St. Joseph’s Altar
Festival for family, friends and food.
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Living in retirement, serving in prayer
St. Joseph Manor welcomes retired Josephites.
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Purple Knights on the Underground Railroad
Students from St. Augustine High School embark on a once in a lifetime trip.
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Explaining that he has a small statue of a sleeping St. Joseph on his desk, Pope Francis said that he places notes identifying problems he needs Joseph to help with under the statue. "Now Joseph is sleeping on a mattress of notes! But I am at peace. That is why I sleep well: it is a grace of God."

– Pope Francis
The Josephites are pro-life, standing for safeguarding the right to life of every human being; pro-family, promoting the dignity and sanctity of marriage; pro-chastity, upholding the virtue all are called to embody in their state of life.

The mission of The Josephite Harvest is to assist and promote the evangelizing ministry of the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart. It is the voice of the Society to summon both men and means to our work and to establish enduring bonds with our benefactors. It shall encourage devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to our Patron St. Joseph, and to the Patron Saints of our Society. It shall foster racial and cultural understanding and reconciliation. It shall make known the achievements of African Americans that reflect the influence of the Catholic faith. It shall recognize the labors of clergy and lay persons who work for the evangelization of African Americans.
FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Dear Friends of the Josephites,

In this season of Lent, we are called to reflect and repent as we journey toward Easter. This time of year, our church provides us with abundant resources to deepen our connection with Jesus. Please take advantage of these special graces at your parish.

In March, we Josephites celebrate the Feast of St. Joseph with 30-day Novena. March 19 is a very special day for us as we recommit our ministry to model that of our patron, St. Joseph. I hope you will join us in the celebration. You can participate by visiting our website, www.josephite.com.

This issue of The Harvest is very special. You will read the testimonial of Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, DC, affirming the ministry of Josephites in his historic archdiocese. We also read a reflection from Josephite Father Brian Fox about his 50 years of ministry.

Where do retired Josephites go? St. Joseph Manor, located in Baltimore city, is home to about 15 retired Josephite priests after serving a lifetime in parishes, schools and special ministries throughout the United States. Now under the care of Josephite Father Paul Oberg, SSJ, who directs the Manor, these men continue to be a powerhouse of prayer for the Josephite ministries.

Also, you can read about why growing up in a Josephite parish makes a difference.

With several Josephite parishes in the New Orleans area, Mardi Gras is a very familiar celebration. Father Joseph Doyle provides a full understanding of this important celebration and its faith dimension.

Finally, The Harvest magazine is asking for your financial support. An article about the magazine’s history is very informative. An envelope is conveniently located for you as well.

Please enjoy this spring issue of The Harvest. It is produced to keep you informed about the work of the Josephites and our needs. As you learn more about our ministry in the African American community, I hope that it will contribute to your own faith development.

Wishing you a Blessed Lent and a Joyous Easter.

Very Rev. Michael L. Thompson, SSJ
Superior General
After more than 100-plus years of ministry in the Diocese of Beaumont, two parishes are no longer under Josephite leadership.

Our Mother of Mercy, the largest African-American parish in the Diocese of Beaumont, and Blessed Sacrament parish are important churches in Southeast Texas and have had a significant influence on the African-American community.

“We celebrate the successful history of these two great parishes,” said Father Michael Thompson, superior general of the Josephites and a native of the diocese of Beaumont in nearby Port Arthur, Texas, and ordained at Our Mother of Mercy Church 13 years ago. “We are displeased in having to make the decision to leave the people who have been so generous in their commitment to the Josephite mission. With a shortage of priestly vocations, it is difficult to replace pastors when a change is requested.”

The Josephite Council, after the bishop requested a change, decided to leave the Diocese of Beaumont.

Blessed Sacrament Parish was founded 102 years ago to serve the needs of a growing black Catholic population in southeast Texas. Father Alexis LaPlante, SSJ, was assigned to open a mission in this area. He planned to start the church in Port Arthur but, due to a hurricane, he found it necessary to begin in Beaumont, then the Diocese of Houston-Galveston. “God often speaks to us in difficult times,” Father LaPlante said of the decision to locate the parish. Later that same year, Sacred Heart in Port Arthur was founded.

Blessed Sacrament parish thrived and spawned a mission church called Our Mother of Mercy in 1937, which has grown into one of the largest parishes in the Diocese of Beaumont.

“Both of these churches have had a great influence in the black Catholic community of Southeast Texas,” Father Thompson said, noting that other parishes were carved into other parishes and carried the Josephite influence with them. At one point in the history of the diocese, the Saint Joseph’s Society of the Sacred Heart staffed nine parishes and schools throughout the Diocese of Beaumont.”

These churches were often literally built by the hands of the parishioners. St. Katharine Drexel, a great benefactor of the Josephite Mission, helped acquire, build and staff the schools of those parishes. As recent as 2005, the parishioners of Blessed Sacrament renovated the interior and exterior of the church and parish grounds.

Father Thompson said, “We are grateful for the love and support of the members of these two parishes, and the many families who for so many years welcomed the Josephite priests and brothers to their communities. While serving in the Diocese of Beaumont, we have prayed with and for the African-American community. Our prayers will continue to be with them as they travel their journey of faith. We ask also for their continued prayers as we continue our Josephite Mission of service.”
LIVING IN RETIREMENT
BUT STILL SERVING IN PRAYER
St. Joseph Manor welcomes retired Josephites

BY ARIANA CASSARD

Since Josephite priests and brothers devote their lives to the mission of the Josephite Society, where do they go when they retire?

