



*The Catholic Community of the East End of Pittsburgh*

ST. BEDE CHURCH  
509 South Dallas Avenue  
Pittsburgh PA 15208

MOTHER OF GOOD COUNSEL CHURCH  
7705 Bennett Street  
Pittsburgh PA 15208

ST. JAMES CHURCH  
718 Franklin Avenue  
Wilkinsburg PA 15221

## Mass Schedule

Saturday Vigil 4:00 pm St. James  
Sunday 9:00 am Mother of Good Counsel  
11:00 am St. Bede

Monday - Saturday 9:00 am St. Bede

**Novenas** 9:30 am St. Bede

Monday Miraculous Medal Perpetual Novena  
Wednesday Mother of Perpetual Help Novena

## Confession & Eucharistic Adoration

Saturday 9:30 - 10:30 am St. Bede

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is available by appointment.

*St. Bede Church is open  
Monday to Friday 7 am to 3 pm  
Saturday, 8 am to 12 pm*

**Faith Formation (CCD)** Sunday 9 am on Zoom

**Baptisms, Weddings, and Funerals**  
by appointment only.



Our churches are accessible.

**PARISH OFFICE**  
509 South Dallas Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15208  
[parishoffice@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:parishoffice@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Phone: 412.661.7222  
Fax: 412.661.9337

**THIRD SUNDAY**  
**OF**  
**Advent**

As the earth brings forth its plants,  
and a garden makes its growth spring up,  
so will the Lord God make justice and praise  
spring up before all the nations.

Isaiah 61:11

**DECEMBER 13, 2020**

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*"With God All Things Are Possible!"*

Website: [saintmarymagdalenepgh.org](http://saintmarymagdalenepgh.org)



@smpgph



[St. Mary Magdalene Parish PGH](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)

## Parish Office

412.661.7222

### Pastoral Staff

Rev. Thomas J. Burke, Pastor [tburke@diopitt.org](mailto:tburke@diopitt.org)  
Rev. David Taylor, Senior Parochial Vicar [dtaylor@diopitt.org](mailto:dtaylor@diopitt.org)  
Rev. C. Matthew Hawkins, Parochial Vicar  
[mhawkins@diopitt.org](mailto:mhawkins@diopitt.org)

### In Residence

Rev. James Adeoye [jamesadeoye@yahoo.com](mailto:jamesadeoye@yahoo.com)  
Rev. Augustine Temu [temuago@yahoo.com](mailto:temuago@yahoo.com)

### Office Staff

Frank Grande [businessmanager@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:businessmanager@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Terri Price [parishoffice@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:parishoffice@stmarymagpgh.org)

### Religious Education

Teresa Maynor [tmaynor@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:tmaynor@stmarymagpgh.org)

### Music Ministries

Jennifer Gorske, Director of Music Ministries  
412.370.2638; [jgorske@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:jgorske@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Gerard Rohlf 412.657.7570; [grohlf@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:grohlf@stmarymagpgh.org)

### Safe Environment

Melissa Viator [mviator@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:mviator@stmarymagpgh.org)

### Social Ministry & Community Outreach 412.241.1309

Anne Scheuermann [ascheuermann@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:ascheuermann@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Pat Hoffman, Social Worker  
Marcus Smith, Food Distribution Assistant/Maintenance

### Holy Rosary Food Bank

Veronica Synder 412.731.4195

### Media & Communications

Cathy Raffaele [craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Glennen Lloyd [parishnewsletter@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:parishnewsletter@stmarymagpgh.org)  
Bulletin [bulletin@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:bulletin@stmarymagpgh.org)

### Housekeeping/Maintenance

Paul Denk, Ray Krivanek, Michael Natalia, Annette Shunk

### Principals

Sr. Thea Bowman Catholic Academy: Ms. Stephanie Michael  
412.242.3515; [info@stbca.net](mailto:info@stbca.net); [sistertheabowman.org](mailto:sistertheabowman.org)  
St. Bede School: Sr. Daniela Bronka 412.661.9425;  
[info@saintbedeschool.com](mailto:info@saintbedeschool.com); [saintbedeschool.com](http://saintbedeschool.com)

**New Parishioners** Welcome! To register, please call or email the parish office. Registration forms are also available on the welcome page of our website:

[saintmarymagdalene.org](http://saintmarymagdalene.org)

## PROTECTION OF GOD'S CHILDREN

Report suspected child abuse  
At the 24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline: 800.932.0313  
If a child is in imminent danger, call 911

## Mass Online: Livestream

The direct link for the live stream: [facebook.com/smmppgh/live/](https://facebook.com/smmppgh/live/)  
(choose the video with the red "live" icon)  
(link is also on the homepage of our website)

You do not have to have a Facebook account.

