

December 25, 2020 | Christmas

Emergencies Only: 952-929-0048



Tidings of Joy!
Merry Christmas

OUR LADY
CATHOLIC



OF GRACE
CHURCH

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Christmas Day 2020

Dear Parishioner

I am grateful to be a member of this parish and walk with you during this pandemic. As we celebrate the last days of Advent, moving towards celebrating Christmas and enjoying what Christ brings to all of us, I'm aware that it's a Christmas like no other. Whether we attend Mass in person, view it online or watch it on Fox 9, how odd it will be seeing the church more empty than full. How strange to celebrate Christmas with no big choirs singing and families packing the pews like sardines. How I love greeting everybody on Christmas from those who attend weekly to those I've not seen for a year. As I have since this pandemic hit full force this past March, I miss seeing you week in and week out.

This Christmas we will only be able to host about one-third of those who typically attend Christmas Mass. It is what it is, but it presses me to rejoice always and, in this circumstance, to give thanks. But, today more than ever, let us rejoice and give thanks. And pray. Pray for those separated from family and friends, those serving in hospitals and health care facilities, for first responders and military personnel. Especially prayer for members of our parish and families who live in health care facilities and nursing homes, some haven't been hugged by a family member in a long very long time.

A year ago, I preached on Christmas morning about the joy that comes from **Just One Yes**. I pray that you may continue to whisper in your hearts – Just One Yes and with your lives you might **Just Offer Yourself**.

In the meantime, as we say yes and offer ourselves through our ministries with our attentiveness to the poor and our neighbors, we continue to pray daily and offer our gifts to the Lord and his purposes. You see, God knows what is happening – and has chosen you – each one of us – to live at this time – for his glory and to serve the needs of our day and age.

May God bless and keep you and your family safe this Christmas Season. And despite the circumstances that surround us, we still say, Merry Christmas!



Father Kevin Finnegan
Pastor

P.S. This is where I would normally write a letter asking you to remember OLG in your Christmas giving (although I'm sure you've already received my other letter 😊). This year, that didn't quite inspire me. Nonetheless, thank you for your generosity through your service, ministry and financial gifts. All of which is still needed – more than ever.



The Holy Spirit In Action!

Every year at Our Lady of Grace, over 100 8th graders receive the sacrament of Confirmation. This journey, which begins in 7th grade, is a beautiful process for the whole community as these teens prepare to be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Several members of our parish community, such as clergy, parents, teachers, discipleship group leaders, staff members, and countless parishioners become instruments of the Lord through their prayers and accompaniment through the preparation.

This year, we incorporated a series of talks on the Kerygma into the program, recognizing the urgency to proclaim the Good News of Christ to participants. During this series we talked about God's love, how sin breaks our relationship with Him, and the impact of Jesus' death and resurrection for our salvation. During the last session, we invited the teens to make – or renew – the decision to follow Christ. It was very powerful to witness 60 teens come one by one to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and pray in silence before Him. The Holy Spirit was truly at work in each one of their hearts, compelling them to say yes to the Lord, yes to a life of faith, yes to holiness!

Let's keep praying for the Lord to bear fruit from the decision they made and continue to prepare their hearts for the Sacrament of Confirmation.

"I felt that knowing how sin divides us from God and how to overcome that is very important. Knowing how you can be saved and exactly how sin divides us from God is good because we can know exactly how much God loves us. We also learned what is a good way to respond to God's love and Jesus saving us from sin. Pledging ourselves to God is a great way to respond and makes me feel closer to God and more willing to help others learn of God's infinite mercy through being kind and merciful just like God is. I felt that going up there was a wonderful thing to do. It gave me enough time to think about all my sins and make myself better for God. It didn't make me feel pressured since there were people going up at all times. It was very meaningful and made me feel closer to God once I put my prayer up there. Thank you for offering me this opportunity." - Simone Kirkeby, 8th Grade Student