On a hilltop of land in the Mt. Washington neighborhood of Baltimore, St. Joseph’s Manor is home to 17 retired Josephite priests and one brother. Both custodial and ambulatory care is provided for the men, but beyond the physical help they receive, these Josephites find joy in living in community and prayer.

“Josephites are aging, just like any other religious community,” said Father Paul Oberg, SSJ, rector of St. Joseph’s Manor. He considers the Manor to be not a place of surrender at the end of the retired priests’ lives, but as a home in which they can continue their ministry.

Each day at the Manor begins with prayer at 7:30 a.m., followed by Mass and breakfast. After breakfast, some men are taken to doctors appointments, while others spend time reading one of the numerous books in the library.

Once lunch is served, it is followed by free time in the afternoon. At this point, many residents choose to venture out of the building and even off the property. Some spend time indulging in hobbies, such as gardening and painting.

Evenings are spent having dinner as a community and either joining in on special events or logging in more prayer time.

“I try to spend roughly four hours in prayer each day,” said Father Francis Butler, SSJ.

For the retired priests at the Manor, prayer is their main involvement in the furthering of the ministry. They pray for successful ministries, adaptation of the men coming from Nigeria, more vocations and the African-American communities the Josephites serve.

The great benefit of this life is the freedom from responsibility, according to Father Butler. He recalls the days as an active priest and all of its joys, but also the expectation of being available all hours of the day.

The men are given the gift of optional activities, such as “Spiritual Exercise” with Sister Anne Marie, a Daughter of Charity who comes Tuesdays and Thursdays to spend time with the residents. Volunteer Mike Duggan, called the “activity man,” will pick up residents and take them wherever they’d like to go, whether that’s the drugstore or a nearby horse farm.

Visitors and volunteers are vital to the operation of the Manor. Groups from surrounding parishes and organizations devote time to visiting with the men, organizing celebrations, helping with daily tasks.

“Volunteers bring outside joy to the men,” said
Father Oberg. “We try to keep them busy as much as we can, but we could use more support.”

Volunteer Jeannie MacDonald has found her time at St. Joseph’s Manor to be mutually beneficial. In 2011, she moved into a house on West Lake Avenue in Baltimore. A neighbor told her about the beautiful Manor down the street and encouraged her to venture onto the property. There she came across a man walking his dogs and struck up a conversation, eventually revealing himself to be the rector. He invited her to come for Holy Hour once a month.

At the time, Ms. MacDonald brought with her many questions. She had married a Catholic man, but it was not something she practiced. She slowly became more involved at the Manor, attending Mass, and then staying for breakfast to talk with the men. It was through their faithfulness that she came to her own faith.

“The first thing that happened was I met these people, and they showed me a side of the Catholic faith I never knew,” said MacDonald. “You can’t be here and go to Mass with these men and not gain faith.”

She was Confirmed in the church at age 63. She now volunteers her time at the Manor four days a week, helping the men with their belongings, communicating with loved ones, taking them offsite to run errands and attend appointments.

“They really are all individuals,” she said, noting her joy in speaking with each resident and hearing about his priestly ministry. Her perception of the church has been completely altered by volunteering her time to these men.

Because no one ages at the same pace, the Manor must be suited for both the retired priests who are still very active and those who are facing tough medical battles. The two registered nurses and one doctor, along with the rest of the staff, ensure that each resident is provided with the best care.

“It’s like a family. When one gets sick, it hurts us all,” said Father Daniel Paul Bastianelli, who moved into the Manor six years ago.

As this population ages, financial obstacles also increase. “It’s a struggle, because the medical costs have skyrocketed,” said Father Oberg. In order to maintain the facility and quality of care for these men, the Society solicits the help of organizations and individuals who can donate resources.

“Because of the generosity of donors, we are able to keep going,” Father Oberg said.
Josephite Father Charles E. McMahon, 87, pastor of St. Peter the Apostle Church in Pascagoula, MS, died from heart complications at a local hospital on Dec. 2. At the age of eighty-seven, he was the Josephites oldest active pastor.

Father McMahon, a native of Detroit, MI, was born on May 11, 1929, the son of William and Margaret Rosener McMahon. He attended Visitation elementary and high school. Following graduation in 1947, he entered the Josephite minor seminary (Epiphany College) in Newburgh, NY.

After his novitiate year, he continued his studies at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington and was ordained in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on June 7, 1958. He returned to his home parish church of the Visitation for his First Solemn Mass.

Father McMahon was back at Epiphany College for his first assignment as teacher of seminarians in Latin and serving as librarian. Two years later, he was sent to St. Joseph Seminary as dean of students, vice-rector, and teacher of psychology. In 1968, he was assigned as rector of Epiphany College and teacher of Latin.

His first venture into pastoral work was as Newman Chaplain at Prairie View University and pastor of St. Martin de Porres church in Prairie View, TX, where he served until sent to Epiphany parish in New Orleans two years later. He remained but a year until assigned to Incarnation parish in Washington, D.C., for a four-year stay until returning to St. Joseph’s Seminary as rector. When he was assigned pastor of St. Luke’s church in D.C. in 1991, Father had completed 26 years in the formation of Josephite seminarians.

Two years later, Father McMahon was appointed director of novices at Mary Immaculate Novitiate, newly located in Houston, TX. For the next ten years the novitiate moved twice more – from Houston to Mobile, AL, and to Baltimore, MD. When there were no novices for the year, Father McMahon assumed parochial duties in nearby parishes.