December 13, Mother of Good Counsel Church, 9 am  
December 20, St. Bede Church, 11 am

The Mass will be available on the homepage of our website and YouTube within two hours of the livestream.

[saintmarymagdalene.org](http://saintmarymagdalene.org)  
[St. Mary Magdalene Parish PGH](http://St.MaryMagdaleneParishPGH)

## Stewardship

### Offertory

November 29 \$7,578.00  
December 6 \$8,697.00

### PSP 2020

Goal \$153,393.00 Received \$105,051.00

## November Contributions Includes Faith Direct

Offertory	\$62,788.00
Angel Tree	\$3,792.00
Campus Maintenance	\$1,389.00
Music Ministry	\$825.00
Parish Share (PSP)	\$5,902.00
Retirement Fund for Religious	\$2,896.00
Social Ministries	\$5,856.00
St. Bede School	\$1,535.00
St. Vincent De Paul Society	\$2,367.00

## Advisory Councils

### Parish Pastoral Council

Patricia Albacete  
Linda Atkins  
Lois Campbell  
Denise Charron-Prochownik  
Anne Kovalan-Santoni  
Peter Lahoda  
Teresa Maynor  
Joan Price  
Janice Reed  
Dante Romito  
Eric Setzler  
Gloria White

### Finance Council

Martin Albacete  
David Aleva  
Christopher Benec  
Linda Burke  
Michael Myers  
Michael Polite  
Judy Prata  
Mara Sullivan

*Pastoral Council meets  
on the 3rd Monday  
of the month.*

*Finance Council meets  
on the 4th Monday  
of the month.*

## BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENTS EARLY DEADLINES

**December 27: due Tuesday, December 15, at 9 am.**  
**January 3: due Monday, December 21, at 9 am**

[bulletin@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:bulletin@stmarymagpgh.org)

## As a Faith Community,

we pray for all who request prayers.

*Loretta Ashley, Gail Britanik, Scot Brown, Terri Burns,  
Amy Corpuz, Mary Ann Dickerson, Louann & Joseph Gordon,  
Theresa Grieco, Pat Griffin, Dureena Grove, Marlene Joseph,  
Mary Lou Laird, Kimberly Lattimore, Martin Lavelle,  
Patricia Marino, Matilda McGuinness, Michelle Menziatti,  
Dee Pryor, Mary Reidell, Emily Reiling, Marion Reynoso,  
Natalie Semler, Janice Simmons, James & Rose Smith,  
Carlos Steele, and Arlene Trichtinger.*

Our parish community prays for those who request prayers for any reason. If you, a family member, or friend would like to be on our prayer list, please contact Cathy at 412.661.7222 or [craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org).

## Mass Intentions December 12–20

Saturday Vigil Third Sunday of Advent	4 pm	George Pavlic (Griffith Family)	BURKE
SUNDAY THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT	9 am Livestream	Cary Allen Hodges (Allen R. Hodges, M.D.)	TAYLOR
	11 am	Joseph Wymard (The Wymard Family)	HAWKINS
MONDAY Memorial of St. John of the Cross, Priest and Doctor of the Church	9 am	William Dzombak (David Dzombak & Carolyn Menard)	HAWKINS
TUESDAY Weekday	9 am	Albert Norbut (Daughter, Helene Norbut)	TEMU
WEDNESDAY Weekday	9 am	Lucien & Jeannine Charron and Prochownik Family (The Prochownik Family)	ADEOYE
THURSDAY Weekday	9 am	Stephen M. Lauble (Irma Lauble)	TAYLOR
FRIDAY Weekday	9 am	Donald King (Sr. Daniela Bronka)	BURKE
SATURDAY Weekday	9 am	Living and Deceased Members of the Stets Family, Stedina Family and Glontis Family (Barbara Krajcovic)	HAWKINS
Saturday Vigil Fourth Sunday of Advent	4 pm	Eleanora Greene (Knights of Peter Claver Ladies Auxiliary)	TAYLOR
SUNDAY FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT	9 am	Living and Deceased Members of the Prata Family (Mary Grace & Judy Prata)	HAWKINS
	11 am Livestream	Joseph and Maureen Vigliotti (John & Lisa Bush)	BURKE

