



## The Fruits of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola

### Parish Author Pens Charming Christmas Book

By Mary Anne Corasaniti

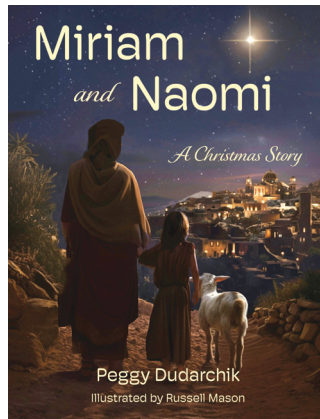
Over the past three years, a very meaningful partnership between the Spiritual Renewal Center and Immaculate Conception Parish has brought the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola to parishioners of I.C. and St. Ann's. One of the hallmarks of these exercises is imaginative prayer, where participants place themselves in biblical scenes, asking God what is happening and what lessons can be learned from the Scripture passage.

One I.C. parishioner, Peggy Dudarchik, shared her experience of accompanying Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem in prayer. "I just needed to know more!" Peggy said. "How far was this? What was the journey like?" Peggy reflected on the challenges of Joseph and Mary's 90-mile journey, especially during the final days of Mary's pregnancy. Peggy imagined the journey taking at least 10 days and choosing a route that avoided unsafe and difficult terrain. Using an out-of-print book for reference, she considered the dangers along the way, such as the path where the Good Samaritan was attacked, and pondered where Mary and Joseph might have stayed during their travels.

Through prayer, meditation, and study, Peggy found a story unfolding in her mind. This creative and prayerful process led to the self-published book, "Miriam and

Naomi: A Christmas Story." Her husband, Dana, son John, and his wife, Brittany, served as commentators and editors throughout the writing process and selection of the illustrator. With beautiful illustrations by Russell Mason, the book is considered a children's book but offers inspiration and reflection for readers of all ages. "Miriam and Naomi: A Christmas Story" received the National Indie Excellence Award in the category of Children's Religion. Reviewers say: "It's just the ticket for facing the angst of modern times, as well as the holiday season," (D. Donovan, Midwest Book Review) and "A timeless addition to holiday traditions, this book is perfect for children and parents to cherish year after year," (The Prairies Book Review).

If you would like to add this lovely book to your Christmas list or to ponder it in prayer, it can be found at [peggydudarchik.com](http://peggydudarchik.com) and online booksellers.



Peggy Dudarchik

## Wheeler Honored for Parish Service

By Kelly Ann Kelly

In recognition of their decades of service to I.C. Parish, David and Daryll Wheeler were honored with an Immaculata Award by Bishop Douglas J. Lucia at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on Dec. 7, 2025. The Immaculata honors volunteers devoted to parish service across the Syracuse Diocese. The Wheelers are long-time active members of I.C. Parish who consistently use their many talents for the betterment of our church and community. They are known for their devotion to education, faith formation, and leadership in the parish, the FM community, and beyond.

David and Daryll raised seven children in Fayetteville and in I.C. Church, and both enjoyed long and distinguished careers as educators in the FM and JD school districts. David served as the principal of Wellwood Middle School for 20 years and Holy Cross School for 10 years. Daryll taught ELA and reading in the FM and JD districts for 17 years, then worked as a staff development trainer for OCM BOCES. She retired when David did in 2011, then went on to serve on the FM Board of Education from 2016 to 2025. Their busy family lives and careers could not keep them from parish and community service.

They have each served on Parish Council and the I.C. School Advisory Committee at different times. David is an usher and server at the monthly Senior Luncheons. Daryll is a lector and Eucharistic minister. It is fitting that they received the Immaculata Award together because they frequently work as a team. They have also been members of the Offertory counting team, chaired the Coffee Sunday committee, cooked for the Men's Shelter, were founding

members of the Stewardship Committee, and co-chaired the 150th Anniversary Planning Committee.

