

Bells of St. Mary

Calling all to Community



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Meet Cathy Waag, Administrative Assistant

By Kathleen Garnica

If you call the main phone number at the St. Mary of the Assumption church or ring the buzzer at the church's front doors, chances are Cathy Waag will answer.

Last August, Cathy was hired for the part-time position of administrative assistant for the church.

"I was ready to move into a part-time position with a simpler pace with a service emphasis, so when I saw this job advertised, I didn't hesitate to apply," she says.

Father Jim Manning impacted her decision to interview. "He was assigned to St. Henry Parish for a short time and was pastor at St. Albert the Great in Kettering at the time of my brother's death," she says. "He was wonderful with my family as we grieved our loss. I knew I would like working with him." St. Henry has been her parish home for decades, with her two kids attending school at Bishop Leibold and Alter. She says she loves the liturgy, which shows as she regularly cantors and sings in the St. Henry choir.

Soon after she began her new job, Cathy gave a generous "yes," to Father Jim when asked if she would take on full-time hours. Cathy brings over 22 years of administrative skills, a love for the church, family and serving others to her daily work.

"I left the academic work setting at UD where it was quiet at Christmas to the church work setting that is anything but quiet at Christmas," she laughs, "but I love it!" Cathy's 18 years as senior administrative secretary for UD's Department of Communication coupled with her 2013 UD bachelor's degree helped her jump right in to the many demands of the job.

A "cradle Catholic" and one of six children, Cathy grew up in a family on the east side of Dayton where church life was always an important part of family life. She and her husband, Jim, have been married 35 years, and they have two grown children, daughter Brittany and son Jonathan.

Cathy and Jim reconnected at their five-year Carroll High School reunion and married nine months later. Brittany and Jonathan are both UD graduates living in Texas and Hawaii respectively. "I miss them and my grandkids are so far away, but we love to visit them. We facetime often and hopefully someday they will be closer," she says.

As to her position, she says, "The best part of working here is the wonderful people and environment, plus I am learning a great deal about church procedures and faith formation. "Learn, Lead, Serve" was the motto at UD, and now I get to continue that here. I'm so blessed to be able to serve the church." When asked if there was anything else she wanted to share, she smiled big and said, "Yes, I am a quilter. For 10 years now, my cousins and I visit my Aunt Helen monthly at Friendship Village to quilt. We talk and create quilts to give as gifts to family and friends. We love our time together."



Cathy Waag

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Update on Sr. Madeline Marie Garnica

By Kathleen Garnica

Last October 2017, our parish blessed Madeline Garnica at the 10:30 am Mass as she began the 7 year journey of discernment with the Little Sister of the Poor (LSP). The first stage of religious life discernment involves a 9 month period referred to as the postulancy. With her belongings— yes, even her phone—and loved ones left behind, Madeline's desire to answer God's call took over.

During that time, she lived in the LSP communities in Baltimore, MD and Queens, NY providing her the experience of daily prayers, devotion, mass, care for the elderly poor, class and many regular chores associated with the caring for the residents and upkeep of the properties entrusted to them. The LSP community is devoted to the caring for the most needy elderly and owns and operates 27 nursing homes across the country. This year, the Little Sisters of the Poor will mark the 150th anniversary of the community's arrival in the United States. St. Paul's Home in Clifton is the second home founded by the Little Sisters, who trace their roots back to France. That is the home where Madeline spent most weekends for well over a year during her initial call to religious life. It was from that home that she officially entered as a Postulate on October 14, 2017.

With 3 other young women ages 22-30, she discerned to the next level of commitment referred to as the Novitiate. On July 27, 2018 Maddie entered the more formal 2 years of formation living at The Novitiate home in Queens, NY. With a change in level of commitment comes a change in name and dress plus an increased level of prayer, instruction, mentoring and even learning French and playing the organ. What drew her initially to this order is their work with the elderly poor. Knowing she and her fellow sisters are available to accompany the residents through their hours of daily need until their hour of death, makes the work very rewarding. The elderly fill her with joy and vice versa. Directly behind the Novitiate is the Queen of Peace nursing home which the Little Sisters own and operate; easy access to "her people" is just past the garden gate.

Monthly phone calls to home and letter writing are the main forms of communication to others but please be assured Sr. Madeline Marie is praying for all of us. She often shares she wants to be exactly where God wants her to be and for now, she believes, she is in that sweet spot. Prayers for her are not only appreciated but felt; please keep them coming for her and for her fellow Little Sisters of the Poor.



Sr. Madeline Marie Garnica

Elijah Cup By Father James Manning

The Elijah Cup is all about praying for vocations. Families are encouraged to take the cup home and use it as a focal point while praying.

Please consider signing up for this opportunity for your family or praying individually.



