, we'll buy the tree."

We finished trimming the trees and everyone came to accept them, or at least tolerated them. But no one appreciated them, except me.

## A mystery tree brings memories of childhood

by Carole Hodge

All Christmases are memorable to me because it is my favorite time of year.

One particularly memorable experience occurred about eight years ago. It was early December, and although it had turned cold we had no snow predicted.

I had most of my shopping done, had put up our artificial Christmas tree, and was happy to have gotten it up early. Wrapped presents were under the tree.

There is something very humdrum about putting up the same tree every year. The word "artificial" removes all exciting things—such thoughts as "Will it smell?" or "Will the needles fall?" or "Will it remain standing?" There are a certain amount of holiday uncertainties that border on tradition.

A few days after I put up the tree, I arose from sleep to find the pleasant surprise of an overnight snow. It was only an inch and a half, but it was a beautiful snow. The bare tree limbs were now coated with white that glistened like diamonds and created a winter wonderland.

I readied myself for work, and realized just before leaving that it was our day for garbage pick-up. As I pulled the garbage can down the drive, I noticed something in the street in front of our house. When I got closer, I could see it was a rather large cedar tree. I assumed it had fallen from a truck or a car. Since I didn't want it to cause a traffic problem or be run over, I pulled the tree off the road alongside our drive and placed it so that the person who lost it could readily retrieve it.

I arrived home from work that evening to find the tree where I had left it that morning. The continuing light snow that day had weighed it down, but it looked so beautiful. It was sad that no one had returned for such a beautiful tree. Reluctantly, I gave the owner another day, but still no one came to get it.

During my childhood we could not afford to buy a Christmas tree, but my father was able to get a cedar tree from a friend's farm. Although we were very poor, my mother and father always got a beautiful Christmas tree. During those years, Daddy cut the tree and Santa Claus came on Christmas Eve, decorated the tree, and put some small gifts under it.

The tree was decorated with large colored lights and icicles, and on Christmas morning it was a sight to behold. To me, nothing on earth could match its beauty. It was always so tall and majestic.

By this time, I had decided to rescue the cedar tree and put it in our dining room. It was no problem to put it up, and there were no adjustments necessary as is often experienced with live trees. I dug out some old sets of lights and ornaments. The tree was so beautiful and the smell was wonderful. It took me back in time to when I was quite young.

What started out to be a rather ordinary Christmas turned out to be a most memorable one thanks to that wonderful cedar tree. I felt that it was a gift, left for me that snow-covered morning. It brought back all those memories of Christmases long ago when things were simple . . . and of a child who stood in front of an old-fashioned cedar tree on Christmas morning in awe of its beauty. Those memories, stirred by this lost tree, made that year my most memorable Christmas.



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## Christmas play among the needy

by Sr. Magdalene Lenges, O.L.V.M.

It has been almost 60 years since I was in Las Vegas, New Mexico. I was just beginning my experience as a Victory Noll missionary along with Sisters Muriel Balch and Mary David Miller. Back then we were known as "catechists."

Among our weekly missions were the Gallinas. I can still see the road we traveled between the Lower and Upper Gallinas—climbing, always climbing, and narrow with many hairpin curves.

Our first Christmas in the Gallinas was something else! Five of us packed the car with boxes the Saturday before Christmas. At Lower Gallinas, Catechist Vigil, the sister in charge, directed the unloading. Presents and candy were safely stored out of sight. The presents were very simple with one exception—Sister Muriel's father, a carpenter, had made sewing boxes for all the girls in her class.

Then preparation began for our annual Christmas pageant. Boxes of costumes were placed in the sacristy and a lad was dispatched to ring the bell telling of our arrival. Other boys set to work to darken the chapel, tacking our black aprons over the windows. The shepherds-to-be were sent out for sticks and sheepskins. The main characters, Our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, the angels, and three kings, were chosen and taken inside to be costumed.

"Where is Our Blessed Mother's dress?" someone asked.

"Oh, the other catechist must have taken it to Upper Gallinas!"

Somehow we improvised for the Blessed Mother! A worn white cassock and a length of blue borrowed from a less-important character clothed our Blessed Mother.

"Catechist Magdalene, will you help with the three kings?" asked Catechist Vigil. "They'll tell you who they are."

I started dressing the kings. Our costumes were not much to speak of: some white cassocks, too worn for use at the altar, a few lengths of colorful material which had come in mission boxes, a cope which had been made for some previous play, wigs, crowns and gills.

By that time, the boys were returning with their crooks and sheepskins. One boy brought an old lantern. The first—and only—practice began! The angels were placed on the side altars. One folded her hands. The other held the string to which was attached the star; pulled, it would lead the kings in.

The play began. Two talented older men played the traditional hymns on organ and violin. The Gospels were read, the age-old story was re-told. When it was time for the kings to come in, Catechist Vigil discovered there were four kings! One was delegated to stay behind with a promise that he could help give out the gifts later.

At the end of the performance, another traditional rite took place: veneration of the Infant. In this, the Infant is presented and all the people in church come up to kiss the Infant and a small coin is offered.

The chapel in which this took place was very tiny. The girl who took the part of Our Blessed Mother noticed how narrow the gate to the sanctuary was. She thoughtfully picked up the Infant and, sitting on the steps of the Communion rail, presented the Child to each adorer. It was one of the clearest symbols I have seen of Mary's part in our salvation. Through her, from her arms, Jesus comes to us.

Adults and children filed out of the chapel quietly and reverently—but that was the end of the quiet!

The party followed and, as the children turned to us with their cheery "Thank you, Catechist!" we breathed a little prayer for our benefactors who not only filled our hands, but also made it possible for us to live among God's needy ones for whom his Son was born that wintry night in Bethlehem.

## The best of early morning memories

by Elizabeth McGrath

It was the Sunday before Christmas some 70 years ago.

After our pastor, Father Charles Curran, had finished his sermon he would announce in his booming Irish voice, "Now for the streetcar schedule for Christmas morning."

I would wait and wait while he went through the list: the Silver Hills car, the Spring Street car, until finally, the Main Street car will leave West 10th Street at 4:30 a.m.

That was our call. Yes, in the 1920s the transit company scheduled the streetcar

runs to coincide with the five o'clock Masses at our Irish Holy Trinity Church and the German St. Mary's Church, which was two blocks away.

Christmas morning found my parents, two older sisters, my youngest sister, and me waiting for the "clang! clang!" and the chance to say "Merry Christmas" to our friends who had boarded before us.

My oldest brother, home from the seminary, had gone earlier with my two brothers who were servers. They had to be at school in sufficient time to have their Buster Brown collars and red ties properly adjusted no later than 4:30 a.m. Sister's orders.

It was something to see the three of them in the procession and serving. After Mass, we walked home together, sometimes even in a snow shower.

Memories just don't come any better than this.



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# Christmas memories

## Sharing pancakes and presents

by Mary Vaughan

Each family was sizeable, with 10 children in one and eight in the other.

The financial profile of each family could be found in the method by which they acquired clothing. The family of 10 obtained their clothes at garage sales and neighbors' give-aways. The family of eight bought their clothing at retail stores or the makings thereof at fabric shops.

The younger children of both families became good friends and attended church and school together. They played, watched television, quarreled and forgave, and shared their favorite meals, especially Aunt Jemima pancakes.

Unfortunately, they did something else together. Shopping! When one of the children confessed this to his mother, they were sent back to the store to apologize and return the lifted merchandise.

"Why did you take something without paying?" the mother asked them.

"We had no money," was their reply.

The mother arranged flyer routes for them all, and her living room became a warehouse as numerous children sorted and bagged flyers until their hands were stained with newsprint. Then mother and children went up and down neighborhood, hanging plastic bags containing flyers on door knobs.

Through spring's sweet wetness, summer's hot sun, fall's beautiful leaves, and winter's six-inch snowfalls, they walked their routes, always sharing the work and monetary reward.

Now everyone had their own money, and the children began to share trips to shopping malls, movies, roller rinks, and ball games.

Finally, with the money they had earned, they bought Christmas gifts for each other. Then they gathered again in the living room, this time to exchange and unwrap presents.

When nine children unwrap gifts in a single room, one would expect the noise level to vibrate the rafters. But this group went about their activity with the same methodic quietness as when they stuffed the flyers. All that could be heard was the peace of Christ and a mother's joyful cry as she unwrapped a gift of Aunt Jemima pancake mix.

## A sweater for Santa Claus

by Ruth Steinmetz

Santa came to our house. My mother lifted me up on the piano bench and, with two tiny fingers I played, "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star." I had rehearsed for weeks. Mother had assured me Santa would leave me lots of

toys if I could render my song without a mistake.

All went well and, as Santa was leaving, I saw Daddy give him some money.

In my child-like curiosity I asked, "Daddy, why did you give Santa money?"

Daddy must have been a quick thinker because he answered, "Well, I wanted to buy Santa a sweater for Christmas, because it is so cold at the North Pole. But I didn't know his size, so I gave him money to buy his own sweater."

## Peaches repents after the crash

by Sue Baker

What was my most memorable Christmas? That's a tough question.

However, in reflection it must have been in 1964. That year our dog, Peaches, who thought she was "people," knocked over our fully-decorated tree.

It wasn't all her fault though! It was one of the years that our tree had a tall, double trunk, and even with pruning it was wobbly in its three-legged stand. It leaned like the Tower of Pisa, so we used our children's building blocks under two legs to correct the tilt.

The worst mistake was to sit it in front of Peaches' favorite window. In our holiday excitement, we had forgotten she was no longer a 10-pound puppy, but a full-grown German shepherd.

The next day, when I returned home from work, I found an overturned tree, broken ornaments, smashed light bulbs, and a very ashamed dog, who was hiding.

We salvaged the tree by wrapping picture frame wire around the trunk in several places and nailing the wire to the woodwork. It was prettier than before, with shiny new ornaments and light bulbs. The wires didn't show... too much.

Yes, 1964 certainly was a memorable Christmas.

## Memories of the Christmas Room

by Gloria Bond

I did not notice the cold air whipping around my legs as I hurried up the steps to Grandmom and Grandpop's house. This was Christmas Eve, and aunts, uncles, and cousins cheerfully greeted one another.

Once inside, my eyes were drawn to the French doors leading into the parlor.

Every year the parlor was transformed by Santa Claus, with the help of his elves, into a magical, musical Christmas Room. Until the long-awaited moment arrived, the French doors were carefully draped and only a hint of colored light sifted through the protective sheeting.

Trusting that the parade into the Christmas Room would not start without me, and satisfied no gaps in the sheet would permit a peek, I rushed into the dining room and inspected every morsel of food. The cake sat in the center of the table along with bowls of colorfully-striped candies, mints and nuts. A paper tablecloth, with Santa faces on its border, created a fanciful background for the many treats. Flickering shadows from the lighted red candles danced in merry rhythm.

My name was called and I knew it was time. Even though my years were few, I remembered from the past that I must find my place in the line of grandchildren. Knowing what awaited, we formed the line with speed and precision. One of the adults slipped through the side door into the Christmas Room.

We stood in line with wide eyes and open mouths as the sheet was mystically whipped away, and the doors were thrown open. Music from the great wooden music box mingled with our excited voices as we filed into the room that had come alive with pure joy.


The proud Christmas tree stood on a large oval table. It graciously held a variety of ornaments, many of which were the results of our school Christmas projects. My favorite decorations were the bubble lights. Watching the rising and falling of the colorful bubbling liquid in the fragile glass tubes had a soothing effect that etched this memory in my mind.

After a flurry of gift exchanges, all attention focused on Grandmom and Grandpop as they sat on the sofa preparing to open their gifts. Warm feelings tickled me as I watched them smile. Grandmom's eyes twinkled in a way I thought must be similar to Mrs. Claus's.

Having had my fill from the Christmas table and having examined my newly-acquired treasures for the umpteenth time, I climbed onto the overstuffed chair. I relished the warmth that settled over me and drifted off to sleep.


All too soon, Mom was gently nudging me. It was time to go home. How could an evening so long in arriving end so quickly? There was a reassuring certainty, however, to know that Christmas Eve would always bring the same joys of the Christmas Room.

Indeed, they still do this to this day.



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## Christmas in the St. Meinrad Abbey

by Charles E. Adams

In 1938, I was in the freshman class at the old Cathedral High School. Our religion instructor, a religious brother, taught us a vocation prayer. Will we find happiness in the single state, the religious life, or the married state? And, if the married state, please, God, a suitable mate. He advised us to faithfully say the prayer daily to ask God's help in this momentous decision.

At the end of WW II, after serving with the Navy through the Pacific campaign, I entered St. Meinrad Seminary along with other former members of the armed forces. "Belated vocations," we were termed.

Was this the answer to the brother's prayer, which I had said faithfully these seven years? I thought so.

It was here, at St. Meinrad, that I experienced my most memorable Christmas. After months of being steeped in the 1300-year-old tradition of St. Benedict's monks, and imbued with them with the real spirit of the faith, the Christmas season came.

The minor seminary at that time consisted of pupils of the four high school years, as well as those of the college. The Abbey Choir was made up of a wide range of voices.

As we marched on Christmas morning into the vast, vaulted-ceilinged Abbey Church adjacent to the monastery, the choir, in red cassocks and white surplices, was in place in the choir loft, located far above and around the huge sacristy. The monks, in their black robes and cowls, were seated below in pews around the high altar.