One of the many hats David has worn in the parish was a furry red one as the jolly old elf himself, playing Santa Claus for a generation of youngsters at the annual pancake breakfasts. Daryll has taught fourth grade Faith Formation and RCIA, and represented I.C. on the Pastoral Care Area council and on the Project Concordia leadership team. Outside of the parish, David coached Little League and is co-president of the board of the Fayetteville Free Library. Daryll was a member of the first Francis House Auxiliary and edited their newsletter, and served in the Federation of Catholic School Parents, including a stint as its president.

The Wheelers are very generous, compassionate, devout, and humble people. "I can think of a dozen people offhand who are more deserving," Daryll said. "David and I were very surprised when the bishop's invitation arrived. I.C. is our home and what we do, we do out of love for the parish."

In his homily at the Immaculata Award ceremony, Bishop Lucia said that Catholics are called to be like John the Baptist: "We're not just called to take in God's Word. We're not just called to announce God's Word. But actually, we're called to be that living Gospel for all people to hear." In their personal and professional lives, the Wheelers have proven themselves to be such evangelists by living their faith, demonstrating their love of God through their love for others, and inspiring generations of youth to develop their relationships with Christ. Congratulations, David and Daryll, and thank you for your kind and generous service!



David and Daryll Wheeler pose with Bishop Douglas J. Lucia at the altar of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Syracuse after receiving the 2025 Immaculata Award for I.C. Parish, Dec. 7.

## Successful Ministry Fair Held

By Kelly Ann Kelly

Stewardship, the Catholic practice of sharing our gifts of time, talent, and treasure in service to God and one another, has long been a hallmark of I.C. Parish. Our commitment to service was on display at the Nov. 9 Ministry Fair. Representatives from dozens of parish ministries staffed tables in Dwyer Hall to promote their efforts and invite new volunteers to join. After every Mass, parishioners enjoyed refreshments and breakfast treats while learning about the stewardship opportunities available in the parish. It was a fun time of sharing and fellowship for all.

This was our first Ministry Fair since 2019. Since then, many ministries lost members during the COVID-19 pandemic leaving them quite shorthanded. For example, there is a great need for liturgical ministers — such as Eucharistic ministers, lectors, and ushers — and drivers for FISH. The Ministry Fair was very successful, with over a hundred new volunteer commitments in total. Many thanks to Kathleen Conway for organizing the event, all the ministry members who participated, and the parishioners who visited the fair for making it such a success!

It's not too late to find a ministry that's just right for you. A list of parish service opportunities and an online sign-up form can be found on the parish website under the Ministry tab, [icfayetteville.org/stewardship-ministries](http://icfayetteville.org/stewardship-ministries).



Father Cliff Auth, Tom Richards, and Patricia Richards were among the hundreds of people who stopped by Dwyer Hall during the Ministry Fair, Nov. 9. During the fair, Patricia joined the I.C. Good News staff. Her first article appears on page 4. (Photo courtesy of Kelly Ann Kelly)

Volume 45, Number 4 Winter 2025

### I.C. Good News

Published by Immaculate Conception Church  
400 Salt Springs Street - Fayetteville, New York 13066  
315-637-9846

ICGoodNews@syrдио.org

Rev. Clifford Auth, *Pastor*

Kelly Ann Kelly, *Editor-in-chief*

*Copy Editors:* Amy Bleier Long, Gloria Hunt, and Lois Papp

### *Proofreaders:*

Elaine LaFollette, Gerry McCarthy, and Pat Richards

### *I.C. School Publicist:*

Caroline Agor-Calimlim

The I.C. Good News is a free quarterly newspaper created by parish volunteers.