In 2006, he assumed pastorate of Katrina-damaged St. Peter the Apostle parish in Pascagoula, MS, which had lost its church and school. He oversaw the building of a parish hall to provide space for Masses and teaching and for social events. At the time of his death, plans and fund-raising for building a separate church were well underway.

Funeral services were held at Sacred Heart Church, Pascagoula, on Wednesday, December 7, at 10:30 a.m. Burial was in St. Peter the Apostle Cemetery, nearby the parish church.

May he rest in the peace of the Lord following 58 years of priestly ministry.
'It has been a wonderful life.'

By Ariana Cassard

A priest’s call to the Josephites is not always expected – it can come out of left field.

While in his second year at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY, a young Brian Fox accidentally met a Josephite priest – Father Earle Newman – while shagging baseballs in a Bronx park. He was a friend of a friend. He was not planning to join the Josephites, for he had already been in contact with the vocation director of the group that operated his college, the Irish Christian Brothers, now known as the Congregation of Christian Brothers.

However, the Spirit of God works in mysterious ways, and he found himself in the Josephite Brothers’ postulancy program in Clayton, Del. in September of 1965.

He was professed a Josephite brother in September, 1967. After completing his degree at Xavier University of Louisiana, he taught high school from 1969 until 1987. He earned a Masters degree in education in 1973 from Loyola University of New Orleans and worked as a counselor at St. Augustine for several years. Later he returned to Xavier and achieved certification to teach chemistry, which he did for ten years.

In 1987 he entered Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, where he earned a Master of Divinity degree. On May 19, 1991, he was ordained a priest at Epiphany Church in New Orleans, La.

After his 1991 summer relief assignments, Father Fox was named pastor of St. Francis Xavier church in Houston, Texas and remained there until 1999.

While he was there, all eight of his associates were Nigerian priests: seven Missionaries of St. Paul and one Claretian. Because of his cordial relationships with the Nigerian priests, he was asked to join the formation team at the Missionary Seminary of St. Paul in Gwagwalada, Abuja, Nigeria, where he taught sociology, psychology and sexuality.

After five years, and a close call with death from cerebral malaria in 2003, it was decided that he would not return to Nigeria because of a double bypass surgery and aortic valve replacement. While recuperating, the pastor of St. James Church in Prichard, Ala. became ill and Father Fox was asked to replace him. He underwent surgery on Sept. 25, 2005, and reported to work at St. James on Nov. 7.

Two years later, Father Fox was appointed as rector at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, D.C. This was familiar territory for him, as many of the seminarians at the time were students he had taught in Nigeria. After three years in the District of Columbia, he relocated to his present assignment as pastor of Our Mother of Mercy Church in Houston, Texas, where he is now in his seventh year.

“Great joy has come from the many people I have taught, ministered to, comforted, advised and worked with,” he said. “It has been a wonderful life, and I would not change it for anything.”

Father Fox says there have been joys and challenges in each of his assignments, and he would not pick any one as better. He found teaching high school to be his most intense and time-consuming assignment. In terms of creature comforts, his time in Nigeria was the most difficult – the food was very different, weather could be harsh, electricity was sporadic, and travelling was challenging.

2017 will mark his 50th anniversary of first profession. He has been with the Josephites for 52 years since leaving home and family.
‘Because of the Josephites, the faith of the African-American Catholic community continues to flourish, grow and meet the challenges of the day’

Editor’s note: This is part of a series of interviews with bishops who lead dioceses where Josephites serve. Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington, reflects on his experience with Josephite parishes and African-American Catholics.

By Ariana Cassard

Who are the Josephites to you?

As the spiritual shepherd of a large archdiocese, I am most grateful for the dedication and service of so many who help this Church in her mission to manifest the kingdom of God in our midst. The Josephite priests and brothers, in their own way in that respect, continue to offer significant service as they live their charism within the archdiocese. The gifts they bring to the Church are undeniable as they are evidenced in the vibrant faith of the African-American Catholics throughout the archdiocese and the nation, and it is a joy for me to call the Josephites brothers and co-workers in the vineyard of the Lord.

The Society of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart (the Josephites) plays an important and invaluable role in the life and mission of the Archdiocese of Washington. For example, we are privileged to be host to the order’s Saint Joseph Seminary, and their Pastoral Center, which brings many good men from around the country and the world here to study, pray and bear witness to the loving care and freeing truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Also, multiple parishes in the archdiocese are currently, or have in the past, been entrusted to the care of the Josephites, including the Church of the Incarnation, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Saint Luke’s, and Saint Benedict the Moor churches. Each of these longstanding parishes offers substantial social outreach and each in turn often works together with other churches historically serving the African-American community, such as for events like the annual East
of the River Revival.

Thanks to the sacramental, educational and pastoral ministry of the Josephites, that portion of the flock entrusted to them has grown and been strengthened in the Spirit, and they have also helped to build up the kingdom of God in a way that others simply might not be able to. Because of their work, the faith of the African-American Catholic community continues to flourish, grow and meet the challenges of the day. This has included making use of their particular gifts in the service of our common calling to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and to be a bridge to the greater community, recognizing that we are all sisters and brothers, one human family before God.

In what ways do you interact with the Josephites?