## December 12–20

SAT	Adoration & Confession Advent Morning of Reflection	St. Bede 9:30 am Zoom 10 am
SUN	Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe CCD Faith Sharing	MOGC 9 am Zoom 9 am Zoom 2 pm
MON	Miraculous Medal Novena Spiritual Enrichment Meeting	St. Bede 9:30 am Zoom, 7 pm
TUE	RCIA Fratelli Tutti Reflection & Discussion	Zoom 7 pm Zoom 7 pm
WED	Food Bank Pick Up Food Bank Distribution Youth Ministry Meeting	Ministry Ctr 8:30 am HR Rectory 9 am Zoom 7 pm
THURS	Mother of Perpetual Help Novena Bible Study with Fr. Matthew	St. Bede 9:30 am Zoom 7 pm
FRI	St. Bede School Mass	St. Bede 9 am
SAT	Adoration & Confession Food Bank Distribution Letter Writing	St. Bede 9:30 am Ministry CTR 9 am St. James 5 pm
SUN	Letter Writing CCD Faith Sharing	MOGC 9 am St. Bede, 12 pm Zoom 9 am Zoom 2 pm

Except for CCD and RCIA,  
Zoom information is on the Events page  
of our website: [saintmarymagdalenepgh.org/events](http://saintmarymagdalenepgh.org/events)

## In Memoriam

*Richard Grove  
(Father of Mara Sullivan)*

Eternal rest grant unto to him, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon him. May his soul and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen

**Bible Study with Fr. Matthew** is on Thursdays at 7 pm on Zoom. The study will also be posted, with a short mini-lecture, on our website and YouTube.

For more information, contact Fr. Matthew at 412.661.7222 or [mhawkins@diopitt.org](mailto:mhawkins@diopitt.org).

To register (required): [craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:craffaele@stmarymagpgh.org)

**Letter Writing in December** will be on December 19 and 20. The focus is on housing evictions and the letters will be directed to members of our PA Legislature. With the coming of winter and the cold, it is important that people not become homeless due to the negative impact of COVID-19 and the economic recession. Letters, envelopes, and stamps will be available as you leave church and on our parish website. Please plan to participate.

**Year End Contributions** If you were thinking of making a year-end contribution to our parish, anyone who is 70 ½ years old before 12/31/2020 and has a retirement account, can make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD).

Required Minimum Distributions (RMD's) have been waived for 2020 by the CARES ACT. Please consider making a QCD to St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

The funds withdrawn **must** be made **directly** to the parish from the custodian. The custodian will send you a Form 1099 showing that the QCD was made and that the withdrawal amount is **not taxable income**.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. **Remember withdrawals must be made prior to December 31, 2020.**

**The Future Leaders of our Holy Catholic Church need YOU!** The parishes of St. Paul Cathedral and St. Mary Magdalene along with Sacred Heart and St. Raphael Catholic Churches are working together to build a vibrant collaborative Catholic youth ministry program for the East End of Pittsburgh.

With the support of Fr. Stubna, Fr. Burke, and Fr. Mele, we have created a study group to build this important ministry from the ground up.

We NEED enthusiastic people filled with the Holy Spirit to join us and help make this a reality for the youth of our community. We are looking for adults, college students and high school students to form our core and junior leadership groups.


**We will be holding a Zoom meeting on December 16, at 7 pm to outline our mission statement and to begin planning exciting events that engage and attract our Catholic youth to a deeper relationship with Jesus through the fellowship and community of their peers.**

For more information, please contact Melissa Viator at [mviator@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:mviator@stmarymagpgh.org).

For Zoom link: [saintmarymagdalene.org/events](https://saintmarymagdalene.org/events)

*If you are unable to join us, please pray for us as we seek to establish a strong youth ministry program for the future leaders of our Catholic Church. Thank you.*

**Our Parish Pantries** have requested laundry detergent during December. Please bring donations to one of the churches. If you bring them to the Parish Office, it is preferred that they be brought between 10 am and 5 pm, Monday through Friday. If not, they can be left on the front or back porch. **Thank you for your support.**

 **Radio Program**, with Fr. Tom Burke as host, highlights elementary and secondary schools; colleges; youth ministry programs; and more, and is broadcast every other Sunday morning on KDKA-AM. Fr. Tom's next program is on December 20.

See the homepage of our website, for the link to podcasts of the programs: [saintmarymagdalene.org](https://saintmarymagdalene.org).

## Century Club

### Winners

#### October

Fr. Thomas Burke  
Sheila Glover  
Dianne Nocito  
Ellen Poslusny

#### November

Richard Andracki.  
Frances Galardi  
Kathleen Lee  
Annette Shunk

We have 75 members so far for this year's Century Club. Membership Forms are available in each of the churches.