Visit our web page at [www.icfayetteville.org/ic-good-news/](http://www.icfayetteville.org/ic-good-news/)

**POSTMASTER: Send change of address to**  
I.C. Good News, 400 Salt Springs St., Fayetteville NY 13066

## I.C. School News

By Caroline Agor-Calimlim

### I.C. School Joins Million Student Prayer

On the Feast of the Holy Rosary, Oct. 7, I.C. School united in prayer with children across the globe. A Million Children Praying the Rosary is an international initiative that began 20 years ago to engage children in praying for peace and unity in the world. Sixth graders led the prayers for the living rosary, where each decade and bead of the rosary is represented by a student.

*Third grade I.C. students have their rosaries ready to pray for world peace as part of the Million Children Praying day, Oct. 7. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)*



### Halloween Fun

Our students had a great time parading in their colorful and creative Halloween costumes. The classes lined the hallway then walked out of the school's front entrance and around the school grounds, where parents waited outside. Pre-K classes and P.E. teacher Don Bell led the parade, which ended with each grade gathering on the school steps for class pictures. Parents and other family members were invited to watch and take pictures. It was a full day of fun with Halloween themed crafts, games, and snacks in the classrooms.

Once again this year, students got to select pumpkins to take home from the I.C. School Pumpkin Patch. Sixth grade students honed their leadership skills by organizing, designing, and executing the project on the school grounds. Younger students wound their way through the pumpkin-lined path and were invited to choose pumpkins to take home — just in time to decorate for Halloween.

*There's nothing "despicable" about teacher Corey Stone (back row, dressed as Gru from "Despicable Me") and his Minions — that is fourth grade students — dressed in their coordinated costumes on Halloween. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)*

### Thanksgiving Blessings

I.C. School observed Thanksgiving with gratitude, giving, and good food. On Nov. 19, Maureen Pierret's kindergarten class enjoyed a traditional Thanksgiving feast in Dwyer Hall. They ate turkey, mashed potatoes, applesauce, dinner rolls, and cornbread muffins. Father Cliff Auth with Monsignor Ronald Bill gave the blessings and said grace before the meal. The room parents prepared the feast and several fun activities including bingo and other games, and crafts such as painting turkeys.

The whole school gathered in the gymnasium for Thanksgiving prayers on Nov. 24. After the prayer and pledge, the sixth graders led the Thanksgiving Alphabet of Gratitude. They named something to be thankful for at each letter of the alphabet, such as "America" for A.

During the Thanksgiving season, the school collected personal items to donate to St. Lucy's Parish. They also assembled a "Thankful Turkey." Each student contributed a feather naming something for which they are grateful. Family members, friends, pets, the school, and God were mentioned on many of the feathers.



*Pictured left - A kindergarten girl paints a turkey figurine at the Nov. 19 Thanksgiving Feast in Dwyer Hall. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)*



*Above - The sixth grade Light the Way leaders perform many community service projects during the school year, including collecting toiletries for the outreach ministries of St. Lucy's Church in Syracuse. (Photo courtesy of Caroline Agor-Calimlim)*

### Monthly Grocery Donations Help Many People in Many Ways

By Gerry McCarthy

Once a month, I.C. Parish distributes paper bags with lists of grocery items requested by Catholic Charities Food Pantry. Parishioners always respond very generously by returning the bags filled with much-needed food and personal care items.

Last spring, Catholic Charities decided to centralize and expand their operations at the House of Providence on West Onondaga Street. This is also the home of Catholic Charities' administrative offices. At this location, they provide various outreach services using the groceries donated by our parishioners and others. They operate a commissary/pantry open to the public that provides groceries directly to those in need. In their large kitchen, staff and volunteers use the donated groceries to prepare meals for many of the people using their services including the Men's Shelter, the universal pre-K programs, the emergency shelter, and feeding undocumented families temporarily housed in hotels and motels, just to name a few.

Because the donated groceries are so important to Catholic Charities, it is their hope that we continue with the monthly donations. Since February, Catholic Charities staff have been picking up the groceries on the Monday following our collection and taking them to the House of Providence to

be dispersed as needed. The grocery donation in November was one of the largest that has been collected at I.C. Parish. It poured out into the hallway in Dwyer Hall.

