

From the Deacon's Desk

Christmas Decorations Work-Bee:

Sunday December 10th after the 9:30 am Mass, we will have a work-bee for all parishioners, especially families with children, to decorate objects that will be used on our banners during the Christmas Season. Each and every time you come to church, you'll be reminded through your personal and individually decorated ornament, that God knows you each by name and appreciates the individual talents and gifts you bring to this community of faith. It will only take about ten minutes of your time, so come to the hall after Mass to make your mark.

Blessings for Middle & high School Students:

As a way to remind our middle and high school children that we are always thinking and praying for you, we will have a special blessing as you prepare for your upcoming semester exams. Be prepared to come forward and bring all your friends, regardless of their faith or religious affiliation.

Bury the Dead:

The Catholic Church teaches that we are to bury the dead. In fact, to bury the dead is one of the corporal works of mercy, and I've always told parishioners that we will bury anyone regardless of their faith or religious background, even if that means they have none. Unfortunately, not everybody is doing this.

As a parish, we have about 20 funerals per year, which is small compared to many of the parishes in the diocese. It is not unusual for many parishes to have 50 per year. In the past, the majority of people chose to go with the traditional way of burying the body of their loved ones; either in a cemetery plot or in a mausoleum, but Walter Berry recently told me that cremation is being chosen almost as much as traditional burial practices.

The Catholic Church for many years now has granted permission for cremation of the remains of a person as long as the ashes are treated in the same way we treat the body. It is important to remember that the cremated remains of a person must be buried in a cemetery plot or placed in a mausoleum/columbarium.

WHAT TO DO: The Church prefers if possible that the funeral rites take place in the presence of the body. If cremation takes place, one must bury the entire content of the ashes of that person in a cemetery plot. This could take place in an individual plot or in a common plot. One could also place the remains in a mausoleum or in a columbarium; these are readily available in most cemeteries nowadays.

The name of the deceased should be clearly visible, and family and friends should know the location of the urn at the cemetery. This helps people to come to pray for your beloved deceased relative anytime. If the burial of the cremated remains will take place weeks or months later, let the funeral home hold the ashes until the proper burial.

WHAT NOT TO DO: Do not keep the cremated remains at home. Do not scatter the ashes on a field, or in a pond, or in a lake. Do not transform the cremains into jewelry. And if jewelry is important to you, get "finger print jewelry" of your loved one. This is a way to keep the memory of your loved one near you. Keep pictures, clothes, and mementos of your loved ones; but not a portion of the body. Do not split the cremains among children and/or grandchildren.

"Bury the dead" will continue being a corporal work of mercy in the Catholic Tradition. It is the only way that we can truly mean it when we say "May he/she rest in peace."

Advent Ecumenical Service:

On Sunday December 3, at 4 pm, there will be an Advent Ecumenical Service at St. Vincent's Church with United Methodist Church and St. Vincent de Paul Parish. The service will be presided over by Rev. Janet

Larner and Rev. Mr. Jerry Green, and it will include music by the two church choirs, prayers, readings, a homily, and fellowship afterwards in the hall. Come and celebrate with us as we joyfully prepare to remember the Incarnation between God and humanity. All are welcome!

Christmas Outreach:

This year we will be doing our Christmas Giving Program a little different than in previous years. We are making the change to better become involved in outreach programs which already exist within our local community, and because there are no parishioners who want to coordinate the massive Christmas gift-giving project from the past few years.

One way you're invited to do this is by helping Christmas Outreach of Isabella County which is a kind of "one stop shopping" for low income clients at Christmas time. Last year they served 745 families, a total of 2,500 individuals.

Eileen Jennings from our parish provides Christmas Outreach stockings to children and a gift bags to teens and older adults. She collects both useful and fun items for these stockings and gift bags. Eileen already has some churches focusing on teen and older adults, but she needs help with items for the children's stockings.

St Vincent de Paul will put decorated boxes in the entrance to the church to collect items, and below is a request for what they need from the parish.

Christmas Outreach of Isabella County needs your help. We will fill 500 Christmas stockings for children ages 3 to 11. Please consider buying small items to help fill these stockings. A decorated box will be in the entrance to the church through December 3. A sample stocking will be in the entry so you can see the size. Lists of suggested items will be attached to the stocking. Some items needed include boxes of 24 crayons, glue sticks, play dough, matchbox size cars, card games, school supplies, jump ropes, jacks, small balls, toothpaste and brush, and small stuffed animals. Unopened toys from McDonald's and Burger King are good.

We also offer calendars to our guests, and they are extremely popular. If you receive calendars from organizations you support and will not use them, please put them in this box. Do not buy calendars. Do not take quantities from Isabella Bank or other businesses in town. Just give us the calendars you would otherwise throw away. Both wall and pocket calendars are welcome.

We will distribute new and gently used winter coats, boots, hats and mittens, jeans, linens (towels, sheets and blankets), books for children and teens. We will give out a basket of household cleaning supplies. Community Compassion Network will have its food distribution at our event. Two ladies from Shepherd operate a table of used Christmas decorations.

We Have Been Counted:

Each October the Diocese asks us to count the number of people in church. Our average attendance this year was 386... up from 352 from October 2016. Considering the 18 funerals we had this past year, the parish increased in numbers. Way to go parishioners!

RCIA: Interested in Becoming Catholic?

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) has begun and we have three people participating this year. Its various stages and parish rituals culminate at the Easter Vigil with the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Weekly meetings include community-building, faith formation and sharing, pastoral conversations and prayer as we help participants better understand and integrate Catholic beliefs and practices. It is not too late to join us, and anyone who is interested should contact Deacon Jerry at the parish office.