Throughout the Mass, the monks'

chanting of St. Gregory's music and the angelic voices of the choir overhead singing the traditional Christmas hymns did indeed "make a joyful noise unto the Lord!" On that Christmas day, in such august company, I felt as close to being "raptured to the seventh heaven" with St. Paul as I ever expect to be in this world!

I was not privileged to remain at St. Meinrad. Since leaving, I have spent 39 joyous Christmases with the wonderful and beloved male God granted in answer to the beseeching of the brother's prayer.

We reside in a lovely wooded setting, as peaceful as that of the monks of St. Meinrad, in Bedford's St. Vincent de Paul Parish. We have five wonderful children and 10 beautiful grandchildren-with another on the way.

## Christmas project makes it special

by Cynthia Schultz

It is traditional for our family to help a needy family at Christmas. I should have known that the Holy Spirit was involved in last year's Christmas project when I made my annual telephone call to a social service agency in town.

It was two weeks before Christmas. My friend, Susan, answered the telephone, scanned her list, then hesitated.

"Cindy, there's a family I know who's not on the list," she said. "They've had a hard time, but never ask for anything. It's a couple with three children. Things started going downhill when the man lost a leg in a work-related accident. The woman stays home to care for him. They have other health problems and don't have insurance. The woman comes in here to do volunteer work in exchange

for food. She's always smiling and so grateful..."

I knew then that they were our Christmas family! What I didn't know was that the Holy Spirit would use me and others in a special way.

I telephoned the woman, whom I'll call "Mary." She was embarrassed that our family wanted to help her.

"There's a lot of people who need help more than us," she said, sweetly.

"Maybe," I answered, "but we want to make your family's Christmas brighter."

Mary finally agreed. She gave me their clothing sizes and the names of toys that her children had asked for, but it was clear that the family had greater needs than gifts of clothes and toys.

Casually, Mary mentioned that one of her daughters desperately needed braces. The little girl's twisted and protruding teeth were causing a self-esteem problem. Her husband also needed a new prosthesis because hers had developed above his knee from a worn out and ill-fitting artificial leg.

Mary was a faith-filled woman who accepted her trials with cheerfulness. It quickly became obvious that the Holy Spirit wanted to use me to help get the braces and prosthesis for free. With the Holy Spirit as my partner, I knew it would happen. However, I decided not to share my thoughts with Mary. Right after we hung up, I made some calls.

Our dentist agreed to examine the little girl, X-ray her mouth, and extract teeth if necessary. Our children's orthodontist would fit the braces. My friend Susan called a prosthesis company, who agreed to supply Mary's husband with a "new leg." The donations totaled about \$4,000!

When I called Mary with the news, she was overwhelmed with gratitude and called all of us her "guardian angels." But we were simply a team of Christians directed by the Holy Spirit to help others.

Yes, the Christmas of 1988 was very special indeed.



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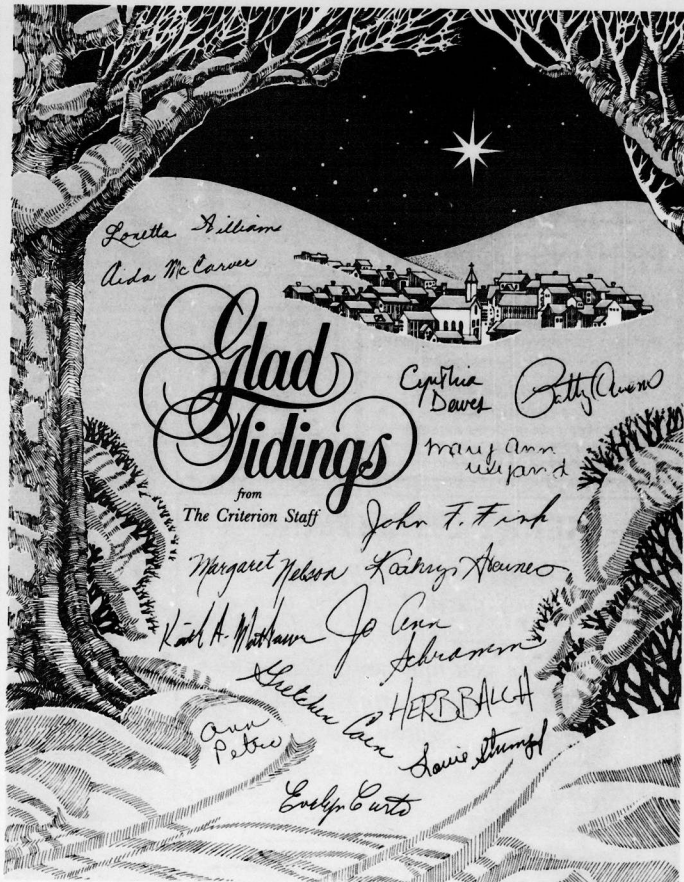
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# What do clowns wish for at Christmastime?

by Mary Ann Wyand

What do clowns want for Christmas?

Thirty new clowns from the Indianapolis area who just completed a 10-week Smiles Unlimited course in clown ministry had lots of expected and unexpected answers when questioned by *The Criterion* Dec. 10 at St. Christopher Parish.

"I'd like a sad face," Shasta, also known as Barbara McFargue, replied, "so I can make it happy."

Kazu, better known as Nick Curto from St. Christopher Parish, would like "a bag of laughs" from Santa Claus.

Granny Mag, actually St. Luke parishioner Margaret McClelland, said she loves children. "I'd like a clown baby," she announced. "Do you think I'm too old?"

Clowns, like children, love toys.

"I'd like a big clown 'steflescope' with a big plunger on the end of it," Zappy Doodle, also known as Dede Fleming, proclaimed. And Calleepe, who is really Vicky Carlton, wants some clown tricks.

Turning to more serious requests, Little Miss Redi, alias Jackie Rieck, said she wants

"my two front teeth" for Christmas. Chemotherapy left Rieck with dental problems, but the cancer is in remission and Little Miss Redi is very happy to be clowning around now.

Bright Eyes, who is really Ruth Rolison, wants "love, laughter, and peace for all of God's children."

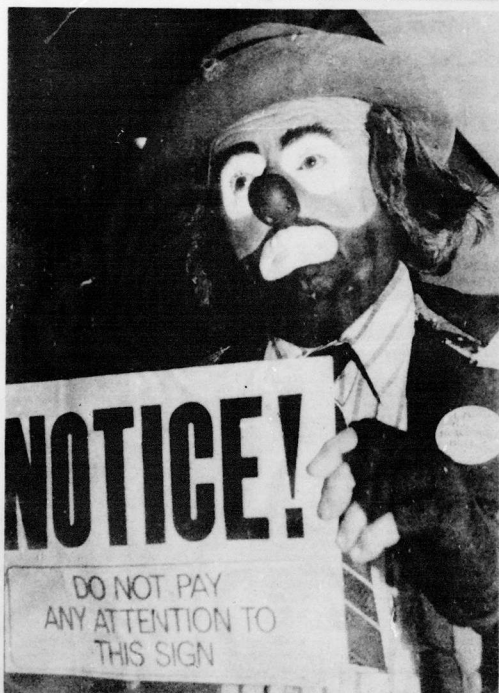
Jingles the Clown, actually Hilda Chavis, shook her bells and admitted that, "I would like for my sister to learn how to tell time. She's mentally retarded. I've tried to teach her for 10 years. It would make me the happiest person in the world."

Lonesome, who is Harlan Rolison, wants to "bring smiles to people that don't have things to smile about."

Tootsie, also known as Deanna Steinbrook, would like to "put love into beautiful packages and give it to homeless and abused people."

And Topper, who is really Gale Dahlke, "would love to be able to bring a smile to the faces of people who are out in the cold, who are lonely, who are sick, and make them laugh, just for a minute."

Hear that, Santa?



LAUGHS—"Ski," a hobo clown, gets a lot of laughs with this sign while clowning around for audiences of all ages. He is Don Berkoski from St. Christopher Parish in Indianapolis. Berkoski also teaches clown ministry. (Photo by Margaret Nelson)

## Ski really likes to clown around

by Mary Ann Wyand

Ski, or rather Don Berkoski, likes to clown around so much that he decided to teach others the art of clown ministry.

During the past eight years, the St. Christopher parishioner has taught over 2,000 people how to become clowns and spread joy to others.

As the founder of Smiles Unlimited, Inc., Berkoski spends 10 weeks working with prospective clowns on character development, costuming, and techniques.

"Clown means 'clod,' the lowest of all things," Berkoski explained. "The word minister means 'servant.' As a clown minister, you go out into the community to become life givers."

Spreading laughs is serious business for the dedicated hobo clown, who enjoys working with other clowns in their "tramp" or "white face" or "auguste" costumes to communicate happiness to nursing home residents, prisoners, hospital patients, teenagers struggling with addiction problems, and children of all ages.

"I've found that clowning changes people's lives," he said. "If you can laugh, you're pain-free."

The Smiles Unlimited founder is currently teaching clown ministry, and giving hope, to inmates in Indiana prisons.

"Our major thrust is in nursing homes," Berkoski explained. "We know that we are reaching these people through clowning because the patients talk about the clowns for weeks."



FRIENDS—Two newly commissioned clowns from Don Berkoski's Smiles Unlimited clown ministry program pose for a photograph after the Dec. 10 ceremony at St. Christopher Parish in Indianapolis. (Photo by Mary Ann Wyand)

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Human Resources Department



# An Hispanic Christmas

by Joe Michael Feist

To many Hispanics in the U.S. Southwest, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without *posadas*, *tamales* and family. These elements proclaim a *feliz Navidad* that is universal.

Spanish missionaries to the New World, in explaining the faith to native populations, often turned to plays or pageants as a vehicle for evangelization.

Hundreds of years later, Hispanics in the Southwest still retain this physical and living approach to catechesis, most notably in the Christmas *posadas* (shelter or hospitality).

The *posada* is a kind of Christmas novena that uses prayer, song and celebration to re-enact the journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

"Traditionally, we have nine-day *posadas* beginning nine days before Christmas," said Virginia Arista, a member of the Cathedral Santuario de Guadalupe in Dallas. "It's usually done through the parishes. Nine different families host Jesus and Mary each night."

Before the procession to the designated house, there is an opening hymn that sets the theme for the *posada*. The song emphasizes a journey and "following the way" of Jesus.

A house-to-house procession then takes place, with the pilgrim group singing. "En nombre del cielo, *o pido posada, pido posada, pido posada, pido posada*," said Sister Espinoza. "In the name of heaven, I ask you for lodging, because to keep on going, my beloved wife is unable."

Those inside the house respond, "This is not an inn, continue on your way. I can't open the door, you may be nitrafi."

After being rejected by a number of households, one takes in the pilgrims.

"There's a great joy when the pilgrims are finally accepted into the house," Ms. Arista said. "People carry in the statues of Joseph and Mary on a donkey. The family is proud to have Jesus and Mary in their home. Then you might have a Scripture reading or sharing. There's usually food and it sometimes ends with a *pinata* for the kids."

While a nine-day *posada* is still held in many communities, said Ms. Arista, "with the hustle and bustle of the 20th century, many Hispanics have a one-night *posada* or a parishwide *posada*."

Sister Mackey Espinoza, director of religious education at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Dallas, said the *posadas* put a halt to all the Christmas hoopla. "It's a warming up for the big feast and the family gatherings, a way of working up momentum."

Sister Espinoza, a member of the Monterrey, Mexico-based Missionary Catechists of the Poor, said another Hispanic tradition is called *acostando el niño*—"laying down the child."

On Christmas Eve, following the last *posada*, she said, families invite *padrinos* (sponsors or godparents) to rock the baby Jesus to sleep.

"First, the *padrinos* pass the statue of the child Jesus) around to everyone to kiss," said Sister Espinoza. "There are certain prayers and songs and the rosary is



**LAS POSADAS**—For many Hispanics, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without "posadas" celebrations that re-enact the journey of Mary and Joseph. (CNS photo by Johnny Hayes of Las Posadas at St. James Parish in Dallas)

recited. Then they rock the baby to sleep and place him in the manger."

The same *padrinos*, she added, would be invited back on the feast of the Epiphany for *le tantamento*, or taking the child out of the manger. This, too, is accompanied by prayers and songs.

In many Hispanic homes, said Ms. Arista, the "most important thing is not the Christmas tree, but the Nativity scene. You can go in some Hispanic homes and that's all they feature."

The custom of making and eating *tamales* on Christmas, usually following midnight Mass, is widespread among Hispanic families, she said.

"For us, it's a family project," she added.

"The main thing is families being together, worshipping together and then sharing a meal," she said. "We'll have *tamales*, *pan dulce* (Mexican sweet bread) and *champurrado* (a thick, hot drink with a masa base and flavored with chocolate). It's a time for family unity."

She concluded by noting the importance of handing down Hispanic customs. "Sometimes it's possible and sometimes it isn't," she said, "but we have to make our children aware of the traditions."

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# Every day can be Christmas Eve

by Dan Morris

Connor taught me that every day can be Christmas Eve. Let me start in the middle. The phone rang. My then 12-year-old daughter answered. "He says it's the police," she said with big eyes, handing me the receiver.

Connor's neighbor had given the police our number. The neighbor's new wife were good friends. The officer said they could use our help. Connor was out of control and refused to go with them.

I ran the two blocks to his apartment. Red and blue police car strobes and amber medic unit flashers reflected off trees and buildings and the street.