Thank you to everyone that have already joined. Next drawing will be held on Monday, January 4, 2021.

## Angel Tree Thank You from Bobbi Cass

I have a sign above my dining room door: **"Don't tell God how big your storm is, tell the storm how big your God is."**

In the midst of the storm of the pandemic and all the restrictions and protocols that came with it, we, at St. Mary Magdalene Parish, launched our annual Angel Tree Program. It looked very different from the previous 30 plus years as we tried to figure out how to connect with all of you and the many people we serve, and still keep everyone safe. We weren't sure what our response would be, but we sent up a prayer and told the storm it was "out of line!" We had a goal of 250 gift cards and we are so grateful to report that we not only met our goal, but we exceeded it by about 20%.

Your generosity is a testament to your willingness to live out the Gospel in your daily lives. Because of it you will touch many other lives. Thank you and may your Christmas be blessed!

**Christmas Fair Trade Sale** continues with in store shopping at **10,000 Villages**, 5820 Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill., 15217 until Christmas.. Please use our special code: **FUNDSTMM**. In store shopping counts until Christmas if the code is used.

Learn more about the Chimbote mission, Queen of Apostles Academy in Uganda, Partners in Progress in rural Haiti (Fatima House Orphanage), and Bread for the World. A zoom presentation about our parish's four Global Solidarity Partners is available on our parish website (a one-hour presentation).

If you did not participate in the Fair Trade Sale, we invite you to support our parish Global Solidarity Partners with a financial contribution. Checks can be made out to our parish, putting Global Solidarity Partners on the memo line of your check. Contributions may be sent to the parish office, put in an envelope and dropped in the collection box in church, or through Faith Direct for an online gift.



## An Update from the Ministry Center

MANY THANKS to St. Bede school students and families, with the coordination efforts of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, for their donations of non-perishables to the Ministry Center's food banks. Canned and dry goods, including dog and cat food for our community's 4-legged friends, will help us during the busy holiday season.

The 8<sup>th</sup> grade is now working on a December clothing drive, focusing on coats, hats, gloves, and socks.

**DONATE TO THE COAT DRIVE!** If you have a new or gently used coat or other winter wear that you would like to donate, please contact the Ministry Center. You can also leave items in the bin at the back of the church at St. Bede.

### END OF NOVEMBER/EARLY DECEMBER STATISTICS:

**November food distribution:** St. James, 260 individuals served, 100 more than November 2019. It is also an over 100% increase of the 120 served in February 2020. **Rental assistance: \$850 Utility assistance: \$400**

**AMAZONSMILE:** You can help the Ministry Center every time you shop on Amazon. Go to smile.amazon.com, choose St. Mary Magdalene Parish as your charity, and ½% of the price of your purchases will be donated to the Ministry Center.

**With grateful hearts, we, at the Ministry Center, thank you for all of your interest and support in 2020, and look forward to working together in 2021. Merry Christmas, and a safe and healthy New Year to all!**

**Give BIG Pittsburgh's** online giving continues through the end of December. If you did not get a chance to make a donation, it is not too late.

Go to [givebigpittsburgh.com](http://givebigpittsburgh.com), search St. James Ministry (a part of St. Mary Magdalene Church) and it will take you to our page to make your gift. Your ongoing generous support to our parish Social Ministries gives help and hope to those in need in the communities we serve.

Thank You!

### Fratelli Tutti: Reflection & Discussion

Join fellow parishioners for a weekly virtual exploration of Pope Francis' latest encyclical letter. Tuesdays at 7 pm. The fifth chapter, "Dialogue and Friendship in Society", will be discussed on December 15. Anyone is welcome to participate at any time.

Visit our website, [saintmarymagdalene.org](http://saintmarymagdalene.org) for the Fratelli Tutti page. The page has a link to the encyclical, to read online or purchase; a list of the topics for the series; articles on the encyclical; and the Zoom link.

Contact Cathy at [craftaele@stmarymagpgh.org](mailto:craftaele@stmarymagpgh.org) or 412.661.7222 for more information.

**Comments from a parishioner on the encyclical...** Learning to better have an attitude that "wills the good" of others and new ways of "building bridges" both locally and globally. *Nancy O'Brien*

**Copies of Fratelli Tutti** are now available at St. Mary Magdalene Parish. Its focus on the gift and value of each person and welcoming the stranger makes for great Advent Season reading. To request a copy, call or stop in at parish office. You can either pick one up or have it mailed to you. A donation of \$10 is suggested.

