

MESSENGER PLUS

Justice and Peace

By Stephanie Checchia

Our service year has been a great success so far! Thank you, everyone, for your generous support of the Justice and Peace projects. Our Angel Tree collection provided tremendous joy to local children, with \$600 in gift cards and over 500 toys being donated to ForKids and H.E.R. Shelter (Help and Emergency Response, Inc.). Did you know that Blessed Sacrament is the biggest donor to the ForKids angel tree project? What a great feeling to be able to share our blessings with the community!

Thank you, also, for your generous contribution to the SMILES collections (the second collection taken up on the second full weekend of every month). We recently gave \$250 to the NEST program and \$250 to Norfolk Friends of Foster Care to provide birthday and holiday gifts for children in the Norfolk Department of Human Services foster care program. This is a wonderful way to celebrate Jesus!

Our Lenten food drive is upon us! We thank the good people of Farm Fresh at Ward's Corner for their charitable donation of paper grocery bags to support this project. Bags will be handed out 4-5 March, and the collection will run through 2 April. Please return food items in paper, plastic or cloth bags or boxes. This drive will support the food pantries of St. Mary's Basilica downtown, St. Pius, and Holy Trinity. Special thanks to our parish youth groups for stapling the grocery lists to the bags!

This June we will be holding a Birthright Bottle Drive to support Birthright of Norfolk, a crisis pregnancy resource center located in DePaul Hospital. Birthright has been providing loving support and helpful assistance to local women in all stages of pregnancy for over 40 years. It is funded entirely by the donations of people like you, and run exclusively by volunteers. All money received goes directly to providing aid for pregnant women in need. Baby bottles will be distributed the weekend of 3-4 June. Please consider contributing to this very important charity. We ask that you return the bottles the following weekend with your donation inside (even spare change is greatly appreciated!). Birthright representatives will be on hand if you have any questions.

Would you like to join the planning team and help to make a difference in our parish and community? New members are always welcome! Please contact Stephanie Checchia at sdostal330@yahoo.com or call Linda Vigneault at 489-3570 to join Justice & Peace.

Religious Education: Kindergarten – Grade 5

By Margaret Eshenour

After the thrill of the Christmas season, our K-5 classes will begin preparing for the Lenten season. In March and April, each class will take turns praying the Stations of the Cross. In addition, we will start collecting money for our classroom CRS Rice Bowls to assist the poor throughout our world. The classes engage in a friendly competition to see who can collect the most money for the poor- don't be afraid to help your child's class win!

Most of our 2nd grade class has already celebrated their first Reconciliation, and they are now busily preparing to celebrate the Sacrament of First Holy Communion. We are very grateful for the dedication and support of the parents and our sacramental teachers: Grade 2: Sally Adams and Eliza Dixon assisting; Grade 2A: Mary Beth Kopso and Katherine Barrera assisting; Grade 2B: Michele Cobas and Robert Hulse. The dates for First Communion are as follows:

- 22/23 April (at each Mass)
- 29/30 April (at each Mass)

Also, on Sunday, 7 May we will celebrate our annual May procession with help from our First Communicants. A big THANK YOU to the parents for bringing their children to class each Sunday and to the catechists for teaching!

Children's RCIA

Our children's RCIA class meets 2 Wednesday's per month from 6:30 pm– 7:15 pm. We have two catechumens this year and 1 candidate. They are busily preparing for the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Communion) which will occur Saturday, 15 April during the Easter Vigil Mass. I am very grateful to have Mark Checchia and Jennifer Gant-Brush to lead the children's RCIA sessions!

Youth Ministry

By Sheila Jenkins

The youth of our parish have been very busy! We went to Busch Gardens and had a great time at Christmas Town. We shared our joyful preparation for Christmas by singing carols with the residents of Consulate Health Care and Province Place along with a large contingent of singers from Saint Pius Church.

Our middle school religious education class, called Edge that meets weekly from 9 am to 10:10 am on Sundays, is bursting with energy. Every week has a lesson and many fun activities. This semester we are learning about the Sacraments and all the graces we receive from them. At Life Teen, our high school group, we have begun to discuss spiritual battle, the constant struggle against evil that we experience daily. We look at its origins and the weapons we have to

fight, in order to share in the victory of the risen Christ. We meet on Sunday evenings from 6 pm to 8 pm. And we always have a tasty dinner provided!

Our Pancake Breakfast on 12 February was a great success. We fed many parishioners with pancakes, bacon and sausage cooked and served by the kids. We had many volunteers set up tables and decorate the social hall. The Confirmation class was the cleanup crew. And, of course, thanks to the volunteers of the Parish Community Life group, it all went very smoothly.

We have twenty-seven young people who are nearing the end of preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation. Our class has talked about challenges to our faith and what we must be prepared to do to live in an unbelieving world while sharing the Gospel with the people who come into our lives. The Confirmation retreat provides a time to bond with each other and to unite our hearts and strengthen our wills to serve the Body of Christ. The Confirmandi will come home from the retreat refreshed and energized, ready to receive from the Holy Spirit the gifts they need to build up the kingdom of heaven. Please pray for them as they prepare to be confirmed.

“Music, Music, Music”

By Gregg Marino, Director of Music Ministries

Our parish Music Ministry is having a good year so far. The Peter & Will Anderson Jazz Trio concert on 22 January was great – everyone who attended enjoyed their music. On Sunday 26 February the Mass Choir from the Basilica of St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception will “raise the roof” with their Celebration of the African American Worship Experience. The final concert of the season is on Sunday, 23 April, featuring the Boys Choir of Hampton Roads.

A few weeks ago, I spoke after all the Masses and invited people to join the various facets of the Music Ministry. The Adult Choir sings at the 10:30 Mass and most of the major liturgical celebrations. Solo song leaders, called cantors, lead the singing at the 5:00 Mass on Saturday and the 8:00 Mass on Sunday. The Youth Choir and the Young Musicians provide the music for several Masses per season – they rehearse on alternating Sunday afternoons at 4:30. We also have a Folk Group who provide the music a couple of times per semester, sometimes at the 10:30 Mass and sometimes at the 5:00 on Saturday. Anyone who is interested in joining one of these groups should contact me.

This May will be a very special birthday for me - I will turn 65, making me eligible for retirement, well, at least semi-retirement. While, effective 30 June 2017, I officially retire from my two positions, as Director of Music Ministries and Administrative Assistant to Father Joe, on 1 July; I will begin my new position as Coordinator of Music. I will still play for all the Masses, maintain all the groups, and be in the office on Tuesdays from 8:00 until noon for planning, scheduling and other music related functions. I am very excited about having this opportunity to continue with our parish music program.

Please keep the Music Ministry and me in your prayers. I am sure I speak for all our members in saying that we are blessed to be able to minister to our parish.