Trying to catch my breath and a little calm, I walked into Connor's small apartment. He sat in a kitchen chair hunched forward with his hands clenched together between his knees. He rocked back and forth, hardly seeming to notice the female medic kneeling next to him and attempting to talk to him.

"I'm going to die tonight. We are all going to die tonight. We are. We are. We are," he kept repeating in a high pitch hardly recognizable as his voice.

My wife and I had met Connor in a scuba diving class about two years earlier. He was our age, 38, and an experienced diver taking the course as a refresher. Over the weeks we learned he was in his second year of a hiatus from heavy construction work in Central America. He was studying advanced Spanish and finishing a master's degree in geography. He earned spending money as a teaching assistant at the university. He loved computers, classical music and creating—everything from complex flower gardens to Florentine cuisine.

We also learned he was an alcoholic. He had not drunk for nearly three years. He attended Alcoholics Anonymous meetings weekly. The stories he shared with us of uncontrolled binges that lasted for days seemed totally out of character with the Connor we knew. It was just an interesting detail in his past life to us. Then.

A single man who had never married, Connor gravitated toward our family, seeming to enjoy occasional immersion into the chaos of a four-child household can generate.

Connor and I became good "dive buddies." We took countless trips to Half Moon Bay to make early morning abalone dives, rushing back to work and classes. In the car we talked of many things, including his alienation from organized religion and his skepticism about a loving God. About a year and a half after meeting him, he knocked on our door one evening. He could hardly stand. He was soused to the gills. I listened, mildly amused as he slurred an explanation of how he had broken up with his girlfriend. My wife and I walked him around the block, then back to his apartment and tucked him in bed.

We would have chuckled if we had any inkling of what the next six months of Connor's life would be like. Scenes flash in memory:

▶Watching in horror from the car as Connor opened two bottles of cough syrup in the aisle of a pharmacy and drank them right there.

▶Finding him passed out in his car.

▶Helping him clean his apartment after one of his returns from the county facility for alcoholics and finding vodka bottles hidden from and for himself in his vacuum cleaner bag, his toilet water tank.

We watched feeling paralyzed as the demons of his childhood, and his present confusion, and his substance abuse would tear at him during both periods of intoxication and sobriety.

We watched an intelligent, sensitive, gentle friend come apart at the seams. We could only imagine and catch glimpses of the anguish Connor suffered. Our prayers and companionship seemed futile, wasted, even "abused."

He didn't die that night or the next weeks in a state psychiatric hospital. He died on Christmas Eve a few months later in a diabetic coma brought on by weeks of alcohol and chemical poisoning.

Christmas Eve. There is no doubt in my mind that God gave to Connor the Christmas gift of peace.



CONNOR'S GIFT—Dan Morris tells how he learned something important about the Christmas gift of peace when his friend, Connor, died on Christmas Eve. (CNS photo by KNA-Bild)

This is not to say death rather than recovery was the best end to Connor's life or any such afflicted person's. But with his passing that Christmas Eve came an insight that remains Connor's annual Christmas gift to me. Death no longer is quite the fearful specter it once was. I can see in it new life, the new life our Savior's birth promises.

Merry Christmas, Connor.

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## The custom of gifts

by Fr. John J. Castellet

Christmas as we know it was not celebrated in New Testament times. It was a long time before Dec. 25 was chosen for the liturgical celebration of Jesus' birth.

All the customs associated with that day developed only slowly over the centuries, like the giving of gifts. Actually, in a large part of the Christian world gifts are exchanged on Epiphany, the day associated with the presentation of gifts to the newborn child by the Magi.

Yet the custom of gifts is thoroughly biblical. It stems from an acknowledgment of God as the supreme giver of gifts to humanity: life, well-being, food, the grand universe, all given out of love and concern for our happiness.

Sharing gifts with others was a way of imitating God's overwhelming generosity. It was a way to become truly Godlike.

The three great acts of religion for the Jews were prayer, fasting and almsgiving. God's faithful people always showed a practical concern for others, especially the less fortunate.

The king, as God's representative, was charged with the care of the disadvantaged. Isaiah (11:4) described the ideal king of the future in these terms: "He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted."

When people complained that God paid no attention to their fasting, they got this answer: "This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless, clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own" (Isaiah 58:6-7).

All though his ministry Jesus preached selfless generosity to others, especially to those in need. Luke records Jesus' words: "You are to be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). To be Godlike and authentically human is to show practical concern, to share God's gifts.

God's supreme gift to us was his Son, the gift that we celebrate at Christmas. Even if the early Christians did not celebrate as we do, they celebrated Christ's coming every day.

The lives of the early Christians were marked by mutual concern and sharing. Luke's vignette of the first community at Jerusalem (Acts 2) is a bit idealized, but it expresses the deep, practical love that Christians showed one another.


"All who believed were together and had all things in common. They would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's needs" (Acts 2:44-45).

You would look in vain for any examples of Christmas gifts in the New Testament. What you will find instead is an ongoing "Christmas," a selfless return to others of God's gifts to us.

The whole meaning of Christmas is summed up in the climactic verse of the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel: "And the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Jesus embodied God's generous love and urged his followers to live it, too, to show their gratitude to him by imitating his generosity in their lives.

Nothing could be more biblical than to give gifts at Christmas—especially to give to those whom no one else remembers.

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# A visit to Bethlehem under Israeli occupation

by John F. Fink

(Excerpts from my diary of Jan. 15, 1989 while in the Holy Land)

This morning we drove to Bethlehem, which is, of course, in Israeli occupied territory and where there has been violence since the Palestinian's *intifada*. In fact, just yesterday one person was killed and several were injured after a stoning incident in a refugee camp in Bethlehem. These were among four Palestinians killed and 33 injured in the West Bank yesterday.

All was quiet in Bethlehem today, but Israeli soldiers were patrolling. Actually, things were much too quiet because all the shops in town were closed in protest over yesterday's shootings. It was really quite eerie seeing the streets completely empty. Our bus driver stopped to talk with soldiers at the city limits and was assured that it was safe, but the quiet in the town was still unsettling.

I was also disappointed that the stores were all closed because I think Bethlehem is the best place to buy things in the Holy Land and I had planned to buy a crib set at a shop that Marie and I have shopped in a couple times in the past.

We had Mass in the chapel in the cave at Shepherd's Field, where the angels appeared to the shepherds to announce Jesus' birth. It's about a mile or so from Bethlehem itself. There were no other tourists around, so we had the place completely to ourselves.

While we were there the weather changed from sunshine to rain.

We then went to the Church of the Nativity, the oldest Christian church in the

world still in use, built above the cave where Jesus was born. I'm sure we have to report that the roof of the church is leaking, again.

I wrote an article in *The Criterion's* Christmas supplement last month about this church and included the history of its roof. At one point the roof was in serious need of repair and in 1482 King Edward IV of England managed to get the Mameluke kings then ruling the Holy Land to accept several tons of lead to be melted down and used to seal the ancient timbers. This did the trick for 200 years.

In 1683, though, the Ottoman Turks needed lead to make bullets, so they stripped it from the roof of the Church of the Nativity and rushed it to troops that then had Vienna surrounded. The lead arrived too late and the Turks retreated from Europe, but the damage had been done to the roof. So for 300 years there were puddles all over the church whenever it rained. No one would think of mentioning the Status Quo document didn't say who was supposed to do it.

Finally, in 1963, someone sneaked up on the roof and fixed it. Some say it was done by the Israelis; others say that God finally grew tired of the bickering and sent a crew of angels to do it. Whatever, the sad fact is that the roof is leaking again. It was raining while we were there and there were four large puddles where the rain was dripping onto the floor.

This evening we had dinner at the home of Gabriel Khano, the owner of the travel agency that arranged our trip, but before that we made a return trip to Bethlehem for shopping. Mr. Khano persuaded one of the shops to open for us.

The rain had turned to a wet snow by the time 10 of us got on the bus for the shopping trip to Bethlehem. The bus turned off its lights and parked in an empty parking lot. We were left in the side door of the store that I've shopped in before. We were, of course, the only customers. In its basement, this store manufactures crib sets and other carvings from olive wood and we saw how they do it on our trip seven years ago. Tonight I got the crib set I wanted and a book on the Holy Land.

The snow had stopped by the time we left the store, but there was a strong frigid wind. I figured that no terrorist would be out on a night like this. Nevertheless, we walked to the bus in the dark and the driver kept the lights off until we had left the parking lot.

It was a nice dinner party at Gabriel and Delia Khano's home, in a nice section of northern Jerusalem. Gabriel is a fairly flamboyant Christian Arab who owns the Guiding Star Travel Agency (among other things). He introduced us royally to his other guests. Altogether there were about 50 people. He showed by his guest list that it's possible for Arabs and Jews to live peacefully because he had both Jewish and Arab professional people there—Arab doctors, a Jewish judge, etc. However, he said that some of his invited Jewish friends did not come tonight and indicated that it was because of the *intifada*.

In his introduction Gabriel stressed the fact that we must all live in peace and his home is an example of how that can be done. He obviously has these dinner parties frequently. He also said that he knows who is responsible for the troubles

between the Jews and Arabs—"Abraham! If he had just stuck with one wife..."

It was an excellent Arab meal featuring stuffed lamb with many Arab delicacies. I talked with Sister Leona Donahue, the Jerusalem director of Catholic Relief Services, with the Jewish judge, a Bethlehem University professor of philosophy, an Arab obstetrician, and French Dominican Father Jean-Baptiste Humbert, a noted Holy Land archeologist.

The Palestinian obstetrician said that Arab and Jewish doctors usually don't work together, except that one or the other might have to refer special cases. He himself works mostly with the Palestinian refugees, he said. He also said that most Palestinian doctors learn medicine in English and speak English in their work while the Jewish doctors learn in Hebrew and speak Hebrew as their first language, with English as a second language. Of course, the Arab doctors speak Arabic with their patients.

The section where the Khano's live, by the way, is for well-to-do Palestinians and is near where King Hussein started to build a home while the area was part of Jordan. It is right next to a housing area where well-to-do Jews live. The two areas are separate and not integrated, but many of those at the Khano's party were near neighbors who have become friends.

One of the guests at the party was the owner of the shop in Bethlehem that we shopped at this evening. We also learned that Gabriel himself went to Bethlehem this morning before our group arrived just to make sure things were safe for us.

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# The gift of listening

by Fr. Bruce Ritter

If you want to give your kids a really great gift this Christmas—one that can last them well beyond the holidays—you can give them the gift of listening. Unlike most other gifts, this particular one costs you nothing at all—until you lose it, and then there is no price you can pay to get it back.

There would be fewer troubled children in this world if we really listened to what our kids are saying. If we want to help our kids, we need to learn to listen to what they are saying they need. That's the sad lesson I've learned from the desperate youngsters who have come to Covenant House for help.

If there is any "secret" to the extraordinary growth we have had at Covenant House, it's that my staff and volunteers have had the wisdom to listen to these kids. Kids who have no other



place to go, and no one to help them can be awfully honest.

"This is your last chance," I said to my kids the day the president of the United States and his wife came to visit. "The president came here to listen and to hear you. What is the most important thing you want him to know about street kids like you?"

"That we need jobs, Bruce," one kid said. "We need more education, Mr. President. There should be more Covenant Houses." All the kids chimed in, anxious to say some final important thing.

Michelle, 20, quietly summed it up for all of them. She doesn't like thinking about home. For most of her young life she was a victim of abuse. "All we need is somebody to care about us," she said quietly. "That's all I want."

President and Mrs. Bush looked stunned. Most people do when they have the opportunity to talk to a bunch of street kids about what "the life" is like out there. They get an instant education in the way things are and the sheer facts are so brutal, so undeniably harsh and hopeless, that you have a tendency to look, well, stunned. You'd like to believe

the stories are exaggerated until you find out that the reality for a kid with no place to go is far worse than anything you could imagine.

Walter was very clear about why he sold drugs: "I supported my brothers and sisters, Mr. President. I had to help feed my family. I'm 18," he said to the president, "and I never held a job in my life. I owned a car, beer, a jail, got shot and stabbed. I can't live on a minimum wage flipping hamburgers."

Our kids at Covenant House tell us in very precise terms what they need to survive. Little wonder, if you look at the statistics on teen-age drug use and high school dropouts. Along with the army of children having children, and increasing numbers of teen-agers victimized by their own ignorance marked for early death by the deadly AIDS virus, the statistics are indeed horrifying.

From kids like Michelle, who has a past she can't forget, and Walter, who despairs of a future he can't see, Covenant House has been a haven, a literal shelter from the storm that has buffeted their young lives. They want help. They want to get off drugs. They want to finish that high school education they threw away. They want to raise their children and provide a future for them.

For some of them, there are answers, although there aren't any easy solutions. Our "Rights of Passage" program gives a kid a place to live so they can finish school and start a job. Our mother-child program teaches young girls how to nurture their babies so that they will grow up healthy and happy. Just a few months ago, we opened a special floor for

youngsters who want to kick their drug and alcohol addictions and who are willing to work hard to do that.

For some of our kids, the hope is a lot simpler. It's also sometimes impossible. Some of our kids just want not to die. Some of them have AIDS, and the sad and bitter truth is, they aren't going to make it to their 21st birthday. The special floor we opened for these youngsters will be, for many of them, just a place to die.