Recently, Social Justice Committee members heard a presentation by Melissa Menon, director of food operations, and another member of the Catholic Charities staff. They gave us a great overview of how they are addressing food insecurity in the Syracuse area. Committee members were then invited to visit the House of Providence to tour the facility, see how the daily operation works, and hear about the services provided at that location. On November 21, nine members of the Social Justice Committee did just that. We were welcomed by Melissa and given a tour of the newly expanded facility, their fully equipped kitchen, and the intake area for the groceries. We were shown where the groceries are stored and how they are used. We were also welcomed by Mike Melara, executive director of Catholic Charities of Onondaga County, who expressed his appreciation to the parish and how he was in awe of the number of groceries donated. Melissa said that 40% of the pantry inventory is from donations, of which Immaculate Conception Parish is the largest donor.

We were very impressed with the operation and new space. It was a beehive of activity, and we were over-

whelmed by how they managed such a huge volume with a very small staff and a few volunteers. It was also apparent that the need for access to affordable, healthy food in the Syracuse area is so great. Because our parishioners have been so generous, it's important for them to know that their donations are really being put to good use.



*The monthly groceries donated by I.C. parishioners are picked up by members of the staff of Catholic Charities and delivered their Syracuse headquarters.*

## Catechesis News

### Elementary Faith Formation News

By Anne Marie Voutsinas

Pope Francis said: “Catechists are people who keep the memory of God alive; they keep it alive in themselves, and they are able to revive it in others.”

The components of the Elementary Faith Formation program here at Immaculate Conception are designed to complement the faith teaching that parents (and grandparents, godparents, and other family members) provide. This includes our weekday and Sunday classes for grades K through eight, Children’s Liturgy of the Word during the Sunday 9 a.m. Masses, sacramental preparation for Reconciliation and Eucharist, back-to-school backpack blessings, and summer Vacation Bible School.

Serving this year in this vital ministry are many inspired teachers, assistants, and substitutes who bring the message of God to our children in a variety of ways. Many of our volunteers have given years of dedicated service; others are new this year. Our high school youth play an important part in our Children’s Liturgy and VBS, as well as teaching classes. Our program depends on the dedication and support of these members of our faith community to present the faith to our youth.

Classes for grades kindergarten to eight are held throughout the school year. The parish website ([icfayetteville.org](http://icfayetteville.org)) has a complete list of class dates and times. This year, we have 243 children enrolled, with 67 preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

Part of learning about God is learning to serve the people in our community. Our classes have already completed several service projects this year. Our Wednesday morning seventh graders made blankets to be distributed by Sleep in Heavenly Peace. All our children participated in the Thanksgiving food drive for Catholic Charities and decorated cards to be included in the Christmas plant distribution to our homebound parishioners. Future endeavors will include making cookies and blessing bags for those in need. We thank all parishioners for supporting us with these projects.

We welcome volunteers who are willing to join us as we work with our youth. Some people are hesitant to volunteer, thinking that someone else will do it. Our teachers find it to be a rewarding experience and are always grateful for any extra support you can offer, so please don’t hesitate to step forward.

We ask for your prayers for all our youth as they continue this year of forming their faith.

### Confirmation Program News

By Gail Capozzi

The Confirmation program is off to a busy start this year! Ninth grade students enjoyed a great retreat with Katie Feulner as retreat leader. Students participated in lots of fun activities including Catholic Trivia and an outdoor Mass at the grotto celebrated by Father Cliff. We were fortunate to have Shane Brown, LCSW, as our guest speaker.

Our 10th grade students have been busy meeting with their First Eucharist Sacrament buddies. Each year, students from our sacra-

ment preparation classes are paired together to pray for each other, exchange holiday cards and notes, and get to know one another. Students in both the ninth and 10th grade classes partnered with our K-8 Faith Formation students to bring lots of needed groceries to generously support the Catholic Charities Food Pantry.