## St. Bede School Update

**Christmas Decoration Door Competition** Before Thanksgiving Mrs. Mollen had the 8<sup>th</sup> graders decorate some doors around the school for Thanksgiving. Other teachers liked the idea and soon started decorating doors for Christmas. Ms. Partin was one of the first to decorate her door. Other teachers soon started to decorate their doors, each grade trying to make the best door. Every teacher is putting up door decorations with one intention: to have the best-looking door. This competition isn't official yet, but someone will probably organize some way for everyone to vote on what door is their favorite. Who will have the best door? Only time will tell.

**Steeler Dress Down Day** On Monday, students were allowed to dress down with Steeler theme being encouraged. This was to raise excitement for the game against the Washington Football Team. This was also to celebrate the Steelers being the sole undefeated football team in December. Ms. Brown somehow got permission for this, despite Sister Daniela being an Eagle's fan.

**Poinsettia Sale** St. Bede had a successful poinsettia sale as usual. Selling high quality poinsettias went extremely well this year as it does every year.

**Tree Sale** Having sold out of trees only four days after opening, the tree sale was also extremely successful. The 8<sup>th</sup> graders helped unload and setup the tree sale last Tuesday and all the trees were sold by Saturday afternoon.

**Half-way Through The 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter** We have made it over halfway through another quarter at St. Bede. Due to Thanksgiving and Christmas break the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter is always different from the other quarters. So far in the school year things have been going well. Despite the fear that we might have been online in December, we have been able to stay open safely and there have been very few issues. St. Bede has been taking all the safety precautions while giving their students the best education they can. I am impressed with how well St. Bede has done handling COVID-19 and giving a good education.

*Daniel Patton, 8<sup>th</sup> Grader*

## PASTOR'S NOTE



### Rejoice!

Traditionally, the third Sunday of Advent is called "Gaudete Sunday" which means Rejoice! We are half way to Christmas! The pink candle in our Advent wreath signifies joy and hope and this weekend's readings focus on rejoicing.

In today's first reading from Isaiah, we read how Isaiah rejoices as he brings glad tidings of God's vindication for his people. In the second reading, from the Letter to the Thessalonians, we read how Paul encourages rejoicing as God prepares his people for the return of the Lord. In the gospel of St. John, we read how John the Baptist testifies to the light and cries out in the desert to make straight the way of the Lord. He spoke about Jesus and helped people be ready for his message and prepared the people to be ready for Jesus' ministry.

Advent is a season of waiting in joyful hope for the coming of the Lord. Gaudete Sunday affirms the value of rejoicing and gives reasons for rejoicing. With great rejoicing and longing for Christ's return, let us take John's words to heart and prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries.

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic and the cold winter season, let us light the pink candle this weekend and see the light of Christ shine on us and bring joy to someone who may be lonely or grieving the loss of a loved one this holiday season by making a phone call or writing a card to someone we have not talked to in a while. Let us rejoice this Gaudete Sunday!

We are looking for volunteers next weekend after the three Masses to decorate our churches. If you would like to stay and decorate after the 4 pm Saturday evening mass at St. James, 9 am Sunday at Mother of Good Counsel and 11 am at St. Bede your help is greatly appreciated!

### Rejoice!

## Looking Ahead

**Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 24**  
2 pm - Mother of Good Counsel (Fr. Taylor)  
4 pm - St. Bede (Fr. Matthew)  
5:30 pm- St. James (Fr. Tom) Livestream  
Midnight - St. Bede (Fr. Tom) Broadcasting Live on KDKA Radio 100.1 FM and 1020 AM

**Christmas Day, Friday, December 25**  
9 am - Mother of Good Counsel (Fr. Tom)  
10:30am - St. James (Fr. Taylor)  
Noon - St. Bede (Fr. Matthew)

**New Year's Eve, Thursday, December 31**  
4pm- St. James (Fr. Tom)

**New Year's Day- Friday, January 1**  
9 am - Mother of Good Counsel (Fr. Matthew)  
11 am - St. Bede (Fr. Taylor) Livestream

**\*\*Please note that you do not need to register or RSVP to attend Mass at St. Mary Magdalene Parish. We have plenty of room at our three campuses and all are welcomed!\*\***

## Year End Donations

As you make decisions on your year-end contributions, please consider your St. Mary Magdalene Parish Community. Your financial contributions in the weekly offertory collection help us continue to keep the campuses updated, clean and comfortable. With the Covid-19 pandemic there are extra costs with cleaning and sanitizing, keeping up to date with technology to have Livestreaming available and the extra costs this time of year with snow removal and salt. Please remember to also support our Parish Share Campaign.

