



IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

GOOD NEWS

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“Thank you, thank you, thank you!”

Immaculata Award Given to Leo Rayhill

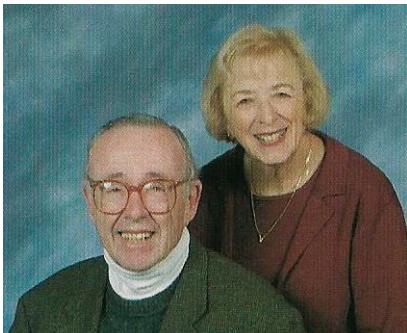
By Ana Morley

Leo Rayhill was awarded the 2020 Immaculata Award for I.C. Parish. Father Ryan bestowed the award upon Leo in his home on Dec. 7, 2020.

Rayhill was selected for this honor in recognition of his 50 years of distinguished service to the Immaculate Conception Parish. A parishioner since 1970, Leo and his late wife, Joan, raised children Brian, John, Patti, and Joan, with Immaculate Conception at the center of their lives. For decades, the Rayhills dedicated their time and talents to volunteering for various parish efforts. Through his family-owned construction business, Leo tended to the exterior stability of the church as a roofing contractor. Inside, he served on Parish Council, was a Eucharistic Minister, taught in the Faith Formation program, helped on Coffee Sundays, and was a lector.

Most visibly, he was the head usher and greeter at the 7:30 a.m. Mass for six decades. Prior to the pandemic, Leo still showed up to usher by wheelchair after an illness affected his mobility. Leo always took it as his personal duty to offer a gracious “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” to every churchgoer who placed their donation in his basket.

Father Ryan praised Leo’s faithful stewardship in the Dec. 6 church bulletin: “Leo’s dedication, commitment and love for our parish are certainly evident. His time and talents have long been put into action as ‘Head Usher & Greeter’



Leo Rayhill, shown in this 2006 photo with his wife, Joan, received the 2020 Immaculata Award for outstanding parish service, Dec. 7, 2020.

at 7:30 a.m. Mass. His kind welcome greeted thousands of people over the years and his clear and strong ‘Thank You,’ at the time of the collection was very sincere.”

For the keen listener, his gentle voice could be recognized as that of the radio host sharing the “Sounds of Jazz” with WCNY-FM listeners from 1971 to 2009. During his tenure at the microphone, Leo was able to carry devoted listeners through his knowledge and passion for 20th Century jazz and interview many of the celebrated jazz greats. His career highlights include producing many live performances and interviewing artists including Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Stan Kenton, Rosemary Clooney, and Louis Armstrong. In 2004, the Syracuse M&T Jazz Festival was kicked off in his honor. In 2009, he was awarded the Syracuse Area Music Awards Lifetime Achievement award for his contributions to the region’s music community.

The Immaculata Award is awarded annually by the Syracuse Diocese to recognize and honor lay people who generously and unselfishly volunteer time and service to their parishes. In considering the past year’s nominee, the parish staff agreed that Leo Rayhill has stood out as a selfless and beloved member of the parish family deserving of it and all our gratitude as well.

In Memory of Marion Swanson

By Ana Morley

It is with heartfelt sorrow that the I.C. Good News marks the death of Marion Swanson, who passed away on Nov. 22, 2020, at the age of 93. Many parishioners will remember the gentle and dedicated woman who served as the parish Volunteer Coordinator for Liturgical Ministries between the years of 1996 and 2014. Born and raised on Syracuse’s north side and schooled at Holy Trinity, the parish was an important part of Marion’s life. When Marion and her husband, Rudy, moved to Fayetteville 50 years ago, the first thing they did was join Immaculate Conception Parish.

As Volunteer Coordinator, Marion trained and scheduled Eucharistic Ministers for every Mass for 18 years. She also communicated with the leaders of the other parish ministries when new members wished to join. She introduced ministry fairs to encourage parishioners to volunteer for I.C.’s many ministries. In her free time, Marion guided the Church Mice through years of excellent craftsmanship, production, and profit. Marion worked alongside her fellow crafters in the basement of the convent and was the group’s treasurer. She was instrumental in putting the craft sale proceeds to good use around the parish. The Risen Christ statue, the ambry (which holds the holy oils), and the flat screen TVs with DVD/Blu Ray players in the Dwyer Hall classrooms were purchased by the Church Mice under Marion’s leadership.