As archbishop, it is my privilege to regularly visit our parishes, including those with Josephite leadership. It was my pleasure just a short while ago to celebrate a major anniversary of one that had been given to the care of the Josephites when it was originally established. Looking back at their history, I noted that the parish was a living tribute to the great faith of the African-American members of the Church who in both good times and bad, when enduring injustice and struggling for justice, always remained strong in the faith and in recognizing our identity as God’s family. The archdiocese also recently held its special liturgy and reception to celebrate Black Catholic History Month at one of these parish communities under the Josephites' care.

Last April the Josephite Pastoral Center and the Archdiocese of Washington, along with the National Black Catholic Congress and Pax Christi USA, hosted a Black Catholic Convocation for parishioners. What do you see as the benefit to gathering Black Catholics within the archdiocese?

The Convocation offered a fruitful opportunity for area African-American Catholics to gather for fellowship and prayer, and to discuss topics relevant not only to them, but all peoples, and not only within this archdiocese but across several dioceses.

Saint Paul, in referring to the Church Universal as the Body of Christ, reminds us that within this one body, this one family of God, there are many parts, each existing not as separate units, but with their own special gifts in communion and harmony with the whole. These gatherings are unique opportunities that showcase the enriching cultural diversity in worship, community and leadership that exists within the Catholic Church, which together is also like a beautiful symphony. Each time these gatherings take place, the Church expresses its universality and gives testimony to our basic belief that we are all created and loved by our God.
How are religious communities included into the mission of the Archdiocese of Washington?

When we speak of the contributions made by religious communities, we must first give thanks to God and acknowledge that the reason our Catholic education and healthcare systems exist at all is precisely because of our women and men religious. Beyond their legacy of first establishing and operating our schools and hospitals, even with lay people now taking over many of these functions, the spirit of these religious continue to inspire. Our archdiocesan Office of Consecrated Life works to promote and support vocations to the religious life and our Office of Missions works closely with religious communities as well.

Since our nation’s capital is located here, together with institutions of higher learning like The Catholic University of America, nearly 70 communities of women religious and more than 40 men’s communities have a presence in the archdiocese in addition to many societies for apostolic life and institutes of religious life. They have all given their life to daily serve the Lord and others and we depend on their charism quite a bit, from the great importance of their prayers to their diverse ministries of teaching, healing, caring, and evangelizing. As with the Saint Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart, these religious orders have an invaluable function here in working for the renewal of society through their support and participation in the New Evangelization.

In 2016, you celebrated the 50th anniversary of your priestly ordination. In your 50 years of priestly ministry, how have you seen the diversity of the Church change?

Here in the archdiocese, because Washington is such a cosmopolitan city, we are privileged to be able to experience the richness of multi-cultural heritages and perspectives. We celebrate Mass in more than 20 languages and minister to people from all around the globe in our parishes and through our archdiocesan Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach. When Pope Francis came to visit Washington in 2015 and we had that grand celebration of Mass for the canonization of Saint Junípero Serra on the steps of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, as you looked around at the assembled crowd, what you saw was a slice of the whole world, reflecting the universality of the Church and the whole human family. People of every nationality, ethnicity, race and socio-economic background were there.

This diversity has always been present in the Church Universal from the very start, as we read in the account of the first Pentecost. This diversity of peoples and cultures, which includes the whole human family, has always been there, but a bit disjointed and not always so visible and apparent, and in this respect, we have seen great change in the past 50 years. Back in the 1960s, a person’s experience of the world was often limited to his or her own community; now we have a global awareness and this strengthens our bonds of communion and solidarity.

During my priestly ministry, the world saw the popes — Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and now Francis — becoming international apostles, traveling to practically every point on the globe. Developments in the news media, television and then the Internet progressively exposed us to a greater international experience. Now, today, we have a much greater awareness and appreciation for the universality of the Church and for the fact that we are one human family, whether we can trace our family lineage back to Europe, Asia, Africa or our Native American ancestors have been in the Americas for centuries.

As at Pentecost, rather than everyone speaking a different language, we are increasingly speaking and understanding with one voice. This greater realization and experience of cultural, ethnic and racial diversity has been not only a blessing for our Church, but for our nation and for our world. There is still more work to be done though.
Students from St. Augustine High School travel from New Orleans to Canada on a once in a lifetime trip

Purple Knights on the Underground Railroad

On Jan. 16, 40 students and four chaperones from St. Augustine High School boarded a bus in New Orleans. Just a few days later they would reach Canada, their northernmost destination, but their focus was much more on the journey.

The trip would follow the path of the Underground Railroad, a journey taken by many slaves in pursuit of freedom.

“I wanted to go on the trip because I knew I would never get this kind of experience,” said Lance Williams, a junior at St. Augustine.

Along the route, the group was able to stop at a variety of sites important to African-American history. One was the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. The young men were drawn to the Education and Uplift exhibit, which houses the photo of the 1965 St. Augustine basketball team.

“I saw my school in the African-American museum and it really made me feel proud to be a Purple Knight,” said sophomore Kolby Perrileaux. “Because it means my school was a part of big-time history.”

The bus then brought them to Bensalem, Pa., to the Motherhouse of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament and the National Shrine of Saint Katharine Drexel. They were taken back in time to when the foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament first opened the Motherhouse doors in 1891 to serve Black and Native-American peoples. Father Tony hosted a Mass in the infirmary in honor of Saint Katharine and the group later visited the Saint’s tomb.

After Mass, the Sisters formed a line and prayed over each of the men on the trip.