Two Different Paths to the Priesthood

By Dan Darragh

Ben Mersch and Mike Kapolka took two different paths to the priesthood. Ben will be pushing 40 when he leaves the seminary at the Athenaeum in Cincinnati in 2024, while Mike, who is completing the third of his seven-years there will still be in his early 30s.

Kapolka has been a member of St. Mary of the Assumption since 2006, while Mersch is a registered member of Our Lady of Good Hope in Miamisburg. The son of Steve and Joyce Mersch, he was raised at St. Augustine in Germantown and has attended or been involved at Emmanuel in Dayton in addition to attending St. Mary of the Assumption where he is a member of the Father Chuck Mentrup Chapter of the Knights of Columbus. Mersch, 34, is a 2003 graduate of Valley View High School in Germantown and graduated from Ohio Dominican University in Columbus with a bachelor's degree in theology and English.

Kapolka pretty much knows what he will be doing for the next eight years after he completes seminary, although where is uncertain, and Mersch has five more years to go at the Athenaeum before he gets his first assignment.

It obviously took Mersch a bit longer to make the decision to enter the priesthood. He had been out of college and working as a local newspaper reporter for more than 10 years when he finally decided to become a priest. And then he had about two weeks to quit his job, get his paperwork together and pack his bags.

"I guess it's a calling that has been on and off for a number of years, since middle school," says Mersch. "After college I was dating and working and watching my friends get married and have kids. I enjoyed my time with children but really didn't have the desire in my heart to have kids of my own. Over time, that and my restlessness with work and talking to friends and priests pushed me to at least want to check it out."

Mersch said he went to a discernment retreat in October 2016 at the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood which was hosted by Father Dan Schmitmeyer, vocations director for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. "He also invited me to a Welcome Weekend in March 2017 at Mt. St. Mary where prospective seminarians can visit for a weekend. I applied that summer and after an extensive application process and interviews, I was accepted and started my studies in the fall of 2017."

Kapolka, son of Jeffrey and Debra Kapolka of Springboro, grew up in various cities around the country, as Jeff was a career Air Force officer. Born in South Carolina, he also lived in Illinois, Nebraska and upstate New York before his dad was stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton in 2004. He continued to work as a civilian at the base for about 12 years after retiring from active duty.

"We spent the first two years here going to church at the base chapel. We lived equidistant from Incarnation and the old St. Mary in Franklin and liked the feel of St. Mary better," he says.

Kapolka said he started to learn more about the faith and began to love it more and more when he was in high school. He attended Springboro schools from grades seven to 12 and graduated in 2010. But when he was a senior, he was busy applying

to colleges and put any thoughts of the priesthood on the back burner.

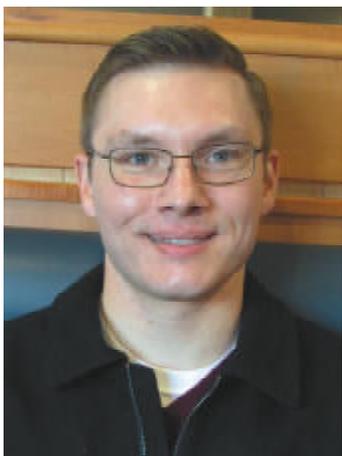
"I got accepted to the Air Force Academy and didn't want to pass up that opportunity," he says. "I thought, 'Well, I'll push exploring seminary down the road a few years.' But right off the bat there, my freshman year, there were a number of cadets who were discerning the priesthood. We got together about once a month, and there was a really active chapel program and some great chaplains and a deacon who was a graduate of the academy and had retired from the Air Force and taught economics."

Kapolka says he grew more confident that the priesthood was really what he wanted to do, but he didn't know if it was really possible until he learned about an undersecretary of the Air Force who was on his way out and wanted to do something about the shortage of priests in the Air Force. He was able to initiate a program where cadets could attend seminary right after graduation, before going on to active duty.

"The program was discontinued my junior year because of budget cuts, but it was revived with a different name by my senior year as the Religious Profession Deferment Program," says Kapolka. "I applied and was accepted." The Military Archdiocese and the Archdiocese of Cincinnati share the cost of attending seminary.



Ben Mersch



Mike Kapolka

Priesthood—from page 3

When he graduates he will spend three years as an associate pastor somewhere in the Cincinnati Archdiocese. After that, he has a five-year commitment as an Air Force chaplain. At that time, according to the agreement signed by the archbishops of the two dioceses, he can elect to serve in the Air Force for up to 20 years instead of being assigned by Cincinnati Archdiocese.

Kapolka is in his internship year and is serving it under Father Matt Robben, who is pastor of both Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and St. Peter and Paul, both in Reading. “Some of the experiences have been eye-opening and interesting, especially the funerals,” he says.