For kids like this, I wish we had learned to listen a lot sooner. I wish we could have reached them before they got into trouble. Increasingly, our efforts at Covenant House have turned to prevention. We want to reach these kids before they get into trouble. We have a 24-hour hotline to counsel troubled youth and their parents, and we send trained staff to talk to kids on the street.

But those are only ways of reaching kids. To really reach them, we have to hear what they are saying, and we have to be listening to do that. In the end, the tragedy is not that kids get themselves into trouble. The bigger tragedy is that we don't hear them.

But we can learn to do that. This is, after all, the season of new beginnings, a special time when the hope-less becomes the hope-full, when we can re-discover and re-cover the meanings of love in our lives and our families. We just have to be willing to learn what may be the greatest gift of all that we can give ourselves and our children—the gift of listening.

(Father Bruce Ritter is president and founder of Covenant House, the ministry house in Times Square that offers 24-hour shelter and counseling to homeless and runaway children under 21.)

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## Christmas in the olden days

by Alice Dailey

"Chestnuts roasting by the open fire" is a warm little lyric, but in our home chestnuts were roasting in the dressing my mother had made before dawn. It was an unwritten law that Christmas dinner be on the table at noon sharp. Only "high-toned" people ate later in the afternoon.

Gathering the menu had become slightly more affluent with my oldest sister's advent into the workplace.

A 16-pound gobbler came from Locke's Poultry Market on Fountain Square where the air was breath-taking. Chestnuts were bought from my Dad's co-worker who peddled them on the side.

Other items, such as mince-meat for Dad's favorite pie, could be found only at the city market, which involved an exciting streetcar trip downtown.

Inside the sprawling market bunches of bananas hung next to jewel-toned apples and oranges. At the mince-meat stand it was fascinating to watch the filling being ladled into paper buckets with little wire handles.

It was fascinating also to observe a little merchant grind fresh coffee beans which sent an aroma to rival that of ambrosia-scented oranges.

Row upon row of vegetable counters displayed sweet potatoes, crisp celery and shining red cranberries, all bursting with fiber and beta carotene which we didn't even know existed.

With the menu settled upon there was still the problem of finding gifts to please. Our devout Mom would never ask for anything but "my good health." Dad didn't drop hints; he just grinned non-com-

mittally, knowing he would wind up with the same mufflers, ties or earmuffs.

There were no gift certificates, at least not in our modest circle, and exchanges were few. If you got something you didn't like you were stuck with it.

My sisters, into cosmetics and perfume, had plenty of choices but when it came down to me, too old for dolls and too young for makeup, what to give? Once it dawned on them that their little sister had read every book in the house twice, there was a shower of books.

Throughout Christmas day I had to be yanked away from devouring Ruth Fielding stories, Zane Grey adventures and even the namby pamby doings of namby pamby Elsie Dinmore whose dialogue was chiefly, "Yes, Papa. No, Papa."

There were few Christmas greeting cards then, the briefest percentage of today's staggering landslide. However, one postcard stands out in memory. An aunt wrote, "Merry Christmas. Don't forget my Mary's birthday comes next month."

No hi-fi music filled our warm, heavenly-smelling home. Who needed it when my sister played the piano and we sang.

As the day wound down and packages under the tree were no longer mystery but now history, with Dad stoking the furnace for the night, a dreaded ritual awaited. One and all had to be "dosed" with Dr. Carter's Kidney and Back tea to purge out the day's gorging.

"What gorging?" I'd whine. "I didn't eat any of that old mince-meat or sweet potatoes or cranberries or stuffing!"

"But you stuffed all day on candy." Sneaking upstairs was to no avail. Mom sought me out wherever and commanded, "You can drink it up if it's hot or damn cold around until it's cold and black. Take your choice."

To this day even the scent of tea is anathema.

## God's Christmas gift to us

by Mary Benson

On Christmas Eve after Mass we set up our nativity. As I watched my son arrange the ceramic figures, I thought of that day many, many years ago when a young, pregnant virgin put her trust in God.

How uncomfortable Mary must have been on that long journey to Bethlehem. How anxious Joseph must have been for her and the child she carried. God had entrusted them to Joseph's care. After the grueling trip to Bethlehem, Mary went into

labor. How frantically Joseph must have tried to find a place for his wife hoping an innkeeper would take pity on a woman about to give birth. Over and over again they were turned away. But Joseph did not give up and trusted God to provide. How grateful they must have felt when they were directed to the stable.

How after making Mary as comfortable as he could, the young couple welcomed God's gift to the world.

As I looked at our nativity, I thanked God for loving us so much that he gave us his only Son on that first Christmas so many, many years ago.

# What to do on Christmas Eve Day

by Joanna Patane Scholz

When asked to write an article on family activities suitable for the day before Christmas my initial reaction was uninspired panic. What could I possibly say that would be of interest or value?

Then I started thinking about my own experiences of "Christmas Eve Day," first as a little girl and now as a wife and mother of three children.

Although some of my family rituals of Dec. 24 are different now, the general tone of the day remains the same. It is a day of preparation—a quiet day, calmer than the Christmas rush which preceded it, not overtly prayerful but somehow hushed in anticipation of the great event ahead.

As a child, the rituals of Christmas Eve Day were the same every year. First of all, we never set foot in a shopping mall on Dec. 24. All that frenzied commotion was finally over with. Now came the time to slow down and enjoy the final stages of Christmas preparation.

Our house always smelled so good that day. Mom and I baked cookies in the morning and my dad brought in our wonderful-smelling Christmas tree from its holding spot in the backyard.

We always decorated our tree on Christmas Eve Day with my best friend and her little sister. The music of Christmas was in the background along with the delightful smell of the cookies.

In the evening my mother prepared the traditional Italian Christmas Eve dinner,

complete with octopus and squid. She always lit a bayberry candle on Christmas Eve—a custom which had practical value too. It helped consume the fish aroma.

We always tried to nap after dinner on Christmas Eve so that we would be refreshed for Midnight Mass. I was a member of the children's choir at St. Kevin's Parish and later became the organist.

Christmas Eve Day rituals are a little different now with my husband and children, but the theme of quiet preparation remains unchanged. The shopping and wrapping are completed—at least by midnight Dec. 23. We still bake cookies in the morning, but the Christmas tree is already decorated. (We adopted my husband's family custom of trimming the tree on the third or fourth Sunday of Advent.)

Now we assemble our manger scene as a family in the afternoon, minus baby Jesus and with the Three Kings in the distance. As we place Mary and Joseph in the stable we discuss their journey to Bethlehem, how tired they felt after traveling so far and what it might have felt like to finally find shelter with the animals. We talk about the shepherds and wonder what it was like to be there to greet the newborn king.

Then we listen to Christmas music and read stories about Jesus' birth. Often we go through Christmas cards, taking time to appreciate their beauty as well as the sentiment in the notes from family and friends.

To us it is important to make the day

before Christmas special with our own family traditions. We try to make it a quiet day with rituals.

As a teen-ager and young adult I always practiced the organ on Christmas Eve morning. How exciting it felt to be at church during the final stages of decorating God's house for Christmas.

I still play the organ at St. Kevin's parish for our Christmas Vigil Mass. But, since we now begin at 8 p.m. there's no time for a rest period after supper and the traditional Italian fish dinner has to be abbreviated.

My mom makes the dinner at our house now and we still light the bayberry candle. My dad has passed away, yet he left with us many fond memories of Christmas Eve to treasure and to build upon with our own family.

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CHRISTMAS EVE—What can a family do Christmas Eve Day? The author suggests making it a day of quiet preparation for Christmas. (CNS photo by Florence Sharpe)

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# 'And God, with grace, did me embrace' throughout the year

In Spring swept  
On clouds that wept  
And nourished all the plants that grew.  
God blessed the flowers  
With sunlit hours  
And added many skies of blue.  
Then Summer came  
With sun of flame  
That warmed the corners of the world,  
And gave new life  
To fields so ripe  
With grain that waved like flags unfurled.  
Oh, what a sight!  
Those colors bright  
On leaves so painted by the Fall.  
Those vivid hues  
That God had used

And left us memories to recall  
One day at dawn  
The leaves were gone  
And Winter came with frigid blast  
Of snow and sleet.  
While life is sweet,  
Another precious year had passed.  
And God, with Grace,  
Did me embrace  
And let me live another year  
To see the Spring  
And birds on wing,  
And know once more all I hold dear.

by Toni Jordan

(Toni Jordan resides in Indianapolis. Her poem, entitled "Another Year," reminds us of the many priceless gifts that God blesses us with during Advent as well as throughout the year.)



A CHILD IS BORN—"She gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the place where travelers lodged" (Luke 2:7). This rendition of the Nativity is from a 19th-century woodcut by Paul Gustave Dore. (CNS photo)

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To you our songs we sing.  
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The star lights up the night.  
Reflecting God's own light.  
We gaze on stable's sight  
With awe and great delight!  
The ox, the lamb, the cow,  
Their warmth he does allow.  
All creatures, then and now,  
In joyful service bow!  
We see the angels there  
With hands upheld in prayer.  
The walls are plain and bare.  
Yet wonders fill the air!  
In glory comforting,  
His heart he's offering.  
In turn our hearts we bring.  
Receive them Sovereign King!

by Joseph P. Gallagher

(Joseph Gallagher worships at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Indianapolis.)

## Bethlehem Blest

O, little town of Bethlehem,  
Your star still shines so brightly.  
Birthplace of that tiny babe  
Who holds our hearts so tightly.  
You saw the radiance of joy  
Midst a manger filled with hay.  
Blest were you to shelter him  
On that first Christmas day.

by K. Lejean Buehler

(K. Lejean Buehler worships at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Indianapolis.)

## A Christmas Lyric

Christmas comes again to all  
To herald joy anew,  
To tell about the Perfect Child  
In a manger laid to view.  
The wise men sought him from afar  
And they their quest attained.  
They saw the Radiant Infant sleep  
While angels did acclaim.  
So tiny and so lovely,  
And yet within his hand  
He holds the world's salvation  
And rules sky and sea and land.  
O Holy Night! O Blessed Time!  
Lo! Hear the angels sing  
As we adore and welcome him,  
Our Savior and our King!

by K. Lejean Buehler



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# Friendly ghosts on Christmas Eve

by Robert P. Lockwood

*Reprinted from Our Sunday Visitor*

Sitting alone by the fire on Christmas Eve, old friends come to visit. Unlike Marley's ghost, they don't arrive as nocturnal specters loaded down with the chains of a sinful life. They merely sit quietly by my side, frozen forever at that point when I last saw them—30 years or 30 days ago; friends and relatives long since dead, or those still living somewhere who rushed in and out of my life at different stages, like waitresses at a busy restaurant.

On the eve of the celebration of Christ's birth, they arrive one-by-one and in no particular order. They bear no messages; tell no tales. It is a quiet communion of memory, sometimes joyful, most times bittersweet.

For some reason though, Art is usually the first to arrive—the strongest boy I ever knew in my teen years and the first close friend to die. Perhaps it is because the last time I saw him was at Christmas Midnight Mass. I was, like most of my breed in the late 1960s, a cynical, all-knowing and vaguely agnostic young college radical. Yet, my cousin had talked me into my first church attendance since my "self-liberation" from all matters of faith at the wise old age of 17.

Art arrived out of nowhere, about 15 minutes after the choir had begun its traditional pre-Mass performance. He must have spotted us from the back of church. He excuse-me'd through the pew, climbing over legs and ladies' bags with the tact and agility of a fullback smelling the goal line. When he reached where we sat, he crashed down between us, dividing us like Moses at the Red Sea.

I hadn't seen Art in months. He had joined the Army and appeared at that time like a visitor from another planet. His big grin of greeting made his face look like a

moon pie. While I had my proper badge of nearly shoulder-length hair, his soldier's crew cut vitally reflected the light from the altar candles.

I can't remember anything we might have said, or what we might have done afterward. But I still smile at that memory of Art the last time I saw him. He didn't die a hero's death in the rice paddies of Vietnam. He was killed while on "R & R" in Europe. Having apparently lost control of his car, he sailed off a cliff. The body wasn't found until the spring thaw. It always amazed me that I went on for months in simple day-to-day living without knowing that Art was lying dead beneath a frozen crust of snow.

My grandfather, dead nearly 20 years, comes next. As I saw him do a hundred times in my childhood, he grasps both ends of the easy chair, backs himself into it, then lands with a grunt as the sudden tilt of the gyro at his body's center of gravity tosses his feet upward, and you are sure both he and the chair will topple over backward. He fumbles in the pockets of his old blue cardigan, then in the cracks between the cushion and armrest, in his daily search for his forever misplaced dentures.

Almost as if he is speaking to me today, my mind can hear him mumbling: "Stole my teeth again! They're always after my teeth!" For the life of me, I can't figure out why he ever bothered with the teeth, though he claimed it was purely for his own good looks. (At my oldest brother's wedding, my grandfather would tell any attractive young lady who asked that he was only 59—"I look like this only because of my wild and reckless youth!") I can remember many a meal that lost much of its flavor as I stared across the kitchen table at those lonely teeth resting quietly by his plate, removed because "you can't really chew with them, and I've got darn strong gums."

He arrived as a permanent guest in our home at Christmastime when I was in

seventh grade—my grandmother having died three days before the feast. He lived with us well into my college years. He was the first to tell me that when I put on a few pounds I had a solid resemblance to Mickey Rooney in his older days. A curmudgeon if there ever was one, he gave his children and grandchildren a hundred stories that we will share.