She also led the Altar Society for many years and managed its membership dues. She frequently contributed to the I.C. Good News to recruit liturgical ministers or Altar Society members, and promote the Church Mice Christmas Boutiques. She also gave her time over the years to the Bereavement and Liturgy Committees, served as a Eucharistic Minister, and sang in the Choir. Her loss was felt widely across the parish community, but her legacy will be felt for years to come.



Marion Swanson, devoted ministry leader and parish employee, passed away on Nov. 22, 2020.

RCIA

Two Join Catholic Church at Easter Vigil

By Kelly Ann Kelly

Immaculate Conception Parish recently welcomed two new members into the Catholic Church through the RCIA program. RCIA, the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, is the process of prayer, reflection, and study by which individuals preparing to join the Catholic Church are welcomed into the full communion of the faith. Catechumens are unbaptized people who wish to join the Catholic Church. Candidates are Christians who were baptized in a different faith and are permanently converting to Catholicism. Catechumen Lee Powell and candidate Zach Kadah received the Sacraments of Initiation from Father Thomas J. Ryan at the Easter Vigil Mass, April 3.

Prior to administering the sacraments, Father Ryan addressed Powell and Kadah: “The Lord has given you a personal invitation, and you have accepted it. You are now entrusted with a sacred story. It’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News, the Gospel of Truth. Let it challenge you to reflect Jesus more clearly in your lives. Embrace it, struggle with it like we all do, love Him.”

RCIA director Craig Rheaume introduced the new Catholics to the congregation and briefly described what each of them said had drawn them to the Catholic Church. Powell described herself as “one of those people who always believed in God but thought that was good enough.” Then, going through some difficult personal experiences provided the impetus for change. “I felt so helpless, and it was really taking a toll on me. One day, I just fell to my knees and started praying and was truly shocked by that,” she told Rheaume. “That moment made me realize that I did need faith in my life, and it made me want to learn more.” She was inspired and encouraged by her daughter, Piper, a student at I.C. School. “It’s funny because I enrolled [my children] at I.C. School because I wanted them to have faith, because I couldn’t teach them that, never thinking in a million years it would lead me to the Church, but it did.” Powell received the sacraments of Baptism, First Eucharist, and Confirmation accompanied by her godmother and sponsor, Maria Fallon.

Kadah was raised Christian, Rheaume said, but had drifted away. “He believes now that taking this step into



Lee Powell and Zach Kadah (wearing red Confirmation stoles) became full members of the Catholic Church through the RCIA program at the Easter Vigil Mass, Apr. 3. They stand in front of the altar with their respective sponsors, Maria Fallon and RCIA director Craig Rheaume, and Father Thomas J. Ryan. (Photo courtesy of Christine Hiney)

the Catholic Church is the most direct way to God and back to the path that he left when he was younger.” Kadah received the sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation. Rheaume was his sponsor.

In the weeks to come, Powell and Kadah will gain a deeper understanding of the mysteries of our faith in the final phase of RCIA, Mystagogia. It is a time of reflection on their sacramental life in Christ, which has just begun. Our parish is blessed to have Lee Powell and Zach Kadah join our family of faith. Please extend a warm welcome to them and pray for them as they continue their journeys.

Easter Plant Deliveries to the Homebound Return

By Elaine LaFollette

On March 27, volunteers from I.C. delivered Easter plants to 85 homebound parishioners. Since we were unable to carry on this ministry over the last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, what a very special occasion this was! To accommodate social distancing, grocery bags filled with a plant and some goodies were picked up in Dwyer Hall and then delivered. Thank you to all 22 volunteers who made deliveries, and to Michelle, Matthew, and Christine Hiney and our Faith Formation children who made beautiful Easter cards to include in the goodie bags. Thank you, also, to Ann Resig who put together 85 Easter candy bags to be included. God is so good, and we are so blessed here at Immaculate Conception to have such a faith-filled community.



I.C. School News

A Teacher of Many Talents: Sister Alvera O'Grady

By Kelly Ann Kelly

Sister Mary Alvera O'Grady, OSF, passed away on January 1, 2021 at the Franciscan Villa in Syracuse, at age 96. During a 62-year career as an elementary school teacher, including several years at I.C. School, Sister Alvera taught countless children with exceptional patience and grace. She joined the Sisters of St. Francis in 1946 and lived her vocation in the religious life for the next 74 years. She earned a bachelor's degree in education from the College of St. Rose in Albany and taught young children — mostly first graders — until her retirement from the Bishop's Academy at Holy Family in Fairmount in 2009. She was also a trained clown and delighted students with her humor and wit.