## St. James Rectory Window Project

St. James Rectory has thirty-three windows that are in desperate need of replacing. They are old, leaking, and most do not even open. We have an estimate from Metropolitan Window Company and would like to replace the windows in three phases. If you would like to "adopt a window" and make a donation, please make your checks payable to St. Mary Magdalene Parish, memo it "Rectory Window Fund" and mail it to my attention. We have already collected \$13,000 for the first phase which will replace twelve windows on the third floor. Please feel free to call or email me to discuss. We appreciate your support.

## Parish Improvements

The first-floor lobby of the Holy Rosary Rectory received a fresh coat of paint last week. Special thanks to our Director of Maintenance, Paul Denk, for his painting expertise.

## Welcome

A special welcome to **Eric, Holly, Juliana, Andrew, and Sage Mohr** who recently registered at St. Mary Magdalene Parish.

## Wedding Bells

Congratulations to **Mackenzie Maurer** and **Evan Ditty** who are celebrating their wedding this weekend!

## Happy Birthday

Happy 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday to my dad, Bill Burke, who celebrated his birthday this past Thursday, December 10!

## Something to Think About...

*The world looks brighter from behind a smile.*

With God, All Things Are Possible!

Fr. Tom Burke, Pastor  
[tburke@diopitt.org](mailto:tburke@diopitt.org)

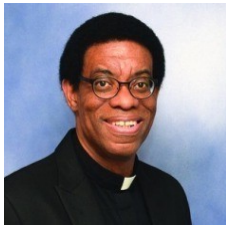
## Fr. David Taylor



A reason to rejoice. The third Sunday of Advent brings us to the midpoint of the season. There is a sense of joy and anticipation as we await the Nativity. But in so many ways the hope and joy of the season are lost in the many challenges we face at this time.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of an ability to have hope even in a time of great distress. The troubles we now face should never take away our ability to be of love and service to others. Yes, we can rejoice even when life is full of trouble.

## Fr. Matthew Hawkins



During Mass this week you will notice something that is different. Instead of taking our responsorial psalm from the book of psalms, as is our usual practice, this week, we turn to the poetic prayer of the Magnificat, uttered by Mary as she visited Elizabeth and was preparing to give birth to Jesus. Our

Blessed Mother's prayer is a poetic prayer of hope, renewal, and vindication. She makes this prayer despite the personal and national circumstances that would cause weaker souls to give in to despair and doubt.

Mary says: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed." Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, which reminds us of how vulnerable we are and how transitory life is, we too proclaim the greatness of the Lord and cast aside the temptation to allow fear to consume us. Mary's Magnificat expresses a deep understanding that the Lord will turn the world on its head. She proclaims: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty. He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy."

Our Christian sensibility helps us to understand how intertwined our destinies are, even though we allow ourselves to be divided by transitory things. The very nature of the way that the virus spreads forces us to see how connected we are even as our uneven response to the virus, and the looming economic crisis that has come with it, reveals our persistent and deepening social divisions.

This is a season when we find much happiness being in the company of others. But for our own health and that of others we must forgo many of our social encounters. However, as people of faith we continue to be the voice of hope to one another.

Advent allows us to look at the sufferings of the present times all the while knowing there will be a better time. As the Psalmist tells us 'Let us go rejoicing to the House of the Lord'.

In times of confusion and doubt we are prone to feed on these divisions. During such times of social crisis, we are in need of spiritual discernment. Paul's First letter to the Thessalonians teaches us to move ahead cautiously, with a discerning heart and a listening ear that is attuned to the voice of God. Paul warns us: "Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good. Refrain from every kind of evil."

Fear and division are debilitating. Catholic social teaching shows us the way forward. We must deepen our sense of solidarity. We will never be fulfilled until we learn to live in solidarity with one another, especially in our darkest hours. To be witnesses who herald the coming of the Lord and the fulfillment of God's promises is a lonely task. John the Baptist described himself as being "the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord,'" It is lonely to traverse a landscape that is as spiritually barren.

This is why we need solidarity. This is why we must encourage one another and accompany each other on the journey. If we try to make this journey alone, with a radical sense of individualism, we will succumb to folly. Instead, when we go forward as a community of faith, like the prophet Isaiah we will have the confidence to say: "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God."