Of course, most of my Christmas Eve visitors are not from the Church Triumphant. Like Scrooge, I am visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present as well. Have you ever thought of the hundreds of lives you have touched—and lost touch with—in the few decades we have been allowed, be it 30 years or 90 years? Those eternal friendships of youth, back when life was an eternity stretched out in front of us, seemed to disappear in an instant. The simple fact of a year's aging could change a relationship dedicated to eternal fealty to a nod in passing in a crowded high-school hallway, then vanish altogether as soon as the caps and gowns of graduation had been returned to the rental company.

My very first friend comes to sit by the fire. A little squirrel-faced boy no more than four years old, he's still wearing short pants and the overstuffed chair nearly swallows him. He moved shortly before I started kindergarten. It could have been across town or across the country, it made no difference at that age. He might as well have fallen off the end of the earth.

Whatever happened to him? Is he happy now wherever he might be? Or has his life taken too many bitter turns, leaving a hurt and burned-out shell without faith or hope? I don't really want to know. I like to keep him frozen forever in short pants half-covering spindly legs as we run down the sidewalk, avoiding the cracks so we won't break mother's back.

There were five of us in college, staying together an extra day before the Christmas holidays. The campus was almost empty and the five of us, whose

collective ride home would not come until the next day, gathered in a dormitory room to surreptitiously sip some smuggled-in wine. We pledged that no matter what happened in the future, every year on that day we would take a sip of the same cheap wine to remember one another. Of course, I have seen none of them since college and, for the life of me, I can't remember the exact date that I had pledged to make that toast. I wonder if any of us kept the vow?

My twins will certainly come for a short visit by the fire. Not, of course, the youngsters on the cutting edge of the teen years sleeping quietly upstairs in their beds, but the three-year-olds who used to wait each day by the window watching for daddy to come home from work. I'll smile with them, remembering the wrestling matches played out on an old mattress in the basement and the endless questions that could be so annoying at the time, but in memory seem like conversations with the wisest of philosophers.

At times I will hear of old friends and relatives whose lives have gone sour. Divorces, lost jobs, too much drink, too much of life's mean-spiritedness. When their young shades visit on Christmas Eve, I want to warn them of the suffering, but I know it is impossible, just as my parents could never really warn or teach me about what lay ahead.

Soon, the guests by the fire will be a trickle—then none at all. Midnight Mass approaches and I bundle myself up for the cold but pleasant walk to church.

At the Mass in celebration of Christ's birth, especially at the Consecration, it seems as if all my Christmas Eve visitors are in attendance. They are all there—the Church Militant, the Church Suffering and, of course, the Church Triumphant.

On Christmas, sitting by the fire and, later, as we wait to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we begin to feel more clearly the meaning of "Communion of Saints."

*(Reprinted from Our Sunday Visitor, Dec. 20, 1987.)*

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## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

## The Sunday Readings

Sunday, December 24, 1989

Isaiah 7:10-14 — Romans 1:1-7 — Matthew 1:18-24

by Fr. Owen F. Campion

Over the centuries, Isaiah, the ancient Jewish prophet, has enjoyed a popularity similar to that possessed by few others in the Hebrew Scriptures. He has been equally popular among Christians, and Liturgies of the Word often employ his writings in their proclamation. This weekend, celebrating the final Sunday of the Advent Season, this time the very day before Christmas itself, Isaiah is the source of the first reading.

The times in which Isaiah lived, heavy with political intrigue and worries for God's people, surround his writings with drama. His own ability as a writer, and firmness of his belief, endow his writings with their special eloquence and color.

Reigning over the kingdom in which Isaiah lived and wrote were rulers descended from David. It was no ordinary line of descent in the eyes of Isaiah and his contemporaries. God himself had selected David to be king. His prophet had anointed him. The dynasty that David founded, and that followed him on



the throne, was special to God, and protected by God. Thus, that dynasty had a most solemn duty to summon the people to the worship of God, and to accommodate that worship.

To compromise with foreign powers, and to act as if God's protection was helpless against foreign might, toyed with the dynasty's belief in its own special role, Isaiah believed. Therefore, the great prophet looked most unkindly upon kings who were fearful, and who, in their fear, associated politically with foreigners and pagans.

In this reading, the king typically looks for relief in foreign alliances and appeasements. Isaiah, instead, looks for security in God. God visibly will provide that security in a new son of the dynasty. That son will bring new life and, by inference, a renewed dedication to God. From that dedication, the land can expect all peace and prosperity.

St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the source of this weekend's second reading. Christian Romans, to whom the epistle first was addressed, lived in a city in which paganism and world privilege were supreme—and most loudly expressed. Being faithful to God in such settings required unusual faith and resolution. Paul called the Christian Romans to that faith. He affirmed, in this weekend's reading, the

descent of the Lord from David. That placed Jesus in the role of heir to David's authority and his place in God's plan. The mission of Jesus, given by Paul in the reading, was—and is—to unite all with God through himself.

Of the Gospels, only two, St. Luke's Gospel and St. Matthew's Gospel, speak of events prior to the Lord's birth, and of the circumstances of that birth itself.

In this weekend's Gospel reading, St. Matthew's Gospel recalls the Lord's miraculous conception. An angel, God's messenger, assured the chaste Joseph that Mary was pregnant by the very power of God, not by human processes. The infant to be born will be known as the son of David. He will be called "Savior." His birth will be as momentous an event for the world as was the birth of the child in Isaiah's time. It will be a totally new life, a new opportunity, a new expression of God on earth, a new access by humans to God and his mercy.

## Reflection

This year, Americans will celebrate this weekend as they gather together with loved ones for Christmas Eve. That day commonly is filled with many preparations for Christmas. Relatives and friends are

arriving. There are things to do at the last minute.

The Liturgy of the Word this weekend asks us to pause in the activity of Christmas Eve essentially to remember these facts:

► Our world, despite its momentary pause to observe Christmas, is a place usually quite forgetful of God and his law of love.

► That circumstance can leave us as fretful and hopeless as was Ahaz long ago.

► God is with us, and with us eternally, with his mercy and guidance.

► That mercy and guidance visibly are with us in the sacrifice, message, and grace of Jesus, son of David and Son of God, with all the meaning those titles imply.

Happily, the world generally grows with kindness and gentleness on Christmas. At least that is the ideal, even among those who concern themselves little with religion at other times. The appeal and the announcement of this great feast of Christmas are love, generosity, and harmony. The church calls us in this liturgy to those ideals, but to those ideals in new and eternal brilliance, for it calls us to Jesus, to unity with him, and to all the peace that unity creates now and hereafter.

## THE POPE TEACHES

## Holy Spirit led Peter to open church to converts

by Pope John Paul II

Remarks at audience December 13

In our reflections on the events of Pentecost, we have seen how Peter was led by the Holy Spirit to baptize the members of the household of the Roman soldier Cornelius, thus opening the doors of the church to non-Jewish converts.

When Peter explained that he had acted in obedience to a clear revelation, the other disciples gave glory to God that the gentiles, too, were called to faith in Jesus Christ and were to receive the Holy Spirit. In this way the church moved beyond the boundaries of the Jewish society and religion in which she had been born.

Because they were persecuted for their faith in Christ, many of the first disciples left Jerusalem and proclaimed the Gospel throughout Palestine and Syria. Many gentiles were converted, especially in Antioch, where the disciples were first called Christians.

A central figure in spreading the faith among the gentiles was St. Paul, who after

his conversion was destined to become the apostle of the nations.

At Antioch, a debate arose as to whether the converted pagans were obliged to follow the mosaic law. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to report to the apostles and elders. At the Council of Jerusalem, the apostles, led by Peter, concluded that God had drawn no distinction between believers on the basis of race. Rather, he had sent his Spirit upon Jews and pagans alike.

In announcing their decisions, the apostles used a highly significant formula: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). With these words, they expressed their awareness that they had been guided by the Spirit of Truth whom Christ had promised them at the Last Supper.

It was the Holy Spirit who enabled the Pentecost which took place at Jerusalem to become more and more a Pentecost for the gentiles also. By the power of the Spirit, the new covenant, ratified in the blood of Christ, was being progressively extended to all nations and peoples, even unto the ends of the earth.

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—by Shirley Vogler Meister

(Shirley Vogler Meister of Indianapolis writes this as a tribute to bell ringers during the Christmas season, for they are good examples of Christian charity. Her brother, Michael, is a captain in the Salvation Army in Chicago. She is a member of Christ the King Parish.)



BELL RINGER — Salvation Army volunteer Dwain Pitzer thanks Virginia Hoering of Indianapolis for a donation.

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# Entertainment

VIEWING WITH ARNOLD

## 'Steel Magnolias' looks at 6 women's lifestyles

by James W. Arnold

Subtlety is not the key word to describe "Steel Magnolias." You can tell from the big opening act wedding scene. As the bride comes down the aisle (the packed church is done over entirely in pink), there are closeups for contrast to Dolly Parton (sentimental reaction) and Shirley MacLaine (cynical sourpuss reaction).

The movie provides broad comedy wrappings for a sad story in which a young woman with a serious diabetic condition literally risks her life to have her own child. Since movies are currently knee-deep in happy-sad tales about parenthood, and the culture is similarly obsessed and in turmoil over the many issues of human reproduction, "Magnolias" fits comfortably into the zeitgeist. There are even religious overtones, also common in 1989 movies.

Beyond that it's also a "woman's picture" in a positive sense that couldn't have been imagined a few years ago. It treats the ordinary (not career-related) concerns of most women's lives—relationships, weddings, childbirths, family—as important subjects. The focus, in fact, is on female friendships: six beauty shop "buddies" from a small Louisiana town who rally round and nurture each other over three or four years while one of them bears

a child (bravely or foolishly) and finally pays the price.

In its original 1987 incarnation, "Magnolias" was a play (still running) with six women characters and a single beauty shop set. The transfer to the big screen resulted in a huge big-budget (\$17 million) overproduction of writer Robert Harling's modest tribute to his own sister and mother. Producer Ray Stark and director Herbert Ross, big shots both associated in recent years with Neil Simon movies, invaded Natchitoches, Harling's hometown, to do the shoot.

Of the six "steel magnolias," the central figure is the hopeful young mother, Shelby (Julia Roberts of "Mystic Pizza"). Her willfulness to have a child despite medical warnings is mitigated by her motive, expressed in a memorable line: "I'd rather have three minutes of wonderful than a lifetime of nothing special." The adoption option is given short shrift, but the movie is positive in the value it puts on life.

Wacko characters include Parton, as the beauty shop proprietor, an incurable romantic optimist married to a dour anti-social blue collar type (Sam Shepard); MacLaine, as the broadly comic curmudgeon ("I've been in a bad mood for 40 years") with the heart of marshmallow; Olympia Dukakis, as the charmingly elegant group dirt-disher ("If you can't say something nice about somebody, come sit



STEEL MAGNOLIAS—Dolly Parton (left) stars as beauty shop owner Truvy Jones and Olympia Dukakis is wealthy widow Clairee Belcher in "Steel Magnolias," a film that chronicles the lives of six Southern belles who share a weekly rendezvous at the local beauty parlor. It is classified as A-III, adults. (CNS photo from Tri-Star Pictures)

near me"). Daryl Hannah, cast against type as Annelle, a klutzy beautyician who becomes a nice but looney religious fanatic, and Sally Field as Shelby's mom.

Sally has the film's major dramatic scenes, especially a rambling, up-and-down monologue to her friends as they gather after the funeral. It's a combination protest and lament and valiant tribute to the role of women in giving and nurturing life, at being present so often at the end as well as at the beginning.

"Magnolias" is not really an intellectual or theological script. After being structured on events marking all the traditional seasons (Independence Day, Christmas, Halloween), the movie ends amid a festive Easter picnic and egg hunt, with Annelle being rushed away for the birth of the child she'll name after Shelby.

The film has its faults, mainly of omission (it's a lilywhite Louisiana) glitz, and shamelessly heavy manipulation. But it's hard to stay mad when it ends with such a clear

affirmative symbol, not just of human perseverance, but of Christian hope.

(Big laughs and tears in the smalltown world of moms, babies, weddings, and funerals; some raucous humor and language; otherwise satisfactory for youth and adults.)

USCC classification: A-III, adults.

### Recent USCC Film Classifications

Bloodhounds of Broadway ..... A-III  
Camille Claudel ..... A-III  
Driving Miss Daisy ..... A-II  
Enemies, A Love Story ..... A-IV  
Glory ..... A-III

Legend: A-I—general patronage; A-II—adults and adolescents; A-III—adults; A-IV—adults, with reservations; O—morally offensive. A high recommendation from the USCC is indicated by the \* before the title.

*At this holy time of Christmas,  
we give thanks for Christ's gift of Himself  
through the ministry of His priests.  
May His coming again this Christmas  
fill your heart with deep peace and joy.*



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QUESTION CORNER

# Why put relics in altars?

by Fr. John Dietzen

**Q** I recently heard that all main altars in nearly every Catholic church in the world contain bone fragments of martyrs. Is this true, and if so why? (Minnetosta)

**A** The practice of inserting relics of saints—usually the entire body or part of the body—began in the very early Christian church.