Sister Mary Alvera O'Grady, OSF, was a first-grade teacher at I.C. School from 1974 to 1980. She passed away on New Year's Day at the age of 96. (Archival photo)

From 1974 to 1980, Sister Alvera taught first grade at I.C. School. In the late 1970s, Sister Alvera and Kindergarten teacher Kathy Lowenberg began the school's popular Three-Ring Circus. Sister Alvera drew on her clown school training to make the circus feel authentic, and Kathy used her sewing skills to outfit the Kindergarten and first-grade performers. In addition to entertaining parents and friends, the annual circus was a fun introduction to the school for incoming Kindergarten students.

In an interview published in the Jan. 20, 2010 issue of Pillars magazine (published by the Syracuse Diocese Catholic Schools Office), Sister Alvera reflected on her life's work: "I taught first grade through most of my career, and I love that age because each is like a bud just opening up. I always tried to make parents understand that each will blossom in his or her own time — and only the Lord knows just when the right time is." She also described her sacred duty to her students: "to lead the children to the presence of God." May our beloved Sister Alvera now enjoy eternal happiness in His presence.

Smiles Day

The sixth-grade students of I.C. School came up with a creative way to boost school spirit this winter: I.C. Smiles Day. The face masks that students and teachers have been wearing throughout this school year for safety have hidden the cheerful expressions we would normally see each day. The sixth graders made over 200 smile stickers — enough stickers for each student and faculty member to wear one on their face mask. Thanks to the ingenuity of the sixth-grade students, the classrooms and hallways of I.C. School were full of happy grins once again!



Smile! You're on Caroline's Candid Camera! Students display their smile stickers on I.C. Smiles Day, Feb. 9, 2021. (Photo courtesy of Erin Zacholl)

Italian Night Returns To Go

By Erin Zacholl

After having to cancel this popular fundraiser last year due to the pandemic, we were thrilled to bring Italian Night back to I.C. this year! It looked a little different than what we've done in the past, but it was still a wonderful event.

Pre-ordered meals were picked up via a drive-thru lane outside Dwyer Hall. Inside, a team of socially distanced volunteers wearing face masks packaged complete pasta dinners, which were generously donated by the Giamartino family, owners of Tully's and the CopperTop Tavern.

Thank you to the Giamartino family and to everyone who participated in this very successful Italian Night event!

Generosity Knows No Season at I.C. School

By Caroline Agor-Calimlim

Christian charity and service are core values of I.C. School. Our students consistently put those principles into action by making generous donations to many good causes throughout the school year. Last November, the entire school collected items needed for the Fayetteville-Manlius Food Pantry. Each class was assigned certain items to collect as part of a Thanksgiving food drive. Sixth graders helped fill up a van with all the donated goods including rice, pancake mix, maple syrup, canned fruit, and jelly.

Christmas is a time of giving, and I.C. School continued its tradition of celebrating the season by giving back to the community. In the spirit of Christmas, the school collected items such as blankets, character bandages, coloring books, and crayons for the Golisano Children's Hospital in December 2020.

Also that month, the sixth-grade class coordinated the Pajamarama Day fundraiser to benefit Paige's Butterfly Run. Students who donated to the cause could wear their pj's to school. With a lot of generous support, I.C. School raised about \$400 to support pediatric cancer research and patient programs — just by being cozy! Another schoolwide Pajama Day fundraiser for Paige's Butterfly House was held in early February as part of the annual celebration of Catholic Schools Week.

During Catholic Schools Week, Jan. 31-Feb. 6, students in each grade also expressed their gratitude to local first responders and essential workers. They made thank-you cards and posters for members of the fire and police departments, workers at the Town Hall, St. Joseph's Hospital staff members, and the employees of Wegmans and Tops.

For Valentine's Day, the sixth grade "Light the Way" leaders made goodie bags for guests of the Samaritan Center in Syracuse. The bags included chocolate, cookies,



Bags and boxes of fun items collected by I.C. School students await delivery to the Golisano Children's Hospital, December 2020. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)

handwarmers, face masks, and Valentine Day cards. All of us in the I.C. School community are so pleased with the generosity of our students and proud of how they have learned to live their faith.