Along their route, the young men could be heard singing freedom
songs such as “Go Down Moses” and “Oh Freedom.” A favorite line from “Oh Freedom” was “Before I’d be a slave, I’d be buried in my grave,” which became an anthem for the trip. These songs and each stop brought the students closer to their roots in America and their ancestors’ struggle for freedom.

“I learned a good bit about my history,” said sophomore Curtis Bibbins. “They were very strong people. They survived beatings, and people hunting them. And to this day we’re still here strong and free, being able to do the things that we want to do.”

Luckily for these students, their education about their ancestry did not have to end when the bus pulled back in to New Orleans. Before the trip, a St. Augustine junior named Kevin Bradley was sitting in class learning about Harriet Tubman when he suggested they begin a class on the subject of their heritage.

“I thought it was interesting and that we should make a class out of it because that is the type of thing that we should be learning in school, in this school,” said Bradley.

St. Augustine High School is now working with Xavier University to build a duel-enrollment course on Black Theology.
A proud history of Catholic publishing

The Josephite Harvest is the oldest Catholic mission magazine in continuous publication in the United States. Established in 1888, the *The Josephite Harvest* is published quarterly to keep its readers current and aware of the work in the Josephite apostolate. *The Josephite Harvest*:

- Encourages devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and our patron, St. Joseph.
- Fosters racial and cultural understanding and reconciliation.
- Makes known the achievements of African Americans influenced by the Catholic Faith.
- Recognizes the labors of clergy and lay persons working in the African American Community.
Initially called The Colored Harvest, the magazine changed its name to The Josephite Harvest in 1960 because the American people had a raised consciousness for the cause of civil rights, social justice and black identity and to give greater identity to the Josephites.

In 1893, The Harvest had four thousand subscribers. By 1895, ten thousand copies were sent at certain times to each of three major cities: New York City, Brooklyn and Chicago, for distribution in larger parishes. It was also distributed in Canada, England, Ireland, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Also, “every Catholic priest in the United States” was sent a copy.

Interestingly, most of the readers of The Harvest do not live in Josephite parishes. In fact, many may not have even met a Josephite. However, they are supporters of the evangelization efforts in the African-American community and concerned about racial understanding.

The Harvest brings benefactors news of the progress of the Josephites work and their needs.

The Harvest has adapted to the changing times. The publication is now available on the Josephite website (www.josephite.com). But digital outlets cannot duplicate the value and convenience of the printed word.

Currently, The Harvest is conducting a subscription drive, asking readers to contribute $10 annually. An envelope is conveniently located in this issue of The Harvest.

Father Joseph Doyle, SSJ, novice master, recently said that The Harvest is an essential tool of evangelization. “We must let our light shine – we must evangelize,” he said. “The Good News must be shared, not hidden under a bushel basket.”

Thank you for reading The Harvest and sharing it with others.

Civil Rights eras and it continues to be so today, Father Thompson said. “True to its mission, The Harvest has fostered racial and cultural understanding and reconciliation in every community in which the Josephites have served. It has recognized the labors of clergy and lay persons who work for the evangelization of African Americans and it has encouraged devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to our Patron St. Joseph, and to the Patron Saints of our Society.”

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Thank you for reading The Harvest and sharing it with others.
What is the value of growing up in an African-American parish?

BY CATHY MCCLAIN

I am a convert. The sign of the cross – this wonderful, visible recognition of my faith – is what brought me to the church.

Geography is what brought me to my particular parish. I have been to many Catholic churches but always find the need to return to my home parish. I can receive the Eucharist and fulfill my Mass obligation at any of the six parishes I pass every Sunday morning but it is only at my home parish that I feel like an included member of the Body of Christ. I need the worship experience every Sunday to give me the ammunition to get through the week.

I grew up in an economically depressed community that was created in response to political pressure about the way returning veterans of color were being treated by the City of Baltimore. My community of Cherry Hill was the home to the largest concentration of public housing east of Chicago and received very few human services even though the majority of the community lived below the federal poverty income guideline.

The Josephites had the foresight to create a parish, called St. Veronica’s, in this impoverished community of 17,000 African Americans and the church quickly became the anchor of the community. The parish became the change agent for many residents in the community.

Receiving services and assistance when I was growing up meant spending countless hours at a bus stop and traveling for hours to the center of the city and often being sent back multiple times. When there was a demonstrated need for energy assistance, the pastor connected with Baltimore Gas and Electric Company and government services and invited them to set up satellite locations in the community. The pastor even housed them at the church at no cost.

When there were not enough recreational opportunities for young people, the parish again opened its doors to Operation Champ so the community children had a safe place to play and learn crafts.

Other services quickly followed: a food pantry, a thrift store, a drug treatment program, Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and even a Headstart program. Later there were homeownership workshops and job fairs hosted by the parish … all in an effort to make the community self-sufficient.

The community grew and because of the influence of St. Veronica, a major community anchor, Cherry Hill became self-sustaining. But something else happened. The residents were filled with pride as they were empowered to take control of their own lives. They became fishers of men.

The parish itself grew because of its outreach and the volunteer rate at the parish is still about 45 percent. All of the services are done by volunteers, with the exception of the Headstart program. Though there are still plenty of handouts – food, clothing and so on, the parish is providing education and training to allow community residents and parishioners to help themselves. Services have never been limited to parishioners.

St. Veronica is a family church where I was not related to anyone outside of my immediate small family when I joined. The parish adopted me and groomed me and nourished my gifts to help me become a part of the fabric of the community.