Probably one of the most unique experiences, though, was when he joined Father Robben on a visit to the home of a couple with a premature baby. The baby was to undergo major heart surgery the next day and Father Robben baptized and confirmed her the same day. The child got through the surgery and was doing well.

Life at the Athenaeum of Ohio **By Dan Darragh**

What’s it like to study for the priesthood at Athenaeum of Ohio? Is it just like going to any other college?

“While it is like college in some ways, it is much more than your typical university experience,” says Ben Mersch, an area man who is registered at Our Lady of Good Hope in Miamisburg and is a member of the Knights of Columbus at St. Mary of the Assumption, Mersch, who is in his second year at the seminary, says, “It’s like if you superimposed a spiritual retreat on top of a typical college.”

The Athenaeum houses Mount Saint Mary’s Seminary of the West and also offers lay pastoral ministry classes which lay persons can take in pursuit of higher education.

“It’s like a college in some ways, but it is much more than your typical university experience. In addition to courses and our liturgical schedule, there is a focus on community – both inside and outside the seminary – as well as the formation of the men in the four pillars – human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral,” according to Mersch.

In addition to classes throughout the week, the seminarians have Mass every day, pray the Liturgy of the Hours (also called the Divine Office) four times a day and a Holy Hour which includes exposition and the Rosary. Each week the students have two hours of apostolic work where they do some kind of off campus ministry. Last semester Mersch worked at the St. Francis Seraph Ministries soup kitchen and this semester he served as a male mentor at Pregnancy Center East.

In addition to academics and community outreach there are extracurricular activities. There is choir, soccer, and basketball. The seminary basketball team – the Minor Prophets – plays scrimmage games at some of the local high schools.

There are also weekly community nights where students gather for a formal dinner and then join in a game or activity. Individual classes also have celebrations for which they are responsible to host. For instance, this year Mersch’s class hosted a celebration in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Then there are responsibilities, both as individuals and a house.

“As a house we have monthly spiritual or rector conferences and individually each seminarian meets monthly with his formation director and his spiritual director,” says Mersch. “Our formation includes setting goals for ourselves in the four pillars and at the end of each year we have peer reviews and self-evaluation which are part of our summative evaluation meeting with the formation team of priests who recommends to the bishop advancement for the seminarian to the next academic year.”

As individuals, each man has a house job to perform weekly to help keep the seminary clean, as well as apostolic assignments to work in the community two hours a week.

Men who decide to enter the priesthood can look forward to anywhere from five to nine years of study.

See Athenaeum, page 5

Athenaeum—from page 4

Those with nine years ahead are likely high school graduates and have to get their core courses out of the way before embarking on the required philosophy and theology courses and the year-long internship.

Both Mersch and St. Mary of the Assumption member Mike Kapolka will spend seven years at the Athenaeum. These studies will consist of two years of philosophy, four years of theology and the internship. Mersch received his bachelor's degree at Ohio Dominican University, a Catholic college in Columbus, and Kapolka is a graduate of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

At the Athenaeum, all students live in a dorm, which includes a single room with a bed and private bathroom. There is a study area, lounge, and kitchen on each floor. There is also a cafeteria. Students have a roommate their freshman year and can live in single rooms after that.

“The education, life and experiences at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary are solid and all those working at this seminary work hard to select and form good men for the priesthood,” says Mersch. “In the wake of the scandals that have rocked peoples confidence, I would say the people of God can take confidence there are many good and holy priests working in our archdiocese and to rest assured that there are a lot of good, holy men who will make good and holy priests coming out of this seminary.”

Baby Bottle Campaign by Jay Lees

Knights of Columbus Right to Life Committee, chaired by Allen Rocky Adams, collected over \$21,000 for the Community Pregnancy Center. Thanks to the parishioners at St. Augustine, St. Mary of the Assumption, and their friends and family for their generous support for the K of C Respect for Life Campaign. Also, a big thank you to the businesses that donated prizes for guessing the amount of change in the Giant Baby Bottle. There was \$242.33 in the Giant Baby Bottle. Prize winners for closest guess were Jim Koesters, Jess Wilson, Debbie Cottongim, Debbie Johnson, Patty Sammons, Teresa Byrd, Sandra Miller, Julia Shaw, David Williams, Phyllis Harovder, and Scott Frederick.



Seated center is Candice Keller, Executive Director, of the Community Pregnancy Center with two of her staff members. Standing is Fr. Jim with K of C members and their families from St. Mary of the Assumption and St. Augustine parish.

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New Manger Scene by Dan Darragh

Parishioners, as well as southbound motorists on Yankee Road, likely noticed a new Nativity scene in front of St. Mary of the Assumption over the holiday. The scene was purchased this year and arrived just in time for the holidays. More statues of persons and animals are available and the scene will be added to in coming years, according to Father Jim Manning. A new Nativity scene was also on display inside the church.