Sixth-grade students fill the I.C. Parish van with groceries collected for the F-M Food Pantry, a few days before Thanksgiving 2020. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)



On Pajama Friday, Feb. 5, many I.C. students sported pajamas featuring superheroes or, like these 3-year-old pre-K students, Disney princesses. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)

Immaculate Conception Elementary School Presents

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- Two \$1,500 Drawings in December and June
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Please visit icschool.org for complete Eagle Challenge Entry Information.



Individual pasta dinners being prepared for drive-thru pickup at this year's Italian Dinner fundraiser for I.C. School, Mar. 18. (Photo courtesy of Erin Zacholl)

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I.C. Good News

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Faith Formation News

The Children are Zooming in their Faith

By Anne Marie Voutsinas

This is definitely the year of the Zoom for the Faith Formation students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. We have all learned a lot about the technology that keeps us connected, while missing the interactions we would have had in a typical year. But we have to say — so far, so good!

We currently have 150 children participating in our K-5 program. This year has been fulfilling in many ways. We normally do not have enough enrollment to hold a kindergarten class, but this year we are able to. Siblings in grades K-5 can learn and explore our faith together as a family each week, following the liturgy focus described in the “Pflaum Gospel Weeklies” catechetical materials we use. Since our program is guided by catechists but led by family members, all members of the family are enriched by the dialogue that happens, connecting our parents and grandparents to the celebration of the Mass.

Our families are also devoting time to prayer — before meals, at bedtime — and time to attend weekly Mass in person or view the Mass online. Our families can access additional materials on a Group Google Drive. So, while our children are growing in their Faith, our families are, as well. The catechists directing this endeavor are Maureen Barry, Rhiannon Waddell, Anne Kemper, Heather Machovec, Andrea Ashline, Anne Fuda, Laurie Albanese, and Karrie Catalino. We are blessed to have these individuals tackle this learning platform. And we are blessed to have Confirmation students who are assisting in preparing learning experiences for each family group. Serving the I.C. community as part of their own Confirmation preparation are Sophie Chmelicek, Ava D’Agostino, Lindsey Green, Sofia Santa Ines, and Sophia Wilbur.

The 90 children in grades six through eight have two Zoom sessions each month and our catechists add additional learning opportunities via Google Drive. The study of the Old and New Testaments remains the focus for instruction in sixth and seventh grades, with our catechists presenting direct instruction and dialogue opportunities at the Zoom sessions. The eighth graders are participating in a pre-Confirmation program using the text “Decision Point” from the Dynamic Catholic Institute. This program includes online access and an app! Our students will continue to use this text throughout their years of instruction leading to Confirmation. Catechists Bev Boland, Carol Godlewski, Margaret Gloo, Tracy Schwab, Deidre Prince, and Georgette Snyder

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Daniel Haungs helped youngsters understand the weekly Scripture readings through his Children’s Liturgy of the Word presentations on the parish YouTube channel.

provide the instruction for these students.

In our Sacramental Preparation program, Anne Kemper, Heather Machovec, and Corey Stone are guiding 54 children who received the sacrament of Reconciliation at the end of January and will receive the sacrament of Eucharist in early May. As with the rest of our program, we have adjusted our interactions due to the state of the pandemic while keeping the sanctity of the Sacraments as a priority for the children.

On a final note, we are taking a break from the Children’s Liturgy of the Word that we have offered virtually during this past year. We would like to thank I.C. teen Daniel Haungs for leading the virtual sessions since the start of the pandemic and in person during the 9 a.m. Masses for three years before that. He was assisted by Michelle Hiney, who created PowerPoint presentations to accompany the lessons each week. We are exploring more options for our preschoolers. Until then we will post a link to Faith@Home, a weekly resource for families from the diocesan Office of Catechesis.

We are extremely grateful to Daniel and Michelle for their efforts and to the other Confirmation students who helped our program work. We ask that you keep all of our children, their families, our catechists, and our student volunteers in your prayers as we continue to grow in our faith.



Students in the Confirmation program bag apples from the Salt City Harvest Farm for distribution to local food pantries. (Photo courtesy of Gail Capozzi)

Confirmation Teens Continue Community Service

By Gail Capozzi

It's been quite a year of changes for our Confirmation students! While they normally look forward to seeing their friends and sharing some breakfast goodies at Sunday classes, our teens have been patiently attending classes mostly via Zoom. We're so grateful for our teachers who work hard to make class time fun while creating camaraderie among the students.