Mass often was offered in those times over the tombs of martyrs since they were in a particular way witnesses to Jesus Christ, giving their life rather than deny their faith. In later times, part of the saint's body was placed in the table of every altar as a reminder and confirmation of that ancient Christian practice.

As you indicate, we have seen a change in that tradition in the past generation. We cannot understand this change unless we realize that many centuries ago the altar began to lose its identity as "the table of the Lord" and its central place in Catholic Church architecture. Any of us over 40 can recall when altars frequently seemed overpowered beneath statues of saints and angels or other structures.

In reforming the liturgy during the past few decades, the church is trying, among other things, to make the altar table once again the central and prominent feature of a church

building, as it should be. It is at the altar that the central and climactic Christian worship takes place, re-offering the eternal sacrifice of Jesus Christ, being united with him in that sacrifice and thus united with his death and resurrection. No public act of Christian worship is greater. This is why the altar is spiritually, and should be physically, the focal point of our church buildings.

The Introduction to the Rite for the Dedication of an Altar, promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1977, requires that the altar be constructed away from the wall so the priest can walk around it, and that it be in a central location where it will draw the attention of the whole congregation.

In any new church, statues, pictures of saints, or relics may not be placed on or over the altar. Even if a church is dedicated in honor of a saint, the altar is dedicated to the

honor of God and all aspects of structure, placement, and use should make that clear.

All this may sound like a long way around to answering your question, but is essential to understand the church's present regulations about relics in altars. The instruction, which regulates church practice around the world, provides for continuation of the tradition of placing relics "in" the altar, but only under these conditions:

► These relics must be of a size that they can be recognized as parts of human bodies. Tiny relics of one or more saints should not be used.

► Care must be taken to be sure the relics are authentic. It is better for an altar to be dedicated without relics than to have relics of doubtful credibility.

► The container for relics must not be placed on the altar, or in the table of the altar, as altar stones used to be placed in a niche on the top of the altar. The container must be placed beneath the altar as the design of the altar might allow.

Church law also provides that depositing such relics must be reserved for fixed altars, that is, altars which are attached to the floor so they cannot be moved (Canon 1237).

(Send questions to Father Dietzen, Holy Trinity Church, 704 N. Main St., Bloomington, Ill. 61701.)



FAMILY TALK

## Christmas is a story of love and also of hope

by Dr. James and Mary Kenny

Christmas is a story not only of love, but of hope. The birth of Jesus is a joyous answer to all those years of waiting and hoping for a redeemer.

Yet the "answer" is never final. Each year our dormant hopes are stirred up all over again, hope that people will put love of one another before personal greed, hope that we can live in peace, and hope for a kinder, gentler world.

Hope, like love and life itself, can be bittersweet. Dreams often remain unfulfilled. When we fall short of our goals, we know the pain of too much hope. How do we regenerate, get up, start over, begin to hope again?

Christmas reminds us, in the midst of darkness and despite repeated failings, to keep the dream alive, to keep on hoping for a better life, a better world.

Here are some people I met during the past year, people who despite the pain, refused to give up. They helped me, through their courage, keep my own hopes alive, and they are all true Christmas stories:

A sixth-grade boy, dribbling his basketball around chairs in his driveway, practicing by the hour to improve his ballhandling skills. His dream is to play in the NBA and become another Michael Jordan.

Sandra, just out of the psychiatric hospital for severe depression, forcing herself to go for a walk when she felt most down on herself and everyone else and feeling what's the use. She let her eyes wander to the blue sky and drifting clouds, and marveled at the universe.

Scott and Annie, getting married, and reminding me that commitment is still possible in an age where many live together without ties or obligations. Saying to each other those courageous words, "I take you for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death." Hoping for the best, aware of the worst, promising forever in a day-to-day world.

Bill and Susie, newly married and planning to have a baby at once, before they save their first \$10,000 and buy furniture and cars. Why? "Because we love kids. We'll make it." I was taken aback, yet how refreshing to know that there are couples today who still believe that we can manage without much money, but not without babies.

Jan, 15 and pregnant, carrying her baby to term and then generously placing him for adoption. Saying no to abortion and yes to life. Just say yes!

A 38-year-old mother with terminal cancer, undergoing a painful bone-marrow treatment in the wild hope that she might live long enough to raise her son to adulthood.

Pete, passing out circulars outside McDonald's, asking people to request paper wrappings rather than Styrofoam so that we can save our environment. Still believing that he can make a difference.

And I remember these others:

Mary, a young, pregnant teen in Palestine, undaunted when there was no room at the inn, continuing on to find a stable to give birth to her baby.

Jesus, dying on a cross, hoping people would hear his incredible plea for forgiveness of those who had done him wrong, believing that his sacrifice would change the world. Hasn't it? It's up to us to keep the Christmas hope alive.

(Address questions on family living or child care to be answered in print to the Kennys, Box 872, St. Joseph's College, Rensselaer, Ind. 47978.)

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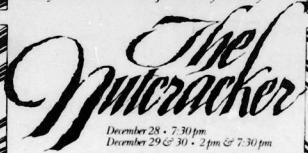
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On the Eve on Christmas, December 24, the vigil of anticipation will be celebrated at 5:00 p.m. Then, at MIDNIGHT, Archbishop Edward T. O'Meara will preside; the cathedral choir will sing starting at 11:30 p.m. On CHRISTMAS MORNING, there will be a 10:30 Liturgy.

### New Year's Liturgies

The January 1 celebration of Mary, the Mother of God, begins with a Liturgy on New Year's Eve at 5:00 p.m. The next morning the Mass is a 10:30.

FREE parking behind the cathedral and in Catholic Center lot.

# The Active List

The Criterion welcomes announcements of parish and church related activities for The Active List. Please keep them brief, listing event, sponsor, date, time and location. No announcements will be taken by telephone. No pictures, please. Notices must be in our office by 10 a.m. Monday the week of publication. Hand deliver or mail to: The Criterion, The Active List, 1400 N. Meridian St., P.O. Box 1717, Indianapolis, Ind., 46206.

## December 22

The Posada will be held at 7 p.m. at the Marian Center, 3111 N. New Jersey St.

☆☆

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for quiet prayer and reflection is held each Fri. from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Mass at St. Lawrence Church, 4650 N. Shadeland Ave.

☆☆

A Christmas Party for adults who work with youth will be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Homeplace, 7810 St. John's Rd., Starlight.

## December 24

A Mass in Spanish will be celebrated at 1:15 p.m. in St. Mary Church, 317 N. New Jersey St. Midnight Mass in English.

☆☆

Sign Masses for the Deaf are celebrated each Sun. in the following churches: St. Thomas, Fortville, 8 a.m.; St. Joao of Arc. 42nd and Central, 10:30 a.m.; and Holy Spirit, 7243 E. 10th St., 10:30 a.m.

## December 26

An hour of prayer and devotion to Jesus and Our Blessed Mother is held each Tues. at 7 p.m. in St. Mary Church, 317 N. New Jersey St. Call 317-786-7517 for information.

## December 29

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for quiet prayer and reflection is held each Fri. from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Mass in St. Lawrence Church, 4650 N. Shadeland.

☆☆

The Sisters of St. Francis of Oldenburg will conduct a Christmas Walk/Tour of the Sisters' Convent from 6:30-8 p.m. All invited.

## December 30

Catholic Adults Reaching Out (CARO) will attend a Pacer game. Call Chuck 317-356-1659 by Dec. 28 for tickets.

☆☆

Pro-Lifers will pray the rosary at 9:30 a.m. at the Clinic for Women, 2951 E. 38th St.

## December 31

St. Ann Church, Indianapolis, will celebrate New Year's Eve with a dinner dance at 8 p.m. at Patterson Hall, 2862 S. Holt Rd.

☆☆

The Catholic Alumni Club (CAC) will join St. Roch Parish, 3600 S. Meridian St. at 8 p.m. for a New Year's Party. Call Anna Marie 317-784-3313 for reservations.

☆☆

Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver #97 will hold a New Year's Eve Party from 9 p.m.-2 a.m. at the Claver Center, 3110 Sutherland. For tickets call Paul Gwynn 317-283-8910 or Sue Whittaker 317-926-6963.

☆☆

Channel of Peace charismatic community will hold New Year's Eve Mass at 9:30 p.m. at St. Lawrence Church, 4650 N. Shadeland Ave. Fellowship 8 p.m. Call 317-546-4065 for more information.

☆☆

Sign Masses for the Deaf are celebrated each Sun. in the following churches: St. Thomas, Fortville, 8 a.m.; St. Barnabas, 8300 Rahke Rd., 9 a.m.; St. Joao of Arc. 42nd and Central, 10:30 a.m.; and Holy Spirit, 7243 E. 10th St., 10:30 a.m.

☆☆

Marian Devotions are held each Sun. at 2 p.m. in Sacred Heart Parish chapel, 1530 Union St. Everyone welcome.

☆☆

Mrs. Sheridan K. of C. 695 Pushville Rd. will sponsor a Gala New Year's Eve Celebration at 7 p.m., \$25 person. Call 317-881-9187.

☆☆

St. Augustine Parish, Jeffersonville, will sponsor its 7th Annual New Year's Eve Dance from 9 p.m.-1 a.m. in the parish hall. "Silver Myths" music. \$25-couple. Call 812-283-9855 for reservations.

☆☆

The Men's Club of Holy Name Parish, Beech Grove will sponsor

a Western Theme New Year's Eve Dance. \$30/couple.

☆☆

The Parish Life Committee of St. Matthew Parish, 4100 E. 96th St. will hold a New Year's Eve Gala at 8:30 p.m. For reservations call Bea Oliver 317-255-3008.

## January 2

An hour of prayer and devotion to Jesus and Our Blessed Mother is held each Tues. at 7 p.m. in St. Mary Church, 317 N. New Jersey St. Call 317-786-7517 for information.

## January 3

Catholic Adults Reaching Out (CARO) will hold a Social and Meeting at 7 p.m. in the CYO Center, 580 E. Stevens St.

## January 5

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for quiet prayer and reflection is held each Fri. from 7 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Mass in St. Lawrence Church, 4650 N. Shadeland.

☆☆

Our Lady Queen of Peace Meditation Prayer Group will gather for an hour of meditating prayer and Medjugorje spirituality at 6 p.m. in St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Center chapel, 46th and Illinois Sts.

## January 6

First Saturday devotions to the Blessed Mother begin with 7 a.m. Mass at St. John of Arc. church, 42nd and Central. Rosary, procession.

☆☆

The World Apostolate of Fatima (The Blue Army) will hold First Saturday Holy Hour devotions at 2 p.m. in Little Flower Parish Center chapel, 13th and Bosart. Everyone welcome.

☆☆

A FIRE chapter meeting will follow 8 a.m. Mass in St. Nicholas Church, Sunman.

## January 7

St. Bernadette Parish, Indianapolis, will celebrate Christmas with a dinner on Epiphany after the 11 a.m. Mass.

☆☆

Sign Masses for the Deaf are celebrated each Sun. in the following churches: St. Thomas, Fortville, 8 a.m.; St. Barnabas, 8300 Rahke Rd., 9 a.m.; St. Joao of Arc. 42nd and Central, 10:30 a.m.; and Holy Spirit, 7243 E. 10th St., 10:30 a.m.

☆☆

Marian Devotions are held each Sun. at 2 p.m. in Sacred Heart Parish chapel, 1530 Union St. Everyone welcome.

## Socials:

MONDAY: St. Ann, 6:30 p.m.; Our Lady of Lourdes, 6:30 p.m.; St. James, 5:30 p.m. TUESDAY: K of C Pius X Council 3433, 7 p.m.; Roncalli High School, 5:15 p.m.; St. Peter

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Claver Center, 3110 Sutherland Ave., 5 p.m.; St. Simon, 5:30 p.m.; St. Malachi, Brownsburg, 6:30 p.m.; Msgr. Sheridan K. of C Council 6138, 695 Pushville Rd., Johnson Co., 7 p.m.; food served 6 p.m. WEDNESDAY: St. Anthony, 6:30 p.m.; St. Roch, 7:11 p.m.; K of C Council 437, 1305 N. Delaware, 5 p.m. THURSDAY: St. Catherine parish hall, 6:30 p.m.; Holy Family K of C, 6:30 p.m.; Westside K of C, 220 N.

Country Club Rd., 6 p.m.; St. Simon, 5:30 p.m. FRIDAY: St. Christopher parish hall, Speedway, 6:30 p.m.; St. Peter Claver Center, 3110 Sutherland Ave., 5 p.m.; Central Catholic School, at St. James Church, 5:15 p.m.; Holy Name, Beech Grove, 5 p.m. SATURDAY: Cathedral High School, 3 p.m.; K of C Council 437, 1305 N. Delaware, 4:30 p.m. SUNDAY: Ritter High School, 6 p.m.; St. Philip parish hall, 3 p.m.

## Vatican warns of dangers of Eastern prayer, meditation

by Agostino Bono

VATICAN CITY (CNS)—Eastern prayer and meditation, while having positive elements, "is not free from dangers and errors" harmful to Catholic spirituality, said a Vatican document approved by Pope John Paul II.

Because of the growing interest in Eastern methods among Catholics, there is an "urgent need" to define the elements of prayer essential for Christianity in any fusion with techniques borrowed from Buddhism and Hinduism, said the document, a letter to the world's Catholic bishops.

Eastern methods were defined as Zen, transcendental meditation and yoga. Also criticized were some of the physical exercises associated with them.