We come for Mass on Sunday morning and stay for the fellowship as we catch up on each other’s lives. We take the time to know
one another rather than the hit or miss I have experienced in other churches. That same sense of welcome is extended to whomever comes through the door for Mass.

After 70 years, St. Veronica’s Church is still an anchor in the Cherry Hill community – providing food and clothing to residents regardless of their religious background or income. Worship is spirit filled and fulfilling on so many levels. I don’t lose my sense of self in the worship, rather it is embraced. The parish community wraps you in its embrace and covers you during any storm. As someone who doesn’t have a lot of family, that has been life sustaining for me.

Today when I consider the fiscal decisions that many of our parishes are facing I am concerned that a valuable piece of our history may be lost. Cherry Hill would not be the community it is without the influence of the Josephites and the creation of the parish of St. Veronica.

The Josephites taught those who were too poor to give to instead give of their time and talent. They helped us move from members of the parish to owners of the parish. My guess is that it is still one of the few parishes in the country that is run very efficiently and completely by volunteers assisting the pastor. St. Veronica’s, in a very real way, represents what the Josephites had in mind when they honored their mission to work in the impoverished African-American community to help them realize their worth.

As we move onto the next big thing, it is my sincere hope that we don’t overlook this major contribution to the African-American community and the important work of the Josephites.

While I only wrote about my experience at St. Veronica’s, I am certain that members of other Josephite parishes can say with some certainty that it represents your parish as well. The work of the Josephites, after all, is transferable and we are blessed to have them.

Cathy McClain, a mother and grandmother, is a member of St. Veronica, pastored by Rev. Steven Ositehmin, and volunteers as the parish secretary. She also is a program manager for Catholic Charities in the Archdiocese of Baltimore.
NOT TOO BAD, NOT TOO GOOD

There are many ways to Mardi Gras

BY FATHER JOSEPH DOYLE, SSJ
Mardi Gras has a bad reputation. But the question is: which Mardi Gras?

In New Orleans, there are actually two Mardi Gras celebrations – one in the French Quarter which well deserves the bad reputation for the decadent, obscene and sacrilegious behavior of many party-goers. The other Mardi Gras, however, is on the “uptown” side of Canal Street and is more or less family oriented.

It is not a bad thing for parents to take their children to one or more parades to see the fabulous floats and catch lots of beads, doubloons and exotic novelties such as hand-painted coconuts from the Zulu float. It is not a bad thing to enjoy watching the marching bands parade through the streets of New Orleans, especially if one of the bands happens to be the St. Augustine High School “Marching 100.”

This year marks the 50th anniversary of “St. Aug” integrating the Krewe of Rex parade. Rex is the most prestigious of all the Krewes, but until 50 years ago, only white bands marched in their parade, or any other parade except for Zulu. Not everyone was happy about the integration of marching bands in the Rex parade. At that time, the parade route ran through the narrow streets of the French Quarter and the band members were subject to harassment from the spectators on the sidewalks and standing in the beautiful wrought iron balconies overlooking Bourbon Street. Mardi Gras was not so good in those days.

Was Mardi Gras ever good? Anywhere? Anytime?

When it began in Europe in the Middle Ages, it was actually a religious celebration known as Carnival (literally, “farewell to meat” or perhaps, “goodbye to the pleasures of the flesh”), since Ash Wednesday was observed on the following day. “Mardi Gras” means “Fat Tuesday” in French. It was time for the homemakers to remove from the kitchen fattening foods such as eggs, milk, butter, sugar, and so on. in preparation for Lent.

With all these fattening ingredients, they baked many tasty delicacies depending on the customs of the country. In England, for example, the custom was to make pancakes on Shrove Tuesday – the day adults were “shriven” from their sins by going to confession. In the beginning, Mardi Gras was very, very good.

Slowly, what began as a good, religious custom deteriorated into a drunken spectacle honoring pagan heroes and gods, accompanied by overindulgences of food, drink and other sensual pleasures. On Mardi Gras day, the media takes great delight in broadcasting
modern day bacchanalia from the French Quarter of New Orleans and the streets of Rio. Mardi Gras is not all good.

The Josephite Priests and Brothers have their own unique appreciation of Mardi Gras. From the historic city of Mobile, Alabama, where Mardi Gras was first celebrated in what is now the United States, to New Orleans, the Josephites open the doors of their rectories to fellow priests and brothers, relatives and friends who come to enjoy Carnival. They are happy to stand along the parade routes and collect bags full of “throws.” Some Josephites have been known to ride on one of the floats, especially on Zulu on Mardi Gras day. The view from the float affords a unique opportunity to see thousands of spectators enjoying the fun of Carnival. The most fortunate Josephites are the ones who teach at St. Augustine High School and join parental chaperones as they walk alongside the “Marching 100.” To hear the crowd enthusiastically shout, “Here comes St. Aug!” is an experience that no Josephite will ever forget. Mardi Gras is not too bad. But Mardi Gras is not too good. From a moral point of view, many sins are committed in places where the boundaries of good, decent behavior are ignored. In New Orleans, hardly anyone is arrested for public drunkenness, drug use or indecent exposure. In short, anything goes on Mardi Gras day. But at midnight, it all comes to an end, sort of. The street cleaners and garbage collectors descend upon the city. The success of Mardi Gras is measured by the amount of trash that is collected and weighed. Mardi Gras is not so good. But it can be turned into good by reparation. For centuries in Europe, beginning with St. Gertrude the Great (1256-1302), reparation for sins committed during Carnival became part of the Catholic tradition. Three centuries later, this reparation was part of a wide spread devotion which we know today as “Forty Hours Devotion.”