Our Confirmation students were excited to host the annual Pancake Breakfast with Santa, Dec. 7 in Dwyer Hall. They did a great job decorating, planning, and staffing the breakfast for our I.C. families!



*Santa and his elves, aka Confirmation students, pose during a break in the action at the Pancake Breakfast in Dwyer Hall, Dec. 7. (Photo courtesy of Gail Capozzi)*



*The Kelly brothers — from left, Charlie, Jack, and Owen — visit with Santa Claus at the Pancake Breakfast, Dec. 7. (Photo courtesy of January Kelly)*



*Kathy Green, Claire Walters, and Father Cliff Auth were all smiles while helping out at the Pancake Breakfast, Dec. 7. (Photo courtesy of Kelly Ann Kelly)*

### Adult Catechesis: The Spiritual Benefits of Bible Study Classes

By Michael Hausladen

I.C. Parish offers a series of adult Bible Study classes throughout the year. Our study of the Gospel of Luke concluded in November and our next program is called “A Biblical Walk Through the Mass.”

Bible study is more than just reading the Scripture. It’s an invitation to join the spiritual journey that early Christians called The Way; a path to encounter Christ, to deepen our faith, and to live out the Gospel in daily life with the ultimate goal of eternal union with God.

Catholic Bible study can enrich your life in several meaningful ways:

**Spiritual Growth:** Spending time with Scripture nurtures a personal relationship with God. St. Jerome famously said, “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” Through prayerful reading and reflection, Catholics discover the Word as a source of comfort, guidance, and transformation. The Scriptures reveal God’s plan of salvation and his enduring love for all.

**Faithful Interpretation:** One of the unique benefits of Catholic Bible study is its grounding in Church Tradition. This foundation ensures that interpretation remains faithful to the teachings passed down through the centuries, beginning with the Apostles. Studying Scripture in this context reveals how the New Testament fulfills the promises of the Old Testament and forms the basis of the Catholic Liturgy — especially the Mass, which is rich in biblical language and symbolism.



*Mike Hausladen (fourth from the right) with his Bible study class in Dwyer Hall during the fall session. (Photo courtesy of Mike Hausladen)*

**Moral Clarity:** In a world of competing voices, Scripture provides timeless wisdom for ethical decision making and virtuous living. The lives of saints, prophets, and apostles provide real-life examples of courage, humility, and trust in God.

**Community:** The Immaculate Conception and St. Ann’s parishes are home to thousands of families, and it can be challenging to make personal connections. Bible study fosters fellowship, shared reflection, and mutual support, helping participants grow together in faith and build a welcoming community within these large parishes.

In April after Easter, we will offer a course in “The Eu-

charist In Scripture,” which will explore the biblical themes of meals shared in faithful fellowship and in covenant relationship with God. Old Testament meals and promises provide a foundation for Gospel meals with Jesus, culminating in the Last Supper as it is understood throughout the New Testament. Jesus’ Bread of Life discourse and the early Church’s practice of “breaking bread” will also be explored.

All are welcome! No prior Bible study experience required. For more information, email [michael.hausladen@live.com](mailto:michael.hausladen@live.com) or call the parish office at 315-637-9846.

## Reflection on the Good Samaritan

By Peter Arsenault

One of the best known of all Jesus' parables is the story of the Good Samaritan. So well known, in fact, that news media often refer to a person who helps someone else (on the road, in a neighborhood, etc.) as a good Samaritan. There are even states that have "Good Samaritan laws" that protect people from being sued if they help someone but something unintended happens anyway. (Sadly, New York state does not have such a law.)

Where does this famous parable appear? It is found in the Gospel of Luke (10:29-37) in response to the question posed by a Jewish scholar, "Who is my neighbor?" Specifically, he is asking who are the people that he should love as much as he loves himself? Instead of a lecture or direct answer, Jesus makes his point through this parable.