The document said it also was a reference point "in a more general way, for the different forms of prayer practiced nowadays in ecclesial organizations, particularly in associations, movements and groups."

The document was issued by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and was signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, congregation head. It was dated Oct. 15 and released at the Vatican Dec. 14 after receiving papal approval.

Christian prayer is defined "as a personal, intimate and profound dialogue between man and God."

"It flees from impersonal techniques or from concentrating on oneself, which can create a kind of trap, imprisoning the person praying in a spiritual privatism which is incapable of free openness to the transcendental God," it said.

Interest in Eastern meditation is a positive sign that people are looking for spiritual fulfillment, the letter said.

But "proposals to harmonize Christian meditations with Eastern techniques need to have their contents and methods ever subjected to a thoroughgoing examination so as to avoid the danger of falling into syncretism," it added.

Syncretism is the merging of different religious beliefs into a new belief.

Some Eastern meditation forms "do not hesitate to place that absolute without image or concepts, which is proper to Buddhist theory, on the same level as the majesty of God revealed in Christ," the document said.

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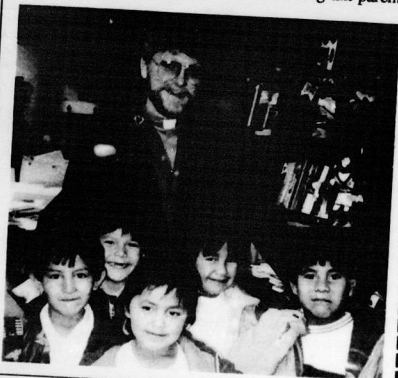
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P.O. Box 610 - Eastern Navajo Reservation  
Thoreau, New Mexico 87323 - 0610

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# Youth News/Views

'GOD CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS'

## Christian Appalachian Project creates hope

by Mary Ann Wyand

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(To obtain more information or a copy of the book, write to the Christian Appalachian Project at 322 Crab Orchard Road, Lancaster, Ky. 40446 or telephone 606-792-365.)



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# In the face of violence, people can begin anew

by Fr. Herbert Weber

A college student named Jay stopped to see me just before Christmas break. As he entered my office, I couldn't help but notice his massive size and strength. Apparently he was used to queues on the subject and quickly informed me that his hobby was weight-lifting.

His newfound strength, however, was part of his problem. He was scared to death that he might direct it toward violence.

As Jay and I talked, he recounted how before his parents' divorce his father frequently was abusive of him. With the holidays around the corner, Jay expected that he would spend some time with his father.

His newfound fear that if his anger went set off, he would take a swing at his father. Because of his strength, it would be harmful.

That was a couple of years ago. Jay managed to get through the holiday season without fighting with his father. After New Year's, he came back and for the next seven or eight months we talked about ways to overcome the violence of the early years of his life.

Jay made a new beginning right in the face of violence. Rather than accepting its legitimacy as a way to solve problems, he asked for something better.

But, first of all, he had to admit that he himself had a tremendous capability of being violent. That admission freed him to seek peaceful self-restraint.

During the Christmas season, there is more talk about peace than at any other time of the year. Why not? After all, it is the Prince of Peace whose birth is celebrated. This year especially, on the eve of a new decade, peace is the concern of prayer and the object of hope for many.

## Faith and love help youths regain hope

by Mary Ann Wyand  
Second of two parts

Does violence always beget violence, or can abused teen-agers learn to look at their tragic situations with hope and resolve for better lives someday?

Conventual Franciscan Brother Martin Masler, who teaches religion at Cardinal Ritter High School in Indianapolis, knows from experience that faith and love help young people turn their lives around.

During a panel discussion on domestic violence, a teen-age boy whose father died of alcoholism emphasized that, "I'm totally against drinking myself. I don't want to be like my dad. He drank every night. I don't want to be drinking my paycheck away. I don't need alcohol."

A female student, who has watched her widowed mother pursue relationships with married men for eight years, noted that, "I think if you're going to get married, those vows should be sacred."

Another teen-age girl whose father tried to molest her was finally able to accept the fact that, "I've never had a dad that I could love and that could love me."

And yet another teen-ager sleeps with a rosary under her pillow to calm her fears of an abusive father.

Brother Martin has brought his expertise in grief ministry into the classroom at Ritter High School to help young people accept tragedy in their lives and begin the long and difficult process of healing. He also started a confidential support group for teens with special needs.

"These kids walk down the halls at school and you never know what's going on inside them, what's happening in their lives," Brother Martin said. "How could you take a test with these kind of problems going on at home? Look how all this affects their classroom performance."

Stopping beside one student, Brother Martin explained that, "This young woman wrote a suicide note to me." The student nodded, wiped tears away, and told the group that, "My parents don't believe me when I say that I'm going to kill myself. Parents should listen to their kids and believe them."

Participation in the support group for troubled teen-agers enables her to talk through her problems and hopefully overcome thoughts of destructive behavior.

Another student who has also considered suicide admitted that, "I can't think of a friend that I know that hasn't thought of committing suicide. We're going through a lot and it seems like the only way out."

Dialogue and prayer with Brother Martin and other Ritter students during the support group meetings offer confused teen-agers the hope and understanding they need to begin wanting to live again.

"The Ritter family is like one big family," a teen-age boy said. "Talking to kids your own age is a lot better than talking to a psychiatrist."

A female student agreed. "You keep a lot of things inside. Now I know that my dad's the crazy one, not me. It's easier for me to talk now."

And another student acknowledged that, "I don't always understand what my parents are going through, but they don't have to put me down all of the time."

Asked for advice on positive child-rearing, the student suggested that parents be supportive and "think about what your kids are going through." And, they advised, "Give your kids a lot of patience and love."

But it will not come about unless people, like Jay, choose to over a more violent form of behavior.

In making the choice for peace, people have to become aware of the repercussions of their own actions, even admitting that their decisions can cause violence elsewhere, sometimes unintentionally.

Last summer I had the privilege of visiting several countries in Central America, including Nicaragua. Being in a Third World country is hard in itself, but seeing that country at war was devastating to me personally.

One day, in Nicaragua, I was part of a meeting with a group of mothers. One woman, Lydia, especially touched me as she told how she had lost two sons in the war. As bad as that was, the recent kidnapping of her daughter by rebel forces was even more painful.

She broke down in tears as she spoke about the way her daughter had gone to the mountain villages as a teacher only to be taken captive. Lydia said that not knowing whether her girl was alive or dead was almost impossible to bear.

All I could recall as she talked was documentation I had seen the previous day regarding the raping and torturing of kidnap victims.

After the meeting, Lydia and I were talking when she discovered that I was a priest. At that, she grabbed my arm and in a pleading manner begged, "When you go home, please tell people what is going on here."

She was asking that the people of a nation who spend so much money in her country think of their actions and decisions in terms of human suffering and not merely ideologies.

Sometimes good people and good nations need to be reminded that their decisions can have ramifications for others. Being peacemakers means being aware of possible ramifications and taking them into account when making decisions.

The old adage is that violence begets violence. If so, it will be necessary for men and women living in a world where violence is prevalent to consciously look for other means of resolving differences.

Perhaps inspired by the actions and words of Jay and Lydia, people of good will also can discover their capacities for peace in looking at new beginnings.

(Father Weber writes religious education articles for Catholic News Service.)

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## BOOK REVIEW

## Addition to the 'Merton canon'

THOMAS MERTON: PREVIEW OF THE ASIAN JOURNEY, edited by Walter Capps. Crossroad (New York, 1989). 114 pp., \$13.95.

Reviewed by Msgr. Charles Dolien

Trappist Father Thomas Merton, more than 20 years after his death, is still the darling of the liberal, secular intellectual. The early Father Merton was a writer who

shared the spirituality of his rich monastic tradition. The mature Father Merton was a prophetic voice applying the principles of his Christianity to the world at large. It was quite invigorating.

But the Father Merton of his last year, who buried himself in a hermitage but kept every worldly contact alive, emerges as a contradiction or, perhaps, as an over-the-hill prophet. He himself fills too much of the picture. Perhaps had he been given a longer life, this might have become more balanced—or less.

## Tension between clergy, laity analyzed

A CHURCH OF THE BAPTIZED, by Redemptorist Father Remy Parent. Paulist Press (Mahwah, N.J., 1989). 213 pp., \$12.95.

Reviewed by Fred Rotondaro

There is a sad and potentially tragic tension between the laity and the clergy in the Catholic Church, writes Father Remy Parent, professor of theology at the University of Montreal, in "A Church of the Baptized." Lay people do not have an ecclesiastical "present" in the church and yet, most ironically, they are the true future of the church. This is the paradox that Father Parent addresses in what is at times a troubling, occasionally brilliant, and always thoughtful volume.

Priests and bishops, he notes, are perceived "as the mediators of the mediation of Jesus Christ." One result of this priestly mediation is that "lay people see themselves assigned the status of a passive object by a game that keeps them at a distance from God."

In chapters on God, Jesus, the Mass, church, and the world, Father Parent explores the dimensions of what he feels is an upcoming crisis of the relationship of the clergy to the laity. The existing structure, he writes, is destructive of

the true mystery of the church—a mystery that depends upon an essential unity, a oneness.

Father Parent believes that "the church and its future belong to all those who, wedding the future of God with the future of the world in their decisions, truly assume their status as subject of life in the church." Lay people cannot be passive in a vital church of the future. Indeed, "in a church of faith in Jesus Christ, there can no longer be a subject and an object of ecclesiastical life. There are no longer any clerics or lay people."

One reading of the above words—which conclude the volume—would be that Father Parent is calling for a type of Catholic Quakerism, a form of direct oneness of man to God that forgoes priestly mediation. He had earlier stressed that salvation is individual and must be based in the here-and-now of the penitent soul.

Another reading of these words, however—and I think a more valid approach—would be that he is declaring not the need to bring down the role of priests in the church but rather to build and support the role of the laity so there is a greater equality that corresponds with the oneness of the church and all who believe in the church.

(Rotondaro is executive director of the National Italian American Foundation in Washington.)

In "Thomas Merton: Preview of the Asian Journey," one of the last conferences that Father Merton gave at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at Santa Barbara, Calif., is presented from tapes made at the time. For the Merton devotee, this is heady stuff; for one less dedicated it is a very unfinished presentation.

The scholars he addressed were very interested in discovering why he was going to Asia and what he hoped to find there. The answer, quite simply, was that he didn't really know. He had immersed himself in Asiatic religious studies and seemed to think that the monasticism of the West might find a kinship with monasticism of the East. It was all so amorphous, but so grandiose in its idealism that it appealed to intellectual seekers.

By this time, Father Merton's definition of a monk was far afield from that of St. Benedict or St. Basil. As he told his audience at Santa Barbara, the Eastern "religions" were more a philosophy than a religion, as we know it. If this is true, and if philosophy is the handmaiden of theology, perhaps there is much that the East can give to the West in religious response. Nothing that Father Merton said has been very convincing to me, but then, of course, I think Catholicism is a revealed religion, and that puts it in a class by itself. The human dimension gets in the way only too often, but maybe that's the price we pay.

This book is really an important addition to the Merton canon and as such it is a valuable record. But it still leaves Father Merton as an unfinished prophet.

(Msgr. Dolien is book review editor of The Priest magazine and pastor of St. Gabriel's Church, Poway, Calif.)

## † Rest in Peace

(The Criterion welcomes death notices from parishes and/or individuals. Please submit them in writing, always stating the date of death, to our office by 10 a.m. Monday the week of publication. Obituaries of archdiocesan priests, parents and religious sisters serving in our archdiocese are listed elsewhere in The Criterion. Other priests and brothers are included here, unless they are natives of the archdiocese or have other connections to it.)

† ANSPAUGH, Kenneth M., 73, St. Joseph, Shelbyville, Dec. 7. Father of Carolyn Thomas; Robert L., Fred T., and Ray F. Anspaugh; brother of Irene Mardis and Margaret Weinm; grandfather of 11; great-grandfather of four.

† CARTER, Theresa M., 73, St. Paul, Sellersburg, Dec. 7. Mother of Paula C. Carmin, Lawrence L. and Robert J. Carter; sister of Rita Murr, Frances and John G. Putnam; grandmother of 11; great-grandmother of two.

† CHUMBLEY, Cosby F. (MBA), 65, Little Flower, Indianapolis, Dec. 7. Husband of Patricia Ann Chumbley; father of Shelia Hahn; brother of Mary Mann and Evangeline Priddy; grandfather of three.

† COLLINS, James D., 86, Christ the King, Indianapolis, Dec. 6. Father of Michael and Patrick Collins; grandfather of four.

† CORN, James T., 79, St. Mary, New Albany, Dec. 5. Father of Joyce Nevins, Larry T. and Roger Corn; brother of Roy, Edward and Everett Corn.

† CRAIG, Lillian, 97, St. Lawrence, Lawrenceburg, Dec. 7. Mother of Mildred Whitman, Freda Childers, Thomas and Lloyd Craig; sister of Marie Burns; grandmother of 27.

† DAMPIER, Cathy Lynne, 35, St. Bartholomew, Columbus, Dec. 5. Wife of Robert Wayne; mother of Cheryl, Robin and Emily Dampier; stepmother of Mike McFarland; daughter of Pauline Voss; stepdaughter of Carl Voss; sister of Marilyn Elkins, Rossanne and Sue Klakamp; grandmother of two.