During the last century, Pope Pius XII declared the Feast of the Holy Face of Jesus was to be celebrated on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday. Some older Josephites remember this devotion being fostered in New Orleans by the Carmelite nuns who once had a monastery on the outskirts of the French Quarter. It is a devotion shared by Carmelites throughout the world to this day.

The Josephites, from their foundation as the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, have had as a part of their charism, “reparation for those who by malice or by neglect have committed sins of injustice against their brothers and sisters.” The Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary at Fatima have asked for reparation. How can we refuse them? Happy Mardi Gras!

Father Joseph Doyle, SSJ, is director of the Josephite Novitiate program in New Roads, La.
For nearly 50 years, the Josephite Pastoral Center has been providing unique evangelization resources to dioceses, parishes, schools and individuals. Now, there is a new push to increase the awareness of the Center among the African-American community and the Catholic Church.

Founded in 1968, the Josephite Pastoral Center was the first to produce religious education materials and resources for the black community. The Center continues its legacy by providing resources and services fostering positive attitudes and appreciation of Black Catholics.

“In 2017, it is our goal to make the Josephite Pastoral Center better known,” said Cheryl Holley, the first African-American woman to serve as director. She plans to do this by continuing to build personal relationships with customers and guests. “The Center has a long legacy as the only place solely established to produce African American ministry resource materials. We have items that are not found anywhere else.”

Meeting the needs of Black Catholics in parishes, institutions and dioceses is the goal, a task made more challenging because the majority of African Americans are not members of predominately black parishes.

Over the years, the Pastoral Center has sponsored workshops for religious education, leadership, liturgical ministries, parish councils and pastoral care. The Pastoral Center made Catholic history as a leader in developing the curriculum for one of the first permanent diaconate training programs in the United States. Also, the Center produced the first Josephite African-American History and Heritage Calendar, which continues today as one of its biggest selling items and enjoyed by Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Ms. Holley said, “It’s very important to me to continue our legacy by having a relationship with our parishes.”

Denise Bogans, the Center’s administrative assistant is your first point of contact. Her relationship building begins when she answers the telephone or welcomes guests to the Center. With pleasure, she is kept quite busy packaging and shipping online orders, telephone and mail-in orders and walk-in orders. “The Center is the number one place to get African-American resources” she said, including beautiful calendars and cards, books for youth and social justice concerns.

Located on the first floor of the St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, D.C., the Josephite Pastoral Center networks with parishes and dioceses around the country.

Deacon Ira E. Chase, Sr., a longtime member of the staff, is responsible for all bulk calendar orders. He has developed a personal relationship with parish and diocesan staff around the country. “My role is to make sure that our customers are satisfied,” he said from the shipping area of the Center where orders for tens of thousands of calendars are processed each year.

A new promotional video has been produced to inform parishes and other customers about the services of the Josephite Pastoral Center. You can view the video by visiting www.josephitepastoralcenter.org.
What we said in
1956

St. Joseph altars add prayer and fellowship to Mardi Gras

BY RAPHAEL F. MAGGIORE, SSJ

March has always been known as Saint Joseph’s month. During it, many prayers, novenas and other exercises are carried out in his honor. One such custom that is observed is the making of St. Joseph’s altars.

If you are in New Orleans, during the month of March, you will see many St. Joseph altars. For a whole week before March 19, newspapers and social media have postings such as: “The public is invited to visit at St. Joseph’s altar, evening of March 18 and on March 19” or “St. Joseph’s altar open for the public,” “Dismantling of the altar on March 19 at 12 Noon.”

In these same postings, you will see daily public notices of thanksgivings for favors received through the intercession of some saint, St. Joseph included, or the Blessed Virgin or the Sacred Heart. A close observer will notice that besides all the parades, conventions and Mardi Gras, there is a manifestation of the faith in New Orleans that goes unnoticed elsewhere.

The St. Joseph’s altar tradition has been growing. The practice is handed down from one generation to the next as some families have had altars in their homes for 25 years or longer. Some report that their fathers and mothers built altars in Italy years ago and when they came to America, they continued to do the same.

“How do you build this altar each year?” I asked. “How long have you been doing it?” The answer usually is: “St. Joseph, he is such a good saint, he cured my child, he helped me when I was sick, and I made the promise that each year I will fix the altar for the poor.”

“Why do you build this altar each year?” “St. Joseph’s altar open for the public.”

Another will tell you: “The promise to make the altar for each St. Joseph’s Day was made when we were in difficulty, in health or financially, as a thanksgiving promise.”

One such family had been doing this for some 25 years at the Cabrini Day Nursery, as was promised.

What does all this mean?

For a St. Joseph Altar, a person, a family or a group prepares food—breads, cakes, pastries, vegetable and fruit dishes. Some of these dishes are prepared by those who made the promise. In other cases, the expense is paid by those who made the promise as a sacrifice and to help the poor.

A table is set in a suitable place with a prominent picture or statue of St. Joseph. The table is then decked with various foods. Naturally, the larger the table, the greater amount of food involved to deck the altar. Candles are usually lit by visitors who come to see the altar.