The road to Jericho was a remote area where it was not advisable to travel alone, but a Jewish man did so anyway. We hear that he "fell victim to robbers... who stripped and beat him and left him half-dead." Most of us have probably wondered next about the Jewish priest or the Levite who passed by this man. Maybe we marvel at the generosity of the Samaritan — a foreigner, not aligned with Jews. But have you ever looked at the story from the standpoint of that victim?

What if you were driving on a road, say in a remote area

of the Adirondacks. You pull over to look at a nice view when two others come up behind you, beat you, take your wallet and keys, then drive off in your car! Imagine being hurt, feeling very alone and afraid, and wondering if anyone will help, or if you can trust them if they do. Then you see a new, expensive pickup truck coming and think "Surely, they will stop," but they don't and your heart sinks. Time passes and you see a black sedan coming with a decal that says Clergy and you think "Hallelujah," but stare in disbelief as it drives past. After a long while, a beat-up-looking camper van with out-of-state plates comes into view and you imagine they will keep on going too — and you almost wish they would. Your heart pounds when the driver stops and jumps out of the van, and you wonder if they are here to help or hurt you more. When you see the compassion in their eyes and when they use their first aid kit to treat your wounds, you relax a bit. You may be grateful and amazed, although still unsure as they help you get comfortable in the van while they drive you to the nearest medical treatment center. When they contact the police to find your car and offer to pay for you to recover and get home, your faith in humanity is restored.

Who was your neighbor in this case? The one who treated you with mercy and compassion. Jesus still says to us: "Go and do likewise."

## Ten Years of Focused Reading on Social Justice

By Mary Anne Corasaniti

Reading is something that many of us enjoy and often take for granted. From the beginning of the I.C. Social Justice book club in March 2015, the readers have used their time together to discuss books on social justice issues and to assist in determining the focus of the charitable work done by the committee.

Starting with, "Saints and Social Justice: A Guide to Changing the World," the group has met monthly during the school year, with meetings held over Zoom during the COVID shutdown. Rotating from one member's home to another, the group has read and discussed more than 70 fiction and nonfiction volumes to date on topics including race, immigration, poverty, eviction, foster care, disability,

and other meaning issues of justice. Linda Ryan, former local history librarian at the Fayetteville Free Library and one of the club's founders, will often facilitate the meetings but she encourages others to pick the books and lead the discussions.

On January 27, 2026, the Social Justice Book Club will be discussing "Dreams of Freedom: An Irish Woman's Story of Love, Justice, and a Young Nation Coming Apart," by local author Marilyn Higgins. It is a novel encompassing the challenges experienced by the wave of immigrants coming to pre-Civil War America, set in the small towns along the path of the Erie Canal — including our own.

The book club always welcomes new members. Contact Linda Ryan at [lmryan@twcny.rr.com](mailto:lmryan@twcny.rr.com) to join.



Members of the Social Justice Committee Book Club (from left): Nancy Shepard, Mary Anne Corasaniti, Betty Fuda, Cecilia Mulvey, Linda Ryan, Gail Meagher, Mariana Mangan, Peg Dougherty, Karen Rutkowski, and Peg McCarthy. (Photo courtesy of Mary Anne Corasaniti)

## Honor Flights Give Veterans a Day to Remember

By Pat Richards

There are so many opportunities to volunteer in service to the community that it is sometimes hard to find an organization that is the perfect match. My husband, Tom, and I have been fortunate to have found one that is perfect for us.

A new opportunity presented itself when we attended the Honor Flight Syracuse Welcome Home event at the Syracuse Airport in April 2022. We had heard of Honor Flight but did not know too much about it.

Honor Flight is an organization that honors veterans by flying them to Washington, D.C. for a day-long visit to the national memorials that pay tribute to their service and sacrifice. Honor Flight Syracuse flies two missions each year. Priority is given to veterans from WWII, Korea, and Vietnam. Each veteran who flies is accompanied by a guardian, usually a family member, who is available to help them throughout the day.