† GALLAGHER, Cornelius E., 64, Holy Spirit, Indianapolis, Dec. 10. Husband of Margaret L. Matt; Gallagher; father of Maureen A. Guthrie, John M. Thomas E. and Joseph M. Gallagher; brother of Margaret Bell, Gertrude Wagner, Joseph and Bernard Gallagher; grandfather of six.

† GOLDMAN, Margaret A., 69, Little Flower, Indianapolis, Dec. 3. Mother of Tylla L. Aldering, Sharon A. and Louis E. Goldman; sister of Elizabeth Nicholas, George, John, Joseph, Robert and Thomas Antic; grandmother of two.

† HITCHCOCK, Wayne (Tom), 59, St. Columba, Columbus, Nov. 29. Husband of Barbara; father of Jo Franklin, Linda Kelley and Alicia Hitchcock; brother of Marvin and Robert Hitchcock; grandfather of four.

† KEELOR, M. Robert, 72, St. Mary, Richmond, Dec. 12. Father of Nancy Kelly, James and Tim Keelor, Tom and Steve Porter; grandfather of 10.

† LAKER, Anna E., 26, St. Louis, Batesville, Dec. 6. Daughter of Evelyn Laker; sister of Anthony L. Laker; granddaughter of Odella Lohman.

† KNIGHT, Eva Marie Moya, 64, St. Mary, New Albany, Dec. 4. Sister of Rose Ready.

† OHLMANN, Robert A., 63, St. Michael, Charlestown, Nov. 30. Husband of Betty Jean; father of Paul K. Ohlmann; son of Anna Mae Ohlmann; brother of Jeanne Ransier, Julie Voss, David, Eugene, Frank, James, Joseph, Lawrence, Richard and Walter Ohlmann; grandfather of two.

† PAINTER, Isaac N., 78, St. Mary, Rushville, Dec. 7. Father of Sandra Buckley, Linda Shoffer, Sharon Trent, Karen Trowbridge, Jack, James, Jerry and John Painter; brother of Bevin Ashley; grandfather of 29.

† PIERCE, Thomas L., 38, Immaculate Conception, Aurora, Dec. 4. Husband of Peggy; father of Thomas, Sarah and Shawn Pierce; son of Dorothy Pierce; brother of Bev Stahle, Jane Betz, David and James Pierce.

† QUEEN, LaVerne V., 86, St. Augustine, Jeffersonville, Dec. 10. Mother of Joan L. Jungheane, Joyce M. Jandejska, Jeanette A. Erdmann, James A. Queen; grandmother of nine; great-grandmother of nine.

† TOBIN, Genevieve M., 85, Little Flower, Indianapolis, Dec. 7. Mother of Patricia A. Hawkins, sister of Anna C. Manion; grandmother of three.

† URRUTIA, Charita B. Altman, 80, Little Flower, Indianapolis, Dec. 3. Wife of Juan B. Urrutia; mother of Nela Delaney Fox, Germaine Corwell, Rita Leesch and John B. Urrutia; sister of Margaret Predenkoski, Constance Dunn, Augusta Smith, Joseph and Alonzo Altmann; grandmother of 14; great-grandmother of 14.

† VOLK, Isabella T., 72, St. John the Evangelist, Encrobsburg, Dec. 8. Sister of Pamela Raver, August, Cletus and Paul Volk.

† TWISSUNG, Herman Gerald, 63, Sacred Heart, Jeffersonville, Dec. 7. Husband of Patricia Weisner; father of Pamela Clegg, Denise Payton, Rhonda, Richard and Terrence Wessling; son of Thelma Lawrence; stepdaughter of Robert Lawrence; grandfather of 14.

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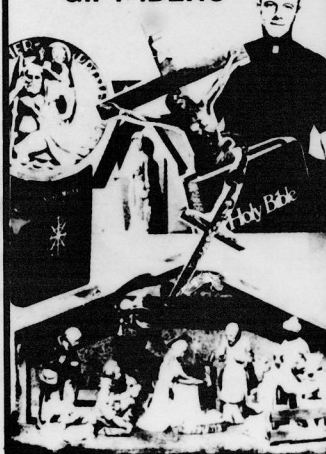
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# Ethiopians face starvation again, CRS says

by Bill Pritchard

WASHINGTON (CNS)—Millions of Ethiopians face famine in early 1990 potentially as severe as the deadly privations of 1984-85, said a Catholic relief official.

"Well in excess of 1 million" Ethiopians in civil war-torn Tigray province alone will "require some form of assistance," said John Waiter, Catholic Relief Services country director for the east African nation.

He said upwards of 2 million people in Eritrea province, where there has been a shaky, informal truce in that rebel conflict, might need food aid as well.

The rapidly developing crisis is driven by severe drought, which has caused crop losses of up to 100 percent in some areas, and the continuing civil war in which Tigrajan and Eritrean rebels are battling for independence from the central government.

Waiter, a CRS veteran who took the Ethiopia post in 1987, said that food supplies could run out in Eritrea in early January. In Tigray, he said, shortages will become severe in April "when they'll be eating up the last of their meager harvests."

A "peak critical time" will arrive in May, he said.

Waiter spoke by telephone from CRS headquarters in Baltimore.

He said relief services have the manpower and transport needed to provide food to the needy, but might not have the means to reach them. That is especially true in Tigray where government and rebel troops are locked in battle and from which the government has barred outside groups, he said.

Waiter said that the relief services hope for guarantees from the rebels and the government allowing aid convoys

to use "corridors of tranquility," to reach the needy population. The other, far less desirable option is to wait for the refugees to arrive from Tigray after their food supplies are exhausted.

CRS said 20 members of Congress have asked United Nations Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar to press-

## The agency will need financial help in obtaining medicine, spare parts, shelter materials

sure the Ethiopian government to arrange safe passage into rebel-held territory for relief convoys.

Waiter said he is talking about the coming crisis now to urge Americans to help in the campaign to allow aid groups access to the famine zones.

CRS East Africa desk officer Mike D'Adamo said the agency will also need financial help in obtaining medicine, spare parts and shelter materials and providing warehousing for relief goods.

As happens frequently in Ethiopia, the food problem began when "it just did not rain again," Waiter said. In Eritrea there has been "a virtual 100 percent loss" in crops. In Tigray, 96 to 98 percent of the potential yield failed in the dry weather. The looming food crisis could send hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans fleeing from their homes in search of food, Waiter said.

"We'll see more of the images we saw in 1984-1985," he said. "That's a very real possibility."

In 1984, an extended drought and the disruption of warfare brought millions of Ethiopians to the brink of starvation and death. International relief agencies' food distribution centers were overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees seeking assistance.

Relief officials say it is much harder to help starving people who are further exhausted by days of trekking in search of food than to provide rations where people live.

In 1991, aid Waiter, CRS, working through a coalition of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian Evangelical Church of Makane Yesus (Lutheran) and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, plans to operate 35 food distribution centers. In 1984-85, he said, the Catholic relief agency operated about 27 centers. The coalition has upwards of 400 field workers in Eritrea alone, he said.

"Our concern is to have the go-ahead to operate" a relief program "that doesn't involve the displacement of people," the CRS official said.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization said in its November "Food Outlook" report that "growing conditions have been extremely poor in Eritrea as a result of the failure of the meher (main) season rains; the outlook is also poor in parts of Tigray."

However, it continues that "good harvests are anticipated in the main producing central and western regions" of Ethiopia.

The World Food Program, a branch of the FAO, said on Dec. 14 that a major shortfall of food contributions would render the agency unable to meet its commitments to hundreds of thousands of people in 1990.

Its executive director, James Ingram, said in Rome that Asia and sub-Saharan Africa—which includes Ethiopia—will be hardest hit by the shortfall of one-third in yearly pledges to the program.

He said the deficit is due to cutbacks by donor countries and increased food prices.

Waiter said that Ethiopians are bracing for the coming famine.

"It's going to be serious," he said. Contributions to the CRS Ethiopian relief effort can be sent to Catholic Relief Services, P.O. Box 17090, Baltimore, Md. 21298-9664.

## Two West Bank towns cancel Christmas

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (CNS)—Two West Bank towns linked to the birth of Christ have canceled Christmas celebrations because of events connected to the Palestinian uprising in Israeli-occupied territories.

Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus, canceled its celebrations for the third consecutive year because of the uprising, known as the *intifada* or shaking off.

The town of Beit Sahour, where tradition says shepherds saw the star announcing the birth of Jesus, also has canceled its activities.

This fall, the 10,000 residents of Beit Sahour—a mainly Christian village in the Israeli-occupied West Bank—peacefully withheld their tax payments through a six-week siege by Israeli troops that ended in October.

The villagers claimed a victory over Israeli authorities, but Israelis said they got the revenues they wanted through the sale of about \$1.5 million worth of property seized from the residents.

"Due to the difficult conditions which our town is experiencing after the tax raids that lasted for a month and a half and the detention of dozens of merchants and residents, we are obliged to cancel all Christmas festivities," the town said in a statement.

More than 700 people, mostly Palestinians, have died in

the 2-year-old Palestinian uprising, which began with confrontations between stone-throwing youths and Israeli troops in the territories. The violence has grown to include murders of Palestinians suspected of being Israeli informers.

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# The church and the cause of protecting the environment

by Liz Schevchuk

WASHINGTON (CNS)—With widespread public concern about air and water pollution, endangered species, oil spills and global warming, both church and state are expressing alarm over threats to God's green earth.

Joining an ecological chorus are the U.S. bishops and Catholic Charities USA, which both addressed environmental matters in the context of fall statements on food and agriculture, and Pope John Paul II, who devoted his 1990 World Day of Peace message to the environment.

Meanwhile, the White House and Congress have pursued legislative efforts. On Dec. 13, for example, President Bush signed legislation providing increased conservation of wetlands—marshes, bogs and swamps being lost to the nation at the rate of about 400,000 acres annually but crucial to clean water supplies and cultivation of marine wildlife and waterfowl. "Even in times of serious fiscal constraints, we can still meet our highest environmental priorities," Bush said.

Earlier this year, promoting such legislation, he suggested that "we can and should be nature's advocate—and that means an active stewardship of the natural world."

The pope, too, has encouraged stewardship of creation, using the World Day of Peace message to discuss the "plundering of natural resources" and an all too prevalent "callous disregard" for nature.

Detailing various environmental problems, the pontiff said that "gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related 'greenhouse effect' have now reached crisis proportions" while continued "industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides" and other chemicals are all "known to harm the atmosphere and environment."

"Today," he said, "the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone. Christians, in particular," the pope added, "realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty toward nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith."

For religious believers, "the issue that exists is fundamentally a spiritual one—our understanding of what

*'Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone'*

the universe is about and where we fit into it," said Father Daniel Martin, a member of St. Patrick's Missionary Society, an Irish order, and consultant to the U.N. Environment Program.

For one thing, he said, Americans, who make up only 5 percent of the world's population, consume 40 percent of its resources.

The environment "is really a big, big responsibility" for Christian churches, Father Martin said. "What's required is much more than having a few prayers."

Getting churches substantively involved won't be easy, he said. "We're all part of the problem, including American bishops and popes and so on."

Concern for creation "is at the heart of where we're called" as Christians to be, said another priest, Jesuit Father Joseph Hacula, director of the Jesuit Social Ministries national office in Washington. It involves "values, morality, ethics. I think we're long overdue," in addressing environmental issues, he said. "I think we're reaching a crisis here."

The U.S. bishops too, are pondering environmental topics.

"By acknowledging that the earth is the Lord's and that God is present in all of creation, we show respect for God's creation," they said in their new statement, "Food Policy in a Hungry World: The Links that Bind Us Together."

In January, the U.S. Catholic Conference Committees on Domestic Social Policy and International Policy will "explore what the conference could do to respond to the moral dimensions of the environmental questions facing

us," said John L. Carr, USCC secretary for social development and world peace. One possibility, he said, is a statement focusing on ecological issues.

"Our natural resources must be treated in a very special way on this planet," said Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee, during the bishops' fall meeting in Baltimore.

Bishop Warren L. Boudreaux of Houma-Thibodaux, La., cited threats to the marine environment and, consequently, the livelihoods of those in the seafood industry. The coastal waterway system "is being polluted, it's being destroyed," he warned.

Catholic Charities USA released a fall policy paper on "A Just Food System" that, among other things, reminded Americans that "a clean environment is necessary for a safe supply of food."

The paper urged "vigorous protection of improved environmental protection laws; expanded programs of reforestation; protection of topsoil, groundwater, oceans, coastal bays and inlets, inland waters, and fragile ecosystems" and international "resource management and environmental replenishment, particularly of fragile ecosystems such as tropical rain forests."

U.N. diplomats also are busy. "The United Nations, as of last year turned up the volume on its own interest in environmental issues," said Msgr. John Muthing, an attaché at the Vatican's Permanent Observer Mission at the United Nations.

"It certainly is the issue of the late '80s at the United Nations, there's no question about that," he said. "Many of the developing countries feel very strongly that most of the problems" can be traced in part to developed countries, Msgr. Muthing said. Yet, "they're not denying that they currently have some serious problems of their own."

Father Martin says the church is environmentally aware now "because the spirit of God is speaking to us."

"I believe it's the spirit of God in the universe... calling us, speaking to the churches" through environmentalists and "even the animals," he said. "It's the sea otters; being sacrificed, who speak to us as well."

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