Nearly all who make the altars ask some priest to bless the altar shortly before noon. Then three children dressed as the Holy Family sit down to eat the first food from the table. When they are finished, the visitors come to see. They, in turn, are given some food from the table. You may observe people carrying a small bag containing their food from St. Joseph’s altar. In some areas, it is as popular as the Mardi Gras.

A legend has it, so I am told, that there were men shipwrecked at sea. They prayed to St. Joseph for safe landing, and came to shore.
somewhere along the coast of Southern Italy. In commemoration of their rescue from shipwreck and starvation on this particular day, each year the custom continued to grow of making an altar in St. Joseph’s honor and distributing food to the poor. This custom is used now in thanksgiving to St. Joseph for favors, as is evident when you ask people why they have these altars. The answer usually is that St. Joseph did some favor for the family in time of sickness or other great need.

It is a happy coincidence that the Josephites are ministering in an area where good St. Joseph means so much to so many people. Devotion to St. Joseph is kept alive during the whole year with continual prayer to this good Saint.

In observing the custom this year of St. Joseph’s altar, it could be a heroic gesture while venerating St. Joseph with our prayers if we ask him for the help to understand better the modern times with all their changes. St. Joseph could unlock the secret of better understanding in a community, which shows so much exterior devotion to him. Catholics, one and all, should look up with all sincerity to this good Saint so that the people of every community will learn to live together, to pray together, study together and save their souls together!
MARCH FOR LIFE

On Jan. 27, Americans gathered in Washington, DC, for the March for Life. These photos were taken by Phyllis L. Johnson of St. Joseph Church in Alexandria, Va.

“Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are bastions of God’s creation...” — Pope Francis
As we prepare to celebrate the Feast of Saint Joseph on March 19, it has been the Josephites’ sacred custom to dedicate 30 days of prayer (beginning on February 18) for our special intentions and those of our friends and benefactors.

Why 30 days? These 30 days of prayer honor the 30 years that Joseph spent with Jesus and Mary on Earth. It is in the 30 days of prayer that we petition Saint Joseph to hear our requests and carry them to God’s throne on high.

Saint Joseph is always there when we need help! We know that’s true. Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, was chosen by God to be the protector of the Holy Family. He is our protector, too.

The stories are familiar. We can imagine his sacrifice in heeding the advice of the Angel telling him of the Virgin birth. During the journey to Bethlehem and those first days in the stable, we see Joseph watching over Jesus and Mary night and day. We can only wonder at his courage as he faced Herod’s wrath which resulted in the treacherous flight into Egypt.

For centuries, Christians have known that they can confide in Joseph, like a father, and call on him for support in times of trouble.

Join your petitions with ours and your prayers with all Josephites as we prepare for the Saint Joseph feast day.

As part of Saint Joseph’s family here on earth, Josephites ask him every day to “obtain for all those who have asked our prayers everything that is useful to them in the plan of God.”

Join in the Feast of Saint Joseph on March 19

JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

“A blameless life, St. Joseph, may we lead, by your kind patronage from danger freed.”
Last year, at the direction of the Holy Father, we celebrated the Year of Mercy. What is our theme this year?

Since this year doesn’t seem to have a special theme, I suggest we adopt the theme “Let’s make the church great again” drawing from the campaign of our new president. Although we all know that America was always great and never lost that distinction, that theme did fire up people to climb on board and get involved.

Our church has never lost its greatness, its importance, its significance, its divine calling and mandate which comes from Jesus Christ, himself. So, why “Let’s make the church great again”?

While the church has not lost its significance, sad to say, many followers have lost their steam or drifted away. In fact, they have drifted away in great numbers. Some have joined other faiths, some have gotten lazy in the practice of the faith, and some have abandoned the faith for who knows why.

We cannot just let that happen and not care because many of these are our friends, family members and people we love.

How can we make the church “great” again?

We must start with ourselves asking questions such as “Am I practicing the faith as best I can? Am I a good model of the faith? Do I live the Christian values Jesus Christ has given us – to love my neighbor, to treat all people with respect and dignity and to encourage others to do the same?”

I fear that many of us keep quiet, remain silent, when the opportunities arise to give witness to our faith and Christ’s teachings – which means to kindly and genuinely explain and defend our faith the best we can.

We must always remain faithful to our Christianity – in word and deed – and model the Catholic Christian life to others. Actions speak louder than words. There is a song using words from the Epistle of St. John – “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

Yes, our faith is still great and always has been and always will be, but what about us? Is there anything I can do to help make it great again for not only myself, but also for those I love and care about?

Ask yourself: “Do I know my faith enough to defend it or to at least talk about it?” I fear many think they can’t. If you don’t, then do something to “brush-up” on your faith. Every Catholic should have the “Catechism of the Catholic Faith for Adults.” With its table of contents and the index, you can easily find a topic.

Adult faith formation classes and RCIA classes are conveniently available and present a great opportunity. Also, many great books and simple-to-read pamphlets are accessible. And, you can easily go online for a simple search. Many Catholic parishes have a free program called “FORMED.ORG,” which has seminars, e-books, movies, documentaries, and so on, offering faith development at your fingertips.

As you plan your Lenten observances – in addition to the regular Lenten disciplines of prayer, almsgiving and fasting – consider how you can help make our faith great again – both for yourself and for others – and be a witness of our great faith!

Father Donald Fest, SSJ, is pastor of St. Joseph church in Alexandria, Virginia.
Many thanks to all of our Sustaining Partners, who together with loved ones, have been enrolled as Perpetual Members of the Josephites, benefiting them with prayerful daily remembrances by all Josephites.

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