In September 2022, Tom, a veteran of the Vietnam War, was invited to fly on Honor Flight Mission #17. Our son, Ian, was his guardian. To say they had a memorable day would be an understatement. Neither of them will ever forget the day they had. But the reward for Tom and me has been our continuing involvement in Honor Flight Syracuse.

Since Tom's flight, he and I have been part of the Morning Team who arrive at the Syracuse Airport at 4:30 a.m.

to welcome the veterans and their guardians who will be flying that day. We help them get their boarding passes and a bagged breakfast to take on the flight, and in the brief time we are with them, we get to hear their stories and share in their anticipation of a very exciting day. Despite the early call, Mission Day has become a very special day for us! That day is capped with the "Welcome Home" event, to which the public is invited for a truly unforgettable experience complete with a water cannon salute as the plane returns and a parade of the veterans with their guardians. The Syracuse Airport even provides free parking for the event. If you attend once, you will be hooked!

Honor Flight Syracuse has also opened another volunteer door for us. The Centenary Salute program honors veterans who are turning 100 years old or more. The birthday celebration can be as big as the family wishes. It might include fire engines, bagpipes, and singers, all at the veteran's home. Or it may be as simple as a lawn sign and a volunteer from Honor Flight to recognize them. Every birthday after that, a celebration continues to honor them, all courtesy of Honor Flight Syracuse. We have had the privilege of attending events for veterans who are as old as 103! Each one is a unique and special event, and an important way we have found to give back to the local veterans who served their country.

Honor Flight turned out to be an organization that is a perfect match for us!

## Senior Luncheon, a Delicious Parish Tradition

By Diane Haller

A wonderful I.C. tradition is the parish Senior Luncheon in Dwyer Hall, held on the second Tuesday of each month from September through May.

At the May 13 luncheon, I met Kenneth Pacioni, an affable man who has been making it all happen for the last 30 years. He oversees planning of the catered meals from Vito's Restaurant, making desserts, and providing themed decorations. I asked Ken what he likes most about the luncheons. "I enjoy being with the people," was his quick response.

Ken has a dedicated crew of 13 volunteers who work together to prepare the food and serve it in a timely and friendly manner. From the time parishioners start to arrive shortly before noon, they are greeted by a server and offered coffee.



Senior Luncheon volunteers, led by Ken Pacioni (far end of table) assemble strawberry shortcake desserts for the guests at the May 2025 luncheon. (Photo courtesy of Diane Haller)

Memorial Day was the theme of the May luncheon. Each table was adorned with a vase of tulips and red, white, and blue shooting stars. As people conversed with old friends and made new ones, the amicable atmosphere ramped up a notch after I heard someone say, "Where's the piano?" Almost immediately, Tom Reitano sat down and played melodies from yesteryear, thoughtfully chosen for his audience. Tom was seven years old when he started playing piano and he began performing in public at age 14. He followed in his father's footsteps and became a music teacher. He is now retired from ESM High School.

It was clear to me as I made my way around the room that everyone was enjoying the camaraderie and the good food. On this day, the menu of sloppy joes, macaroni salad, and baked beans was topped off with a strawberry shortcake, lovingly prepared by the Senior Luncheon volunteers. So, it certainly brought to mind a festive holiday cookout. At one point, Father Philip Hearn made a smiling appearance — a highlight of the day!

As the meal came to a close, the kitchen remained a flurry of activity with clean-up well underway. The volunteers are just as much a close-knit family as the people they serve. Many thanks for your years of dedicated service!

When the hall was almost empty, Ken came out from the busy kitchen one last time and invited me to come back to another luncheon. I said, "I'll be back, for sure!"



Honor Flight volunteers Pat and Tom Richards celebrate veteran John Shott's 103rd birthday with him, July 4, 2025. (Photo courtesy of Tom and Pat Richards)