"I've really enjoyed the Discipleship Group talks about the Kerygma: God's love for us, sin dividing us from God, Jesus saving us, and our own response to this good news. Something that really stood out to me was the bridge analogy that the speakers frequented; there is a deep chasm between humans that sin and God, and the cross Jesus died on is the bridge we walk across to receive the eternal happiness only God provides. Only God is the answer to free us from our sins, so we must turn to him and completely surrender ourselves in order to be truly free. This analogy is also a very nice way to put it since it gives a visual as to what happens spiritually and inside of each one of us. If I could summarize these D-Group talks, it would be that we need to surrender ourselves wholeheartedly to God; humans are sinners, and God is the Savior." - Natalie Mosakowski, 8th Grade Student

"What a great age. They aren't little kids anymore but not grown up either. Developmentally they are trying to figure it out. They may not say it but many are wondering who am I and where do I belong? They're trying to take what their parents have taught them along with their school and friends and make sense of things. Friendships and their peer group become increasingly more important. With great curriculum combined with our love for them, D-Group leaders walk alongside these students to be another voice reinforcing Catholic Teachings from both home and school. Our unit on friendship highlights that having friends of virtue, who are loving, faith filled, patient, hopeful, etc., is the goal. These are the ones we want to call our closest friends. Love everyone but hold close to those who will lead you to Jesus. What's not to love about that? With each meeting we have curriculum to give us direction and that always seem to include sharing, laughing and praying together. It's a blast!" - Sally Lareau, Discipleship Group Leader



Answering the Call to J.O.Y.

Whenever I think about feeding those around me who are truly hungry, I think about the parable of the loaves and fishes. Obviously we don't perform a miracle like Jesus did in multiplying the small amount of food to feed thousands, but we do follow his example of concern for those who are hungry. He knew that His followers needed to be fed, that they were human beings who needed food and nourishment for the tasks before them. We follow in His footsteps when we, too, provide food for the hungry and recognize the humanity of those in need. There is joy in helping to meet another person's basic needs, in knowing that in some small way, we made life easier that day. One of the really simple, yet essential ways that members of our team contributed to the wellbeing of the guests at Loaves and Fishes was by providing over 30 cases of water. While water doesn't sound like something exciting, public drinking fountains are turned off due to the pandemic, and the guests were glad to have the water bottles to quench their thirst.

Additionally, at Sharing and Caring Hands, we typically serve around two hundred lunches each month, but, just like at Loaves and Fishes, the numbers have increased this year. It is a joy to get to know a little about some of the guests who come month after month. For example, there's a woman who consistently visits, bringing containers to "sneak" extra food out of the dining room. Even though we all know she does this, we look for her each month, worrying when she isn't there, rejoicing when we see her again. Over the years, our volunteers have baked hundreds of dozens of beautifully decorated cookies and cupcakes that have brought big smiles from the guests. We get to experience the vicarious joy of watching a child debate between desserts that were baked just for this occasion, wondering whether the cupcake or the big cookie will win. Kids' faces just light up when they get to choose something fun like dessert, not just whether or not to have green beans.

The parishioners of Our Lady of Grace who volunteer to help cook, serve and clean up after these meals are amazing. We have made over 600 pounds of sloppy joes for Sharing and Caring Hands along with 3000 chicken patties for the guests at Loaves and Fishes this year and our volunteers have done all this out of love for God and neighbor. They take time from their busy days to help make Jesus Christ known and loved. They offer their time and talents freely. Before we serve each meal, we pause to pray together. We thank God for our blessings and the opportunity to serve His people. Each one of our volunteers is answering God's call through Father Kevin's invitation to "Just Offer Yourself" and, in the process, experiencing the joy that answering that call brings.

Melissa Miller, *Director of Community Life & Social Justice*



OLGMC Gala 2021

Saturday, February 20

This year's gala will be a virtual event with plenty of fun and surprises, so please mark your calendar for that evening.

Beyond attending, there are many ways to support the cause. Please contact our event co-chairs regarding sponsorship opportunities and auction item donations before Friday, January 8:

Dave Schliesman (schlies24@gmail.com)

Sarah Schliesman (sarahschliesman@hotmail.com)

Thank you in advance for your support!