In the fall, we were happy to introduce the “Decision Point” program, created by the Dynamic Catholic Institute, to our existing curriculum components: “Chosen,” Ignatian Spirituality, and the Catholic Youth Bible. This year, we will add a new component focusing on our Blessed Mother.

Our teens kept busy with service projects despite quarantine restrictions. They helped with the apple harvest at the Salt City Harvest Farm and made quick work of bagging hundreds of pounds of apples! Families delivered the fresh fruit to several food pantries, including 140 bags that were handed out at the Caz Cares curbside food distribution. Many teens are serving as teacher assistants for the younger Faith Formation kids in the parish.

For the holiday season, teens made Thanksgiving and Christmas cards for residents of area nursing homes and donated warm socks to the clients of the Samaritan Center. They also collected lots of Christmas candy for the Syracuse Diocese Jail Ministry. Since then, our Confirmation teens have started a Jail Ministry team which is 35 students strong! We are each assigned three people from the Onondaga County Justice Center who we write to every two weeks along with mailing out a newsletter from the Diocese Jail Ministry. We send notes of support and good cheer to let them know we are thinking of them and that they are never alone. While the students have an opportunity to gain a better understanding about the criminal justice system, they also learn empathy for others.

Our Confirmation II students will soon be busy getting ready for their big day in May! We appreciate your prayers for our students and catechists as they continue on their spiritual journeys during this challenging year.

HSYM Hosts Creative Christmas Event



By Stephanie Antshel

Santa Claus wasn't about to let COVID-19 ruin Christmas fun at Immaculate Conception! Instead of joining parishioners at the traditional Pancake Breakfast with Santa, he agreed to participate in Curbside Cookies with Santa!

Hosted by the High School Youth Ministry on Dec. 5, the socially distanced event was a great success! The elves (high schoolers) created a drive-through holiday experience in the parking lot between the church and I.C. School, with stations for collecting children’s letters to Santa and handing out gift bags. Many festive elves stood along the way, waving beautifully decorated signs bedazzled with Christmas greetings. Santa sat majestically in his chair, surrounded by twinkling trees and paper snowflakes, at the top of the stairs outside the multi-purpose room of I.C. School. Santa, who was wearing his mask as well, waved and shouted “Merry Christmas” to the smiling children as they passed by. Each family also received a cookie decorating kit to take home and enjoy.

Approximately 100 families participated in the event and, although it was quite different from Breakfast with Santa, it was awesome to be able to spread Christmas cheer in a safe and fun way!

Santa Claus and his helpers from the I.C. High School Youth Ministry spread Christmas cheer to parish families at the Curbside Cookies with Santa event, Dec. 5. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Antshel)



Families visiting Santa Claus at the Curbside Cookie event received these cookie decorating kits to enjoy in the safety of their homes. (Photo courtesy of Stephanie Antshel)



Packages of socks and Christmas candy donated by Confirmation students spill into the Dwyer Hall corridor awaiting delivery to the Jail Ministry, December 2020. (Photo courtesy of Gail Capozzi)

Parish Author Explores “Up Side of Downs”

By Kelly Ann Kelly

Marlee Matto is a 20-year-old parishioner who was a rambunctious child with a talent for playful pranks. She grew up in a friendly neighborhood, participated in sports at F-M High School, and danced up a storm at her prom. In the fall, she will attend Syracuse University, where she will live on campus. That description certainly applies to many young people in I.C. Parish, and by itself may not seem particularly newsworthy, let alone an especially compelling basis for a book. But Marlee’s story takes on greater significance when you learn that she has Down Syndrome. Her mom, Lisa Palermo Matto, recently self-published a book of anecdotes drawn from Marlee’s life and childhood hijinks called “The Up Side of Downs.”

In a series of short, easy-to-read chapters, Matto paints a loving portrait of her only daughter. Marlee is shown to be a clever, compassionate child who, thanks to her parents and her own fierce determination, was never defined or limited by her diagnosis. In the book, Matto doesn’t shy away from the stressful, and sometimes perilous, situations Marlee got into as a child, but consistently emphasizes the themes of acceptance, grace, humor, and love.

Encouraged by friends and family members who enjoyed hearing tales of Marlee’s adventures and misadventures, Matto began collecting stories for a book several years ago. Last year, the pandemic shutdown gave her the time away from her position as director of faith formation and youth ministry at St. James Church in Cazenovia to finish it. Artist and former I.C. parishioner, Brooke Stratton, who now lives in Boston, provided the charming illustrations.

“The book is not about Down Syndrome or raising a child with a disability,” Matto said. “It is a compilation of funny, touching stories that celebrates inclusion, family, neighbors, community, and the Fayetteville-Manlius School District.” Father Tom Ryan so enjoyed the book that he gave it a ringing endorsement on Amazon: “I highly recommend it. It’s a fun book. It’s humorous but I think it also teaches



Author Lisa Palermo Matto and her daughter, Marlee Matto, proudly present “The Up Side of Downs,” a collection of stories from Marlee’s childhood. (Photo courtesy of Lisa Palermo Matto)

some serious lessons about life, about life’s journey, and the beauty of every person.”

Matto hopes that Marlee’s story will enlighten, as well as amuse: “I hope people will take away a few things from the book, the first being that people with disabilities have the same hopes and dreams as everyone else. Their lives are a gift from God, filled with purpose and beauty. They want to live productive lives, have friends, jobs, go to school, and be independent. Marlee is thrilled to be attending Syracuse University’s InclusiveU program in the fall, where she will live on campus and take classes.”

“The Up Side of Downs” is available on Amazon and at Paola Kay Gift Shop in Fayetteville.

The Drama of Scripture

By Peter Arsenault

Most people love a good drama. These days, there are many ways such stories are told — written in contemporary style in books, spoken on radio shows or podcasts, visually with musical enhancements on television or in movies, not to mention other forms of media. Given all of that content, we may not be as well tuned in to the underlying drama found in the Scriptures, written centuries ago in different styles.

One example that comes to mind is found in Luke chapter 4. In verse 16, we’re told Jesus went back to “...Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.” So far things sound pretty ordinary — going home and doing something that He and His family had always done, comparable to going to Sunday Mass with family. It was common for a respected Jew to be offered the chance to read aloud from the Hebrew Scriptures and offer comments. Luke recounts how Jesus is handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to read from.

Things get interesting once Jesus begins to read. He goes to a passage written in the first person (I/me) from chapter 61 which offers hope to all Jews that someone anointed by God (a Messiah) would come and set them free. The passage is short, probably shorter than most synagogue readings: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord,” (Luke 4:18-19).

Then instead of offering His thoughts or comments on the reading, Jesus does something rather dramatic — he rolls up the scroll and sits down. How do we know this was so dramatic? Luke tells us “...the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him.” Were they looking at him that way because of the short reading, or out of anticipation of what he was going to say, or because of the particular passage? Maybe all three, but Jesus clearly had their attention when he then said, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21). Really? What just happened? Jesus connected his reading and their hearing with a prophecy in Scripture written hundreds of years earlier. How can that be?

It took a while for the message to sink in, with some being impressed and others left questioning. Ultimately, Jesus had to leave from their midst because they wouldn’t accept the truth that he had just revealed to them, and to us, in a beautiful, dramatic manner: Jesus is indeed the Messiah!



A typist wears a face mask in this Oct. 16, 1918, photograph from the American Unofficial Collection of World War I Photographs, 1917 – 1918, at the National Archives, College Park, Maryland. (Source: National Archives and Records Administration)

Lessons from the Last Pandemic

By Kelly Ann Kelly

The COVID-19 pandemic and the extraordinary public health measures implemented in the past year to curb its spread are often described as “unprecedented.” Our situation is unique in U.S. history, but it was foreshadowed by events that occurred just over 100 years ago.

In the fall of 1918, as the United States and Europe were embroiled in World War I, Central New York experienced an outbreak of influenza. The virus (mistakenly called the “Spanish Flu”) arrived here through Camp Syracuse, a military training facility at the State Fairgrounds that housed 12,000 soldiers. The disease spread to the community when ill soldiers were treated at local hospitals. Within a month, more than 10,000 cases of influenza were reported in Syracuse and the surrounding villages.

On Oct. 8, the Fayetteville Village Board of Health ordered all public gathering places, including churches, closed until further notice. Dr. George Bryan, the Town of Manlius Health Officer, estimated there were 80-100 cases of influenza around Fayetteville that week out of a population of just about 1,500. Thanks to the closings, the number of new influenza cases had dropped to only a few per day by the end of the month and the ban on public gatherings and church services was lifted.