Principal's Update: *The Joy of Giving*

Throughout the school year, our students and families have been sharing their time, talents and treasures with us. Our school community has pivoted during this pandemic to help us expand from 3 to 4 elementary classrooms per grade to meet the spacing requirements, for which the Men's Club generously gave their time to assist us in moving furniture and materials to the new spaces. Our PSO committee chairs displayed ingenuity and creativity in adapting the much loved and traditional events that we could not do during the pandemic. Our school initiatives, which have been overwhelmingly supported, have given us a chance to share these gifts with St. John Paul II Catholic School, Ascension Academy and Sharing & Caring Hands. The joy that you feel in your heart when helping the less fortunate is what the spirit of Christmas is about.

Thank you for helping us bring joy to others through your prayers and supporting the events and activities at the school.

Mrs. Ginger Vance, Principal

Stories of JOY from Our School

"Our 3rd graders was put into one of the larger classes and while that brought its own unique set of challenges, both the kids and our amazing teachers have risen above to make this year incredibly joyful. It's like they are starting to truly understand just how lucky they are. One huge benefit to the larger class was the huge impact we made for our sponsor family. We were able to support a family of seven and make it what we hope will be a very merry Christmas for them. From bikes to bedding to Spiderman and slippers, the families of Mrs. Kopetka's 3rd grade class came together to spread joy." - School Parent

"The boys were able to return to school yesterday. We talked about it a lot because I knew it would only be for two days and this mom was worried about yet another transition back to distance learning next week. So they decided they wanted to go, even if for a short couple of days. When my son arrived in his classroom, one friend got up, did a little happy dance and shouted 'I missed you so much!' Made his day. Worth it even for two short days!" - School Parent

"A true moment of joy for me came during the school All Saints Day Mass, as I watched the 8th grade/Kindergarten buddy teams participate and share the mass together. Despite distance learning, despite masks and social distancing, the parade of kindergarten saints in their crowns and robes goes on. I am filled with gratitude to the school administration and staff for finding ways to maintain so many special traditions that form the lasting memories our students will carry with them."
- Alumni and School Parent



K-8 Open House

Thursday, January 21, 6:30 PM, Virtual

OLG School is **big** enough to provide strong academics and **small** enough to foster a supportive school experience. Come and see how our school's nurturing faith environment and rigorous academics could be a match for your family! Our school is a unique community of highly skilled educators, active parents, supportive staff and eager students. Honored by three National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Awards, OLG School continues to set children on a path for success in high school and beyond.



Simple Gifts. Unspeakable Joy.

More than a building, “church” blossoms in communities where Christians are living the Gospel. And yet, we miss gathering as one body in our building. We miss seeing each other. We miss the many ways the OLG campus allows us to casually, easily connect with our brothers and sisters in Christ; we pray together, we sing our praises to God, we are being “church” together. The building may not be “church,” but its sense of place fosters what it means to be church and Christ for one another.

This year, we’ve had nine months of “pandemic time” to reimagine church. Since the beginning of time, women have birthed precious babies, made in the image of God, in nine months. Now, we’ve birthed new ways of being church, too.

Yes, we still have Mass. Yes, we still send priests to anoint and offer reconciliation. Yes, we still baptize, confirm, and witness marriages. And yet not all our community can join us. Some of our seniors living in assisted living facilities are isolated, unable to leave their homes to protect their health. Others choose to worship virtually.