We saw similar success in containing the novel coronavirus in this area last year. The rollout of vaccines that protect against severe COVID-19 illness offers hope of another way to help end this pandemic. Let us draw inspiration and hope from the example of our forebears and pray that Our Lord grants us the strength, patience, and compassion to continue acting for the public good for the duration of this crisis.



Social Justice Committee

Book Club Enlightens and Inspires

By Mary Anne Corasaniti

If you are looking for some informative reading and to hear diverse authors’ thoughts on contemporary social justice topics, or you just want to read a good book, do we have the book club and reading list for you!

In early 2015, Immaculate Conception’s Social Justice Committee formed a book club that meets monthly to discuss book selections that inform and educate the members about various issues that impact our society. While the book club reads all genres that relate to social justice, the discussions inspire thoughts about how the Social Justice Committee might serve the community better or, at the very least, how our members might view others with more open, understanding and Christlike hearts.

Over the last several months the group has met via Zoom and enjoyed discussions about everything from a book that we read in high school and enjoyed revisiting with new eyes, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by Harriet Beecher Stowe, to “Antisemitism: Here and Now” by Deborah E. Lipstadt. We were all mesmerized reading “Braiding Sweetgrass,” by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry professor, particularly her references to areas of Central New York with which we were familiar. Seeing them through the eyes and culture of Native Americans brought a new light to the familiar.

Additionally, we often share differing points of view about books that we have read — as was the case with “White Fragility: Why It Is Hard for White People to Talk About Racism” by Robin DiAngelo. We learn not only from the authors but from each other as well. Among the I.C. Social Justice Committee and Book Club members are women who have for years dedicated countless hours to assisting refugees in resettling in our community. When we shared Dina Nayeri’s “The Ungrateful Refugee,” it was not only the author who enlightened us but our very own “experts.”

In the coming month, the I.C. Social Justice Book Club will be reading “The Bluest Eye” by the late Toni Morrison. We will come together on Tuesday morning, April 27 at 9:00 a.m., probably via Zoom. If you are interested in joining this lively and inspiring group, please contact Linda Ryan at lmryan@twcnry.rr.com to be placed on the Zoom invitation list.

Reinvented Giving Tree Yields Great Fruits

By Kelly Ann Kelly

Last Christmas, parishioners once again demonstrated extraordinary generosity in response to great need by donating well over \$25,000 to the Social Justice Committee’s Giving Tree Fund. Purchasing special Christmas presents for the less fortunate has long been a beloved holiday tradition at I.C. Church. Each year, the Social Justice Committee’s Giving Tree project gave parishioners the opportunity to fulfill the gift requests of hundreds of individuals and families being served by local charitable and social agencies. Last year, however, the pandemic forced committee members to rethink their plans.

Instead of leaving gifts at church, parishioners were asked to donate money and the response was phenomenal! Linda Ryan, coordinator of the Social Justice Committee, is very grateful for the parish’s magnanimous response. “Heartfelt thanks to all of you for your selfless generosity in supporting our reimagined Giving Tree project this year,” she said. “The results were truly exceptional, with over \$25,000 donated so that we might provide our typical agencies with the funds to best serve their individuals and families in need.”

Some agencies that received funds fall under the umbrella of the Catholic Charities Preschool Program. Catholic Charities program officer Rick Kline and preschool program manager Cynda Lamb expressed their thanks for the generosity of our parishioners in a letter dated Jan. 28, 2021. “The donations the program received were beyond generous,” they wrote. “After much deliberation, program staff decided to support children with supplies for home learning as well as a special toy. Administration purchased items and invited teachers to come pick up the learning packs and select a toy for each child in their class. Teachers were thrilled to be able to choose something special for each student. It was a very festive day for everyone!”

Parishioners will also be pleased to know that their contributions will continue to improve lives all year long. The outpouring of support for the Christmas gift fund allowed the Social Justice Committee to also make a donation of \$5,000 to the Brady Faith Center in support of the Brady Market, a grocery store set to open soon at the site of the former Nojaim Bros. Supermarket in Syracuse. The closure of Nojaims in 2017 left the residents of the near-southwest side neighborhood in a food desert. The Brady Market will offer affordable, nutritious groceries, including fresh fruits and vegetables from the nearby Brady Farm. The store seeks to feed minds and souls as well, with wellness classes for community members and learning opportunities, case-management, counseling, and mentoring for employees.