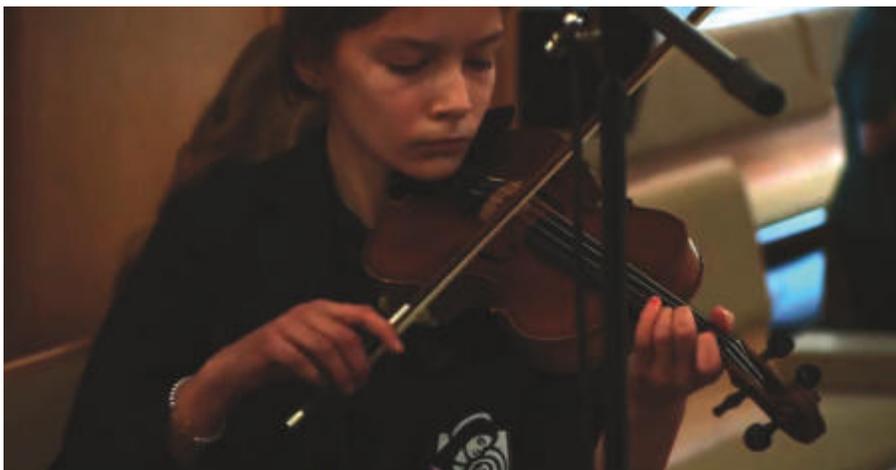
Reimagining church is not merely doing what we do with fewer people in the building. As we reimagine worship and ritual, we are connecting differently to find meaning. Zoom meetings, livestreamed Masses, and drive through communion: it often feels strange, and yet there have been moments of grace that we hope to carry beyond pandemic time. As Teresa Berger, professor of liturgical studies and Catholic theology at Yale Divinity School says, “God is omnipresent. God doesn’t have any greater trouble encountering us in the digital social space than in a hospital room, a refugee camp, a middle-class parish in Connecticut, or in my own kitchen or garden.”

October brought a fresh load of snow the day before our first drive-through communion. 74 seniors braved the weather and snowy roads to receive Communion that hour. They were so hungry for the Eucharist, so hungry to receive Jesus after months of virtual worship. Several cried. Through tears, one said simply, “this is the first time since March I have received communion.”

Drive-through communion is one small way we have reimaged church. We witness deep gratitude for such a simple gift. It is Christmas. Jesus is the gift. We gather, virtually, in the sanctuary, or at the curb to receive this simple, precious gift. And our response is joy.

Beryl Schewe, *Director of Pastoral Care*

“Virtual worship is still embodied liturgy, says this Yale liturgist.” U.S. Catholic, December 10, 2020



Singing with a Grateful Heart

*"Let us have music for Christmas...
Sound the trumpet of joy and rebirth;
Let each of us try, with a song in our hearts,
to bring peace to men on earth."
(M. L. Jarrell)*

What? No choir? How can we have Christmas without choir?!

How do you celebrate when you can have no more than four singers? How can you sing when you are 6' or more apart? How will we blend our strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes to represent all of our music ministries and all the varied tastes of our assemblies? Live stream? Who had ever done that?

When our choirs were abruptly stopped because of the Covid outbreak in March, we hoped that by Easter, we would be singing together again. But as you remember, Fr. Kevin preached Easter Mass to an empty church. Yet we have had music every week – beautiful music that blesses those who make it and blesses even more those who hear it. We have been able to bring good music done at a consistently high quality to our livestream Mass for the past 8 months because the musicians that have come forward each and every week have done so with willing hearts and spirits. They know that music is the prayer that touches people. They have never once said “no” when we have asked. They have always come with a smile and the genuine love of singing for God. Even when they or members of their families were ill with Covid or sitting in quarantine, others stepped up to help.

Little by little, we have been able to bring music back to our other Masses as well, even if in abbreviated form. The world needs music, our souls need music, our prayers are brought to life through music. It is my grateful heart that is singing this Christmas, for all the people who make music in our church, who plan and practice, who give their gift of music every week. So while this Christmas will be different for all the choirs that won't be heard or for all of us who have been sidelined, we can still sing the carols in our hearts, we can still lift up our gratitude and we can look forward to the day when we will hear the song of the assembly once again – without our masks on!

Shelly Aebi, *Director of Liturgy*



Giving

Every gift that you make helps advance our mission of making Jesus Christ known and loved and maintains the financial health of our parish operations. Here's how you can continue to help:

Sign up for online giving. Visit www.olgparish.org/give to sign up and begin making your secure contribution.

Mail in your weekly contribution within your offering envelope by check in your offering envelope to: Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, ATTN: Stewardship Giving, 5071 Eden Ave, Edina, MN 55436

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